EVALUATION OF THE NEW CENTURY HIGH SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

Report on Program Implementation in the First Year

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Executive Summary

New Visions for Public Schools, the Department of Education of the City of New York (DOE), and their partners in the teachers' and administrators' professional associations have embarked on an effort to transform many of the city's large comprehensive high schools into successful, small learning communities. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Open Society Institute, along with DOE, are providing support for this effort. By demonstrating the effectiveness of a limited number of small high schools operating under a set of core principles, the New Century High Schools (NCHS) initiative seeks to leverage its limited resources to transform the entire high school system in New York City. The initiative derives its inspiration from earlier, successful efforts in New York and other urban districts to improve student achievement, attendance, and graduation rates by making schools into smaller, more personalized environments. This report presents the findings from the first year of data collection from a multi-year evaluation of the NCHS initiative.

In Fall 2002, the initiative established 12 new small high schools in New York City (nine in the Bronx, two in Brooklyn, and one in Manhattan), began transforming one comprehensive high school in Brooklyn into smaller units, and opened four programs in the Bronx that were slated to become small, autonomous schools in Fall 2003. Based on plans developed through a collaborative process, the new schools and programs had previously competed for planning and implementation funds in a multi-stage process orchestrated by New Visions. Throughout the planning and first-year implementation period, New Visions and expert staff in the Bronx high school superintendent's office provided technical assistance to school teams on school management, curriculum development, student and staff recruitment, and other topics.

The educational approach embodied in the NCHS initiative relied on each planning team's establishment of a partnership between educators working within the school system and a private nonprofit organization with strong ties to the community. Together, the partners were expected to make all important decisions about the mission, goals, and methods of the new schools. In addition, the community partner was expected to play a special role in tying the school more closely to the surrounding community and in supporting the overall healthy development of enrolled youth. Within this basic structure, each new school was expected to focus planning and implementation efforts on the elements of effective small schools, as identified by New Visions and its partners at the beginning of the initiative. The designated elements included a rigorous instructional program, personalized learning relationships between students and adults, meaningful assessment of student learning, a clear focus and expectations for students, opportunities for youth development, effective use of technology, school-based professional development and collaboration, instructional leadership aimed at improving student achievement, and engagement with the community and parents.

External Supports for New Schools

A priority for the evaluation in examining the schools established in the first year of the NCHS initiative was to learn about the supports provided to the planning teams and the new schools. In response to questions about the sources of their supports, principals in the Bronx emphasized the extensive support received from the Bronx high school superintendent's office, especially on issues related to starting a new school and navigating the DOE bureaucracy. In addition, principals valued

assistance from this source in staff hiring and development, budgeting, and curriculum preparation. Principals also valued the mentors assigned to them by the Bronx superintendency and by New Visions, and the connections established between NCHS teachers and City University of New York faculty, who offered professional development around literacy instruction. Principals said that, as their schools neared their first year of operation, they needed additional help in curriculum development and literacy instruction, and they also needed political support from New Visions and the district liaisons in their interactions with DOE and with the larger comprehensive high schools in which many of them were located.

The community partners' views on the supports they received were somewhat more mixed. While they generally praised the help they received from their district liaisons and New Visions, in some instances individual partners complained that the grant amounts received from New Visions were unrealistically low and that training was too exclusively targeted to the principals and teachers, and not to the community partners.

Characteristics of New Century High School Students

In the initiative's first year of operation, New Century high schools enrolled 1,567 students, 82 percent of whom were ninth-graders. A slight majority (55 percent) of students were girls, 55 percent were Hispanic, and 34 percent were black (not Hispanic). Eighteen percent of students qualified as English Language Learners, and 7 percent received special education services.

Compared with the students attending the larger comprehensive high schools that housed the NCHS schools, NCHS students in the Bronx were more likely to be female (58 percent vs. 48 percent) and English Language Learners (22 percent vs. 15 percent). However, NCHS students in the Bronx were less likely to require special education services in the most restrictive environment than were students in the comprehensive high schools (8 percent vs. 1 percent). Compared to high school students in all DOE academic and alternative high schools, NCHS students were more likely to be female (55 percent vs. 50 percent), less likely to be white (5 percent vs. 16 percent), and more likely to be Hispanic (55 percent vs. 34 percent).

In their responses to survey questions, NCHS students assigned a high level of importance to doing well in, and completing, high school. They also reported having earned fairly high grades as eighth-graders, with only 15 percent reporting that they earned mainly C's or lower. However, this positive picture was somewhat contradicted by a majority of NCHS teachers, who reported that students often did not complete homework, came to school late and unprepared, and lacked motivation. Teachers were unlikely to report more serious attitudinal or behavioral problems.

Characteristics of Staff and Community Partners

Overall, teachers at NCHS schools had less experience than high school teachers in the rest of New York City. Forty percent of NCHS teachers had taught for six or more years, compared with 62 percent of high school teachers in the city. New teachers did not differ significantly from more veteran teachers in their responses to the teacher survey, except in some of their impressions of professional development provided by their schools and by the NCHS initiative. Compared to veteran teachers, new teachers were more likely to find the NCHS-related professional development to be appropriate to their

grade level and subject area, while veteran teachers were more likely than new teachers to report that the professional development opportunities helped their school staff to work together productively. Thirty-five percent of all NCHS teachers lacked full certification.

For all but one of the NCHS principals, 2002-03 was their first year as a principal. If not experienced as principals, the principals as a group were well educated, with all but one reporting coursework beyond the masters degree.

The NCHS community partners represented a broad spectrum of nonprofit institutions, including organizations focusing on community-based development and social services, youth development and recreation, the arts and history, higher education, and education reform. Most had prior experience with public schools and with their educational partners on the planning teams.

Educational Climate and Focus

Students had generally favorable perceptions of their schools' educational climate, indicating that they felt known and felt that they belonged. Half or more reported positive relationships with peers. Just over a third of students and teachers said that serious fights occurred at school, often involving students from the host schools. Teachers infrequently reported serious behavioral issues such as weapons possession, theft or robbery, or student pregnancy.

Teachers and principals reported high levels of coordination around their respective schools' educational focus, as well as high levels of teacher autonomy with regard to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Almost all teachers said they understood and supported their school's educational focus.

Teacher autonomy and coordination worked hand-in-hand in NCHS schools, with faculties working collaboratively to design and implement curricula that were consistent with both Regents expectations and school themes, according to teacher reports.

Community Linkages and Partnerships

All community partners reported high levels of cooperation between school staffs and themselves. Teachers agreed with this perception, with 72 percent saying that they regularly used resources and supports provided by the community partner organization. Half of teachers said that their community partner had provided them with instructional support.

Partners said that they influenced the day-to-day operations of the schools, but only one-quarter said that they had a great deal of influence. According to both principals and community partners, the community partners' greatest influence was in non-academic areas, such as organizing after-school programs and activities and communicating with parents. No partners reported that they exerted a major influence on curriculum or instruction.

Communication between school leaders and community partners was frequent, although community partners perceived that it was more frequent than did principals. Partners and principals

were more likely to discuss resources and non-academic matters than they were to discuss curricular or instructional issues.

Only three partners maintained a regular, major presence in their schools, playing central roles in both planning and operating the school. Several other partners expressed a desire to have a more regular presence at the school so they could play a greater role.

Two-thirds of the partners said that they had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or other written agreement with the school delineating their role. However, one-third of the partners that had an MOU were dissatisfied with its scope, content, or specificity.

Features of Students' Educational Experience

This part of the evaluation assessed the extent to which the schools implemented the elements of effective schools listed earlier.

Academic rigor. Students and faculty reported that NCHS schools offered a challenging academic environment that prepared students for the Regents exams they must pass in order to graduate. Almost two-thirds of students said they were challenged to work hard and that they spent most of their time learning new things. At least three-quarters of teachers reported that their curricula and assessments were aligned with Regents standards. Both students and teachers reported that classroom instruction often called on students to take an active role in their learning, by asking questions, conducting their own research, role-playing, and selecting the books they would read. However, a third of students reported being bored in class or spending too much time reviewing material they had already learned.

Classroom observation data in English/language arts indicate that teachers tended to use traditional instructional strategies and to address fairly low-level skills, although these data are limited because they represent only a single snapshot in the classrooms observed. Instruction observed in English/language arts classes centered on reading and was mainly intended to help students learn facts, definitions, and content and to communicate their understanding. Teachers tended to ask fact-based or procedural questions most of the time, rather than more complex inferential or hypothetical questions. However, the texts that students were reading in these classes were generally original sources and appropriate for the grade level. In the classrooms observed, classes were small (averaging 16 students present per class) and students were generally on task (with an average of 82 percent on task per instructional segment observed).

Personalized student-adult relationships. The vast majority of students reported that teachers treated them with respect and that they felt comfortable with teachers. Parents generally echoed their children's satisfaction with the level of caring and concern found in the NCHS schools.

Advisory periods, intended in part to help foster more personal, trusting relationships between students and teachers, met with mixed results in the schools. Teachers and students endorsed the intent of advisory periods, but teachers in some schools reported problems with implementing them as desired. Their complaints revolved around not having received enough guidance on how to use the time set aside for advisory periods in order to keep students meaningfully engaged and to build trust and personal relationships with students.

Meaningful, continuous classroom assessment. Teachers in NCHS schools used varied assessment strategies to gauge their students' performance. Indeed, they were more likely to use "authentic" assessment strategies such as portfolios and exhibitions than they were to use traditional assessments such as tests and quizzes. Students said the assessments administered by their teachers were fair.

Clear academic and behavioral expectations for students. Almost all students said they knew and understood what was expected of them by the NCHS schools they attended. This observation was confirmed by principals, almost all of whom said that the school had established guidelines for behavior, attendance, and coursework. At the classroom level, 86 percent of students said that expectations were consistent across classrooms.

Opportunities for youth development. Although in existence only a short time, NCHS schools established an admirable array of activities and opportunities intended to engage students. A quarter to a half of students said that they had exerted leadership and decision-making in the school, often through student council or other opportunities. Sixty-eight percent of students said that their schools offered a range of sports, clubs, and activities that gave them opportunities to make certain choices about what they learned and how they spent some of their time in school. Consistent with the age of the students served, most principals acknowledged that they had not established extensive career awareness activities such as job shadowing or internships. Many reported that establishing those opportunities was a priority for the coming year.

Effective use of technology. Technology did not play a central role in the delivery of instruction. Most teachers and principals said their school did not have enough computers for effective use in student learning. Teachers faulted the lack of computers in their classrooms, with 41 percent reporting having no computers in their classrooms. However, half of the schools had a computer lab with at least 20 computers, and more than three-quarters of students said their teachers gave assignments that required them to use a computer. Teachers and students agreed that students spent less than two hours a week using a computer in class.

Characteristics of the School Infrastructure

Professional development and collaboration. Teachers participated in extensive professional development activities, with 55 percent participating in at least 36 hours of professional development in the first year. According to teachers, professional development mainly focused on developing assessments and subject-specific content training. Satisfaction levels were moderate, with 44 percent reporting that professional development prompted them to change their instruction.

Even so, the evaluation found extensive evidence of positive professional collaboration. The vast majority of teachers and principals reported that they collaborated extensively with other staff at the school, with common planning times a regular feature in all but one school.

Leadership focused on student learning. More than half of all teachers reported that their principal monitored instruction (according to 74 percent of teachers) and curriculum (according to 58 percent of teachers) at their school. Eighty percent of teachers reported that their principal had been to

their classroom to observe their teaching, but they were not always satisfied by the feedback they received, with 40 percent saying that the feedback was not on topics they considered important.

School engagement with the community and parents. NCHS schools were very active in communicating with parents, often with the assistance of their community partners, but principals were disappointed with the level of parental involvement. Seventy-one percent of teachers said that they communicated regularly with parents, and 69 percent of schools conducted activities to help parents support students' learning at home, according to principals. However, more than half of principals and teachers cited a lack of parent involvement as a serious or moderate problem.

Student and Parent Reactions to the New Schools

Students' positive reactions to the new schools were evident in their patterns of daily attendance, which compared favorably with attendance rates citywide and in the Bronx (for those NCHS schools in the Bronx). Overall attendance in NCHS schools was 88 percent for ninth-graders and 85 percent for tenth-graders. Excluding two schools that served youth who had previously been out of school, attendance rates were 91 percent for ninth-graders and 92 percent for tenth-graders. All of these rates were higher than the citywide rate for ninth- and tenth-graders in both academic and alternative schools. Similarly, attendance rates for students attending NCHS schools in the Bronx (91 percent for ninth-graders and 92 percent for tenth-graders) were significantly higher than attendance rates for students attending the comprehensive high schools that housed the NCHS schools (which were 72 percent and 80 percent respectively).

Students liked the small sizes of their school and their classes because the small settings allowed them to develop friendly relationships with their teachers and fellow students. They also liked the willingness of teachers to provide extra help, the use of hands-on learning, the advisory periods, and many other program features. Students did not like the physical space of their schools, the need to share the school building with students enrolled in different schools, and the security arrangements of the larger schools.

Parents liked the new schools, in particular because of the increased motivation and academic performance they saw in their children, as well as their children's improved attitudes and self-confidence. Like their children, they expressed concerns about the physical space in the new schools and the lack of a safe environment in the larger comprehensive high schools. Some parents wanted to see more academic challenge in classroom instruction and expectations, and some recent immigrant parents wanted their children to learn English at a faster rate.

Conclusions and Evaluation Priorities for the Coming Year

The evaluation data collected in the first year will serve as a baseline for this multi-year evaluation. In the coming year, the evaluation will supplement these data with another round of data collection on program implementation and with student-level data on students' educational performance and attendance during their first year of enrollment in the NCHS schools. The study will also obtain data about students' educational performance in the prior year (2001-02, which is the eighth-grade year for most students enrolled in NCHS schools in the program's first year). Data on students' prior

performance will help the evaluation understand whether NCHS students' performance in high school is consistent with, better than, or worse than their performance as eighth-graders.

Our overall conclusion from examining the initiative in Year 1 is that the initiative itself and the schools it created are on track to achieve the initiative's short-term goals, which are to create a network of new or transformed small high schools that employ research-based principles to provide high-quality educational experiences to students who might otherwise be at risk of educational failure. Given the scope of the task undertaken by the new schools, our expectations for the first year were ambitious but realistic. We expected that, in addition to establishing themselves as functioning high schools, the new schools would demonstrate certain indicators of probable later success. Our scorecard on the new schools is as follows:

- Each of the schools opened and operated for a full year, was staffed by competent personnel, and was adequately equipped and organized to provide instruction that met, at a minimum, local expectations for quality.

- Educators and community partners working in the schools received adequate and in some instances better than adequate supports and resources from New Visions, the Bronx superintendency, and other sources.

- Community partners extended and enriched the schools, particularly in the areas of after-school and weekend opportunities, outreach to parents, opportunities for community service, curricular enrichment, student recruitment, and consultation on planning and administration.

- New York City youth and their parents were sufficiently attracted to the opportunities offered by the new schools that students enrolled in the new schools in adequate numbers. Similarly, the planning teams' outreach to educators made it possible to recruit teachers who sought professional opportunities in small high school settings.

Our first-year assessment indicates that the NCHS initiative is assembling the building blocks for future success through, in particular, efforts at the school level to (1) develop positive climates for learning, (2) build partnerships with private nonprofit organizations characterized by active community and cultural ties, (3) provide clear instructional leadership, (4) encourage high levels of professional collaboration, and (5) promote academic quality. With the additional data on implementation that the evaluation will collect in the next years and with more precise data on student characteristics and performance, it should be possible to determine the specific levels of educational success of the initiative overall and also to identify any variations in the success of schools with varying characteristics.

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I. Purpose and Context for the Small High Schools Initiative in New York City

With financial support from three prominent philanthropic organizations, New Visions for Public Schools, the Department of Education of the City of New York (DOE), and their partners in the teachers' and administrators' professional associations have embarked on an effort to transform many of the city's large comprehensive high schools into successful, small learning communities. The $30 million New Century High Schools (NCHS) initiative, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Open Society Institute, aims to replace certain failing comprehensive high schools in the city with a network of smaller schools that implement research-based strategies for education and youth development. In September 2003, the Gates Foundation and its New York partners announced a major expansion of their commitment to support the establishment of small high schools in the city. Over time, the New Century High Schools are intended to promote substantial improvement in New York City high schools and in the learning experiences they deliver to students, in order to support high levels of educational success among all students citywide. This report describes implementation of the NCHS initiative in its first year, primarily from the perspective of the new schools and the students they serve.

Building on previous work of the Annenberg/New York Networks for School Renewal initiative, the NCHS initiative is providing planning and implementation grants to public/private partnerships formed to design and implement innovative, effective high schools. At the beginning of the program's first year (school year 2002-03), the initiative launched 12 new high schools, a transformation of an existing high school, and four programs that were slated to become schools in fall 2003. To link these new schools to the communities in which students live and the cultural resources of the city, a partnership between a community or high school district and a local nonprofit partner was developed, and this partnership operated each new or transformed school and program[1].

By demonstrating the effectiveness of a limited number of small high schools operating under a set of core principles, the NCHS initiative seeks to leverage its resources to transform the entire high school system in New York City. Although the initiative by itself represents a serious commitment of financial and human capital to reforming New York City high schools, it is dwarfed by the sheer size and complexity of the New York City public school system. In their first year, the New Century

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[1] The experience of the 13 schools operating in Year 1 is the focus of this report. The evaluation also collected certain data from the four programs in operation at the beginning of the 2002-03 school year. The report text that follows indicates when the discussion is focused on schools and when it is focused on both the schools and programs. Analyses of survey and site visit data did not find consistent differences between the experiences of the schools and programs in their educational components, their policies, or the reactions they prompted from students, community partners, and staff.

schools served fewer than 1,600 students out of the city's 287,000 public high school students. And while the $30 million investment in NCHS represents a major contribution by the private funders, DOE's annual budget is over 400 times that size. Even within the boundaries of its scope, however, the NCHS initiative has the resources to launch successful schools that offer a good education to a relatively small number of students. To achieve its ultimate goal of stimulating systemic reform and improvement, the initiative must use its intellectual and political capital to reach more students and create more schools than is possible with the financial resources directly available to the initiative itself.

To provide objective, systematic information on the implementation of its secondary-school reform initiative and on the results it is achieving, New Visions has contracted with Policy Studies Associates, Inc., to conduct a comprehensive evaluation. The evaluation will document and assess the implementation of the initiative's central features in participating schools, measure the effects of the schools on student performance, and generate findings that can be used by New Visions and others to inform the design and administration of future phases of the initiative. The evaluation will provide regular feedback to the initiative's core team (which consists of the funding consortium, New Visions, DOE, and the professional associations), other interested funders, and additional stakeholders about the initiative's progress in supporting the development and operation of successful small high schools. The evaluation will also assess the initiative's success in building momentum for a systemwide shift toward smaller, more effective high schools in New York City.

Major Elements of the NCHS Initiative

To reap the benefits that research has associated with small high schools and other small learning communities, the New Century High Schools initiative is creating new or transformed small high schools through several waves of grantmaking. Using the funds provided by the three foundations, the initiative is providing planning and implementation grants to partnerships linking private nonprofit organizations (including nonprofit community-based organizations, higher education institutions, museums and other cultural institutions, arts organizations, and hospitals) and public school educators based in DOE's regional superintendencies (formerly based in the high school superintendencies, community districts, and other divisions).

The first of three intended waves of planning grants, awarded in March 2001, supported the development of plans for small high schools that were to be either new schools created through the transformation of large low-performing high schools or completely new schools (not linked to any existing high schools) or new schools created through a hybrid process. The first wave of implementation grants, awarded in April 2002, provided support for what was intended to become 24 new or transformed small high schools. Selection of implementation grantees was based on the review

of plans showing evidence of effective local partnerships, broad community engagement in the planning process, completeness and comprehensiveness in school design, alignment of the school's design with its mission, congruence with the educational-design characteristics endorsed by the initiative, evidence of capacity to implement the proposed design, and other important features.

Under the first wave of implementation grants, the replacement of existing high schools occurred in three ways. First, one large comprehensive high school in Brooklyn was selected for transformation into four new academies, which were intended to gradually replace all other academic programs in the building. Each academy in this "transformation high school" was eventually expected to offer a distinctive academic program, built around its own career theme. A second approach was launched in the Bronx, where nine new schools and four programs opened in high schools slated by DOE for closure due to prolonged poor performance. As intended in the transformation high school, each of eight Bronx high school buildings now houses one or more new high schools and a reduced number of students enrolled in the original comprehensive high school. Unlike the transformation school, however, each new Bronx high school opened with an entirely new leadership and staff, drawing only minimally from prior staffs at the schools. The Bronx high school superintendency (now disbanded under the DOE systemwide reorganization) led the change effort in that borough and provided direct support to the planning and leadership teams of the new schools and programs in the Bronx. In a third approach to "birthing" new high schools, three new schools opened in their own facilities and recruited students from various feeder schools and other sources. In almost all of these schools, most of the students served in Year 1 were ninth-graders. Each school will add students and grades over the next three years.

The schools and programs opening in September 2002 included the following:

Transformation of an existing high school

- Harry Van Arsdale High School

Creation of new schools located within existing large high schools slated for closure, all in the Bronx

- Academy for Careers in Sports (program)
- Bronx Aerospace Academy (program)
- The Bronx Guild
- Bronx High School for Visual Arts
- Bronx International High School
- Bronx Leadership Academy

- Community School for Social Justice
- High School for Teaching and the Professions
- Marble Hill School for International Studies
- Mott Haven Village Preparatory High School
- New Explorers (program)
- Pelham Preparatory Academy (program)
- School for Excellence

Creation of new, free-standing high schools

- Community Prep School in Brooklyn
- Millenium High School in Manhattan
- South Brooklyn Community High School in Brooklyn

In addition to financial resources, New Visions provided the planning teams of the new schools with varied types of both centralized and on-site assistance in the areas of community engagement and collaboration, educational program design (including curriculum, staffing, and professional development), school organization and administration, supports for student development and well-being, and effective linkage with district and system-level structures. New Visions and its partners are providing continuing technical support through the New Century High Schools Learning Network and through DOE's Leadership Academy, which aims to attract and train principals capable of leading school-level improvement. For the new high schools and programs in the Bronx, many of these forms of assistance were provided in Year 1 by the Bronx high school superintendency's office of small schools.

Based on the positive experience of the Year 1 focus on the Bronx, New Visions and the core team decided to target Brooklyn for the establishment of new high schools in the second wave of grants, based on the high incidence of failing comprehensive high schools in that borough and the interest of that borough's educators in the NCHS initiative. Following the award and implementation of planning grants, New Visions awarded implementation grants to eight new high schools in Brooklyn and 10 new high schools in the Bronx (which included the four sites opened as programs in September 2002).

The Initiative's Theory of Change

As a framework for evaluation, the evaluation team developed a change theory that describes how the initiative plans to use its resources to influence broad, citywide changes. The resources that the initiative expects to make available, the activities that it plans to carry out with those resources, and
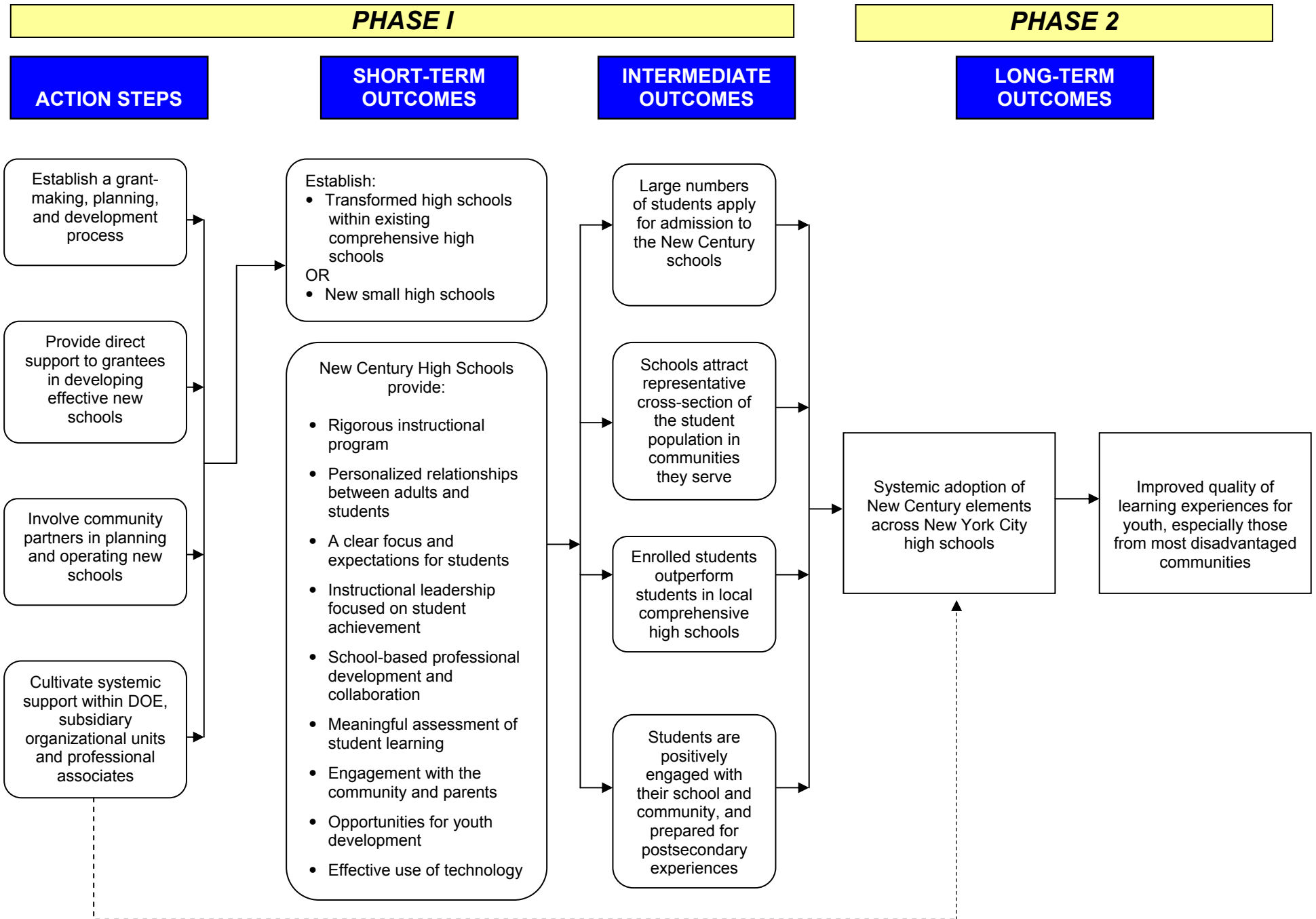
the short- and long-term changes that are expected to result from those activities are summarized in this theory of change. The change theory, therefore, represents not only the road map for the initiative but also the framework for its evaluation.

The change theory, which is depicted in the figure on the following page, begins with the initiative's *long-term goal* of improving high school learning opportunities for disadvantaged youth in New York City, especially students from low-income families and students of color, and traces backward from there to describe how the initiative's sponsors expect to reach their goal. For the long-term goal to be attained, short- and intermediate-term outcomes must first be achieved through a series of discrete accomplishments. According to the change theory, the initiative's expected *short-term outcomes* are the development and implementation of a network of small high schools that reflect nine research-based elements of effective small high schools. Improved student performance in those schools is the *intermediate outcome* of greatest importance in the change theory. Preceding all of these outcomes is a series of *action steps* that the initiative is taking to move the NCHS process forward, which are:

- A two-stage grant-making process that awards (1) planning grants to public-private partnership teams to develop plans for new high schools and (2) implementation grants to the teams with the most promising plans

- Provision of direct technical assistance to the planning and implementation grantees

- Leadership roles for community partners in the planning and implementation of the new schools

- Broad involvement of DOE and the teachers' and administrators' associations in the design, development, and operation of the new schools

The experience of New Visions and others over recent years has served as the impetus for the new initiative, which builds on previous promising efforts to promote the creation of new, small high schools and to transform comprehensive high schools into small, more personalized learning environments. The work of New Visions and others has been documented in a growing body of research, showing that students in small high schools outperform their peers in larger schools on many measures of academic and developmental success (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Institute for Education and Social Policy, 2001; Lee & Burkam, 2003). By establishing a group of prototype small high schools, the initiative hopes not only to improve the academic and developmental outcomes of the enrolled students but also to promote the emergence of effective, small high schools throughout the New York City public school system and beyond.

Figure 1
NCHS Program Theory of Change

PHASE I	PHASE 2

ACTION STEPS	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

ACTION STEPS

- Establish a grant-making, planning, and development process

- Provide direct support to grantees in developing effective new schools

- Involve community partners in planning and operating new schools

- Cultivate systemic support within DOE, subsidiary organizational units and professional associates

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Establish:
- Transformed high schools within existing comprehensive high schools

OR
- New small high schools

New Century High Schools provide:

- Rigorous instructional program
- Personalized relationships between adults and students
- A clear focus and expectations for students
- Instructional leadership focused on student achievement
- School-based professional development and collaboration
- Meaningful assessment of student learning
- Engagement with the community and parents
- Opportunities for youth development
- Effective use of technology

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

- Large numbers of students apply for admission to the New Century schools

- Schools attract representative cross-section of the student population in communities they serve

- Enrolled students outperform students in local comprehensive high schools

- Students are positively engaged with their school and community, and prepared for postsecondary experiences

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Systemic adoption of New Century elements across New York City high schools

- Improved quality of learning experiences for youth, especially those from most disadvantaged communities

Hence, the <u>long-term goal</u> of the New Century High Schools initiative is to improve the quality of high school learning experiences provided to youth, especially those from the most disadvantaged communities of New York City. By almost any measure, New York City high schools, as a group, do not perform adequately in educating their students. In many high schools, only about half of the entering ninth-graders graduate four years later. Among students from the senior class of 2001 who stayed in school for four years, only about three-quarters passed the state Regents exams in English and math, even though passing the exams is required for graduation beginning with the class of 2003. Moreover, many students outside Manhattan must travel lengthy distances to high school everyday, in order to escape poor schools in their neighborhoods. According to DOE data reported by the United Federation of Teachers, about half of the students enrolled in Manhattan high schools reside in one of the other boroughs.

The <u>intermediate goal</u> of the initiative is to demonstrate better student outcomes than those produced by existing New York City high schools. The initiative's success can be gauged by four intermediate outcomes, which New Visions staff and NCHS grantees have cited as important. These outcomes are:

- *High student demand.* The New Century schools should attract enough students each year to generate sufficient per-pupil revenue to offer the range of services that each school deems central to its mission; families should recognize that the NCHS schools offer better educational opportunities than the available alternatives.

- *Broad demographic representation.* The schools should attract a student population that closely resembles the student population in the communities they serve, in terms of race/ethnicity, prior achievement, gender, and incidence of poverty. This broad representation is important in order to make sure that the new high school opportunities benefit all students and do not favor students from relatively more advantaged circumstances.

- *Improved student achievement.* Students attending NCHS schools should outperform students in local comprehensive high schools on key academic outcomes.

- *Enhanced student engagement.* The NCHS schools should enhance students' engagement with their school and community, as measured through school attendance and other means, and prepare them for postsecondary pathways.

To improve the quality of high school learning experiences available to students in New York City, the NCHS initiative seeks, as its <u>short-term goal</u>, to replace large, failing comprehensive high schools with a network of new, small schools that embody key findings of research on best practice in secondary schooling, especially in schools serving low-income students and students of color. The NCHS initiative is premised on the belief that the city's existing large high schools, as a group, have accumulated too long a history of failure to warrant the investment of more time and effort in reform

within the current organizational paradigm. Based on their experience working in and with New York City high schools, the leaders and grantees of the NCHS initiative report that staff in many of these schools typically have grown discouraged and disillusioned by reform efforts that come and go, leaving few improvements behind. Students tend to be divided and sorted according to their needs and expected postsecondary pathways, denying most students access to challenging courses. In these failing schools, most students are not known well by a single adult in the school, because they move from one room to another during the day and from one year to the next and because each teacher is responsible for a large number of students. Students have learned that they can get by with only minimal effort and that no one will notice when they have not learned what they need to know. Rather than trying to reform the failed high schools from within, the NCHS initiative seeks to replace failed schools with new schools that have a clear vision, a rigorous instructional program, effective leadership, and strong ties to the community and to the city's cultural resources. The initiative's leaders believe that creating new schools allows for a fresh start, with staffs selected in part because of their commitment to a school's vision, students who are attracted to each school because of the program it offers, and community partners who bring a track record of helping youth in troubled circumstances.

The role of the community partnerships is particularly central to the initiative's vision of how the new schools will gradually grow and mature. New Visions and the members of the core team expect that over time each lead community partner will progress from being an external provider of ideas and services to gradually becoming a core force for effective internal programming within the school. As the educators and lead partner within the school work more and more closely together, they will recognize their collective strengths and needs more and more effectively, so that their missions and roles within the school become more consistent and mutually supportive. In addition to enriching the school and its students, this mutual growth may also improve and enlarge the mission and capacity of the community partner organization itself, enhancing the effectiveness of its work in areas unrelated to the school.

The urgency of the work of NCHS is underscored by the potential benefits of high-quality, small high schools in stemming New York City's dropout problem. The city's most recent data for the Class of 2002 shows that only 51 percent of the class graduated on time. Another 20 percent were officially listed by DOE as dropouts, while the remaining students were still carried on system's rolls at the end of the 2001-02 school year. Undoubtedly, many of this latter group will or have already dropped out. It is encouraging to note, however, that new research by Lee and Burkam (2003) indicates that (1) students in schools enrolling fewer than 1,500 students are more likely to graduate than are students in larger schools and (2) students are less likely to drop out of high schools where relationships between teachers and students are positive. Drawing on their analysis of a huge nationally representative longitudinal data set, these researchers report that these two findings are closely related— student-teacher relationships tend to be more positive in smaller high schools. Their analyses also

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suggest that other benefits are associated with small school size, including "organizational trust, members' commitment to a common purpose, and more frequent contact with people with whom members share their difficulties, uncertainties, and ambitions" (p. 385).

In the NCHS initiative, replacing current failing high schools is occurring in two stages. The first stage consists of developing a network of new schools that perform better than existing schools. The second stage involves convincing the school system, unions, and other stakeholders that their resources and efforts on behalf of secondary schooling should be redirected to replacing existing schools with replications of the successful new schools. Such a shift would require the educators working within the city's school system to rethink all aspects of secondary schooling, from the frequency and timing of principal meetings to facilities issues, professional development, and teachers' availability to take on multiple responsibilities. The NCHS model requires that schools have the flexibility to hire their own staffs and to define their roles based on the unique focus of their schools. The model also requires a long-term commitment between schools and community partners, overcoming a legacy of traditional separation between public schools and nonprofit community-based, cultural, and other organizations. NCHS is banking on the power of positive outcomes in its first-generation schools to challenge the status quo and make it possible to transform the institutions and systems that shape high schools in New York City.

The cornerstone of the initiative's effort to replace existing schools is the set of nine elements of effective high schools that New Visions has identified based on prior research findings. NCHS schools are expected to implement each of these elements in ways that are consistent with their own educational vision and academic program. The NCHS initiative is based on the expectation that, if the new schools incorporate the nine elements in their school designs, the schools will demonstrate positive learning environments and improved student performance. Each of these elements has a direct link to the indicators of success identified above. For instance, a rigorous instructional program should prepare students to pass the Regents exams, and youth development opportunities should build students' engagement with their school and community and strengthen their ability to plan for personal success in higher education and careers. By implication, failure to implement any of these elements hampers a school's ability to improve student performance. Given the importance of these school-based elements in determining the success of the initiative, assessing their implementation is a central objective of the NCHS evaluation.

II. Evaluation Design

The evaluation is organized in two tiers. The first tier is assessing the implementation and effectiveness of the planned approach to establishing, assisting, and supporting the new schools. The second tier is examining the operation and experiences of the schools themselves, gauging the relative effectiveness of their designs and identifying common features of schools that support students in achieving educational success. Although each tier could be designed as a separate evaluation, the program's theory of change suggests that the two tiers are best viewed as complementary components. This research strategy means that the assessment of the initiative must be based, in part, on an understanding of the schools' effectiveness in serving students. Similarly, the schools' effectiveness will be viewed within the context of the initiative's goals, resources, and constraints.

Working within the preceding set of priorities and assumptions, the purposes of the evaluation design are to:

- Provide short-term feedback to New Visions staff and the other members of the core team on the progress of the initiative

- Describe the operations and effects of the new small high schools, including effects on students

- Contribute to the planning of further efforts to promote small high schools and associated reforms of secondary schooling in New York City

Although the evaluation's findings should be relevant to a broad audience, the first two purposes address, in particular, the needs of the initiative's sponsors and administrators. The third purpose is directed more generally to practitioners and policymakers interested in achieving significant improvement in the secondary school experiences that are supported by large public systems.

Research Questions Guiding the Evaluation

Three central research questions are guiding data collection and analysis throughout the evaluation. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the contribution of the external support provided by the core team to the design and implementation of the new schools?

2. To what extent is the New Century High Schools initiative yielding sustainable high schools that implement the design characteristics endorsed by the core team?

3.   How, if at all, does the New Century High Schools initiative contribute to the systematic reform of secondary schooling in New York City overall?

We anticipate that the first of the three research questions will be a particular priority in the first few years of the evaluation, because the initiative's main concern during those years will be to establish and sustain the new schools. In later years, the focus of the evaluation will shift to the schools themselves and their students, as reflected in the second research question, and finally to the initiative's broader contribution to the New York City high schools, as reflected in the third question. Although answers to the third question have important long-term implications for the core team and the New York City schools, the evaluation's top priority is to provide timely and useful information on the initiative's implementation and development in the new high schools. Therefore, the first two questions will receive greater attention throughout the evaluation. An important rationale for the focus on the first two research questions is that the information, analysis, and interpretation generated by the evaluation in these two broad areas may directly influence citywide policy regarding secondary schools.

Approach to Data Collection

The evaluation is drawing on both quantitative and qualitative sources of data to address its research questions and measure progress against the initiative's goals. Data sources for the evaluation include:

- Site visits to NCHS schools

- Site visits include: individual interviews with principals and community partners; focus group interviews with teachers, students, and parents; observations of classroom instruction in English language arts; and review of key documents from each school.

- Surveys of principals, teachers, non-instructional staff, students, and community partners

- Non-instructional staff include any full- or part-time professional staff that did not provide instruction. These include counselors, social workers, librarians, and specialists, but not administrative staff.

- Analysis of demographic data on students and teachers, and of student performance data, from DOE data bases

Site Visits and Classroom Observations

The evaluation team is visiting each NCHS school launched in Year 1 at least once a year in the spring of Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3. In addition, team members will conduct two annual visits to a subset of approximately half of the schools initially funded in Year 2. The site visits include: separate interviews with the principal and a representative of the community partner; focus group interviews with 4-8 teachers, 4-8 students, and as many parents as can be scheduled; and observations of instruction in English language arts. In preparation for the focus group interviews, team members ask the principal of each school to select representative groups of students, staff, and parents, although in the case of some smaller schools, the entire faculty may participate in the focus group. Each interview lasts about an hour, and each observation lasts one class period. An experienced team of two researchers conducts each site visit. In Year 1, the evaluation visited all 13 new schools and one program.

In the classroom observations, we use an instrument developed specifically for this evaluation to record evaluation team members' observations of instructional strategies, content, and classroom management and organization. To design this instrument, the evaluation team drew on the research and development efforts of other experts in the field. We are especially grateful to Barbara Taylor and David Pearson (2000) and Alfred Hess (2000) for their permission to adapt their coding schemes and methodologies in our own development of the observational instrument and approach used in the evaluation. We also appreciate the encouragement that we received from other researchers to further develop and apply their work. The work of Andrew Porter (2002) in aligning a hierarchy of instructional methods also contributed to our design of observational instruments and methods.

The observations conducted for the NCHS evaluation are organized in 10-minute segments, with each observation period typically consisting of five segments. In Year 1, trained observers recorded data from 249 instructional segments. We expect to use the same approach to site visiting and classroom observation throughout the evaluation, with adaptations made annually to reflect the growing grade range in each school.

Surveys

In the spring of 2003, we administered surveys to all principals, teachers, non-instructional staff, students, and lead community partners in NCHS schools. In Year 1, the surveys collected background data on survey respondents and baseline measures of the implementation of the nine elements of effective schools. In succeeding years, surveys will be used to measure progress toward

full implementation of those elements. All survey responses are strictly confidential, and the identity of respondents will never be revealed.

In Year 1, the evaluation administered surveys in all 13 schools and in four programs. Survey response was as follows:

Respondent Group	N	Response Rate
Students	1,549	85%
Teachers	102	69%
Non-instructional staff	42	82%
Principals	13	76%
Community partners	14	82%

In presenting responses from the student, teacher, and non-instructional staff surveys, this report uses percentages to describe the distribution of responses. Responses from principals and community partners are reported in terms of both percentages and the actual number of responses, because the small N's for these respondent groups can make percentages misleading (for example, a single response accounts for a difference of about 7 percent among principals).

Analysis of survey data found little difference in response patterns between schools and programs. For this reason the responses from schools and programs are combined throughout this report, unless the text indicates otherwise.

Extraction of data from DOE databases. The evaluation will collect demographic data on all students and teachers in NCHS schools, as shown below.

Demographic Data on New Century High School Students and Teachers

	Students	Teachers
Race/Ethnicity	X	X
Gender	X	X
Eligibility for Reduced-Price Meals	X	
Prior (8th grade) Achievement	X	
Prior School Attendance	X	
Years of Teaching Experience		X
Area of Certification		X

In addition, the evaluation team is obtaining outcome data for students enrolled in NCHS schools to gauge the effects of the new schools on student outcomes. Specifically, for each student enrolled in a New Century high school, the evaluation is obtaining the following data:

- Average daily attendance
- Credits earned toward graduation
- Scores on Regents English and math exams
- Graduation status

The data on student characteristics and outcomes that are reported in this volume have been drawn from survey responses and from the school and student information posted on the DOE web site.

Analysis Plans and Procedures

In general, analysis has been designed to respond to the evaluation's research questions, based on an understanding of the implementation stage of the schools and the initiative overall. Hence, for example, the evaluation expects a more preliminary level of implementation of the nine design elements in a school's first year than in later years.

Site visit data. The evaluation team has reviewed and summarized interview notes from site visits, using NUDIST software, in write-ups for each of the Year 1 NCHS schools and the one program included in the site-visit sample. These reports are serving as internal evaluation documents. In cross-site analysis, we have compared, contrasted, and synthesized findings from the individual schools and program to make statements about the group of sites and about categories of sites. The cross-site analysis, which our specialized software facilitates, allows the evaluation to examine differences across sites and contexts.

Survey data. All survey data have been entered into a database and cleaned by data analysts. The evaluation team ran an initial set of frequencies for each survey item for the initiative as a whole. The evaluation is reporting all survey tabulations in the aggregate, across all schools and programs. In addition, we have conducted many more specialized analyses in order to compare responses across related or possibly related items (e.g., teacher participation in professional development and teacher sense of professionalism within the school) and also to compare survey response patterns across schools with varying characteristics (e.g., schools with large percentages of new teachers).

For sites in which at least 15 teachers and 50 students participate in the survey, the evaluation will provide a set of tabulations from its own surveys to use in the school's own planning and

evaluation efforts. In this way, sites will also be able to compare their own survey results with survey results from the initiative as a whole. The high survey-response threshold has been set to protect the confidentiality of survey respondents.

In subsequent years of the evaluation, analysis will link survey responses from each school to student outcome data from that school in order to identify the relationship between implementation of the nine elements and student outcomes, controlling for students' prior achievement and other demographic factors. This analysis is critical to the evaluation's ability to report on school policies and practices that are most closely associated with positive student outcomes. In Year 1, analysis has examined school-level policies and practices in light of measures that might be viewed as early indicators of positive outcomes, such as student satisfaction with the school, teachers' sense of professionalism and collegiality, and the like.

III. External Supports Received by Educators and Community Partners

The evaluation assessed the supports provided to educators and community partners by asking the recipients about what supports they received, whether the supports met or didn't meet their needs, and what additional supports and assistance they continued to need.

Supports That Principals Received

In surveys and interviews, principals were asked about the type and amounts of help and assistance they received from sources external to the school itself, including supports from New Visions and the school's liaison with its local district, which for most of the schools and programs was the small schools office of the Bronx high schools superintendency. The evaluation also examined the support relationships between the school and its community partner, the neighborhood surrounding the school, and students' parents; those discussions are contained in Chapter V.

Interviews with principals indicated that the principals of schools in the Bronx received extensive help and support from the small schools staff of the Bronx high schools superintendency. During the planning stages of the initiative, the Bronx office held weekly meetings at Morris High School, during which planning team leaders received assistance in writing their proposals, and they discussed issues associated with starting a new school. Topics covered in these sessions included staff hiring and development, budgeting, and curriculum preparation, among others. Several principals were effusive about the help they received from this source. One said, "We got incredible support from the Bronx office of the high schools superintendent. They were on top of us all the time." Another principal said, "I thought _____ and _____ were available and they picked smart people and they totally get it. I felt that they were constantly there for me." From another principal, "Planning meetings were sponsored by New Visions, but the greatest credit goes to _____, _____, and _____. They have been completely helpful and totally available."

In addition, the Bronx office paired new principals with veteran principals who agreed to serve as mentors. Mentors helped new principals navigate the school system and especially its administrative apparatus, and served as sounding boards for new ideas. Several principals said that their relationship with their mentor was helpful.

According to principals, the Bronx office provided particular help in curriculum. One principal remarked, "Before we implemented the proposal, we had several staff development sessions on what should be considered in terms of curriculum and operational issues." Principals also appreciated the

Bronx office connecting them with City University of New York (CUNY) faculty, some of whom worked with teachers throughout Year 1 to improve instruction in literacy. CUNY also provided literacy training to NCHS educators in the summers preceding and following Year 1. Several principals said, however, that they and their teachers needed more support on literacy issues. One principal said, "Any support around literacy would be greatly appreciated because literacy does have an implication on other subjects... [We need] workshops [for educators] to help students read and understand what they are reading."

In addition to the help provided by the Bronx small schools office, principals reported other forms of support from their district, including a $10,000 allocation to purchase printers in one school, and the services of a grant writer to help another school prepare the NCHS implementation proposal.

In addition to their need for more help in literacy instruction, principals reported additional areas in which they needed assistance. Several principals stated that they needed still more help with curriculum, with one principal stating, "One of the things I would like to see is more help with the curriculum. One really can't go by the prescribed curriculum. Creating a pool of curricula from more sources would be very useful so that we don't have to start from scratch." Also, "For next year..., it would be good to have inter-visitation with other schools, for teachers to see what other schools are doing."

Other principals commented that they needed more political support from New Visions and the district liaisons in their internal relationships with the larger system and with the larger high school in which they were located. A principal commented, "I don't need a lot of technical assistance from New Visions, but I need them to ask [us] what we need from the system and to start advocating for us." From another principal, "One thing I think is that the district leaves it up to the new principals to negotiate with the host principal. They ought to do something more to make the host principals feel obligated to help with stuff like gym. [We have received] only two new rooms next year, even though there will be 75 new students. [And then] the UFT blames the new schools for overcrowding."

Supports That Community Partners Received

Feedback provided to the evaluation through survey responses and interviews with each school's community partner yield a mixed picture regarding their perception of the external supports they received from New Visions and their district. The community partners' survey responses indicate that they were very pleased with the support they received from their New Visions liaison and their district liaison. All of the community partners agreed that both the New Vision liaison and the district liaison kept them informed about important decisions and issues regarding small schools. They all also

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agreed in surveys that their New Vision liaison and their district liaison followed through with the commitments they made to other school staff. All but one community partner agreed that their New Visions liaison was responsive to their ideas and suggestions, and all agreed that the district liaison was responsive to their ideas and suggestions.

Results from interviews with the community partner offered a slightly different point of view, however. In interviews, community partners expressed differing levels of satisfaction with the supports they received from New Visions and the district while planning their new school. Community partners who were positive about the support they received from New Visions particularly appreciated the help they received in identifying new sources of funding. One community partner commented, "Sometimes the staff pointed us in the direction of new grants," and another said that he received emails from New Visions regarding funding opportunities. Several community partners said that they appreciated the friendly, caring relationship they had with New Visions. A community partner described the relationship with New Visions as "user-friendly" and commented that "they often ask about what we need." Yet another community partner praised the work of one New Visions liaison and remarked "_____ was incredible. She continually challenged people. She threw the moose on the table and challenged people to go after the meat."

In addition to identifying funding sources, a central responsibility of New Visions was to provide grant funds directly to the new schools through the community partners. In some cases, community partners felt the funding was adequate. One community partner said, "Support from New Visions has been great. They put resources on the table for us to leverage with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers." Other community partners said that New Visions should obtain and provide additional funding. One said, "New Visions needs to be realistic about the financial side for partners. It's riskier for partners. The planning grant doesn't do anything for this kind of model. We spend $650,000 a year for this kind of model."

One community partner criticized coverage of community-partnership issues in the training opportunities offered by New Visions. The senior representative of this organization said that the training New Visions provided during the planning stages of the initiative was geared specifically to principals and teachers but not the community partner. This interview respondent suggested that the planning process include a segment explicitly addressing the role of the community partner.

During interviews, few community partners commented about the support they received from the district or from community organization. One partner praised the Bronx high school superintendency for publicizing the school to the community through public service announcements on local cable stations and meetings with housing communities. Another praised the efforts of the South

Bronx Churches in helping "everybody to get their information together for the proposal, talking about liability, and helping everyone through the process."

IV. Characteristics of Students Enrolled in the New Century High Schools

In Year 1, the evaluation used several information sources to identify characteristics of students enrolled in the new schools. The primary sources were the DOE student and school database, as reported by DOE on its website, and the evaluation's surveys of students and teachers. As indicated below, the DOE-reported data do not include information on NCHS students in Harry Van Arsdale High School, the single "transformation" school, because DOE does not report separately on these ninth-graders within the school's overall population.

The available information on NCHS students allows the evaluation to report at this point in the study on their demographic characteristics, their prior educational performances (as determined from student self-reports), and their overall orientation toward their education.

Demographic Characteristics

In Year 1, the 13 NCHS schools enrolled approximately 1,567 students. Of these, 82 percent were ninth-graders, 14 percent were tenth-graders, and no grade classification was available for the remaining 4 percent. (The following data on gender, race/ethnicity, and special needs do not include NCHS students enrolled in Harry Van Arsdale High School.) Fifty-five percent of NCHS students were girls, and 45 percent were boys. As seen in Figure 2, 55 percent of the students in the NCHS schools were Hispanic, and 34 percent were black (not Hispanic). Hispanic students were the majority in nine schools, black students were the majority in two schools, and Asian students constituted the largest racial/ethnic group in one school. White (not Hispanic), Asian, and American Indian students together constituted 11 percent of enrollees.

Students with special needs for English language learning and for special education enrolled in NCHS schools in fairly large numbers. Almost 18 percent of NCHS students qualified for special services as English Language Learners. Seven percent qualified for special education, with 5 percent eligible for special education in the least restrictive environment and 2 percent eligible for special education in the most restrictive environment. (These two categories reflect mild and moderate handicapping conditions, respectively.)

For students attending NCHS schools in the Bronx, the evaluation compared the demographic characteristics of NCHS students with students enrolled in grades 9-12 in the NCHS schools' corresponding comprehensive high schools. This comparison revealed that students in the two sets of schools had nearly identical racial/ethnic characteristics. However, NCHS students were much more

likely to be female (58 percent vs. 48 percent) and more likely to be an English Language Learner (22 percent vs. 15 percent) than were students in the corresponding comprehensive high schools, as seen in Figure 3. Compared to NCHS students, students in the comprehensive high schools were much more likely to be eligible for special education services in the most restrictive environments (8 percent vs. 1 percent). (These differences were statistically significant.) Percentages of students eligible for special education in the least restrictive environment were about the same in the two groups of schools.

The evaluation also compared the grades and race/ethnicity of NCHS students with students enrolled in grades 9-12 in New York City's academic and alternative high schools. This comparison revealed that NCHS students were more likely to be female (55 percent vs. 50 percent), less likely to be white (5 percent vs. 16 percent), and more likely to be Hispanic (55 percent vs. 34 percent) than were students in grades 9-12 in these 320 New York City public schools. These differences were statistically significant.

Prior Educational Performance

The report on the second year of the evaluation will describe NCHS students' achievement and school attendance in the year prior to their enrollment in the NCHS schools, in order to depict students' level of educational need prior to enrolling in an NCHS school and the change during their first year of enrollment in an NCHS school. As noted earlier, this analysis will employ student-records data maintained by DOE and will establish a baseline for the longitudinal measurement of students' educational progress while enrolled in the NCHS schools. The analysis will also compare achievement levels of NCHS students in the Bronx with achievement levels of students in the corresponding comprehensive high schools.

In Year 1, the self-reports of NCHS students indicate that they earned fairly good grades before enrolling in the NCHS school, with only 15 percent reporting mostly C's or lower. Thirty-seven percent reported that they had earned mostly A's or a mix of A's and B's, and 49 percent reported that they had previously earned mostly B's or a mix of B's and C's, as seen in Figure 4. The evaluation has no way to judge the veracity of these self-reports, although the promise of anonymity to student respondents was intended to encourage candor.

Figure 2

Race/Ethnicity of Students Attending NCHS Schools
(N=1,217)*
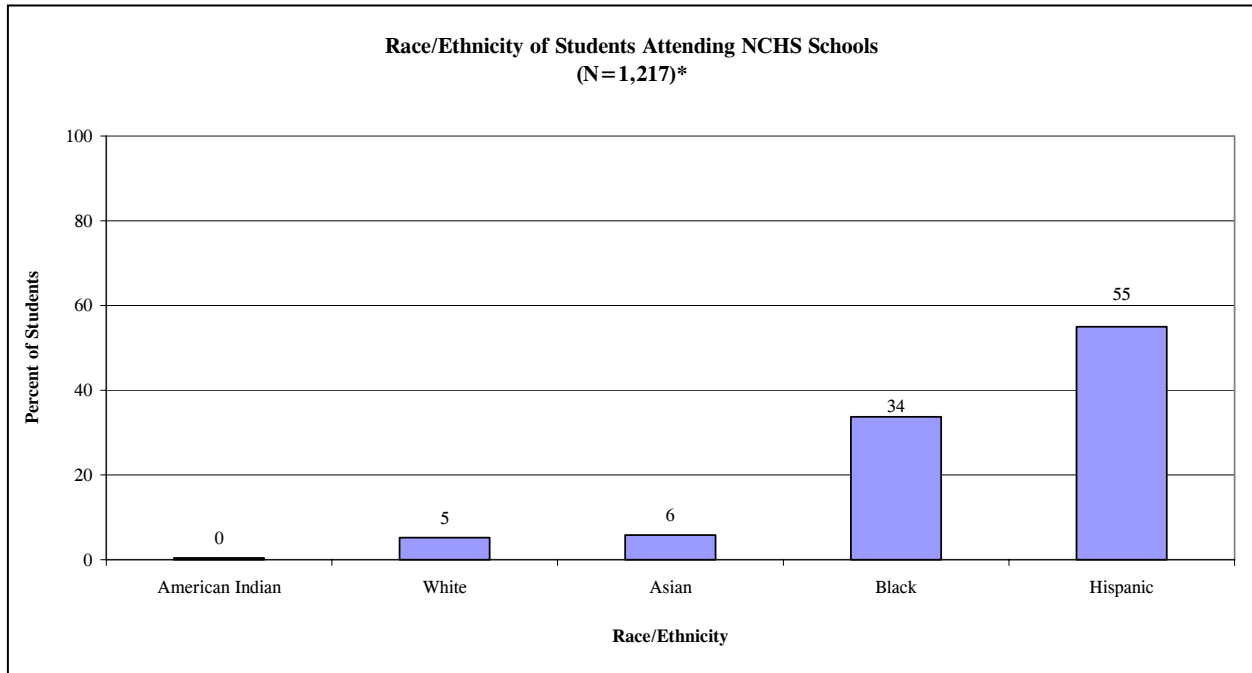
* The numbers presented in this figure are based on 12 of the 13 NCHS schools. NCHS students enrolled in Harry Van Arsdale High School are not included in the counts because these data are not reported by DOE.

Figure 3

Bronx Students' Eligibility for Special Needs Programs
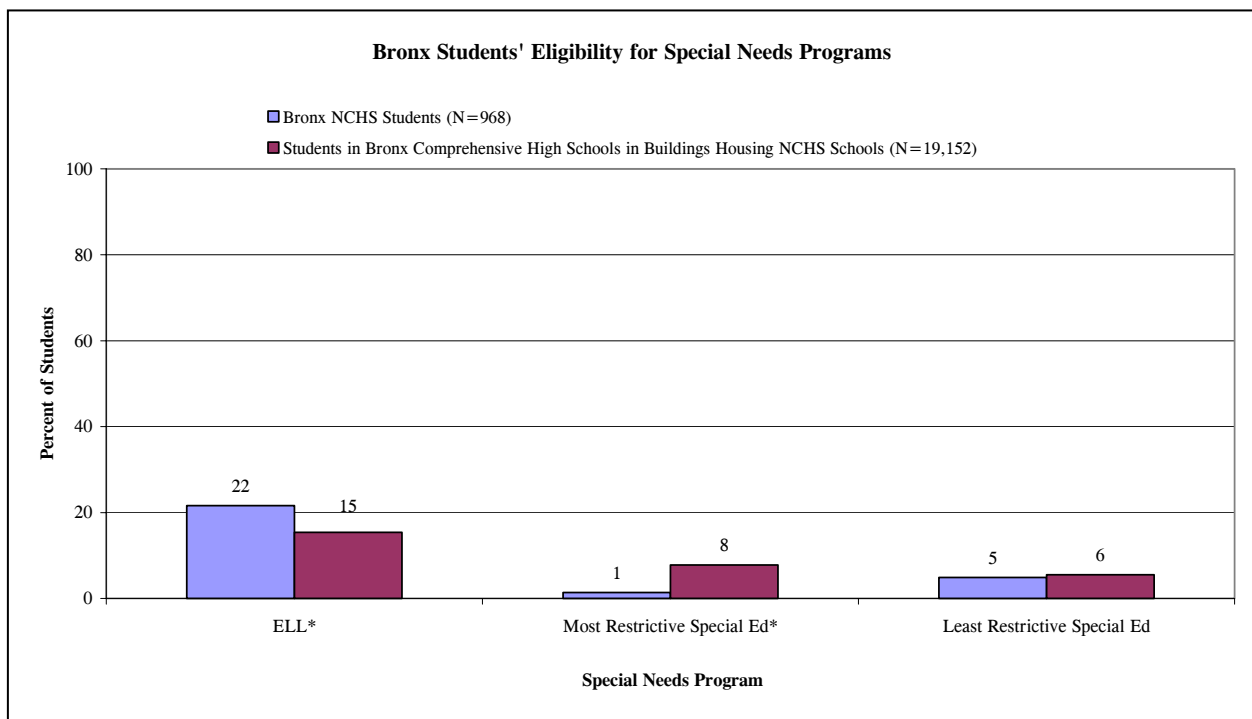
* Difference is statistically significant.

Attitudes Toward Education

In surveys, students said that they valued education and believed it was important to their future lives. As shown in Figure 5, 90 percent or more of students reported that doing well in school was important to them, that they needed to finish school to get a good job, and that the things they were learning would be useful for college or a job. Only 12 percent said they didn't see the point of going to school. Students had very high educational aspirations, with almost two-thirds (65 percent) stating that at the very least they wanted to continue their education through college.

Students' day to day attitudes and actions did not necessarily reflect the reported importance of education in their lives, however, according to school staff. As shown in Figure 6, over half of teachers reported the following as moderate or serious problems, in order of seriousness: failure to complete homework, tardiness, coming to school unprepared to learn, lack of motivation, and student apathy. Although principals' responses were similar to teachers, non-instructional staff and community partners did not perceive these problems to be as serious as teachers did. School staff and community partners only infrequently cited student absenteeism, cutting class, or dropping out as serious or moderate problems.

Figure 4

Students' Self-Reports of Their Prior Educational Performance
(N=1,549)

Figure 5

Students' Self-Reports of Their Expectations about Their Education
(N=1,549)

Statement	Percent
Doing well in school is important to me	97
I need to finish school to get a good job	96
The things I am learning in school will be useful in college	93
The things I am learning in school will be useful in a job or career	90
The things I am learning in school will be important later in life	88
I don't see the point of going to school	12

Percent of Students Who Agree or Strongly Agree

Figure 6

Barriers to Students' Academic Success, According to Teachers
(N=102)

Barrier	Percent
Students not completing homework	80
Student tardiness	72
Students unprepared to learn	65
Students' lack of motivation	60
Student apathy	54
Student absenteeism	36
Students cutting class	23
Students dropping out of school	15

Percent of Teachers Reporting This Is a Moderate or Serious Problem
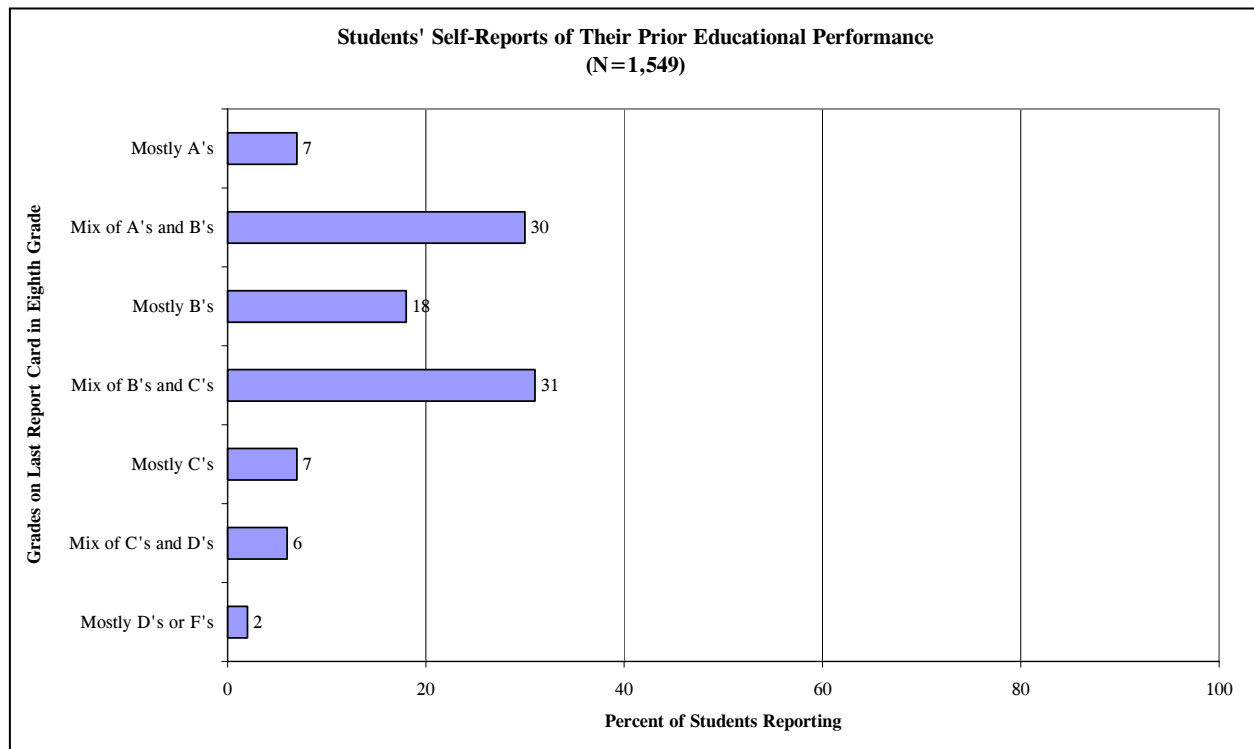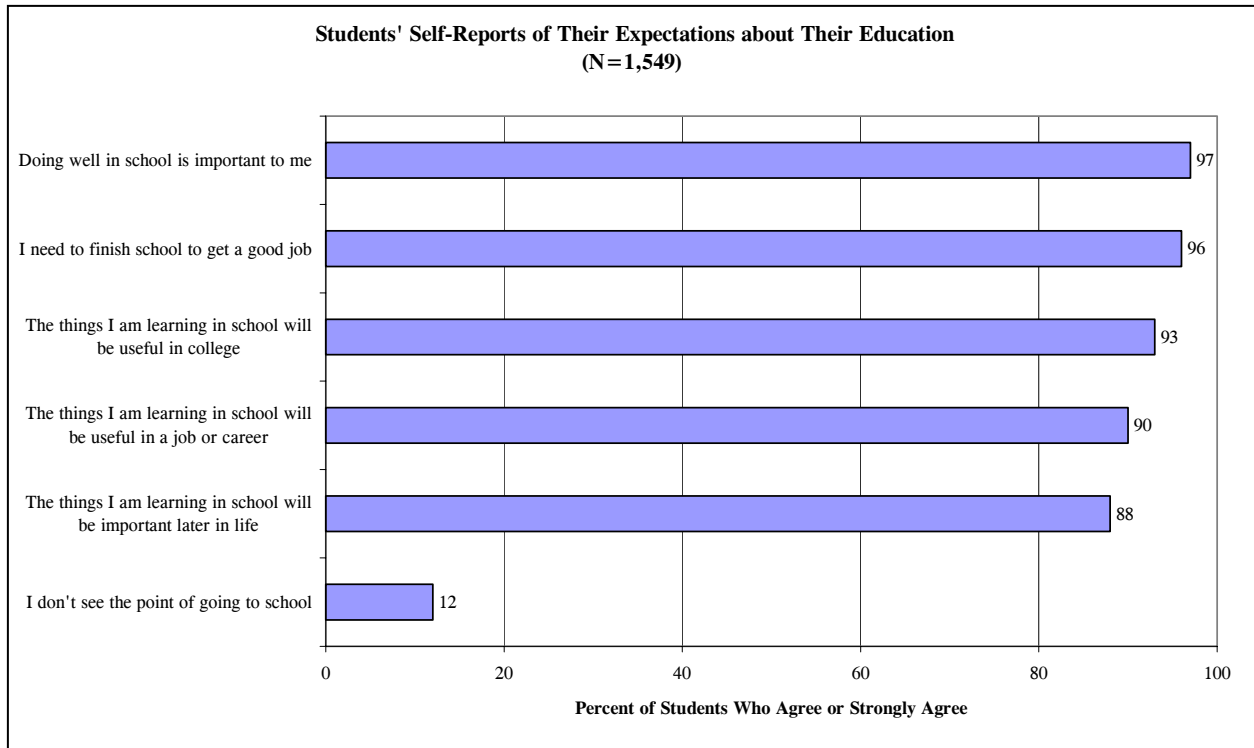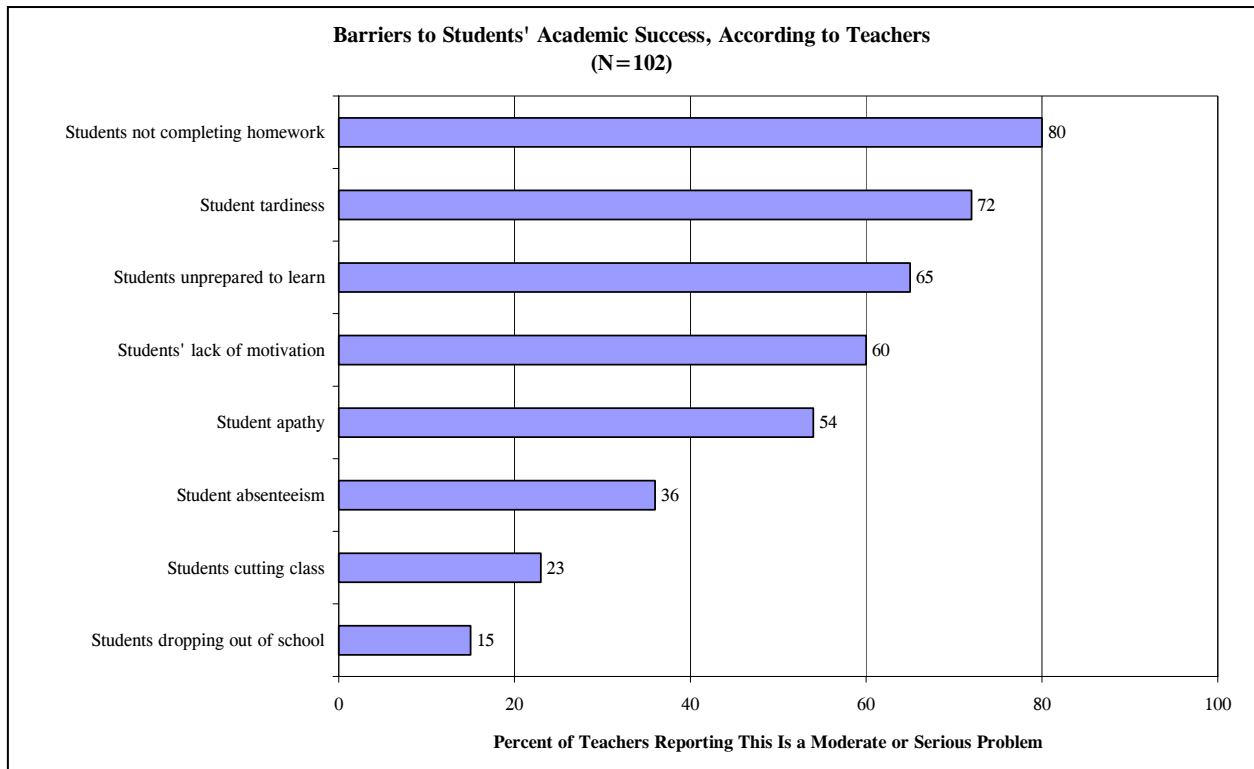
V. Characteristics of the High Schools

A central objective of the evaluation in its first year was to report on the establishment and operations of the new schools. This chapter describes the people, organizations, settings, philosophies, and community relationships that formed the backbone of the schools in their first year. It also describes how the schools did or did not address the initiatives nine elements of effective small high schools.

Characteristics of the People and Organizations Who Created and Operated the New Schools

Staff Characteristics

The teaching force of the NCHS schools and programs in Year 1 was relatively inexperienced, compared with high school teachers in the rest of New York City. Forty percent of NCHS teachers had taught six or more years prior to assuming their current job, compared with 62 percent of high school teachers in the city with the same amount of experience. Six of the NCHS schools and programs had almost all new teachers (defined here as at least 80 percent of their teachers having taught fewer than six years), while three of the NCHS schools and programs had very veteran staffs (at least 80 percent of their teachers had taught more than six years). The other schools and programs had very similar percentages of new and veteran teachers. Almost three-quarters (73 percent) of new teachers (those who had taught for five years or less) generally believed that their education and training had prepared them for their current teaching jobs.

New teachers did not differ in significant ways from veteran teachers in their responses to the evaluation's teacher survey, with the only differences seen in ratings of professional development. Compared to veteran teachers, new teachers were more likely to indicate that professional development delivered in connection with their current job had been appropriate to the grade level they teach. Seventy-eight percent of new teachers, compared to 58 percent of veteran teachers, reported that NCHS-related professional development had been appropriate to their grade level and subject matter "always" or "usually." Veteran teachers, on the other hand, were more likely than new teachers to indicate that professional development helped their school staff to work together. Sixty-two percent of veteran teachers, compared to 41 percent of new teachers, reported that professional development helped their school staff to work together better "always" or "usually."

Just over one-third of teachers in New Century high schools (35 percent) reported that they lacked full certification. These teachers held either an Occasional Per Diem certificate (for substitute teachers) or a Preparatory Provisional certificate (for individuals still enrolled in teacher preparation programs). Almost half of the teachers in New Century high schools (47 percent) had completed the requirements for a Certified Provisional certificate, but had not been teaching long enough to earn a Permanent certificate.

For all but one principal, 2002-03 was their first year in this position. Although principals did not generally have experience in their new positions, they were well-educated, with 92 percent (12 of 13) having completed coursework beyond a master's degree.

Community Partner Characteristics

The NCHS community partners represent a broad spectrum of nonprofit institutions, with most having prior experience with public schools and with their educational partners. Among the 17 partners, five are community-based development or social service organizations, four are organizations supporting youth development and/or youth recreation, three are museums or historical societies, two are postsecondary institutions, two are religiously-affiliated social service organizations, and one is an organization that supports educational reform, as seen in Table 1. The vast majority of community partners responding to the survey (77 percent, or 10 of 13) reported having worked with other members of their school planning teams before applying for the New Century grants.

The Educational Climates and Foci Characterizing the New Schools

In Year 1, the evaluation looked carefully at both the climate for learning and the educational focus or mission of the new schools. We had anticipated that both areas would provide valuable preliminary signals about the likelihood of success in the new schools.

Educational Climate

In surveys, students reported generally favorable perceptions regarding their school's educational climate. As shown in Figure 7, over two-thirds of students responded positively to questions about whether they felt known and successful and whether they felt that their ideas counted and that they belonged. As shown in Figure 8, half or more of students also responded positively about their relationships with peers, in terms of the ease of making friends among students in the school,

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students helping one another, and students caring about each other. However, almost two-thirds (65 percent) said that there were groups or cliques of students who didn't talk to each other.

Table 1
Community Partner Organizations

Partner Organization	School/Program	Organizational Focus
ASPIRA	Marble Hill School for International Studies	Youth development
Bronx Historical Society	New Explorers	Arts and humanities
Bronx Museum of Art	Bronx International School	Arts and humanities
CASES	Community Prep	Community-based social services
Citizens Advice Bureau	Community School for Social Justice	Community-based social services
East Side Settlement House	Mott Haven Village Community School	Community-based social services
Good Shepherd	South Brooklyn Community School	Religiously-affiliated social services
Lehman College Art Gallery	Bronx High School for the Visual Arts	Arts and humanities
Lehman College for School/College Collaboratives	High School for Teaching and the Professions	Postsecondary institution
Mosholu Montefiore Community Center	Bronx Aerospace Academy	Community-based social services
Institute for Student Achievement	School for Excellence	Educational reform organization
Outward Bound	Bronx Guild	Youth development
St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corp.	Harry Van Arsdale High School	Community-based social services
South Bronx Churches	Bronx Leadership Academy II	Religiously-affiliated social services
Take the Field	Academy for Careers in Sports	Youth recreation
University of Vermont	Pelham Prep	Postsecondary institution
YMCA	Millennium High School	Youth development

Slightly more than one-third of students (38 percent) reported that serious fights often occurred among students, as seen in Figure 8. About the same proportion of teachers reported that fights occurred (31 percent), although much smaller proportions of non-instructional staff (12 percent), principals (15 percent, or 2 of 13), and community partners (7 percent, or 1 of 14) reported that there were fights. Data gathered during site visits to the schools indicate that many of the fights reported by students were between students in New Century high schools and students from the larger

comprehensive high schools, not between NCHS students. At four schools, students said they did not feel safe because the larger school in which they were housed was not safe, and because students from the host schools often teased or picked on the NCHS students. At three schools, students said that the security guards assigned to the comprehensive schools did not respond appropriately to requests for assistance from students in the NCHS schools. At another school, students were not allowed to go to the restrooms when students from the comprehensive high school were changing classes, because several students had been assaulted in the restrooms; in this school, the NCHS students were only allowed to go to the restrooms when students from the host school were in class. As the host schools are phased out of existence, the tension between the two groups of students in some locations will cease to be a problem, but that may take at least two more years.

According to teachers, student disrespect was more likely to be a problem in students' relations with other students than in their relations with teachers. As seen in Figure 9, almost two-thirds (64 percent) said that student disrespect for other students was a moderate or serious problem, while less than half (47 percent) said that disrespect for teachers was serious. Principals, community partners, and non-instructional staff saw student disrespect as a less serious problem than did teachers.

Figure 7

Student Perceptions of Educational Climate
(N=1549)

Figure 8

Student Relations with Their Peers
(N=1549)

Statement	Percent
It's pretty easy to make friends at this school	79
Most students in this school would help each other	66
There are groups or cliques of students who don't talk to other students	65
Most students in this school just look out for themselves	64
Most student at this school care about each other	54
Most students in this school are mean to each other	42
Serious fights often happen between students	38

Percent of Students Who Agree or Strongly Agree

Figure 9

Teachers' Perceptions of Problem Behaviors Among Students
(N=102)

Problem	Percent
Student disrespect for other students	64
Student disrespect for teachers	47
Physical conflicts among students	31
Parental alcoholism/drug abuse	23
Vandalism of school property	21
Student drug abuse	16
Student pregnancy	14
Robbery or theft	14
Student use of alcohol	13
Student possession of weapons	7

Percent of Teachers Reporting This Is a Moderate or Serious Problem
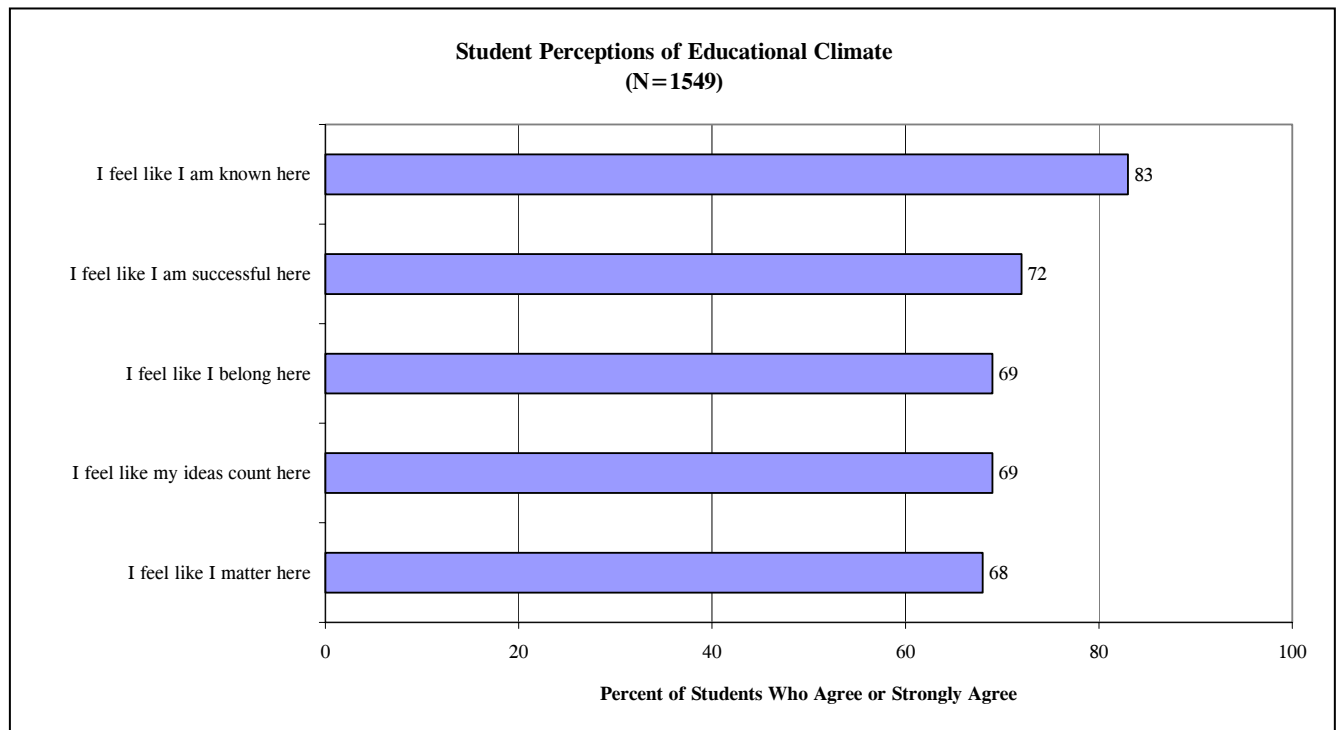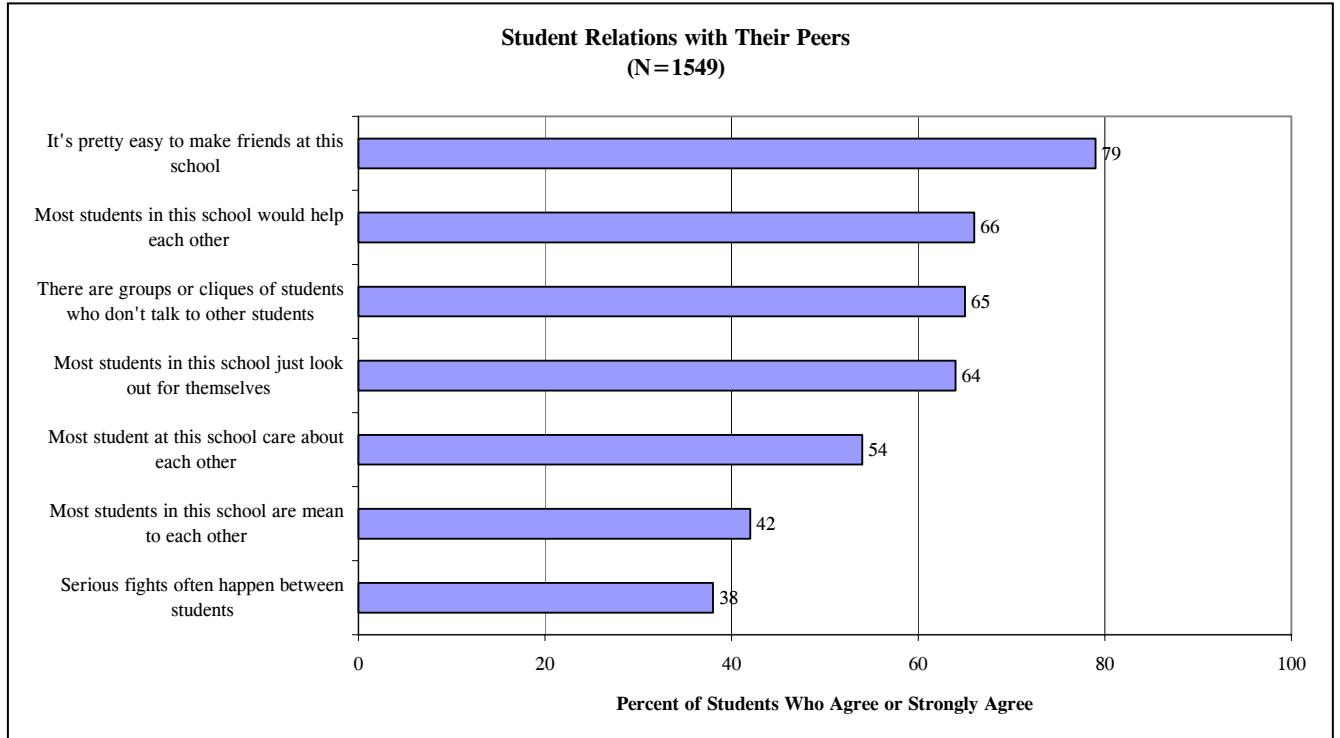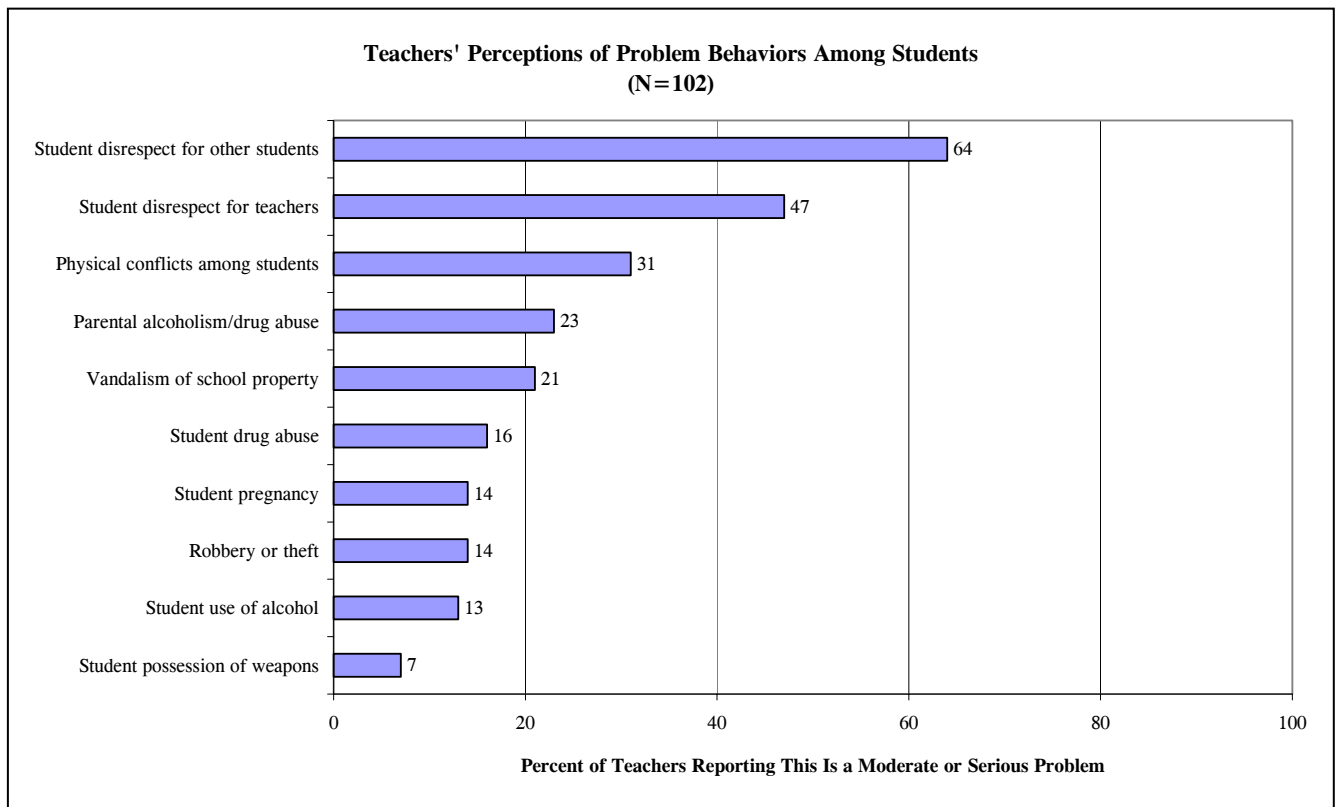
As also seen in Figure 9, staff responses did not indicate serious behavioral problems in areas such as weapons possession, student pregnancy, robbery and theft, use of illegal substances, and vandalism, with less than a quarter of respondents reporting moderate or serious problems in these areas. Among the respondent groups, community partners were especially likely to report problems in the areas of parental alcoholism and drug abuse, with 36 percent of community partners (5 of 14) reporting problems in these areas.

Educational Focus

Teachers and principals reported high levels of coordination around the school's educational focus, often through the use of a core curriculum, but they also reported extremely high levels of teacher autonomy with regard to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Almost all of the teachers (96 percent) understood and supported the school's educational focus, and most (85 percent) were familiar with their school's educational focus before they began working at the school. Eighty percent of teachers and 77 percent of principals (10 of 13) said that the educational focus was coordinated across grades. Half of teachers (52 percent) reported that their school used a core curriculum to maintain a consistent focus across classrooms. Over three-quarters of teachers, principals, and community partners said that the instructional strategies used by teachers were consistent with the school's focus and that the course content and instructional materials reflected the school's educational focus. Only 36 percent of community partners (5 of 14) perceived that teachers in their school coordinated instruction around an educational focus. However, none of the community partners reported having a major role in designing the school's curriculum or delivering classroom instruction and most did not maintain a permanent presence in the school, so they may not have the same degree of familiarity with instructional coordination as the teachers.

In a seeming contradiction with their reports that teachers closely coordinated their instruction, all principals and at least 80 percent of teachers reported that teachers had a great deal of flexibility in deciding what to teach, selecting instructional materials, and designing classroom assessments. However, teachers' comments during focus groups help explain this apparent contradiction. Teachers said that they do have a great deal of flexibility in designing a curriculum that is consistent with the school's educational focus, but it is a shared flexibility because most curriculum development is done collaboratively. For instance, at one school, all teachers have three common prep periods a week, during which they meet to discuss concerns about individual students and strategies for integrating their curricula. At another school, teachers participated in a summer institute that focused mostly on curriculum issues but also on collaboration. Teachers described their interactions with one another as a source of professional development, especially during regular team meetings, when they share with one

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another what works and what doesn't work in their classrooms. At another school, one teacher asserted simply, "We've written everything from scratch."

Community Linkages and Features of Partnerships with Community Organizations

Linkages Between the School and the Community Partner

All community partners reported that there is a great deal of cooperation between school staff and members of the community partner organizations. According to two-thirds of community partners (9 of 14), the nature of their relationship with the school is spelled out in a formal partnership agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Despite reporting high levels of cooperation, one-third of community partners that have MOUs in place (3 of 9) are dissatisfied with the scope, content, and specificity of those agreements.

Among teachers, 72 percent reported that they regularly used resources and supports provided by their school's community partner. Just over half of teachers (53 percent) reported that the community partners provided them with instructional support, including curriculum design, youth development programs, relationship-building with the community and parents, and funding. To help teachers with curriculum development, some community partners provided curriculum consultants, while others showed teachers how to incorporate new ideas and information into their curricula. For example, one community partner whose area of expertise was the arts helped teachers to incorporate arts skills and content into their curriculum. Another community partner provided a mentor teacher who had experience working with small schools and who helped the staff with writing rubrics and curriculum units. Teachers enthusiastically praised the consultant, crediting him with much of the progress their students had made in learning to write well. Seventy-one percent of community partners responding to the survey (10 of 14) said they had donated financial resources to the school, ranging in amount from $15,000 to $700,000.

The other half of teachers did not perceive extensive support from their community partners, and some voiced disappointment. Among their comments were: "I am still trying to identify what their role is" and "I don't know what they do; there is not too much interaction." Other teachers commented that it was difficult for them to identify what support the community partner provided because their role had not been defined. As one teacher stated, "The big piece missing is a clear philosophy and understanding of what it is they [the community partner] are supposed to be doing. Nothing specific has been established and there is no clear role for the community partner."

Communication between the School and Community Partner

In general, communications between the school and partner were frequent and regular, although community partners perceived that communication occurred more frequently than was reported by principals. At least half of both principals and community partners reported that they spoke with their counterparts often or very often about student evaluation results, student progress, resources for the entire school, and resources for a specific group of students. However, in every case, higher percentages of community partners reported talking with principals than principals reported talking to community partners. For instance, 77 percent of partners (10 of 13) said they discussed resources for the whole school with the principal often or very often, compared with only 67 percent of principals (8 of 12).
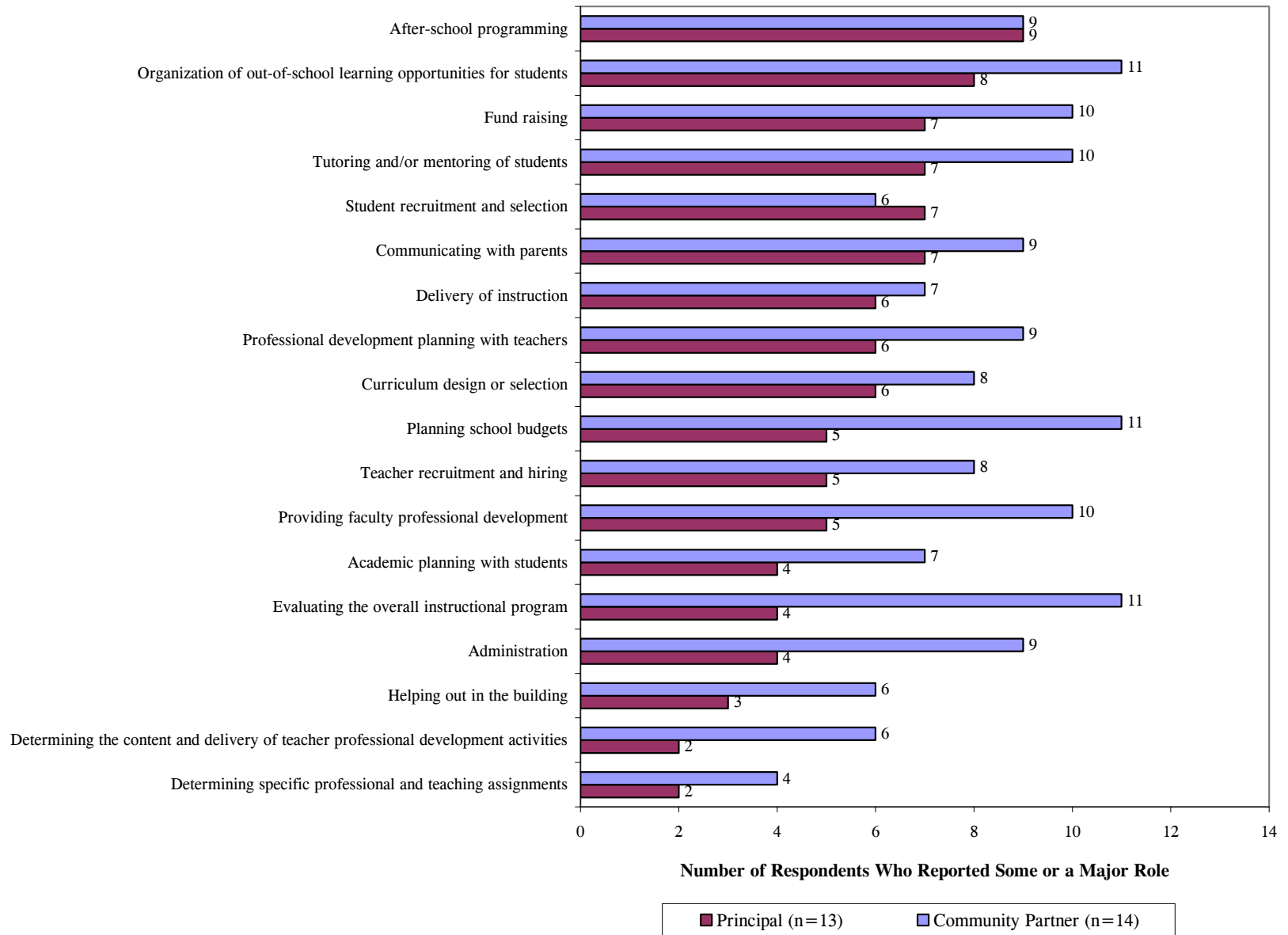
Discussions between principals and community partners were less likely to address curricular or instructional issues. Only 38 percent of principals (5 of 13) said that they discussed academic standards, curriculum, or academic support services with the community partner often or very often.

Day-to-day Roles of the Community Partners

All community partners said they believe that they have at least some influence on the day-to-day operations of the school, but only one-quarter (3 of 13) believe they have a great deal of influence. A majority of community partners report having a major role in just two areas: fund raising and after-school programming. When asked if they played either a major role or some role in certain areas, the three most commonly reported areas of reported influence by community partners were planning school budgets, evaluating the overall instructional program, and organizing out-of-school learning opportunities for students, as seen in Figure 10. Overall, principals agreed that their partners' greatest contributions came in non-instructional areas, although they differed somewhat from the community partners in the specific areas they identified: providing after-school programming, organizing out-of-school activities for students, and communicating with parents. In an encouraging signal, however, both community partners and principals reported the involvement of partners in curriculum design or selection in almost half of the new schools (as reported by eight community partners and six principals).

Regarding contact with parents, 78 percent of community partners (11 of 14) said they were involved in providing information to parents on community-based resources for their children and families, and half of the partners (7 of 14) said they sponsored programs to help parents support their children's schooling at home.

Figure 10
Role of Community Partner in Day-to-Day Functions of School

Number of Respondents Who Reported Some or a Major Role

Principal (n=13)   Community Partner (n=14)

Function	Principal	Community Partner
After-school programming	9	9
Organization of out-of-school learning opportunities for students	8	11
Fund raising	7	10
Tutoring and/or mentoring of students	7	10
Student recruitment and selection	7	6
Communicating with parents	7	9
Delivery of instruction	6	7
Professional development planning with teachers	6	9
Curriculum design or selection	6	8
Planning school budgets	5	11
Teacher recruitment and hiring	5	8
Providing faculty professional development	5	10
Academic planning with students	4	7
Evaluating the overall instructional program	4	11
Administration	4	9
Helping out in the building	3	6
Determining the content and delivery of teacher professional development activities	2	6
Determining specific professional and teaching assignments	2	4

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Community partners reported direct contact with students on a fairly frequent basis. Almost 80 percent of them (11 of 14) said that students had attended an event or volunteered in a community program sponsored by the partner. Community partners were more likely to have contact with students through after-school programs than through community service opportunities or internships. Five out of 14 community partners reported that most or all students in the school had participated in after-school or weekend enrichment programs that they conducted, compared with just one partner that offered paid internships and two that sponsored community service projects for students.

Case study data confirm that partners made valuable contributions to the schools' after-school programs and parent involvement but were not, for the most part, heavily involved in the schools' core academic programs or in the day-to-day affairs of the schools. At a few schools, the community partner provided support by cultivating relationships with parents. This included setting up and running the PTA, providing orientation sessions to parents, and conducting home visits. One principal praised the community partner for its work with parents, commenting, "They have helped to develop a relationship with parents and students. For example, they have been helpful in setting up the PTA and giving workshops to parents. They have been instrumental in getting a psychologist to come to the PTA meetings and talk to parents about issues they have been facing." Teachers were also grateful for the work that community partners did, expressing the belief that community partners who had established relationships with the community gave the new schools greater credibility.

In at least three schools, partners played key roles both in both planning and operating the school. Their contributions began during the planning stage, culminating in central roles in selecting the school principal. As one partner said, "We controlled the planning process. We felt from the get-go that it was critical that [my organization] pick the school leadership. We picked a principal who knew us and with whom we felt comfortable….Our priority was to have someone who understood [this organization] and was part of our culture." Another partner was instrumental in getting a waiver from the school system that allowed its choice to lead the school, even though that individual did not have the proper credentials to serve as principal. The third partner set up the planning team, which "did everything, including hiring."

In the preceding three examples, the partners have remained intimately involved in the day-to-day operation of the school, largely by co-locating entire segments of their staffs at the school. One partner has transferred its division director to the school; she assists in the day-to-day management of the school and also handles student intake and orientation. The partner also coordinates the school's youth development activities, in large part by hiring, training, and supervising 25 advocate counselors, who lead the weekly advisory periods. The partner also makes available six social workers to students who need additional support or counseling. A second partner has transferred to its school the entire staff from the after-school youth leadership program that it has operated for six years. It also

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transferred its technology staff to the school to manage the school's computers. The third partner assigned a staff member to the school, who serves as the assistant principal. She oversees several case managers employed by the partner and located at the school. The partner's director of training also works at the school.

At the same time, even these three partners resemble their peers in having played a minimal role in their respective schools' core academic programs. In these cases, once the principals were selected, both partners were satisfied to let them take the lead in designing the curriculum. "We've kept a hands-off approach once I knew the right people were involved," one partner explained. "[The curriculum] came out of that school." Another partner had a similar explanation. "[The principal we selected] epitomized the latest thinking in literacy and numeracy….We allowed the principal to be a gifted instructional person and have the partnership maintain the school."

Several partners seem to want stronger relationships with their schools, including having more staff on site in the future. As one said, "If we did it again, we'd make it a full co-leadership model, so that instead of having a person here a couple of days a week, we'd really have a co-leader… not that they'd be on the same level as [the principal], but that they'd be here full-time." She continued, "It needs to be a new kind of relationship, where we're both in the school, and it's our school—not the school with our help." Another partner said that he would have liked to have seen his organization have more of a presence on site to "capture the flavor of what we're involved with on a day-to-day basis."

Features of Students' Educational Experience

In this section and the section on school infrastructure, we review school characteristics in the areas corresponding to the nine elements of effective small high schools, as identified by New Visions at the beginning of this initiative. In their applications for New Century grants, schools described how their school designs incorporated each of the nine elements. The evaluation, therefore, will track the level of implementation of each element in each of the three years of data collection. In the final year, analyses of student outcome data will include an examination of the relative influence of each element on student outcomes. Here we present implementation data for the first year.

In our discussion of academic rigor, we describe the characteristics of English language arts instruction delivered in the NCHS schools, a topic that bears on all of the nine elements but especially on academic rigor.

Academic Rigor

Students generally perceived that their NCHS schools offered a challenging academic environment, with 63 percent reporting that in all or most of their classes they were challenged to work hard, and that they spent most of their time learning new things, as shown in Figure 11. Seventy-one percent said that they learned a lot in most or all of their classes. One student commented, "We are learning at an alarming rate." As proof of that, another student at the same school said that a friend of his at the comprehensive high school in the same building is using the same math textbook as their NCHS school but that the NCHS math class is three chapters ahead. Most students in this focus group said that the math benchmark exam given by the Bronx Superintendent's office (which they had just taken that day) was easier than most of the tests their math teacher gave them. Over half of students surveyed (56 percent) said that they needed to do a lot of studying to do well on tests in all or most of their classes. At one school, a student pointed out that only seven students made the honor roll, which indicates that grading is fairly strict. One student said she was "busting my butt for a 65 just to pass."

Meanwhile, one-third of students surveyed said that in most or all of their classes they were bored (34 percent) or spent most of their time reviewing material they had already learned (33 percent).

Students' survey responses indicate that their classes often required them to take an active role in their own learning. As seen in Figure 12, over half of students (58 percent) said that they often or almost always had opportunities to ask their own questions about a topic or conduct investigations. Sixty percent said that they worked on projects that required research or data collection. Sixty-two percent said that they read and discussed original sources in their classes. At one school, students in the focus group said that their teachers use interactive activities and projects, such as requiring students to act out landmark court cases. Over half of students (59 percent) reported that they completed activities that involved extended writing. Students at one school said they were required to write essays on a continuing basis, with one adding that in those essays, "You have to connect yourself to history and also put information in your own words."

Teachers' reports in this area were similar to those of students, except that teachers reported fewer opportunities for student research or data collection (22 percent of teachers reported this occurred at least once a week). In another difference, 42 percent of students said that most instruction involved teacher lectures, but only 25 percent of teachers reported this amount of lecturing.

Overall, teachers and principals reported that their curriculum and assessments were aligned with Regents standards. At least three-quarters of teachers said that their school's curriculum and student assessments were aligned with the Regents standards. Similarly, more than 80 percent of principals (at least 11 of 13) said that their school's curriculum and assessments were aligned with
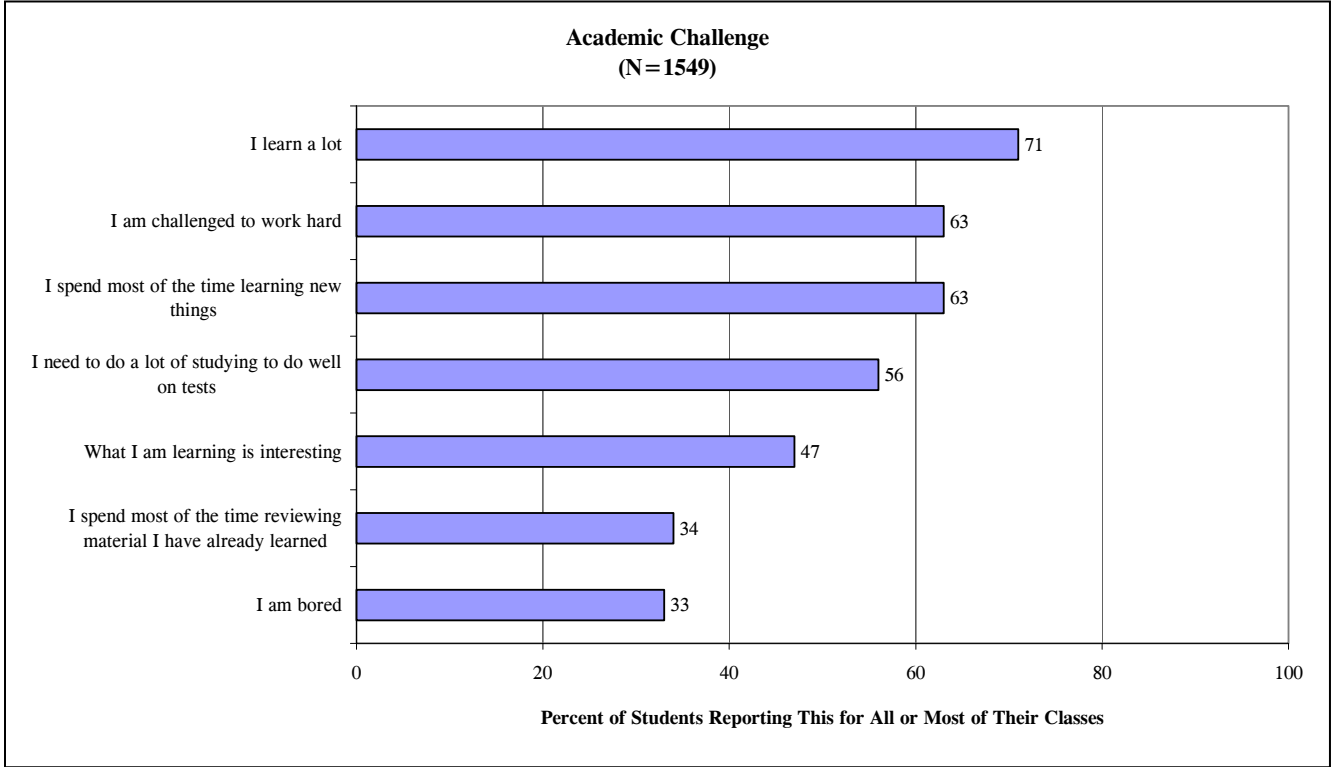
Figure 11

Academic Challenge
(N=1549)

Statement	Percent
I learn a lot	71
I am challenged to work hard	63
I spend most of the time learning new things	63
I need to do a lot of studying to do well on tests	56
What I am learning is interesting	47
I spend most of the time reviewing material I have already learned	34
I am bored	33

Percent of Students Reporting This for All or Most of Their Classes

Figure 12

Student Reports of Instructional Activities
(N=1549)

Statement	Percent
The teacher asks the class to read and discuss original sources	62
I work on a project that requires research or data collection	60
I complete assignments that involve extended writing	59
I have opportunities to ask my own questions about a topic and investigate the answers	58
The teacher gives me time to reflect on my work	55
I spend the majority of class time working with students on group assignments	51
The teacher lectures for the majority of the class time	42

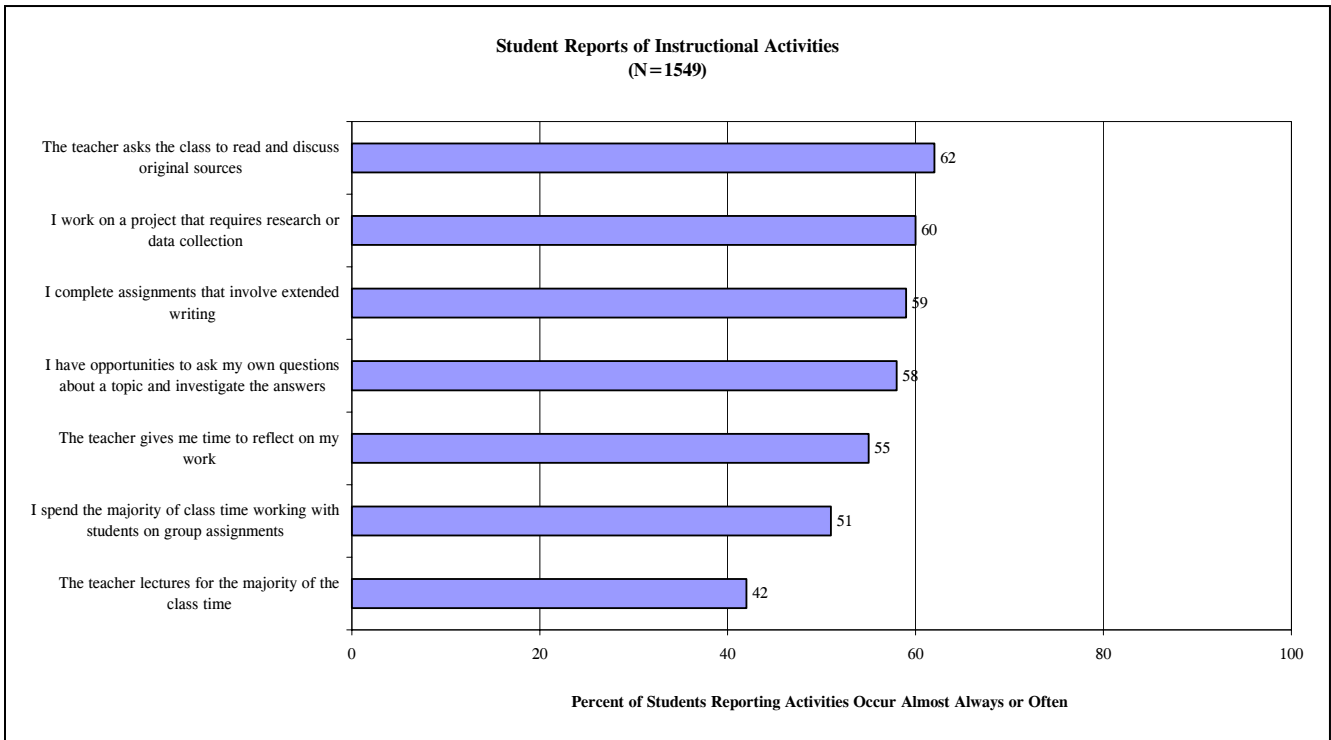**Percent of Students Reporting Activities Occur Almost Always or Often**

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Regents standards. Teachers at one school explained how they made explicit efforts to align their instruction with the Regents exams. Rather than teach to the test, teachers at this school incorporated Regents-type questions into their curricula and emphasized skills that students will need to use on Regents exams. "With each unit I will draw out Regents questions that are relevant," one teacher explained. "They will get the Regents questions at the beginning of the unit and then they will answer them as they go along so that they get used to doing them. For example, if they are analyzing a document, it is similar to scaffolding an essay. I link it to the Regents." Some schools, however, did not specifically align their curriculum with the Regents tests. When asked if anyone monitors the curriculum to ensure that it is preparing students to pass the Regents, one teacher responded, "Other than the students?"

Students agreed with staff reports of the level of alignment with the Regents: Seventy-five percent of students said that they were being prepared for Regents exams in all or most of their classes. In one school, different classes rotate through gym each day so that a class can attend a math Regents prep session with a specially qualified tutor. Ninth-graders at another school were preparing to take the Regents U.S. History test, even though students do not generally take that test until their sophomore year. Students in this school attended Saturday Regents prep class to help them get ready. All of the students in this focus group except for one believed themselves to be ready for the exam, and subsequent contact with the school revealed that more than 60 percent of the students passed the exam on their first try.

Although students and teachers agreed overall that their schools offered rigorous curricula, they disagreed somewhat at the school level. In comparing measures of students' perceptions of academic rigor with measures of teachers' perceptions of academic rigor, only one school appears among the top four schools on ratings of rigor by both teachers and students. However, students and teachers were more likely to agree on which schools had the lowest levels of academic rigor, with three schools appearing among the four lowest-rated schools, according to both teachers and students.

As a window on the characteristics and quality of instruction in the NCHS schools, the evaluation examined English/language arts instruction using systematic methods.[2] It is important to remember that these observations represent single snapshots of instruction across 13 schools and one program. However, with at least three observations conducted at each school, together they present a useful tool for examining instruction across all sites.

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[2] In spring 2003, as noted earlier, the evaluation conducted systematic observations in English language arts classrooms in all NCHS schools and one program. Each observation was divided into 10-minute segments, with each observation period typically consisting of five segments. Observers recorded data from 249 segments.

These data show that during the observations teachers tended to use traditional instructional strategies and address fairly low-level skills. Instruction typically centered on reading as the language arts focus (68 percent of instructional segments observed) and reading connected text as the language arts activity (43 percent of segments). Instruction was mainly intended to help students learn facts, definitions, and content (53 percent) and to communicate their understanding (51 percent), as shown in Figure 13. Teachers worked with students as a whole class or large group (as recorded in 62 percent of instructional segments observed), and they mainly taught by telling or giving students information (64 percent), as seen in Figures 14 and 15. Narrative text served as the primary material for the lessons observed (56 percent). For the most part, these texts tended to be appropriate for ninth-grade English classes, including such works as *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Black Boy*, and *Down These Mean Streets*. However, in a few classes, observers found lower-level reading texts in use.

Figure 13

Performance Goals of Language Arts Instruction
(N=249)

Category	Percent
Learn facts/definitions/content	53
Communicate understanding	51
Use ELA skills or strategies	24
Make connections	13
Learn contextual content	8
Conjecture/generalize/prove	5

Percent of Observation Segments

Figure 14

Student Grouping for Language Arts Instruction
(N=249)

Category	Value
Whole class/large group	62
Individual	38
Small group	17
Pairs	13
Other/NA	0

Percent of Observation Segments

Figure 15

Instructional Strategies Used During Language Arts Instruction
(N=249)

Category	Value
Telling/giving information	64
Listening/watching	43
Coaching/scaffolding	37
Eliciting recitation	37
Disciplining	23
Eliciting discussion	21
Other/NA	15
Checking work	14
Reading aloud	10
Modeling	8
Assessment	7

Percent of Observation Segments
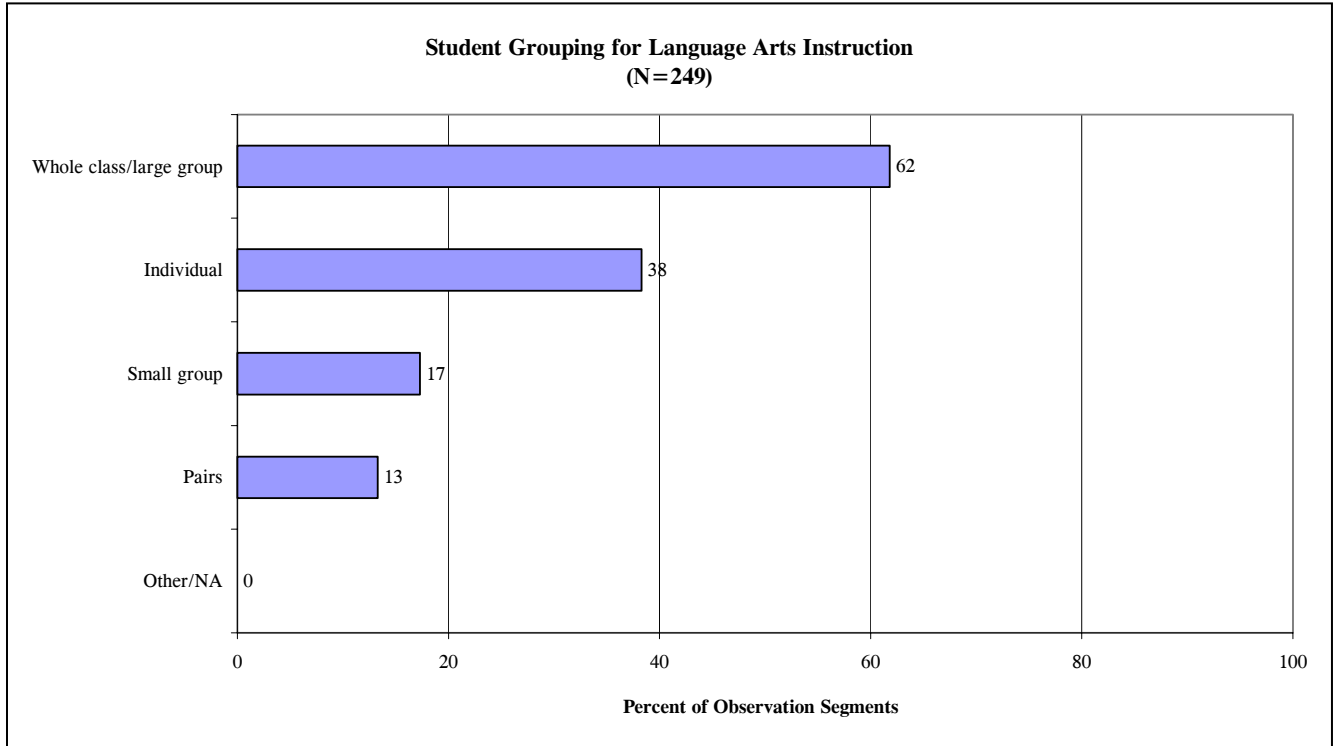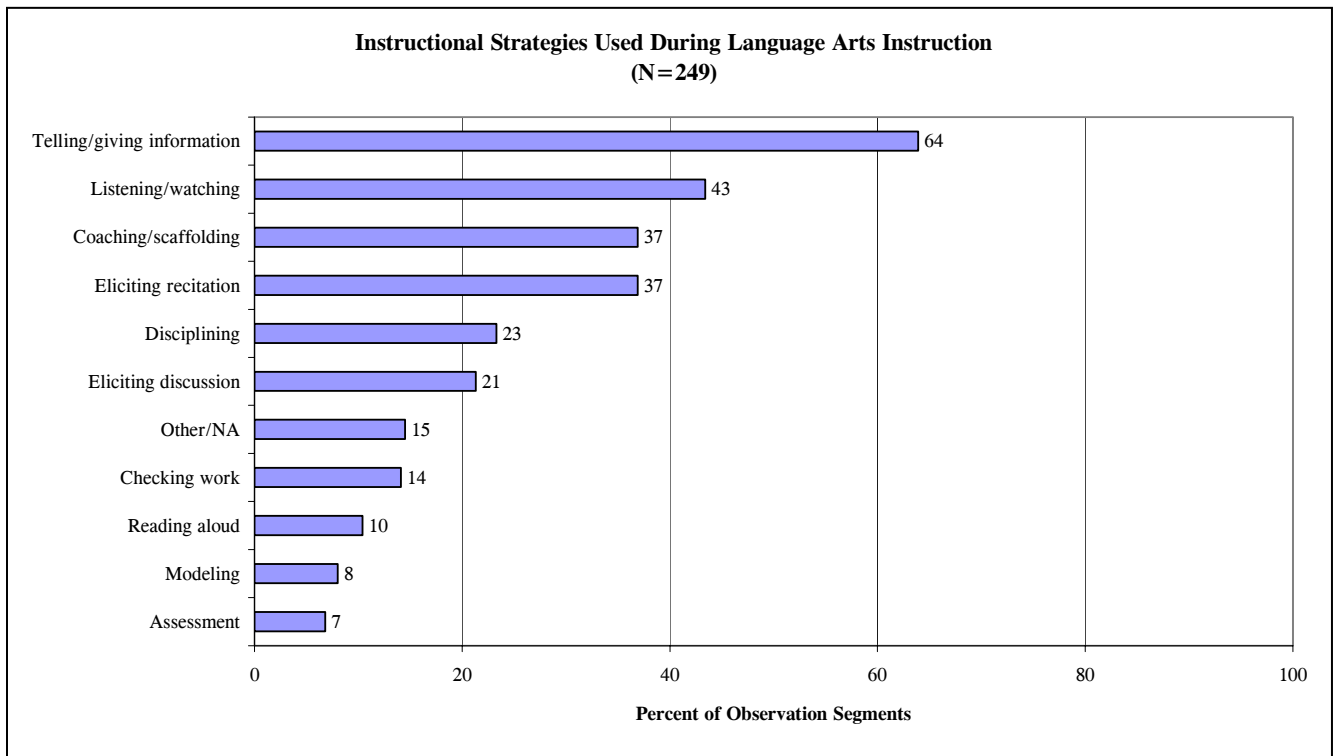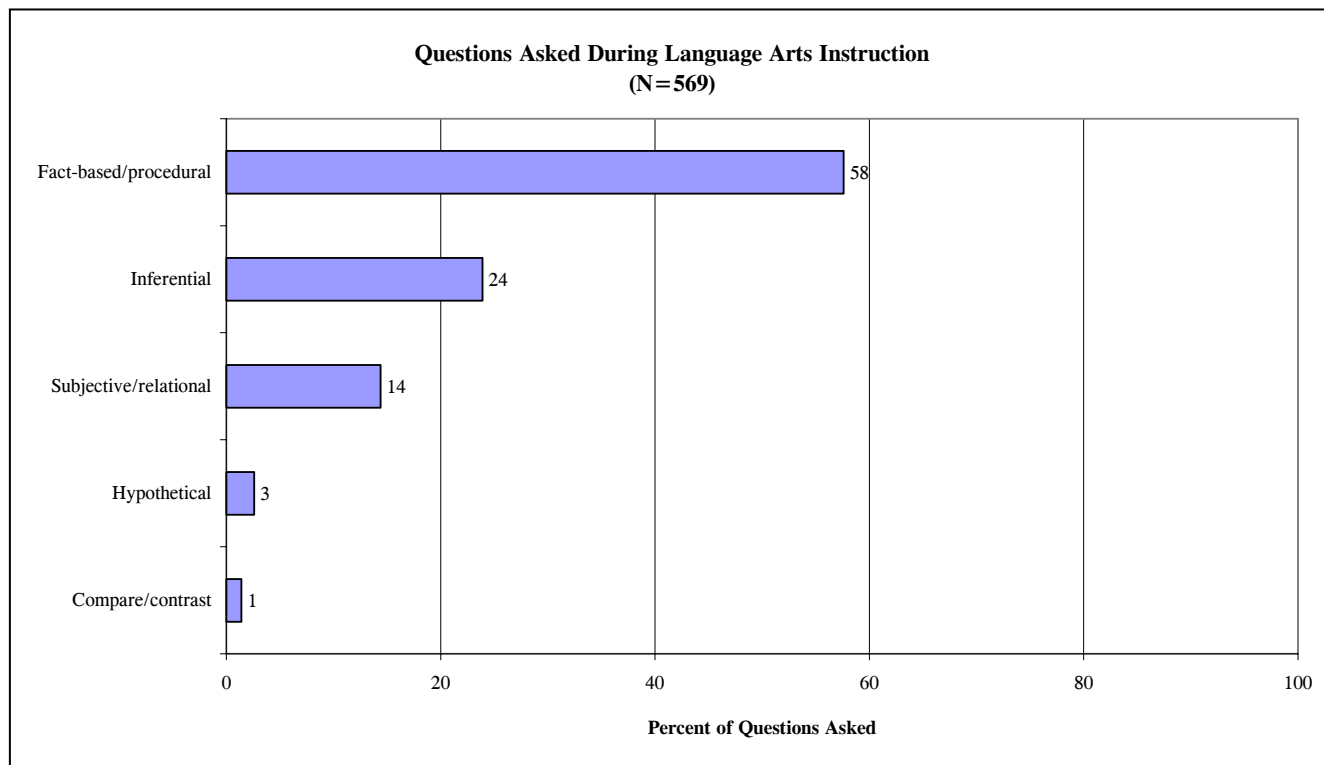
During the classroom observations, researchers recorded all questions posed by teachers, and categorized them using the following hierarchy (examples are taken from actual classroom observations at NCHS schools):

Question Type	Definition
Fact-based/procedural	The answers to these questions can frequently be found in, and extracted from, the text/materials used. No attention needs to be given to reasoning or thinking more deeply than the surface level. (*Example: What does the fisherman do with the bottle?*)
Subjective/relational	The answers to these questions require either affective/personal responses to the topic (feelings or emotions) or for students to relate the topic to their own life (e.g., How do you feel about...?). Responses to this type of question can rarely be considered correct, nor do they require substantive support to establish their "validity." (*Example: Who is your favorite rap artist and why?*)
Inferential	The answers to these questions require the answerer to go beyond the words of the text, drawing inductive or deductive conclusions about beliefs, values, or happenings which are not explicitly described in the text. Questions may ask for an explanation of why something happened or an identification of something referred to but not fully described. Answers may be directed towards explaining the "why" or the "how," not just the "what" that happened. (*Example: Why did she have to take it from them to get money? Why didn't she go somewhere else?*)
Compare/contrast	The answers to these questions require the integration of two or more characters, ideas, procedures, plot-lines, or events. Questions may also seek the separation of two or more things and the criteria by which differences are noted. (*Example: Is there any difference between the Koran and the Bible?*)
Hypothetical	The answers to these questions require students to propose alternative scenarios (e.g., What if...?) These questions ask students to hold some things constant while anticipating the differences if other things are changed. They allow students to explore the relationships between different components in the topic being studied. These questions ask the students to make evaluations or suppositions. (*Example: What kind of job would Hank have in our world? Would he be a car mechanic or an engineer?*)

Based on data categorized as described above, teachers tended to ask fact-based or procedural questions most of the time (58 percent), as seen in Figure 16. In the hierarchy of educational methods, the questioning and other approaches observed in NCHS English/language arts classrooms are mainly appropriate for the teaching of basic information and skills. Over the course of the NCHS initiative and the evaluation, as teachers develop broader instructional repertoires and as schools add grades and students move on to the learning of more complex skills and content, we expect to see shifts toward instructional goals, types of questions, literacy activities, and literacy foci that are more advanced.

Figure 16

Questions Asked During Language Arts Instruction
(N=569)

Category	Percent
Fact-based/procedural	58
Inferential	24
Subjective/relational	14
Hypothetical	3
Compare/contrast	1

Percent of Questions Asked

Using only the observation data, we cannot draw definitive conclusions about the relationships between instructional strategies used, types of questions asked, and performance goals. For instance, while asking inferential questions is correlated with students talking about the higher meaning of text and with the goal of students making connections, it is also associated with lower-level goals and activities, such as students communicating their understanding of the text and listening to text being read to them. Similarly, although segments in which teachers coached or scaffolded are associated with subjective/inferential questioning and elicitation of discussion, coaching/scaffolding is also associated with inferential questioning and activities related to basic comprehension of text. Therefore, we cannot say definitively from these data that certain instructional strategies or higher-level questioning are associated with more advanced performance goals.
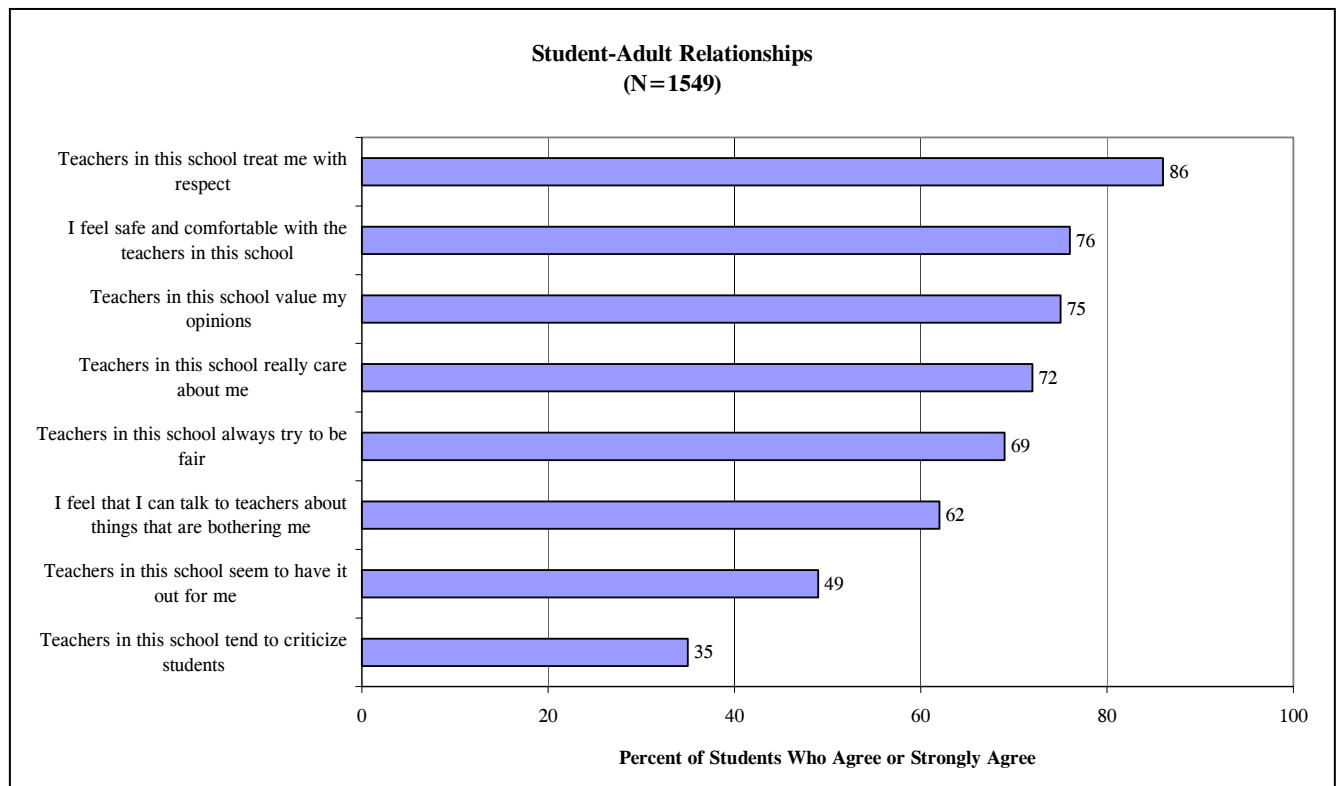
Two classroom features emerging from the classroom observations offer promise for the schools' future development, however. These are small classes and generally high levels of time on task. The English language arts classes observed for the evaluation averaged 16 students present per class, with most classes serving 13 to 20 students. The largest class we observed numbered 25 students and the smallest class served only one student. During the 249 instructional segments for which data were recorded, an average of 82 percent of students were on task in any given 10-minute segment. Generally speaking, students were most likely to be on task in the first 30 minutes of the observational

period and were decreasingly likely to be on task in the last 20 minutes of the 50-minute observational period.

Personalized Student-Adult Relationships

As shown in Figure 17, students reported that teachers treated them with respect (86 percent), that they felt safe and comfortable with teachers (76 percent), and that teachers valued their opinions (75 percent). Students reported that they spoke with staff on a weekly basis about school, schoolwork, and future plans. Among teachers, all reported speaking frequently with students about academic and personal issues but were most likely to talk with students about academics. Non-instructional staff and principals were most likely to talk with students about personal things, including personal goals and plans.

Figure 17

Student-Adult Relationships
(N=1549)

Percent of Students Who Agree or Strongly Agree

Teachers in this school treat me with respect	86
I feel safe and comfortable with the teachers in this school	76
Teachers in this school value my opinions	75
Teachers in this school really care about me	72
Teachers in this school always try to be fair	69
I feel that I can talk to teachers about things that are bothering me	62
Teachers in this school seem to have it out for me	49
Teachers in this school tend to criticize students	35

Comments from students reinforced the finding that New Century High Schools have created environments where students are known and cared for by their teachers and other adults at the school. One student commented that they would "not [be] cared for as much in a large school. I feel

comfortable here. Everyone knows you here. Teachers listen to you and get your opinion." At another school, students were most positive about the small size and family-like atmosphere at the school. "We can communicate with teachers," one student said. "They are like our family." Another agreed, "You can bond with the teachers. You can be for real with them and they don't care." Students appreciated that the personalized atmosphere also meant that someone was looking out for them. As one reported, "The principal knows every single person in this school. There are limits to things you can do." A student at another school echoed that sentiment. "You can't do anything wrong because you get caught quick. They know us very very well. At other schools they don't know all the students. They might know your face but not your name." One student said, "Slipping through the cracks? Not at this school!"

Even parents agreed that the schools offered a uniquely positive learning environment. One parent's impression was echoed by many of the parents we spoke with: "The students are closer to the administration and the teachers than they would be in other schools. Every teacher knows every student by name. They know what is happening in these kids' lives."

Advisory periods represent a critical strategy that every New Century school used to develop strong teacher-student relationships. Though the duration, frequency, and design of these periods differed from school to school, most had a common purpose: Helping teachers and students connect on a more personal level through serious discussions about personally meaningful issues. According to one principal, "The advisories are the key. They make school meaningful….The teachers have built trust with the students, and in return the students share quite a bit."

Survey results and comments from students and staff indicate that advisory periods met with mixed success. The most common subject discussed during advisory periods, according to students, was school and school work (79 percent of students said they talked about these issues sometimes or often during advisory periods). The second most common subject discussed was current or world events (71 percent), followed by career plans (62 percent) and what is going on in students' lives outside school (58 percent).

In their comments, teachers expressed strong support for the concept of advisory periods but indicated that they were not always able to make them work as desired. One teacher captured a common sentiment among her peers, "The advisory can be an excellent thing, but it has to have some goals." At school after school, teachers lamented not having enough guidance in how to conduct their advisory periods. Examples of their comments follow, with each comment made at a different school:

- "We have all struggled. It's at the end of the day. We're tired, they're tired. It's pass/fail. It started out we were doing group building. There was nothing of

substance. We would do a few projects that worked for a few weeks. There's no continuity, either across advisories or throughout the year. I would not call it hang-out time. It is a free discussion time."

- "Someone was supposed to give us advisory materials, and it did not happen... it's not our forte."

- "Right now it's just casual conversation. We tried having instruction, but kids were bored. Now we just allow them to have a conversation."

- "There is no common understanding of how to use the advisory period."

- "Teachers do everything from tutoring to poetry. [Most students still think of advisory as] free time."

As a result of these problems, several schools turned to their community partners to help design and run advisory periods. As one principal explained, "[The partner's] role is helping us to devise an advisory period for working with students...That's been very strong, because it's something the teachers don't feel comfortable with."
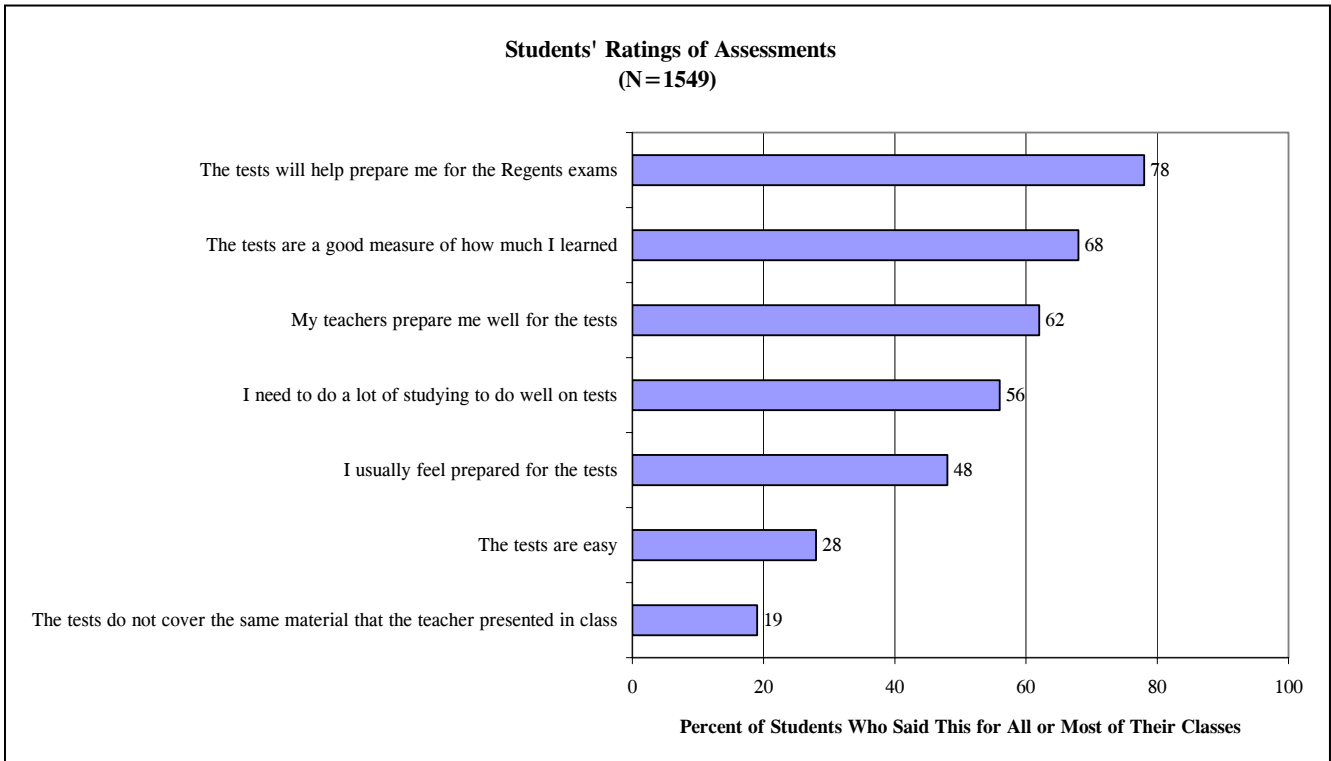
Meaningful, Continuous Classroom Assessment

Teachers reported frequent and varied assessment of student work through various means, including oral presentations. Students found their exams to be fair and also good measures of how much they had learned, according to 68 percent who said that this was true for all or most of their classes. As seen in Figure 18, only 19 percent said that the tests did not cover the same material as was presented in class. Sixty-two percent of students said that their teachers prepared them well for their tests in most or all of their classes.

Many teachers in New Century schools used and highly valued "authentic" assessment strategies, such as individual portfolios of student work and performance tasks.[3] Teachers reported using authentic assessments more often than traditional classroom assessments (such as end-of-chapter tests and written quizzes). Thirty-seven percent of teachers reported administering authentic assessments at least once or twice a week, compared with 30 percent who reported using traditional assessments that often. Moreover, teachers ranked authentic assessments as the most important measure they used in gauging how much their students had learned: Thirty-eight percent said it was the

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[3] Assessment is considered "authentic" if it calls for students to apply what they have learned in a context over which they may have some choice. Authentic assessment is contrasted with traditional assessment in which students passively react to written or oral test questions.
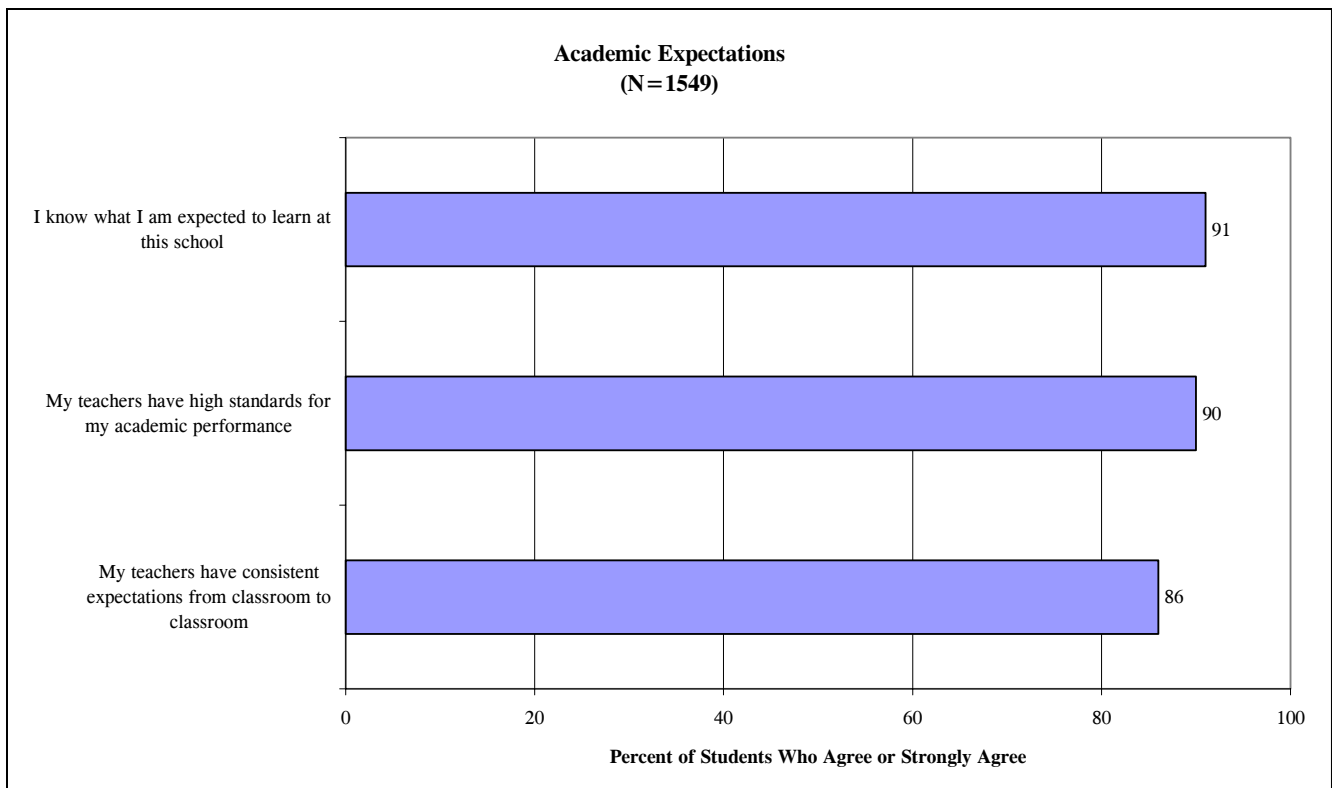
Figure 18

Students' Ratings of Assessments
(N=1549)

Statement	Percent
The tests will help prepare me for the Regents exams	78
The tests are a good measure of how much I learned	68
My teachers prepare me well for the tests	62
I need to do a lot of studying to do well on tests	56
I usually feel prepared for the tests	48
The tests are easy	28
The tests do not cover the same material that the teacher presented in class	19

Percent of Students Who Said This for All or Most of Their Classes

most important measure, compared with 32 percent who said that students' class participation was the most important measure.

Site visitors found evidence of authentic assessment being used in six of the schools visited. At one school, student assessment was done in many ways, including oral presentations, essays, art, and roundtables where students talked about what they had learned. During one classroom observation, each student prepared to teach a lesson to two to three other students on something the student had learned in class. At another school, portfolios were central to the school's assessment system. In each class, students completed three extended projects, and then picked their best one from each class for their portfolio. To demonstrate their proficiency, they presented their portfolios each semester to a group of teachers and invited guests. At yet another school, students often worked in teams on long-term projects called exhibitions and prepared portfolios of their individual work. Teachers made it clear that they wanted students to become accustomed to preparing several drafts of their work and to understand that learning is a process. At several schools, teachers used rubrics, which they shared or developed with students in advance, to assess completed assignments.

Clear Academic and Behavioral Expectations for Students

According to survey responses, the schools established guidelines for behavior, attendance, and coursework, as reported by 92 percent of principals (12 of 13), and students knew what was expected of them. As seen in Figure 19, 91 percent of students said that they knew what they were expected to learn at school, and 90 percent said that teachers had high standards for them. Eighty-six percent of students reported that expectations were consistent across classrooms. At many of the schools, students told us that they were very aware that the school was designed to prepare them for postsecondary education. One school made its expectations very explicit by requiring students and parents to sign a contract prior to the student enrolling in the school. The expectations delineated in the contract included: coming to school every day, wearing a uniform, not engaging in backtalk, and not fighting. Overall, the principal said that "The expectation is that you will behave appropriately and in ways that are conducive to learning."

Figure 19

Academic Expectations
(N=1549)

I know what I am expected to learn at this school — 91
My teachers have high standards for my academic performance — 90
My teachers have consistent expectations from classroom to classroom — 86

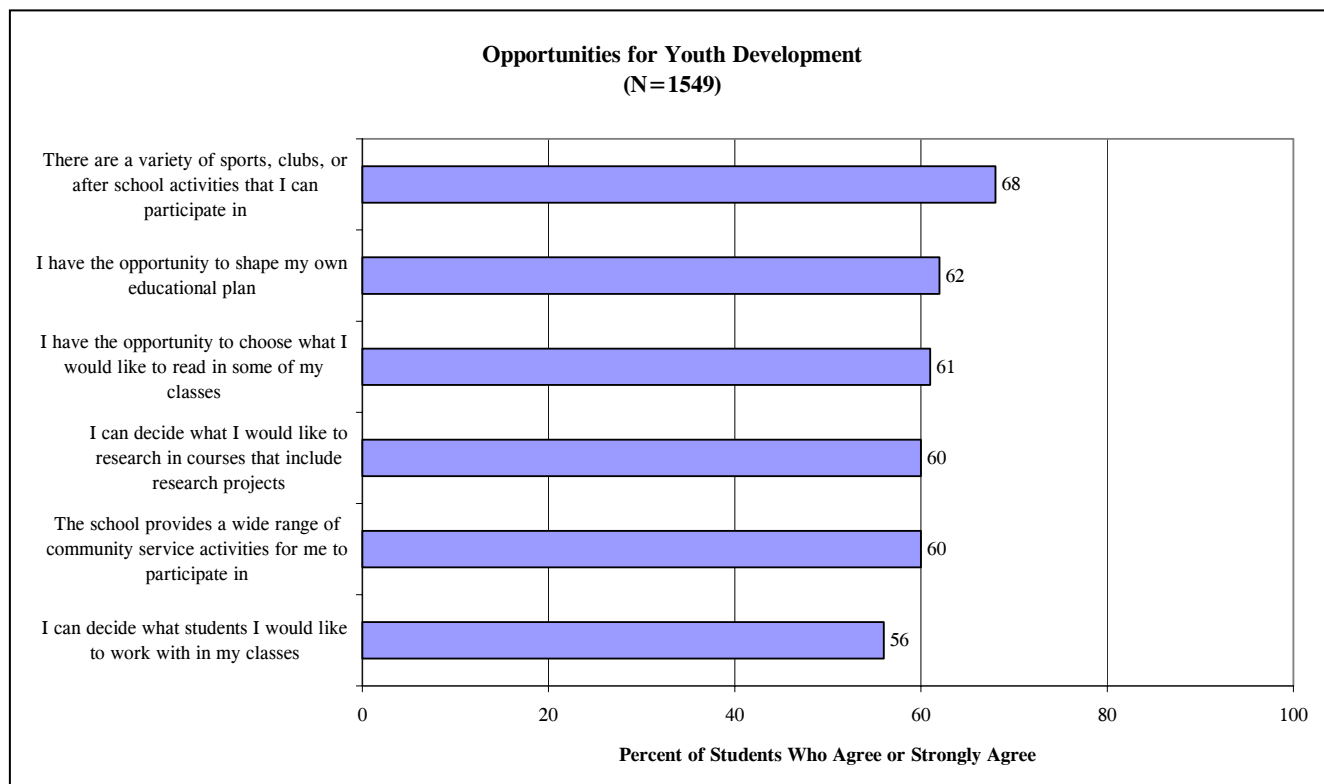Percent of Students Who Agree or Strongly Agree

Opportunities for Youth Development

The evaluation examined opportunities for youth development by reviewing opportunities that schools made available to students to exercise choice and engage in leadership. We also examined opportunities to apply academic learning outside the school through service and career awareness activities. In addition, we collected data on students' opportunities to plan for the future, especially with regard to higher education.

A quarter to a half of students said that they participated in leadership and decision-making activities in the school, through student council or other opportunities. As shown in Figure 20, two-thirds (68 percent) said that their school offered a range of sports, clubs, and activities in which they could pursue their personal interests. Sixty percent said that community service opportunities were available. Between half and two-thirds of students reported that they had input into their education plans (62 percent) and/or they could make choices about what they read (61 percent) or researched (60 percent) in their classes. Just under half (45 percent) of students had heard guest lecturers talk about college.

Figure 20

Opportunities for Youth Development
(N=1549)

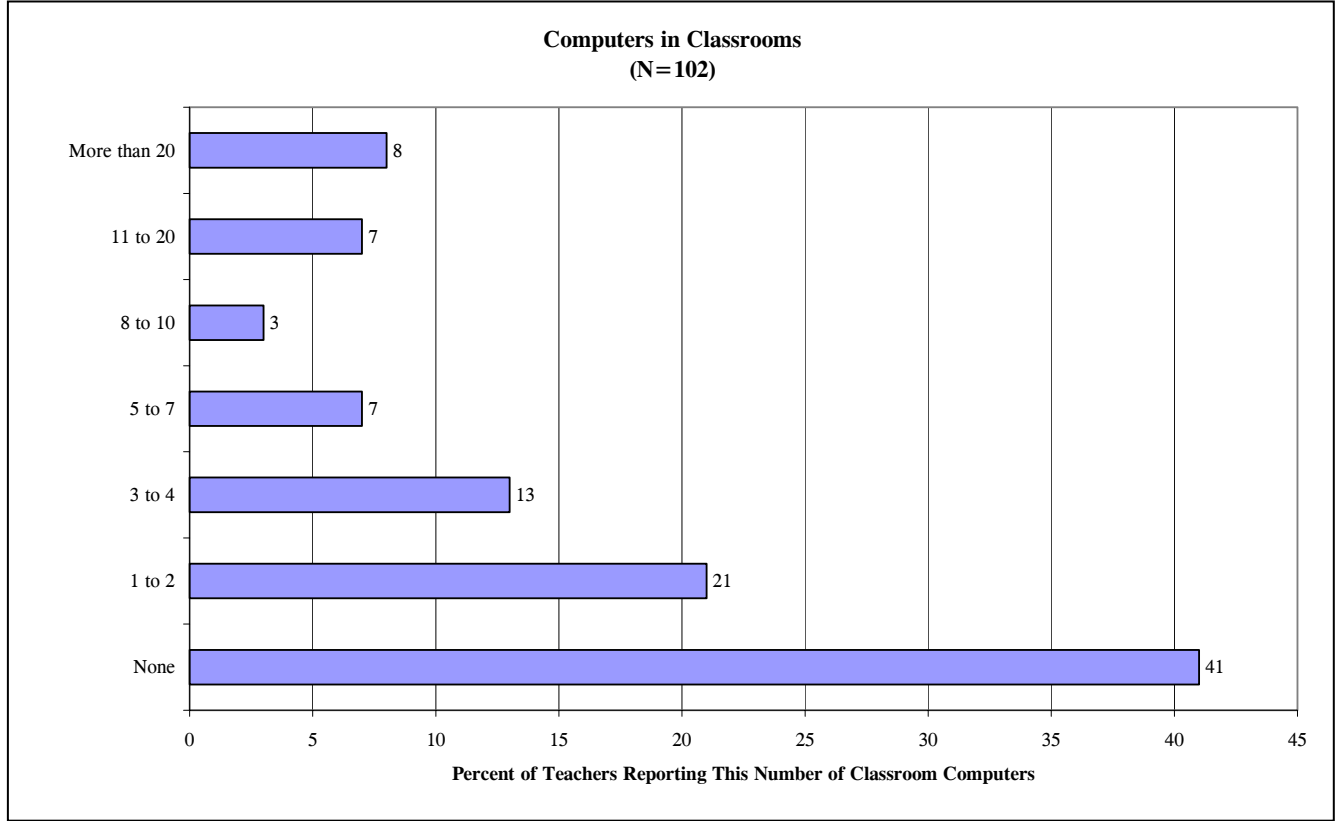|	Percent
There are a variety of sports, clubs, or after school activities that I can participate in	68
I have the opportunity to shape my own educational plan	62
I have the opportunity to choose what I would like to read in some of my classes	61
I can decide what I would like to research in courses that include research projects	60
The school provides a wide range of community service activities for me to participate in	60
I can decide what students I would like to work with in my classes	56

Percent of Students Who Agree or Strongly Agree

By most accounts, the New Century schools have not established extensive career awareness activities, such as job shadowing or paid or unpaid internships. The majority of students had not visited a business, shadowed an employee, or worked in an internship arranged by the school. During site visits, many principals and community partners indicated that such activities may be offered to upper-grade students in future years, but most did not believe such activities to be appropriate for ninth-graders. There were exceptions, however. At one school, the community partner had arranged for about a dozen students to serve as research interns at the New York Academy for Medicine. Students who participated in the program praised it highly, saying they participated in actual experiments at the Academy. To the extent that schools did offer less intensive career awareness activities, such as guest speakers, community partners were heavily involved. Eighty-five percent (11 of 13) said that some or all students attended career awareness activities sponsored by the partner organizations.

Effective Use of Technology

Technology did not play a central role in the delivery of instruction. A majority of teachers (59 percent) and principals (7 of 13) said that their school did not have enough computers for effective use in instruction. As seen in Figure 21, 41 percent of teachers had no computers in their classroom, 21 percent had one or two computers, while 15 percent had eleven or more computers. Teachers (85 percent) and students (94 percent) agreed that students used computers in class less than two hours a week. Even so, teachers assigned work that required students to use a computer, according to 77 percent of students and 62 percent of teachers. One possible explanation for this discrepancy between assignments using computers and classroom computer availability is that half of the schools (7 of 13) had a computer lab with at least 20 computers, and several others had at least five computers in the school library. In some cases, the computer labs consisted of laptops on mobile carts that could be wheeled from one classroom to the next.

Figure 21

**Computers in Classrooms
(N=102)**

Number	Percent
More than 20	8
11 to 20	7
8 to 10	3
5 to 7	7
3 to 4	13
1 to 2	21
None	41

Percent of Teachers Reporting This Number of Classroom Computers

Characteristics of the School Infrastructure Intended to Promote Learning

Professional Development and Collaboration

Teachers reported that they had received extensive professional development since being hired to teach in their NCHS school. More than half (55 percent) said they had received at least 36 hours of professional development, and 10 percent had received at least 70 hours. The two areas in which the most teachers said they had received at least some professional development were in strategies for developing assessments (87 percent) and subject-specific content training (85 percent). The latter area was the focus of the most intensive professional development, according to respondents.

Levels of satisfaction with professional development were only moderate, however, with 30 percent of teachers reporting that the professional development they received in connection with NCHS always or usually deepened their knowledge of their content area. Only 44 percent reported that the professional development prompted them to change their teaching. Less than a third of teachers said

that NCHS-related professional development always or usually included adequate follow-up (31 percent) or in-class guidance (29 percent).

Even so, we found extensive evidence of positive professional collaboration, which is essential for teachers to derive benefit from professional development. Teachers and principals agreed that collaboration occurred in their schools on an ongoing basis. Eighty-seven percent of teachers and all principals reported that there was a great deal of cooperative effort among teachers, and 89 percent of teachers felt responsible for helping other teachers. School schedules facilitated collaboration, with 42 percent of teachers reporting that they had at least three hours of scheduled time every week to meet with other teachers. All but one principal said that their schools scheduled common planning time for teachers. At one school, all teachers had three common prep periods per week, which they said facilitated discussion of curricular and instructional issues. The teachers mentioned that they met daily to discuss student concerns and curricular integration. The teachers generally agreed that they found the collaboration to be very useful. At another school, teachers described their interactions with one another as a source of professional development. During their meetings as a team, they were able to share with one another what worked and what didn't work. At a third school, teachers worked on interdisciplinary teams, and teachers on each team took turns observing their colleagues teach and then conferring about what they observed during their team planning time. According to one teacher, "I have visited every teacher [on my team]. I have learned so much from that. It should be done everywhere."

In other cases, however, time set aside for collaborative planning was being used for other purposes. For example, one teacher remarked, "We have common planning time, but we use it for other things because there is so much going on." Another teacher agreed, commenting "Technically, we have professional development once per week for 50 minutes, but we end up talking about immediate problems that have nothing to do with curriculum and instruction."

Leadership Focused on Student Learning

Survey responses indicate that most principals exerted instructional leadership in the initiative's first year, with 74 percent of teachers reporting that their principal monitored instruction in the school and 58 percent of teachers reporting that their principal monitored the curriculum. Self-reports by principals to the same questions indicated that 92 percent (12 of 13) monitored instruction and all monitored curriculum. (Both teachers and principals may have answered accurately, because a principal may monitor instruction in the school but not necessarily monitor the instruction provided by every teacher, with the result that only a fraction of the teachers perceive that the principal monitors instruction.)

More than two thirds of teachers (68 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that their principal praises, publicly recognizes, and provides tangible rewards to teachers whose instructional practices reflect the school's educational focus. In general, principals seemed to be very involved with helping teachers develop their curriculum and instructional skills. Eighty-one percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their principal was available to provide them with guidance and assistance in structuring instructional practices to reflect the school's educational focus.

Survey data also indicate that principals visited classrooms regularly and discussed instructional issues with teachers, but reactions to the quality of their feedback was mixed. Eighty percent of teachers reported that their principal had been to their classrooms to observe their teaching. Although principals were highly likely to observe teachers, they were less likely to model or demonstrate teaching strategies. Only 25 percent of teachers reported that their principal had been to their classroom to model or demonstrate a teaching strategy.

When principals observed teachers' instruction, their feedback was most likely to center on expectations for student performance. Forty percent of teachers reported that the feedback they received from their principal had not been on topics they considered important. Even so, 88 percent said the feedback addressed issues that required the teacher's attention, and 87 percent found the feedback useful in improving their instruction.

One principal's comment underscored the tension that principals may feel in trying to promote improved instruction while also supporting teachers. This principal holds an hour-long professional development session every week on Wednesdays to which teachers are invited, but not required, to come. The principal said the sessions are focused on "nuts and bolts teaching strategies." She admitted, however, that she struggles with striking a balance between getting teachers to adopt the approach that she wants them to adopt and giving them flexibility. She said, "I don't know how to make them do what I want without trying to mandate it, so I tend either to be a micromanager or I get overwhelmed and [end up being] too hands-off."

School Engagement with Community and Parents

According to survey results, schools were very active in communicating regularly with parents, but their efforts did not always translate into strong parent involvement with the schools. Almost three-quarters of teachers (71 percent) reported that they communicated regularly with parents. Sixty percent of non-instructional staff reported that they talked to parents on the phone every day. As part of their

outreach to parents, 69 percent of principals (9 of 13) reported that their school conducted activities to help parents support students' learning at home.

Despite the frequent communication and extensive parent resources available through the schools, more than half of principals (7 of 13) and teachers (54 percent) cited lack of parent involvement as a serious or moderate problem. Principals reported that parents were more involved in school governance than in other school activities. For example, 69 percent (9 of 13) reported that parents were somewhat or very involved in meetings of the parent-teacher association, and 54 percent (7 of 13) reported that parents were somewhat or very involved with policy decisions or planning. In contrast, 31 percent (4 of 13) reported that at least half of parents had attended student performances or exhibitions, and 46 percent (6 of 13) reported that at least half of parents had attended back to school night. Moreover, 38 percent of principals (5 of 13) reported that parents were somewhat or very involved as school volunteers. Only one principal reported that parents were somewhat or very involved with monitoring teachers.

Community partners were less likely to see lack of parent involvement as a problem, with only 43 percent (6 of 14) calling it a serious or moderate problem. One reason that community partners did not view the lack of parent involvement as a serious problem may be that the community partners had more regular contact with parents than did school staff and played a key role in parent outreach at the schools. All but two of the partners provided parents with resources and information on community resources available to them, and almost half (6 of 13) designated a parent liaison to work with parents.

Parents participating in focus groups confirmed that they have frequent contact with school staff and that schools regularly communicated with them, either through telephone calls or written materials sent home. When appropriate, written materials were in both English and Spanish. Typical comments from parents included:

- "I can talk to the teachers any time I want. We just had a meeting with the teacher about report cards."

- "I talk via email with all the teachers, the principal, whomever. I also call here. I feel comfortable in coming here. I've given suggestions about curriculum and activities. I sat in on classes. How involved you want to be is up to you."

- "This school requires you to be involved as a parent, to make a success of the school."

Several principals cited their work with parents as a strength of the school.

- "We have an open door policy with parents without having to get an appointment to see us. We even invite them to sit in the classrooms if they want."

- "We had been doing outreach to parents around issues of language. It's not extensive or where we want it to be, but it has allowed us to take the traditional work with parents in the community to another level."

However, one principal gave voice to the frustration some principals feel with the lack of parent involvement, saying, "Parents are not partners. The only time I find they are active is when they come in when their kids have beat up someone and they come in to explain why it is okay."

VI. Student and Parent Reactions to the New Schools

With only a few exceptions, the first year of school and program operations under the NCHS initiative proceeded relatively smoothly, with significant indications of concurrence on mission, purpose, and methods among the people involved in creating and supporting the new schools. But the real test of the acceptance and success of the initiative will occur over time in the reaction of the schools' ultimate consumers: the students in the new schools and their parents. Here, we report on early reactions to the schools, as framed by students' level of school attendance, their reports of what they like and don't like about the new schools, and their parents' reports of what they like and don't like.
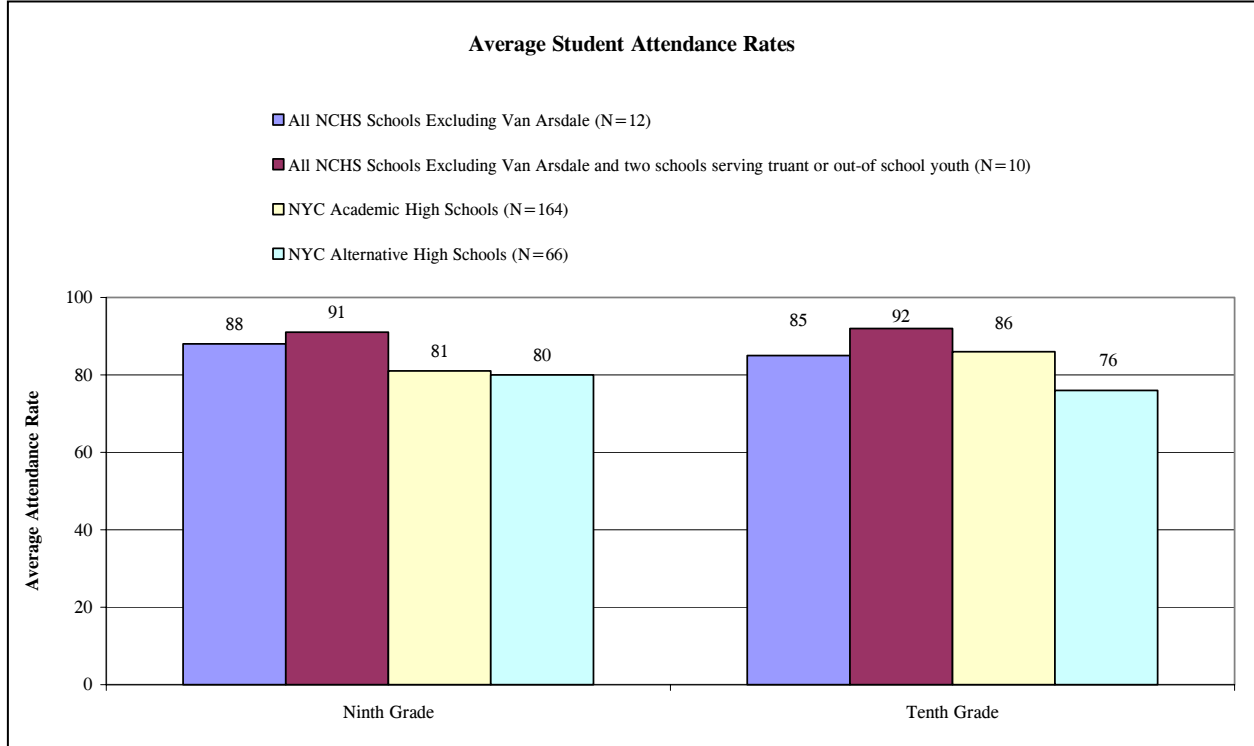
Student Attendance in the NCHS Schools

Students' positive reactions to the new schools were evident in their patterns of daily attendance. Data maintained and reported by DOE indicate that students attended the new high schools on a fairly regular basis overall during the 2002-03 school year, with attendance averaging 88 percent among ninth-graders and 85 percent among tenth-graders enrolled in the NCHS schools, as seen in Figure 22. These figures are somewhat misleading, however, because two NCHS schools that served youth who had been out of school before enrolling in the NCHS school had overall attendance rates of 56 percent and 81 percent. Excluding those schools, the average attendance rates among NCHS schools were 91 percent for ninth-graders and 92 percent for tenth-graders. (None of the attendance figures include NCHS students enrolled in Harry Van Arsdale High School because DOE does not post data for ninth-graders in this school separately from other students within the school.)

The attendance patterns of the NCHS students compared favorably with the overall attendance patterns in New York City public high schools. In the 2002-03 school year, the average attendance rate of ninth-graders in academic high schools was 81 percent; ninth-graders in alternative high schools attended 80 percent of the time. Among tenth-graders citywide, the attendance rate was 86 percent in academic high schools and 76 percent in alternative high schools.

To see how the NCHS patterns of student attendance compared to attendance patterns in the schools in which the NCHS students might otherwise have enrolled, the evaluation compared the attendance patterns of NCHS students in the Bronx with the patterns of students in the same grades who were enrolled in 2002-03 in the comprehensive high schools in which the Bronx NCHS schools are located. This analysis revealed that the NCHS students attended school on a much more frequent basis than students in the same grades who were enrolled in the corresponding comprehensive high schools.

Figure 22

Average Student Attendance Rates

- All NCHS Schools Excluding Van Arsdale (N=12)
- All NCHS Schools Excluding Van Arsdale and two schools serving truant or out-of school youth (N=10)
- NYC Academic High Schools (N=164)
- NYC Alternative High Schools (N=66)

The average attendance rate of NCHS ninth-graders in the Bronx was 91 percent, compared to 72 percent for ninth-graders in the corresponding comprehensive high schools. Among tenth-graders, the averages were 92 percent for NCHS students and 80 percent for students in the comprehensive high schools.

In the coming months, the evaluation will re-examine student attendance patterns in light of additional data on NCHS students, particularly their educational achievement patterns formed prior to enrolling in a NCHS school. These analyses, which will include comparisons with the prior achievement of students in the Bronx comprehensive high schools, will explore the fundamental educational similarities and differences between NCHS students and their peers in the larger Bronx schools in which the NCHS schools are located.

Student Likes and Dislikes about Their Schools

In addition to assessing student reactions in light of data about students' actual behaviors, the evaluation also asked students in focus groups about whether they liked their new schools and what, in particular, they liked or didn't like. Overwhelmingly, students said that they liked the small size of

their schools, which, they said, allowed them to develop close, friendly relationships with their teachers and with each other and which thereby facilitated nurturing learning environments. According to one students, "I like that it's small, and we each get attention. There's not one person who doesn't get attention from our teachers. And they treat us all the same. In a normal high school, they don't talk to you when you have a problem. They don't care." Another student said, "I like the close thing with teachers and that you can discuss your problems with them."

In general, students also said that they liked the small class sizes, the willingness of teachers to provide extra help, the use of hands-on learning, the advisory periods, the new books and equipment in the school, the lack of negative distractions, and their special status as the first students to go through the new high school. In schools with summer programs, students expressed appreciation for those opportunities to learn about what to expect in the new school. A student said that this program "was how you got to know each other more." Another student said, "It helped us get more familiar and to see the kinds of things we were going to do."

Students whose NCHS school was housed in a large comprehensive high school said that they did not like their school's physical space. As one student said, "I don't like that we're in such a small place. We deserve more rooms. We need more rooms." Students also complained about the security environment of the larger high school. Students agreed that they didn't like having to pass through a security checkpoint to enter the school. One student said, "It can take 10 minutes to get through security. The security guards make kids wait outside in the winter cold until security calls them in." In several schools, NCHS students asked for their own entrance into the school, separate from the entrance used by the larger comprehensive high school.

Youth from several schools indicated that the small school size was the reason for unfriendly gossip and fights among students. "Here we gossip so much. Everything travels fast. By the next period, if something happens, the other two classes have heard."

Even though most students said that they enjoyed the close relationships with teachers, students at one school did not. A student in this school said, "When we first got here, they got too friendly with us. We took advantage of that." Another student said, "If they [teachers] laid down the law and became more strict and sturdy to the rules of the school   if they are going to enforce those rules   then this would be a better school."

In some instances, students said that they didn't like the long class periods ("it can get boring"; a student in another student said that two-hour classes without a break are "annoying"). They also complained about the virtual absence of elective courses and the lack of access to the gym.

Some students cited group assignments as a school feature that they liked, while others cited group assignments as a feature that they explicitly didn't like.

Parent Likes and Dislikes about the New Schools

In focus groups, parents' and grandparents' reactions centered on the educational features of the schools, with particular attention to the positive changes they perceived in their children since enrollment in fall 2002.[4] Parents said that their children's educational performance had improved, and they attributed these changes to the small schools and caring teachers. According to one parent, "The teachers have been helping her a lot and motivating her to do better in school. It didn't happen in her junior high school. She is more motivated." Another parent said, "Teachers are getting the kids to read more, to write more, they keep pushing them to do more." According to another parent, "I like the tutoring provided in the after-school. He is combining work in school with after-school. And in big schools, they can't afford programs like the after-school available here."

They also reported that their children liked their new school, were displaying better attitudes and higher levels of self-confidence since enrolling, and were making new friends. For example, one parent said, "She's more open now. She will raise her hand and answer a question. I think she is starting to come out of her shell." Another parent said, "Right from the beginning, my kid said, 'I don't want to leave. I want to stay here.' He is opening up. He comes home and talks about [school]. He's not late to school. He's coming every day." From another parent, "He is doing really well here, better than in his junior high school. He likes it better here. He has friends." And from another parent, "My son had low self-esteem because he was going through adolescence and he did not get invited to places. Attending this school has given him self-discipline and makes him think about his actions. He can control his impulses now."

Parents' major concerns centered on the security environment of the larger high schools, the school's space, and also what some perceived as a lack of academic challenge. According to one parent, "We need our own building because if we can avoid other students, we would not have to deal with dropouts bullying our students." Another parent said, "This is not their own space. They don't have music. They share a gym. Teachers' don't even have their own office space. They have an open-door policy because they don't have a door." On the issue of curriculum, a parent said, "They didn't have a solid curriculum when they began. They were still trying to piece things together. When I first walked in and wanted to see a sample of the curriculum, they couldn't show it to me. It was

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[4] The evaluation design relied on the schools to assemble parents to participate in the evaluation's focus groups. The parents who actually participated in the focus groups tended to be the most active, involved parents in the schools and were not representative samples of parents.

under development. They were working with a consultant. They had a vision statement about the curriculum, but I wanted to see the meat and potatoes."

Parents who were immigrants voiced particular concern about what they perceived as the slow pace of instruction and the lack of challenge; in particular, they wanted to see their children make faster progress learning English. In one school, foreign-born parents questioned the school's academic rigor. They were disappointed that their children were currently learning at what they saw as the equivalent of a fourth- or fifth-grade level.

VII. Conclusions and Evaluation Priorities for the Coming Year

During the first year of operations of the New Century High Schools initiative, the evaluation collected data that will serve as a baseline for this multi-year evaluation. We anticipated that, if the NCHS initiative were on a trajectory that could lead to success, the new schools would demonstrate that (1) they were taking advantage of the supports and special resources available through the network of assistance providers established by the initiative, (2) they had formed sustainable partnerships with private nonprofit organizations that had a commitment to fostering effective small high schools and educational success for participating students, (3) they had recruited students and staff whose expectations and qualifications were consistent with the goal of creating and sustaining successful small urban high schools, and (4) the building blocks were present to suggest the likelihood of real progress over the next several years. In the discussion that follows, we review the evidence in each of these areas, and we also describe preliminary analytic questions and findings intended to help identify the keys to educational success in these new small high schools.

Conclusions from the First Year of Operations

Our overall conclusion from an examination of the initiative in Year 1 is that the initiative itself and the schools it has created are on track to achieve the initiative's short-term goals, which are to create a network of new or transformed small high schools that employ research-based principles to provide high-quality educational experiences to students who might otherwise be at risk of educational failure. Given the scope of the task undertaken by the new schools, our expectations for the first year were ambitious but realistic. We expected that, in addition to establishing themselves as functioning high schools with an appropriate array of courses and educational experiences, the new schools would demonstrate certain indicators of probable later success. Here is our scorecard on the achievements of the initiative and the schools in each of these areas.

Establishment of Functioning High Schools

Each of the schools slated for operation in Year 1 did in fact open and operate the entire year. Even though 2002-03 was a start-up year, the evidence indicates that the schools were staffed, equipped, and organized to provide instruction that, at a minimum, met local expectations for quality. Schools scheduled students for instruction in the appropriate content areas and delivered that instruction in classrooms staffed with acceptably qualified teachers. In addition, schools retained and assigned non-instructional personnel with backgrounds in areas such as social work, psychology, and English

language learning. Although many of the schools experienced professional turnover during the first year, the effect of this turnover was in some instances to move out those personnel who were uncomfortable with a school's mission or educational approach. For the most part, educators who left were adequately replaced. The schools provided supplementary whole-school activities through arrangements such as advisory periods, and they equipped their classrooms with essential print materials, although less often with classroom computers. Indirect measures of the adequacy of the initial start-up include evidence of relatively high levels of student attendance, student perception of academic rigor, and indications of adequate preparation for Regents exams. Looking to Year 2, the evaluation will examine the experiences of the schools opening in Year 2 to ascertain whether they also succeed, at a minimum, in meeting local quality expectations.

Use of an Appropriate Array of Supports and Special Resources

The educators and community partners working in the schools indicated that they were aware of and used at least some of the supports and special resources provided through the initiative, especially those provided through the Bronx high school superintendency. The relative popularity and success of this resource led the initiative to attempt to replicate this model through the provision of resources for supports to NCHS planning teams under the supervision of the Brooklyn high school superintendency. The DOE reorganization that eliminated the regional high school superintendencies precluded the further use of this exact model, although there is no reason to believe that this work can't continue through the regional superintendent structure that has now been implemented. In addition to the resources provided by New Visions resources channeled through the DOE, the schools also used supports provided directly by New Visions staff, and they used supports provided through other assistance providers such as CUNY's provision of professional development to teachers in literacy instruction. Looking to Year 2, the initiative needs to further institutionalize the capacity to support and sustain the new schools within the school system's basic infrastructure. It also needs to respond to the schools' continuing needs in the areas of curriculum and advocacy in their relationships with the large comprehensive high schools in which many of them are housed. Pursuing additional partnerships with postsecondary institutions may also yield new and valuable supports for teachers.

Formation of Sustainable Partnerships

A central feature of the NCHS initiative has been its reliance on each school's partnership with a private nonprofit organization that is committed to fostering successful small high schools and the educational success of participating students. Among the other purposes of the partnerships, they were intended to root the new schools more firmly in the broader life of the city, which in the case of some

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partnerships meant the immediate geographic communities in which the schools were located and in other cases meant the New York City arts and educational communities. Evaluation data indicate that these partnerships extended and enriched the schools in various ways, such as through the provision of after-school and week-end opportunities, outreach to parents, opportunities for community service, curricular enrichment, student recruitment, and consultation on the essential planning and administration of the schools' educational programs. Given the relative newness of the notion of public/private partnerships creating and operating high schools, it's not surprising that the partners' roles were not always clear within individual schools. Looking to Year 2, it will be important for the initiative to work with all of the school and private partners to clarify these roles and find ways to ensure their long-term sustainability and to track the progress of the partnerships in attaining the level of integration envisioned in the program's theory of change.

Recruitment of Students and Staff

Although the timing of the high school application process in school year 2001-02 precluded the participation of the Year 1 schools, they were still able to recruit enough students to begin operations in September 2002. The initiative's policy of recruiting and enrolling ninth-graders in each school's first year and adding a grade a year made it easier to recruit students directly out of eighth grade, rather than trying to recruit students who had already started high school elsewhere. A significant number of tenth-graders also sought enrollment in the new schools and were accepted. In interviews with students and parents, the appeal of these new schools was their small size, their promise of greater educational personalization, and their intent to mount challenging academic programs. In many cases also, the particular academic or career theme chosen by the new school had a specific appeal to students or their parents.

Similarly, teachers were also attracted by the schools' small size and their plans for greater personalization and academic rigor. Another factor facilitating teacher recruitment was the need to assemble teams to conduct the planning for the new schools. In order to staff the schools that emerged from these plans, planning team leaders (many of whom went on to become principals of the new schools) sought out teachers whom they knew to be interested in small, academically challenging high schools. Some of these planning participants then signed up to teach in the new schools or they referred friends and colleagues whom they knew to be seeking this type of opportunity.

Looking to Year 2, the individual schools, with the help of the NCHS initiative, need to find ways to inform and attract eighth-graders who want the types of educational opportunities that the new schools provide. And it will be essential for the schools and the initiative to create and maintain the professional conditions that will attract and retain the teachers needed to implement challenging,

personalized educational opportunities, especially in areas of teacher shortage, such as mathematics and the sciences.

Building Blocks for Future Progress

The point of assembling the components of effective high schools is, first, to provide positive educational opportunities to today's students and, second, to build a network of schools that demonstrate the benefits of small, personalized, academically rigorous high schools for urban at-risk populations. Our first-year assessment indicates that the New Century High Schools initiative is assembling the building blocks for future success through, in particular, efforts at the school level to (1) develop positive climates for learning, (2) build partnerships with private nonprofit organizations characterized by active community and cultural ties, (3) provide clear instructional leadership, (4) encourage high levels of professional collaboration, and (5) promote academic rigor. The ultimate effectiveness of these efforts will be measured to a significant extent by evidence of the enrolled students' educational success. As described in the preceding chapters, this initiative has made significant progress to date in each of the areas listed. Although much work remains, there are no reasons to expect that the initiative cannot continue to make progress in each of these building-block areas.

Analyses to Identify Keys to Success in the Small High Schools

Over the next several years, the evaluation will analyze many forms of data on the small high schools in order to identify those external interventions and school-level efforts that are most clearly associated with educational success at the school and student levels. Information from these analyses will enable New Visions and DOE to frame the assistance they provide to schools in ways that focus on especially high-value external interventions and internal efforts. Described briefly here are examples of initial analyses that the evaluation is pursuing in the areas of educational climate and instruction. Going forward, the evaluation will examine a growing list of possible relationships, including relationships between educational components and student outcomes.

Relationship of Collegiality and Shared Decision-Making with
Teachers' Professional Satisfaction and Effectiveness

This analysis responded to the following hypothesis: *A high level of collegiality and shared decision-making among the teachers and principal within a school is a consistent feature of*

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instructional environments that promote teachers' professional satisfaction and effectiveness. If analyses found a clear correlation between (1) collegiality and shared decision-making and (2) teachers' professional satisfaction and effectiveness, the information would help school leaders and assistance providers to better understand the value of promoting various types of professional experiences for school staff.

Using data from Year 1, the evaluation found a positive and statistically significant correlation between (1) staff input in the school's goals, curriculum, schedule, staffing, etc., and (2) teacher agreement with statements such as "Most teachers share the same beliefs and values about the central mission of the school" ($r=.40$; alpha $=.01$), "There is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff members" ($r=.38$; alpha $=.01$), and "I feel responsible for helping other teachers at this school do their best" ($r=.25$; alpha $=.01$). This finding suggests that a high level of collegiality and shared decision-making among teachers and the principal within a school is a good indicator, at this early point in the evaluation, of an instructional environment that promotes teachers' professional development, satisfaction, and effectiveness.

Relationship of Collaboration and Support among Teachers with Instructional Rigor

This analysis responded to the following hypothesis: *A high level of collaboration and support among teachers is a consistent feature of instructional environments that are academically rigorous.* If analyses found a clear correlation between (1) teacher collaboration and support and (2) perceptions of academic rigor, this information would also help school leaders and assistance providers know what types of support to provide in schools.

Using data from Year 1, the evaluation found a positive and statistically significant correlation between teachers' support for colleagues and the level of academic rigor at that school as reported by students ($r=.29$; alpha $=.01$). That is, schools where teachers feel responsible for helping other teachers do their best also display higher levels of academic rigor, according to students, than do other schools.

Relationship of Teachers' Perception of the Teaching Setting with Student Satisfaction

This analysis responded to the following hypothesis: *Teachers' perception of a positive setting for teaching is a consistent feature of schools characterized by high levels of student satisfaction.* Evidence of a clear correlation in this area could inform school leaders and assistance providers in useful ways, similar to the preceding example.

Year 1 analyses reveal a positive and statistically significant correlation between (1) teachers' perceptions regarding the school as a professional environment and high quality in principal leadership (r=.47; alpha =.01), and (2) teachers' perceptions of the school as a professional environment and opportunities for staff input into decisions (r=.54; alpha =.01). Analysis also found a positive and statistically significant relationship between (1) student perceptions of positive relationships with teachers and opportunities for student leadership and decisionmaking (r=.24; alpha =.01) and (2) student perceptions of positive relationships with teachers and students' sense of belonging (r=.62; alpha =.01).

Relationship of the Use of Portfolios, Exhibitions, and Rubrics to Assess Students with Academic Rigor

This analysis responded to the following hypothesis: *Schools that use portfolios and exhibitions to assess students, with rubrics used in measurement, are also schools that set high expectations for student performance and give students' responsibility for their own learning*. Unlike the preceding analyses, this analysis did not reveal a clear or statistically significant relationship in the areas examined. It is possible that the hypothesized relationship requires time to emerge, which would be true if portfolios and exhibitions are difficult to implement adequately in a single school year. It is also possible that the hypothesized relationship just doesn't exist, at least in NCHS schools. For Year 2 data collection, the evaluation is refining the survey questions regarding portfolios, exhibitions, and rubrics and will examine whether those methodological changes make it possible to detect any relationships in this area.

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