



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Charter High Schools Closing the Achievement Gap

INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION

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Prepared by:

WestEd

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Office of Innovation and Improvement

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October 2006

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Foreword

I have visited successful charter schools all across America—in farm country, the inner city, and everywhere in between. Like the schools profiled in this guide, they have two things in common. First, they set high standards. And second, they work as long and as hard as it takes to help every student succeed, regardless of race, background, or ZIP code.

The eight schools profiled here are serving different populations, but all of them are closing the achievement gap between low-income, minority, and special needs students and their peers. By trying out innovative new strategies, these schools are blazing a trail for others to follow. They're dispelling the myth that some students can not learn and proving that if we raise the academic achievement bar, our students will rise to the challenge.

This book is one of a series of innovation guides produced by the U.S. Department of Education. Upcoming guides will feature K–8 schools that are closing the achievement gap and highlight promising practices to expand the pool of high-quality charter schools. In addition, the series will include strategies to encourage parents to help improve schools and show ways in which distance learning can increase access to rigorous course work.

I hope that educators nationwide find these examples as inspiring as I do. Together, through proven strategies like these, we will achieve our goal of every child learning on grade level by 2014.

Margaret Spellings
U.S. Secretary of Education



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The eight schools participating in the development of this guide and the case studies on which it is based were generous with both their time and attention to this project. We would like to thank those who were instrumental in coordinating and participating in the site visits that inform the case studies and this guide.

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Introduction

Closing the achievement gaps that separate the academic performance of various subgroups of students is a central goal of current education reform efforts nationwide. Hard-earned progress has been made at the elementary school level, but high school students are not progressing nearly as well. Indeed, it is at this level that performance gains in general have been most elusive and chronic student achievement disparities among significant subgroups seem most intransigent. Yet success is not beyond reach.

This guide profiles eight charter secondary schools that are making headway in meeting the achievement challenge. They are introduced here so their practices can inspire and inform other school communities striving to ensure that all of their students, regardless of their race, ZIP code, learning differences, or home language, are successful learners capable of meeting high academic standards.

In the nationwide drive to raise student achievement and eliminate performance gaps, state accountability systems and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) provide public access to data on how students are doing. This information pinpoints any achievement gaps that exist and, in doing so, propels and helps guide action to close them. The data also shed light on hard-won advances. For example, 2005 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show significant performance gains in the early grades. Fourth-graders in all subgroups demonstrated improved achievement on the reading exam. Equally important, the achievement gaps between African-American and white students and between Hispanic and white students narrowed to the smallest size in history on the reading assessment.¹ Gaps also narrowed in mathematics, and the average scores for white, African-American, and Hispanic fourth-graders were higher than in any previous assessment year. Students who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—an indicator of family

poverty—had higher average scores in math in 2005 than in 1996. Those fourth-graders with disabilities who were assessed also had a higher average score, and a higher percentage of them performed at or above “basic” compared to previous assessment years.² Such gains do not come about by accident: While there is more to do, these improvements suggest that by paying attention to the data and implementing research-based practices, schools can make a powerful difference in closing achievement gaps.³

Unfortunately, improving high schools has proved more challenging. Achievement on NAEP for 17-year-olds has not increased.⁴ In international comparisons, our high schools are effectively losing ground rather than gaining it.⁵ NAEP data show that higher percentages of 12th-grade African-American and Hispanic students score “below basic” in reading and math, compared to their white and Asian American peers: In 2000, 70 percent of African-American students scored below basic in math compared

to 58 percent of Hispanic students, 29 percent of white students, and 26 percent of Asian American students. In reading, 48 percent of African-American students scored below basic compared to 41 percent of Hispanic students, 28 percent of Asian American students, and 22 percent of white students.⁶ Meanwhile, high school graduation rates continue to be lower for minority students than for white students. In the class of 2002, about 78 percent of white students graduated from high school with a regular diploma, compared to 56 percent of African-American students and 52 percent of Hispanic students.⁷

Not surprisingly, high school reform has become a major goal for educators, policymakers, and foundations alike. At the federal level, the American Competitiveness Initiative specifically aims to increase academic rigor and improve math and science education, with the goal of ensuring that all U.S. students graduate equipped to compete and thrive in the new global economy. The National Governors Association (NGA), too, has identified high school reform as essential to states' interests. In its 2003 report, *Ready for Tomorrow: Helping All Students Achieve Secondary and Postsecondary Success*, the NGA asserts, "States have a powerful incentive to plug the leaks in the education pipeline."⁸ The report encourages governors and other state officials to create and support an integrated K–16 data system and to align more effectively the K–12 and higher education expectations and incentives. Among the significant nonprofit organizations that have focused on secondary school reform, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has funded major initiatives to restructure high schools and make curricula both more rigorous and more relevant.

The Role of Charter Schools in Closing the Gap

Charter schools are uniquely positioned to contribute to this effort. Charter schools are public, but they operate with greater autonomy than many non-charter public schools. States vary in their charter school laws⁹ but, in general, these schools are exempted from many state regulations in exchange for explicit accountability for results, spelled out in the terms of their charter or contract with a state-approved authorizing (i.e., oversight) agency. Under these conditions of increased autonomy, school communities can mobilize to work together in new ways to achieve success. Compared to regular public schools, they often have greater control of their budgets, greater discretion over hiring and staffing decisions, and greater opportunity to create innovative programs.

Nelson Smith, president of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, puts it this way: "Charter schools are giving administrators the freedom to innovate, teachers the ability to be creative, parents the chance to be involved, and students the opportunity to learn—creating a partnership that leads to improved student achievement."¹⁰

The first charter school legislation was passed in Minnesota in 1991, and, as of as of October 2005, there were some 3,625 charter schools serving 1,076,964 students in 40 states and Washington, D.C. Of these, approximately 21 percent (761) are high schools and 27 percent (978) combine middle and high school.¹¹ A recent survey of charter schools by the National Charter School Research Project concluded that "nationally, charter schools serve a larger proportion of

minority and low-income students than is found in traditional public schools, a characteristic due largely to the disproportionate number of charter schools located in urban areas.”¹²

The Schools Profiled in This Guide

Chosen in 2005 from over 400 charter secondary schools across the country that are meeting achievement goals under NCLB, the eight schools profiled in this guide are all outstanding in many ways. They are setting and aggressively pursuing high expectations, and they are achieving success in closing achievement gaps. They are meeting the needs of traditionally underserved student populations (in these cases, African-American, Hispanic, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and special education students).

The profiled schools are a varied lot. All serve high school students, but six also include lower grades traditionally considered part of middle school or junior high, one with fifth grade. Some schools are urban, some suburban, and one serves a rural population, and their enrollment ranges from 120 to 767. Students of color account for more than 92 percent of the population at five of the schools; two others have student populations that are more racially and ethnically mixed; and one serves a more homogeneous population in a rural community. At five schools, more than 75 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, including 100 percent of the students at one school. At two schools, 25 percent of the students are designated as special education. One is a boarding school, one is run by a teacher cooperative, and one focuses on the performing and visual arts. All are college preparatory in intent,

and each is developing creative solutions to the problems faced by many public high schools. Collectively, they are testing the water to see what is possible for public secondary schools.

The site selection process, described more fully in Appendix A, involved several stages of screening sites based on their overall achievement levels and also on their student test scores in comparison to similar schools in the city or state. To be considered, a school had to have graduated at least one cohort of students and have data to show that students were moving on to college, for the most part, or to work. In many of the schools, significant numbers of students have been the first in their families to attend college. Selected variables for each school are provided in table 1 and also in the individual school profiles in part II of this guide.

To understand what was contributing to success in these schools, a “snapshot” case study of each school was conducted. An external advisory group helped guide the development of a research-based conceptual framework for analyzing schools and also informed the site selection criteria. A two-day site visit was made to each school, to see the school in operation and to talk directly with teachers, students, parents, administrators, and members of the governing board, both individually and, sometimes, in focus groups. Illustrative materials, such as the schedules and assessment tools highlighted in the figures in this guide, were collected from all sites.

This descriptive research process suggests ways to do things that others have found helpful and practical “how-to” guidance. This is not the kind of experimental research that can yield

Table 1: Selected Variables of Profiled Charter High School Sites^a

School and Location	Year First Chartered and Authorizer	Grades/ Enrollment	Student Population Ethnicity	Percentage in Special Education	Free & Reduced-price Lunch	Annual Cost per Student	State Per-Pupil Funding
Gateway High School San Francisco, Calif.	1998 Local district	9–12 / 440	20% African-American 21% Asian American 23% Hispanic 32% white	25%	33%	\$8,255	\$6,071 plus \$457 other state and federal funds
Media and Technology Charter High School (MATCH) Boston, Mass.	1999 State	9–12 / 185	67% African-American 7% Asian American 21% Hispanic 5% white	9%	72%	\$16,000 ^b	\$10,815
Minnesota New Country School Henderson, Minn.	1994 Local district	7–12 / 118	2% African-American 0% Asian American 5% Hispanic 94% white	24%	25%	\$9,100	\$9,100
North Star Academy Charter School of Newark Newark, N.J.	1997 State	5–12 / 125 highschool only; total 384 in 3 schools	85% African-American 0% Asian American 14% Hispanic 0% white	7%	90%	\$9,090 ^c	\$9,090
The Preuss School La Jolla, Calif.	1999 Local district	6–12 / 772	13% African-American 23% Asian American 58% Hispanic 6% white	2%	100%	\$7,551	\$5,393
The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C. Washington, D.C.	1998 D.C. Public Charter School Board	7–12 / 320	99% African-American 0% Asian American 1% Hispanic 0% white	13%	78%	\$33,000	\$30,000 state ^d plus \$1,000 federal
Toledo School For The Arts Toledo, Ohio	1999 Toledo Board of Education	6–12 / 379	37.5% African-American 1% Asian American 5.1% Hispanic 56.4% white	5%	44%	\$7,138	\$5,890
YES College Preparatory School, Southeast campus Houston, Texas	1998 State	6–12 / 665	5% African-American 1% Asian American 92% Hispanic 2% white	2%	78%	\$7,205	\$6,500

College Course Enrollment	Number of Advanced Placement Courses Offered	Percentage of 2- and 4-year College Acceptance (class of 2005)	Number of Graduates 2005	College Attendance Class of 2005	Distinctive Features
Offered	6	74% 4-year 35% 2-year	94	73% 4-year 22% 2-year 4% jobs 1% military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College preparatory curriculum that exceeds University of California admissions requirements. Advisory and house community system Personalized support for all learners
Required	4	100% 4-year	22	100% 4-year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with Boston University, students take 2 college humanities classes senior year at BU. Students receive 2 hours of tutoring daily from MATCH Corps tutors. AP for all required.
Offered	0	80% 4-year 20% 2-year	15	80% 4-year 20% 2-year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student-centered, project-based learning curriculum School run by teacher cooperative
Not offered	3	100% 4-year	21	90% 4-year 10% 2-year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Star's combined classes 2004–05 have the highest rate of 4-year college acceptance and attendance of any N.J. public school regardless of income level of student population. School culture developed through community circle and school rituals Data-driven instruction: use of interim assessments, analyzing results, and making changes to improve student learning
Offered	12	91% 4-year 9% 2-year	75	84% 4-year 16% 2-year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with school located on University of California, San Diego campus Teachers actively engaged in professional development All students will be the first in their family to attend college.
Not offered	4	100% 4-year	13	88% 4-year 12% jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public boarding school Ninth-grade "gate" ensures students have mastered academic and social skills before starting college preparatory upper-school program.
Offered	0	65% 4-year 8% 2-year	39	65% 4-year 8% 2-year 25% jobs 2% military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual, music, theater, and dance performing arts school Partnerships with community organizations and professional artists
Required	9	100% 4-year	75	87% 4-year 12% 2-year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 58% of juniors and 70% of seniors enrolled in dual-credit program with Houston Community College Southeast Campus. Strong parent involvement includes workshop classes for families

^a Data reported by schools both here and in profiles are for 2005–06 school year.

^b Includes \$1,800 facility costs plus \$3,000 residential tutoring MATCH Corps cost.

^c Does not include building purchase/renovation expenses.

^d U.S. Congress and D.C. Council amended education budget for boarding charter schools in D.C.

valid causal claims about what works. Readers should judge for themselves the merits of these practices based on their understanding of why they should work, how they fit the local context, and what happens when they actually try them. Also, readers should understand that these descriptions do not constitute an endorsement of specific practices or products.

The research revealed that while the differences across these schools are interesting in themselves, it is the schools' significant similarities that are more instructive for understanding their effectiveness:

- ◆ **They are mission-driven.** Determined to get and keep their students on track for higher education, they create a safe learning environment and a strong school culture, with school leaders, teachers, parents, and students all relentlessly focused on ensuring student success.
- ◆ **They focus on college preparation.** They provide students with a rigorous, relevant, and engaging curriculum, as well as with cocurricular opportunities, such as internships and travel programs to broaden student experiences.
- ◆ **They teach for mastery.** Teachers are not simply imparting a rigorous curriculum; they are expected to teach for in-depth understanding. As needed, students are given remediation, acceleration, and more time on task to learn and master key academic standards.

- ◆ **They provide wraparound support.** In ensuring support that responds to students' academic and social needs, they expect and receive help from families and community partners. Personalized support is evidenced through systems, such as advisory programs, college counseling, academic tutoring, and mentoring.
- ◆ **They value professional learning.** The principal often serves as an instructional leader, and teachers are collaborative and actively engaged in ongoing professional development throughout the year.
- ◆ **They hold themselves accountable.** These schools tend to be well-run organizations with strong, active governing boards that generate creative solutions to challenges that arise and empower administrators and other leaders to make and implement decisions expeditiously.

Part I of this guide explores these common themes in more depth. Examples are drawn from across the set of schools to show the various ways the themes were enacted. To illustrate the points more fully, sample materials taken directly from the schools are presented in accompanying figures. This cross-site section ends with a discussion of implications for all public high schools.

Part II is intended to help the reader get a holistic picture of each school. A brief profile or narrative snapshot of each school brings together in one place important contextual information about each school, its history, and key features. Readers may want to refer to these profiles to get a more comprehensive understanding of each site.



PART 1

Common Themes in Profiled Close-the-Gap Charter Secondary Schools

Each of the charter schools presented here is progressing toward its student academic achievement goals and each has promising practices to share. Yet, as a group, those involved with these schools—dedicated teachers, motivated leaders, hard-working students, and committed families and communities—share a continued sense of urgency, the prevailing attitude being, “We can do better every day.” Together they are creating a learning environment where the “work hard to get smart” adage applies not just to students but to the entire school community.

Unlike most public schools, which tend to conform to some fairly traditional models, must follow district and state guidelines, and can find themselves mired in bureaucratic procedures, charter schools are, by definition, free to innovate. Each school profiled herein has certain characteristics that set it apart from the other seven (e.g., one operates as a boarding school, while another offers exclusively student-driven, project-based learning). Yet in their drive to close the achievement gap and ready students for success in college and other postsecondary endeavors, these eight charter schools have incorporated some common “best practice” elements—elements that would benefit any public school.

Schools Are Mission-driven

In each of these schools, a group of thoughtful individuals has developed a shared focus that guides the work of the school at every level,



Common Themes Among The Schools Profiled

- Driven by Mission
 - Relentless focus on goals
 - Supportive culture
- Focused on College Preparation
 - Rigorous curriculum
 - Real-world experiences
- Teaching for Mastery
 - Remediation and acceleration
 - Data-driven teaching
- Wraparound Student Support
 - Easily accessible adult support
 - Family commitment
 - Demystifying the college-going experience
- Valuing Professional Learning
 - Principals as instructional leaders
 - Teachers learning together
 - Teacher induction and retention
- Holding Themselves Accountable
 - Sound fiscal management
 - Dedicated boards
 - Continuous improvement

from budget priorities to curriculum choices to hiring decisions. Teachers, students, parents, administrators, board members, and community partners are on the same page, with a clear sense of and commitment to the purpose of the school program. All decisions are considered according to whether they advance the mission. At North Star Academy Charter School of Newark, N.J., whose mission includes preparing each student for success in college, the principal says he “doesn’t spend a dime unless it is directly going to impact instruction and learning and preparation of students for college.” The mission, therefore, focuses efforts of school staff and shapes school culture.

Relentless focus on goals. All of these schools were created in response to what their founders experienced as a lack of satisfactory high school options in the local community, and their missions reflect this. In San Francisco, Calif., dissatisfaction with both public and private options for children with learning differences led six parents to sit around a kitchen table and talk about a school where such students could prepare for college and would not slip through the cracks. That early planning resulted in the creation of Gateway High School. Even Mel Levine, whose Schools Attuned work had inspired Gateway’s founders, doubted such a vision could be implemented in a public school. But the board, faculty, students, and staff at Gateway are proving it can be done through relentless focus and hard work. Doing so has meant weaving extensive support systems into the fabric of a charter high school that now serves a racially and ethnically diverse student population, of which 25 percent qualify for special education services.

On the other side of the country, North Star Academy Charter School of Newark was conceived

to address the lack of college preparatory options for public school students in Newark, N.J., where, according to the 1996–97 New Jersey School Report Card data, only 50 percent of the freshman who enrolled in Newark high schools reached their senior year and of those only 26 percent stated that they hoped to go to a four-year college after graduation. Deriving its name from Frederick Douglass’ abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, this school promotes education as the “north star” for its inner city African-American children. That connection is affirmed in the school’s call-and-response (excerpted below) that students participate in at regularly scheduled community meetings:

Who are you? A Star! I shine brightly for others.
Why are you here? To get an education!
Why else? To be the great person I am meant to be!
And what will you have to do? Work! Hard! ...
And what will you need? Self-discipline! ...
And what else will you need? Respect for me, my peers, my teachers and all people!
Where are you headed? To college! ...
And when you succeed what will you do?
Give back to others!

And in the rural upper Midwest, in Henderson, Minn., an hour outside of the Twin Cities, Minnesota New Country School (MNCS) was founded by a team of visionary educators and community members bent on creating a school to serve students who, for academic, social, or other reasons, would have a hard time fitting in and doing well at more traditional schools. Some MNCS students had done well academically in other settings, but found themselves bullied or teased for how they dressed or other nonacademic reasons. Others may have done well socially but struggled academically. Premised on the belief that students

learn best when motivated by something that interests them, MNCS largely eschews a traditional teacher-planned curriculum in favor of project-based learning, in which students gain knowledge and skills through exploration as they carry out projects of their own choosing that culminate in a product or performance. The projects, developed with the support of a teacher qua adviser who then serves as project coach, may be focused on a single subject (e.g., one student researched chemicals in fast food and then developed a nutrition class for his peers) or may be interdisciplinary (another student researched the Victorian era, then designed and hand-sewed 19th-century clothing). Students may work individually on projects or as a group, as when students undertook a multiyear project studying frog deformities found at a nearby nature center. Each student works on multiple projects at the same time and develops a personalized learning plan that includes a portfolio of projects and assessments, a resume of accomplishments, and a post-high school plan. “I wouldn’t make it in a traditional high school,” says one student. “I’ve had personal problems and I’m in my fifth year here, but that’s okay. I can express who I am through my projects.”

Most of these schools’ missions are very specific: readying low-income and minority students for success in college. The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C., serves a grades 7–12 population that is 99 percent African-American and 78 percent low-family-income. SEED’s high academic expectations are evidenced in its course sequence overview (see fig. 1), which includes a “ninth-grade gate,” beyond which students cannot pass until they have mastered key skills and then are considered ready to work at grade level in a demanding

college preparatory curriculum. Believing that all children can succeed in this kind of a curriculum given the right environment and the right support, SEED founders set out to ensure that their inner city students would have both of these elements around the clock, five days a week, making SEED the nation’s only charter boarding school at the secondary level.

The Preuss School of La Jolla, Calif., was conceived by a provost at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), who saw in the dismantling of affirmative action programs an urgent need to better prepare high school students in select subgroups that had not been well represented at the university even with affirmative action. Located on the UCSD campus, Preuss works hard to attract students who will be the first in their families to attend college. So, too, does the Media and Technology Charter High School (MATCH) of Boston, Mass., whose goal is the preparation of inner city students, “including those who have no family history of college attendance,” to succeed in college and beyond. YES College Preparatory School, Southeast campus, in Houston, Texas, where 92 percent of the students are Hispanic and 75 percent are from low-income families, takes a similar approach. YES and MATCH both have a graduation requirement that students gain acceptance at a four-year college or university.

Although all of these schools provide students with a college preparatory curriculum, not all see college as the principle or sole goal for students. In Ohio, the mission of Toledo School for the Arts (TSA) is to provide a college preparatory curriculum with arts-based learning, but the larger goal is for students to become lifelong learners whether they head to college, art school, or directly into

work as artists. To that end, TSA makes every effort to connect students with professional artists, whether by hiring artists to work as teachers or by facilitating students to work as artists in the community (such as when a TSA jazz combo plays at a local venue). At MNCS, which is operated by a teacher cooperative and has no principal, the lead teacher says she wants “students to know they can do postsecondary studies and be successful, whether that is technical training after high school, college, or other pursuits.”

But, each school, including TSA and MNCS, is committed to ensuring, minimally, that students have the choice to attend and succeed in higher education. That commitment has influenced the grade configuration of some schools. Recognizing that some number of students would arrive at their door performing below grade level in core subjects like reading and math, all of these schools offer remediation and extra support to bring these students up to grade level. But several of the

Fig. 1: SEED School Course Sequence Overview Indicating the Ninth-grade Gate

The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C.
Course Sequence Overview
 (8/8/05 Pending Graduation Requirements Approval)

The Middle School
 The middle school is a graded, student-centered program that aims to prepare students for success in a traditional, college preparatory upper school course sequence.
A two-year sequence which includes:
 Math
 English
 Life and Earth Science
 Civics
 Geography
 The Arts
 Technology Training

The Ninth Grade Gate
 The Ninth Grade Gate is a standards-based list of skills that students entering the ninth grade must be able to perform in order to be at grade level and to embark on a college preparatory upper school curriculum. Students work on mastering these skills throughout the middle school course sequence. Students do not enter the upper school until they have mastered The Ninth Grade Gate skills.

The Upper School
 The upper school is a traditional, college preparatory sequence of courses leading to college admission

Required Courses

9 th Grade	English I	World Studies I	Algebra I OR Geometry	Physical Science OR Biology	Spanish I	Art and Health & Wellness	Elective
10 th Grade	English II: World Literature	World Studies II	Geometry OR Algebra II	Biology OR Chemistry	Spanish II	Technology and Health & Wellness	Elective
11 th Grade	English III: American Literature OR AP Lang. & Comp.	United States History OR AP US History	Algebra II OR Pre-Calculus	Physics OR Chemistry OR Pre-Engineering	Spanish III	Technology	Elective and Junior Seminar and SAT II Prep
12 th Grade	British Lit/ African-American Lit OR AP Lit & Comp	Government, Politics, & Economics OR AP US Government	Pre-Calculus/Calculus OR Business Math	Pre-Engineering OR Elective	Cultural Studies and DC History	Elective	Senior Seminar

schools decided that these types of interventions alone would not suffice; they saw a need for more time with students in order to ensure their success with a rigorous curriculum. To that end, they have created programs that encompass earlier grades typically associated with middle school (e.g., sixth, seventh), thus giving educators a few more years in which to work with students before high school graduation. In one case, the reverse happened: North Star started as a middle school and expanded when parents voiced the need for better high school options for their children.

Students at these schools recognize and appreciate that the adults at their schools are committed to students' success. Those interviewed spoke with excitement about the caring and dedicated teachers and other staff who are preparing them for success beyond high school. One YES student spoke of his teachers, "They push and they push hard. Knowing that they care is my safety net. Teachers believed in me so I started to work hard and then harder."

Supportive culture. A common objective across these schools has been to create a positive, supportive school culture. That effort is readily apparent when first entering the buildings, where student artwork and projects, inspirational quotes, and college banners brighten the hallways. It shows up, too, in such basic things as the consistent cleanliness of each school. At a deeper level, it is evident in the affirmative daily interactions among students and between students and teachers as well as other adults in the community. All of these schools are relatively small in size and adults know each of the students personally. MNCS has as its motto, "No Child Left Unknown." MATCH's principal, who

greeted every student personally at the front door each day, says, "Kids do not care how much you know until they know how much you care."

At these schools, there is a pervasive sense that it is cool to be smart and work hard. This contrasts significantly with the experiences many students have had at their prior schools, where they felt the need to hide their academic prowess and intellectual curiosity in order to fit in. These schools are proactive in their attempts to shift students' attention to learning and away from some of the common distractions found in many public schools serving adolescents, including concerns about fashion and safety. Most of these charter schools have a school dress code or a uniform, a policy that serves multiple purposes. One Preuss senior says that having a school uniform has been good because "it covers [the fact] that we are all poor. Also, you don't have to focus on what people are wearing." In communities where gangs are a problem, dress codes or uniforms also guarantee that students do not wear gang colors (either intentionally or unintentionally), which can affect their ability to make friends or their safety as they travel to and from school.

These sorts of policies are driven by a school's understanding of its students and what will be conducive to their learning. Neither TSA nor MNCS has any dress code because each school, in its own way, is intent on supporting students' individuality and creativity. At TSA, where teachers and students alike are artists, the student who came to school dressed in an outfit she made entirely of duct tape drew rave reviews. At MNCS, the aim is to let students be themselves, whether they take an alternative approach to dress and hairstyle (and body piercing) or a more traditional approach. In what

many students identify as MNCS's accepting environment, students' sartorial choices are of little concern, freeing everyone to attend to learning.

Eliminating concerns about safety is of highest priority at these schools. You will not see security guards or metal detectors but behavior violations are not tolerated, and there are few incidents of fighting, bullying, or drugs. A common time and place for trouble to brew in many public schools is at the beginning and end of the day on the school bus. Yet, the dean of students at Preuss says the school's bus drivers experience none of the problems commonly associated with transporting students in large groups because older students serve as "guardians of the climate" and the students monitor themselves and each other. Whether on the bus or off, older students at Preuss, as at many of the schools, take responsibility for helping younger students adopt the school culture.

Some schools have created incentives intended to keep students motivated to work hard and meet conduct expectations. For example, MATCH students who work hard and behave in an exemplary fashion can earn gift certificates. But schools seek to trigger internal motivators as well. North Star high school students are encouraged to consider what "legacy" they will leave the middle school students coming up behind them. Core values of caring, respect, responsibility, and justice are also articulated in a pledge that all members of the North Star community are asked to sign (see fig. 2). Similarly, SEED works with great intentionality to help students understand and assume its core values of respect, responsibility, self-discipline, compassion, and integrity.

When problems do arise, these schools have systems for communicating and resolving conflicts, and staff use a common language that students absorb and articulate themselves. At MNCS, teachers and students have been trained to deal with interpersonal conflicts through a process of restorative justice, which involves creating a circle and passing a "talking piece" from one person to another so individuals "share their truth" when it is their turn. The school has also instituted a student jury to decide the consequences in the restorative justice process. A student who breaks the code of respect, for example, might have to vacuum the school building for a week to restore respect to the community.

The bottom line is that these schools hold students accountable and, if necessary, will expel them. But the approach to behavior management, like the approach to learning, is supportive rather than punitive. When students see administrators, teachers, and other adults demonstrating respect and high expectations for their pupils, taking their job seriously, and working hard on students' behalf, students step up to do the same. The message that emerges in talking with students across these schools is that they count themselves fortunate to be at a school where their success is the object of everyone's effort.

Schools Focus on College Preparation

"Every single person knows why they are here—to get our kids into college and ensure that they are successful when they are there," says the principal at YES. This theme is echoed at the majority of these profiled schools, two of which have admission to college as a graduation requirement. Even at TSA, where many

students intend to continue in the performing arts rather than go directly to college, and at MNCS, where the emphasis is on preparing students to be successful in whatever post-high school endeavor they choose, teachers, staff, and other adults in the school community are intent on making sure that students have a solid college preparatory experience, including access to higher-level classes.

Rigorous curriculum. In the seven schools that operate with a typical teacher-conceived

curriculum (MNCS is the eighth), the curriculum is aligned both to state standards and to college entrance requirements. Some of the schools focus heavily on core academic classes, putting the elective subjects into after-school clubs. TSA, with its arts program, requires that students successfully complete a college preparatory curriculum in addition to their arts classes. In fact, the school has its own version of the longstanding “no pass, no play” rule for high school athletes: If TSA students are not doing well in their core academic classes, they

Fig. 2:
North Star
Community
Member
Pledge of
Core Values

CORE VALUES OF COMMUNITY

CARING

1. We take care of each other.
2. We help each other. We notice when someone needs help and we lend a hand.
3. We do not hurt each other physically or emotionally.

RESPECT

1. We treat each person as valuable, worthy of greatness and goodness.
2. We accept individuals for who they are.
3. We show our respect at all times for each other, for property, for differences, and for opinions different from our own.
4. We are honest with each other.

RESPONSIBILITY

1. We believe we are the masters of our own destiny and that we have the power to control our lives and shape our futures.
2. We are committed to the highest level of achievement: academic, social, and personal. We recognize our strengths and try to improve on our weaknesses.
3. We participate fully in everything we do. We do not do things halfway.

JUSTICE

1. We act with fairness toward each other.
2. We get involved when members of the community are in trouble or need help.
3. We work to improve our community and the world.

I pledge to live by these values as a member of the North Star community:

Signed

Date

are pulled from arts classes and given tutoring support until their academics improve, at which point they may resume their work in art, music, theater, or dance.

Because it does not have a school curriculum that can be aligned with college entrance requirements, MNCS continues exploring how to make it easier for institutions of higher education to understand how to “translate” MNCS academic credits when considering students for admission. The school’s almost exclusive use of project-based learning also puts the onus on teachers to ensure that, collectively, a student’s projects throughout his or her years at the school will cover the required state curriculum standards. To that end, MNCS has developed a skills rubric, which is used by students in conceiving and planning their projects; used by teachers and students together in checking that a project encompasses the necessary curriculum standards; and used by teachers in assessing the degree to which students have adequately developed the skills and knowledge required in the standards (see fig. 3).

In light of research showing that the highest level of math attained in high school is an important indicator of college completion,¹³ all of these schools are paying particular attention to this subject. At several schools, students double up on math classes (accelerating learning for those who entered below grade level) and receive other remediation to prepare them for higher-level math courses. At MNCS, mathematics is the only subject area not taught exclusively through project-based learning. While students may, in fact, learn some math through their projects, all students study math through the Accelerated Math program, which allows

them to progress at their own pace. Students complete computerized Scantron forms so they can monitor their mastery level; when they have passed the concepts of one unit, they move on to the next set of standards, continuing to work at their own pace.

It can be challenging for these schools with their relatively small populations to offer a wide range of courses. Consequently, several give students the opportunity when they are ready to take higher-level courses at local universities. At MATCH, students are required to pass a course at Boston University during each semester of their senior year, and the school provides tutors to support their learning. The intent is to give students a taste of higher education while they are still in high school. At MNCS, Preuss, and TSA, students are encouraged to enroll in the federally supported Post Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) program, which allows them to take courses for credit at area universities and colleges. It is through such partnerships that these schools are able to offer the breadth of curriculum that meets students’ needs.

Six of the schools offer Advanced Placement (AP) classes along with relevant support to help students succeed in these more challenging courses. Although the students are generally doing well in the classes, in some schools, the majority of students are not scoring well on the AP exams, a concern the schools are investigating and trying to address. At Preuss, for example, after seeing students struggling with document-based questions (DBQs) on an AP history exam, staff began integrating the use of primary sources and DBQs as early as the sixth grade, to begin better preparing students for this exam. In this, Preuss is one example of how, rather than

being demoralized by students' exam performance, staff at these schools seem to take it as an important reminder of the need for teachers themselves to work smarter and better. Moreover, as the principal at more than one school notes, the point of offering AP classes is not

solely to have students place out of a subject in college. Equally important is the role of such classes in signaling high expectations to students and helping students understand and prepare for the academic demands of college. Education research analyst Adelman found that the rigor

Fig. 3:
Minnesota
New Country
School
Skills Rubric
for Students
and Teachers

MNCS Skills Rubric			
Basic Skills	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<u>Reading</u>	Reading at less than 6th grade reading level (Not passed BST)	Reading at or above 6th grade level (Passed Basic Skills Tests).	Reading at or above 10th grade level in at least one area.
<u>Writing</u>	Needs a lot of assistance to express thoughts and reflections	Able to express thoughts and reflections with limited help	Able to construct a well-written 5 paragraph essay
<u>Mathematics</u>	Math less than functional (i.e.-decimals, fractions, basic measurements)	Able to do functional math (i.e.-decimals, fractions, basic measurements)	Completed Algebra I and Geometry or technical equivalent
<u>Communication</u>	Does not listen well, difficulty participating in sharing of information and thoughts	Listens well. Difficulty participating in sharing information and thoughts	Ability to present in an organized manner in a group and limited settings
Thinking Skills			
<u>Creative Thinking</u>	Only follows established practices	Has limited creative ideas or limited follow through to product	Uses creative ideas to adapt, improve, enhance a product
<u>Problem Solving</u>	No effort when confronted with problem	Identifies problem, but uses little effort to solve	Shows some persistence but inconsistent in success
<u>Task Completion</u>	Difficulty in completing projects, requires much assistance	Completes most projects with assistance	Completes required projects with minimal assistance
<u>Context</u>	Collects basic information for project, unable to utilize or apply to outside world	Completes large projects, but unable to purposefully connect to the real world	Purposefully connecting large projects to real world
Personal Qualities			
<u>Responsibility</u>	Unable to manage self (cleaning, credits, behavior), while blaming others	Manages self with guidance, not blaming others	Consistently manages self and takes responsibility for successes and failures
<u>Respect</u>	Abusive (physically, mentally, or verbally), lack of self respect	Respects self or others	Consistent respect of self and others
Managing Resources			
<u>Manages Time</u>	Cannot follow schedule or meet deadlines, with daily supervision	Meets deadlines with daily supervision	Meets deadlines with periodic supervision
<u>Manages Information</u>	Cannot acquire, organize or interpret information with large amounts of assistance	Can acquire, organize and interpret information with large amounts of assistance	Can acquire, organize and interpret information with minimal assistance
Interpersonal Skills			
<u>Team Member</u>	Unable or unwilling to work in a group	Able to work in a single role and select groups	Able to work in multiple roles and in diverse groups
<u>Service and Ownership</u>	Refuses to cooperate and does not see value in complying	Helping out for an external reward	Helping out when asked for intrinsic reward

of a student's high school studies, as evidenced by having taken AP courses and higher-level math courses, is a strong predictor of college completion for all students, but even more so for African-American and Hispanic students.¹⁴

Real-world experiences. Recognizing that being successful in college and other post-high school endeavors entails more than just having solid academic skills, these school administrators also are working to broaden students' experiences beyond what would otherwise be available to them. Internships and other real-world work, travel learning, and enrichment experiences all provide relevant, engaging learning experiences and, in the process, expand students' understanding of and comfort with the world beyond family and neighborhood. Equally important, these experiences help to build students' "social capital," a term social historian Robert Putnam and others use to refer to "the networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."¹⁵ In doing so, these schools also help level the playing field for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Last summer, several students at North Star had American Field Service scholarships to study and live with a family abroad; another had a paid internship at Lehman Brothers, allowing him to learn about how the business world works; another attended a journalism program at Princeton University; and 12 students went to New Zealand to learn about Maori culture. Meanwhile, Preuss students participated in a four-week internship at UCSD with the Health Information Partnership where they met with the CEO of the university's medical center, witnessed a kidney transplant, and got a behind-

the-scenes look at the medical field. Other Preuss students attended a math and science camp on a different University of California campus. Students at YES College Preparatory School, Southeast campus, engaged in internships, summer school programs, and leadership programs, such as wilderness camps and Outward Bound.

These types of experiences are not limited to off-school months. YES has instituted service learning projects once a month, on Saturdays, with students undertaking such varied work as cleaning public beaches and parks and tutoring local elementary school students. To generate broader learning opportunities for its students to perform or show their work publicly, as well as to be taught or mentored by professional artists, TSA has initiated a series of "ARTnerships" within the community (see fig. 4). For example, one restaurant hosts a TSA chamber music series with student musicians, the local jazz club hosts performances by TSA jazz players, and the Toledo Ballet Association includes TSA students as dancers in its annual production of "The Nutcracker."

Schools Teach for Mastery

In these mission-driven charter secondary schools, students are expected to work hard and learn; there is no social promotion. For their part, teachers are expected to do more than just cover the curriculum and engender student's basic understanding. They are expected to help students gain mastery.

At SEED, middle school students who are unable to meet the ninth-grade "gate" skills are offered an additional "growth" year to continue working on building their skills in middle

Fig. 4: A List of ARTnerships Excerpted From the 2006 Annual Report of Toledo School for the Arts

ARTners

Arts Commission of Greater Toledo
TSA Development Director David Gierke served as Director for the ACGT Young Artists at Work program, spearheading an innovative partnership linking ACGT to TARTA in a city-wide moving arts exhibition. TSA painting instructor Andres Orlawski was a YAAW faculty member, and TSA students participated as Young Artists. TSA Artistic Director David Saygers served as ACGT Trustee and liaison. Several TSA students accepted into YAAW program.

Manhattan's Restaurant
TSA presented a chamber music series at Manhattan's restaurant during 2004-05, and Manhattan's moved from being a faithful advertiser to the sponsor of the 05-06 First Friday Series.

Mickey Finn's Pub
Host again for TSA Pop Combo concerts, Mickey Finn's Pub also was the site for Artapalooza, TSA student-driven May arts fair. In recognition of TSA's presence there, new sandwiches named for TSA teachers and students were added to the menu.

Murphy's Jazz Club
Murphy's once again hosted TSA's Jazz Studies concerts, sponsoring four events during the school year. TSA alum Ryan Erard became a regular performer at Murphy's, and TSA instructor Kenneth Zuercher helped in recording jazz.

Owens Community College Center for Fine and Performing Arts
The CFPA at Owens Community College became the TSA Main Stage venue, and provided generously discounted fees and services for the four programs offered there by TSA. CFPA Concert Office Director Barbara Barkan served as TSA board member, and Technical Director Cassie Breitingner designed sets for TSA productions.

Toledo Ballet Association
Over a dozen TSA students were active in the Ballet's productions of The Nutcracker and Coppelia, and attended classes at the Ballet School. TSA 6th graders enjoyed a performance of The Nutcracker, and TSA Director Martin Porter served as a board member. TSA shared its Board President, Rob Koenig, with the Ballet.

Toledo Jazz Society
The Jazz Society co-sponsored several programs with TSA, including a joint residency with Gene Parker, a series of Jazz Society music-in-the-schools presentations by the TSA Jazz Combo, and children's programming by TSA at the Art Tatum Jazz Fest. The two organizations teamed to present the first annual presentation of the Harlem Nutcracker. For 2005-06, TSA was awarded an Ohio Arts Council Arts Partnership Grant for programming with the Jazz Society.

Toledo Museum of Art
For the fifth year, TSA students represented one of the largest blocks of students receiving school tours in the Museum Docent Multiple Tour program, which works to create more meaningful museum experiences through repeat visits.

Toledo Repertoire Theatre
In addition to TSA staff members Rosie Best, Jamie Dael, Audra McCabe and David Saygers serving in voluntary roles for the Rep and its productions, TSA presented a successful production of The Crucible in the Rep's 10th Street Theater. Many TSA students participated in several Rep productions, on and off stage, and TSA students attended the Rep's Christmas Carol school matinee.

Toledo Symphony Orchestra
Over twenty TSA students received music lessons from Toledo Symphony string players this year, through the TSO community outreach program. TSA Associate Conductor Chelsea Tipton provided a master class for TSA students for the second year.

school. At MATCH, ninth-graders must pass proficiency exams in reading, writing, and math, with four opportunities to pass the exam. If after four tries students still do not pass reading at a 9–10 grade level, math at 90 percent proficiency and writing at 70 percent proficiency, they are retained and additional academic support is provided.

Remediation and acceleration. Supporting students to be successful in academically rigorous studies is the core work for these schools. As one administrator of a four-year high school

says of his school, the first two years are focused on remediation and acceleration to bring students who are academically below grade level up to proficiency and also focused on training students to develop study skills and fill in academic skill gaps. The second two years are focused then on preparation for college. At SEED, the middle school program is seen as the place for remediation and acceleration, preparing students to start the high school program performing on grade level. While extensive tutoring is available at all these schools, there is also great awareness among all members of

the school community that students need to become independent, self-regulated learners if they are to succeed in higher education.

At these schools, if learning requires more time, more time is provided. All have developed longer school days or school years and some have added summer and weekend academics. MATCH, as an example, requires 100 hours of weekend tutoring for all 10th-graders in math, English, and biology (provided by Boston-area undergraduates). The tutors develop “tutoring plans” that build on their knowledge of their students (in part from regular assessment) and are tied to teachers’ weekly lesson plans. A sample

weekly schedule for a MATCH sophomore (see fig. 5) illustrates a three-pronged approach to supporting students’ academic development: more time in classes (in this case, a 10-and-a-half-hour school day), a doubling up of classes in targeted areas (in this case, algebra and geometry), and regular and frequent tutoring.

Some of the schools have a traditional schedule with 50-minute classes; others use a block schedule with 90- or 100-minute classes; and some use a combination of the two. Like all decisions made at these schools, class scheduling depends on the school mission and focus. For example, MATCH has a school day that

Fig. 5:
 MATCH Sample
 Weekly Schedule
 for Sophomores

SAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR A MATCH SOPHOMORE

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
7:45 to 8:30	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	
8:30 to 9:26	U.S. History class	U.S. History class	U.S. History class	U.S. History class	Friday assessment quizzes	MCAS tutoring (starting at 9)
9:30 to 10:26	English 10 class	English 10 class	English 10 class	English 10 class	School-wide assembly	MCAS tutoring
10:30 to 11:26	Geometry tutoring	Algebra II tutoring	Geometry tutoring	Algebra II tutoring	Tutoring session I	MCAS tutoring
11:30 to 12	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Tutoring session I continued	MCAS tutoring
12:04 to 1:00	English 10 tutoring	English 10 tutoring	English 10 tutoring	English 10 tutoring	Lunch (until 12:30); Tutoring session II	
1:04 to 2:00	Algebra II class	Algebra II class	Algebra II class	Algebra II class	Tutoring session II	
2:04 to 3:00	Geometry class	Geometry class	Geometry class	Geometry class		
3:04 to 4:00	Silent sustained reading	Silent sustained reading	Silent sustained reading	Silent sustained reading		
4:04 to 5:00	Biology class	Biology class	Biology class	Biology class		
5:15 to 7:00	Teacher tutorial	Newspaper club	Poetry club	Review session run by teaching assistant		

includes a two-hour block of time for students to work on their major academic subjects with help from their MATCH tutor, with teacher “walk-arounds” built in to ensure a close connection between the teaching curriculum and tutoring sessions. During this two-hour block, 9th- and 10th-graders work on English and math; 11th-graders work on AP U.S. history and SAT math, reading, and writing; and 12th-graders work on AP calculus, biology, or literature, along with the course work from their classes at Boston University.

Data-driven teaching. In these profiled schools, lessons plans are considered dynamic documents that are open to revision as teachers regularly assess students for understanding (formally and informally) and reteach as needed. North Star has developed a multifaceted data-analysis and instructional-planning process to support teachers in using assessments to understand student needs. Students are assessed against learning standards every six to eight weeks, with the results disaggregated by individual standard and by individual student, but also aggregated by standard for the entire class. The results are given to teachers in an easy-to-read spreadsheet (see fig. 6).

Once the test results are available, North Star’s principal meets with each teacher and, together, they analyze the data to identify what students or groups of students did not learn the standard and, therefore, need additional instruction, whether through small group work, tutoring, or acceleration. Then, still working together, they plan how the teacher will differentiate instruction and what other forms of support might be helpful in enabling students to achieve to the standard(s).

These schools are relentless in their efforts to advance student learning and do not rely exclusively on differentiated instruction but also consider the larger context if appropriate. At Pre-uss, when data showed that students were not achieving well in math, the teachers reexamined the curriculum scope and sequence, lowered the class size to 15, and added two tutors. So now in the eighth-grade algebra class, there are two tutors and one teacher for 15 students, which means each adult can sit with five students at each of the three tables to work closely with them on math concepts.

Schools Provide Wraparound Student Support

A commitment to closing achievement gaps requires more than simply offering rigorous academics. All of these schools recognize that if their students are to be successful, the school community must offer a variety of supports. This understanding is summed up in the YES school motto, “Whatever it takes!”

Easily accessible adult support. At these schools, time is made for students, and adult support is easily accessible. As charters, the schools have the flexibility to more quickly allocate resources and make staffing decisions based upon student needs and school mission. For example, each of the schools provides a relatively low student-to-teacher (e.g., 22 to 1). Many schools have contracts with either full-time or part-time specialists, among them social workers, counselors, parent liaison translators, and special education resource specialists. Gateway has the full-service Learning Center that is open to any student experiencing academic difficulties, irrespective of whether the student has

Fig. 6: North Star Assessment Report for Data-driven Algebra Instruction (Excerpt With Names Masked to Protect Student Privacy)

					NSA Algebra #2 Results 05-06															
					Algebra															
					Question #:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
					MULT. CHOICE: TOTAL CORRECT															
					MULT. CHOICE: % CORRECT															
					OPEN-ENDED: % POINTS POSSIBLE															
					COMBINED PROFICIENCY SCORE:															
					Number sense-Ratio/Proportion															
					PFA- Write equation for a functions															
					PFA-Evaluating Expressions															
					Number sense- Percent of a Number															
					Number Sense- Ratio and Proportion															
					PFA- Write equation for a functions															
					Number Sense- Percent of a number (discounts)															
					Number Sense- percent of a Number															
					Number sense- Percent of a Number															
					Data Analysis/Probability- Central tendency - Median															
					Open Ended- Number Sense- percent															
					OE Data Analysis-Central tendency- Mean															
					PFA-Extend Sequences (Visual)															
					Number Sense- Comparing and Ordering Integers															
					Number Sense-Percent															
Student Name																				
Student 1	35	88%	79%	85%																
Student 2	32	80%	50%	71%																
Student 3	25	63%	38%	55%	d			a												
Student 4	32	80%	63%	75%				a						c						c
Student 5	24	60%	53%	60%																
Student 6	32	80%	83%	81%			d													
Student 7	26	65%	35%	56%	c		d	d												
Student 8	32	80%	75%	79%			b	c												
Student 9	30	75%	54%	69%																
Student 10	34	85%	67%	80%						c										a
Student 11	33	83%	71%	79%								a								c
Student 12	31	78%	63%	73%																
Student 13	35	88%	79%	85%				a	d											
Student 14	33	83%	83%	83%																
Student 15	31	78%	88%	81%																
Student 16	28	70%	38%	60%	c															
Student 17	32	80%	63%	75%	d		a	a												
Student 18	29	73%	54%	67%																
Student 19	28	70%	88%	75%																
TOTAL CORRECT PER Q:																				
% CORRECT PER Q:																				
% CORRECT BY STANDARD:																				


a diagnosed learning difference. The Learning Center provides, among other things, subject-area tutoring, an alternative exam environment, assistive technology, reading support, academic counseling, and referrals for diagnostic testing. A quarter of the student body regularly attends after-school tutoring. To explain the value of the Learning Center to funders and new staff, Gateway uses a vignette that relates how the center significantly changed the learning experience for one of Gateway's first students (see fig. 7).

Tutors abound at these schools. Two of the schools have tutors in classes serving as teaching assistants, and virtually all schools provide tutors outside of class and beyond the standard

school day or week as needed. At TSA, teachers themselves tutor before and after school and on weekends.

As indicated previously, tutoring plays a central role at MATCH, where two separate tutoring programs are in place. The first involves 50 undergraduate college students from Boston-area colleges and some older volunteers as well. The college students are typically strong academically and are receiving work-study financial aid from their colleges. These tutors work specifically with MATCH 10th-graders on the weekend, in 25 four-hour blocks of tutoring. Since the federal work-study law requires colleges and universities

Fig. 7:
Gateway High
School's Learning
Center Vignette



Gateway High School

The Learning Center in Action – Cynthia, Gateway Student
Cynthia began her high school career with a vague sense of both her strengths and her weaknesses as a learner. Her teachers and previous schools attributed her difficulties to either laziness or poor aptitude. However, Cynthia had a suspicion that something else was going on, knowing how hard she worked and how much she did want to learn.

With her parents' support Cynthia decided to take a chance and enter the inaugural class of Gateway High School. Early in her 9th grade year along with her classmates, Cynthia was screened by the Learning Center and found to have a moderate learning disability in the area of visual processing. The Learning Center provided a year of remediation around language development, in addition to tutorial and other supports. In Cynthia's sophomore year, the Learning Center arranged a pro bono assessment through a private educational therapist, who more thoroughly described the areas of difficulty that she was experiencing. The Learning Center informed her teachers who then were able to work more effectively with Cynthia.

Gateway's commitment to Cynthia was outmatched only by Cynthia's commitment to her own academic efforts. With free tutoring provided by the Learning Center as well as regular consultation with her teachers, and armed with tools such as books-on-tape and accommodations like extended time on her SAT and AP exams, Cynthia flourished. This formerly reluctant learner and shy young woman, became president of her senior class and captain of the girls' basketball team. She would also score a perfect '5' on her Spanish AP exam. Cynthia was a Summer Search recipient and following her junior year she won a scholarship to participate in a community service-based summer program to Vietnam and Thailand. In her senior year, Cynthia won a sizable scholarship from Reading for the Blind & Dyslexic for her achievements in overcoming her obstacles to learning. Cynthia is now in her first year at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. She is the first member of her family to attend college.

to spend 7 percent of the federal funds for their students on community jobs, not campus jobs, MATCH became a major work site for students from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston College, Boston University, and Harvard, and the colleges pay anywhere from 50 percent to 90 percent of their students' hourly wage.

The second MATCH tutoring program is known as the MATCH Corps. Begun in 2004, the 45 members are recent college graduates (up to seven years out) who have signed on for a year of service as full-time tutors. Some

volunteers also spend part of their time as teaching assistants; others spend part of their time in projects assisting the school. Half of the volunteers are funded by AmeriCorps, and they also provide tutoring to two regular large Boston public high schools; the other half are privately funded. All tutors did well in college, with top AP, SAT, and American College Test (ACT) scores; all receive three full weeks of summer training before they begin. Each corps member provides six hours of daily tutoring, working with one to three students in two-hour blocks. Many stay up to three hours after

the day ends, until 8 p.m., to work with struggling students; some also make appointments to work with their students on the weekend.

Many of these schools also have advisory programs to help students deal with any adolescent life issue that arises, whether academic, personal, or social. In Preuss's program, students stay with the same adviser from sixth through 12th grade. One Preuss student observes that there are never any fights among students because in their small school environment with the same adviser throughout the years, "You become family, you grow up together." At YES, students participate in the APSD (Academic, Personal and Social Development) program, a designated time set aside with an adviser to address the spectrum of nonacademic issues that are relevant to their lives. They receive counseling and support and have a safe place to talk about issues they face now or simply anticipate, such as the transition from home to college.

Some school programs include having mentors for students. At Preuss, students are matched with a mentor from the community, who makes a seven-year commitment to meet regularly with the individual student. As an example of the level of mentor dedication, one mentor started a scholarship fund when her student became a senior to ensure that financial constraints would not keep either that student or any other Preuss student from going on to college.

Family commitment. Parent and guardian involvement begins at the outset, as students and their families complete applications to enter the charter school admissions lottery. School staff then make every effort to sustain that involvement by developing strong communication be-

tween school and home through regular conferences, phone calls, and e-mails. Some send home a weekly folder with information for parents or guardians to read and with a request for parental sign-off.

Parents are considered partners at these schools, whether they are serving on the governing boards as they do at some of these schools, fundraising (e.g., TSA parents run the concession stands at the city's semipro baseball games to raise money for students to attend national competitions in music, dance, and theater), participating in parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings, keeping communication lines open with the school, expressing appreciation for hard working teachers, or motivating students through their support. At YES, expectations for all community members—teachers, parents, students—are detailed in a contract to be signed by all parties. The parent section (see fig. 8) lists many stipulations that any school staff might request of parents and guardians. For example, they ask that parents notify the school as soon as possible if a student must be absent. Because these are schools of choice, parents are generally happy to oblige with such requests. But anticipating that not all will oblige, at least one of these schools has some built-in consequences: Preuss stipulations are that if parents do not complete their volunteer hours, their student's younger siblings will not be considered for admission.

At Preuss, YES, MATCH, and TSA, some students travel more than an hour each way to get to school, some changing buses twice each way. Yet, even with such burdens on their children and, therefore, on the entire family, some parents express relief that their child need not attend his or her neighborhood school. At some of these

Fig. 8: YES School Contract: Parent and Guardian Commitments (Excerpt)

PARENTS'/GUARDIANS' COMMITMENTS:

We fully commit to YES College Preparatory School in the following way:

- ① We will make sure our child arrives at YES College Preparatory School by 7:30 a.m. (Monday – Friday)
- ② We will make arrangements so our child can remain at YES College Preparatory School until 5:00 p.m. (Monday – Thursday and 4:05 p.m. on Fridays)
- ③ We will make arrangements for our child to come to YES College Preparatory School on appropriate Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. and remain until 1:00 p.m.
- ④ We will always help our child in the best way we know how, and we will do “whatever it takes” for him/her to learn. This also means that we will check our child’s homework every night, sign our child’s agenda and let him/her call the teacher if there is a problem with the homework.
- ⑤ We will allow our child to remain after school on any day he/she arrives with incomplete homework or chooses to disrespect the YES College Preparatory School team. If this occurs, it will be our responsibility to pick up our child.
- ⑥ We will always make ourselves available to our children, the school, and any concern(s) they might have.
- ⑦ We will notify the teacher **as soon as possible** if our child is going to be absent from school.
- ⑧ We will read all papers sent home carefully, sign them, and return them within two (2) days or else our child will have to stay for Wall Street or detention
- ⑨ We will attend all parent meetings and conferences.
- ⑩ We will allow our child to go on YES College Preparatory School field trips, including out-of-town field trips.
- ⑪ We will make sure our child adheres to the YES College Preparatory School dress code.
- ⑫ We will ensure that our son/daughter will attend the mandatory summer program.
- ⑬ We understand that our child must follow the YES College Preparatory School rules in order to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom.
- ⑭ We, not the school, are responsible for the behavior and actions of our child.

** Failure to adhere to these commitments can cause my child to lose various YES College Preparatory School privileges and can lead to my child’s removal from the YES College Preparatory School team.

** All YES College Preparatory School students will be reevaluated at the end of the school year and after the summer program.

In signing, we have read and agree with this contract and the Code of Student Conduct.

Parent’s/Guardian’s Signature: _____
Date: _____

urban schools, it is not unusual for parents to describe their neighborhood school as being “just down the street from the liquor store,” or as being located in an area where drugs and violence are commonplace. Some focus group parents say they feel better knowing their children are going to school in a safe environment, even if it means long hours away from home or other demands on the family. The quality of neighborhood schools

notwithstanding, focus group conversations reveal a pervasive sense of gratitude among all parents that their children are afforded the positive experiences offered by these charter schools and that, as a result, they can look to the future with greater hope for their children.

For their part, leaders of these schools listen carefully to parents and try to be responsive. For

example, early in MNCS's history, its founders considered implementing a more traditional curriculum in the lower grades because some new students were struggling with the transition to project-based learning. But when they circulated a proposed course schedule, parents complained that their students had been promised project-based learning and that was what they wanted. Teachers heard the parents' concern and reconsidered. The teachers' decision was to retain project-based learning but to add more support to help struggling students make the transition. At North Star Academy, initially created as a middle school, parents' stated dissatisfaction with local high school options and desire for their children to continue having a high quality education beyond middle school, led school leaders and teachers to add a grade 9–12 program.

These schools understand the value of empowered, engaged families, not just in supporting student learning, but also in supporting the school itself. Families at these schools volunteer in every way imaginable, from raising money to painting classrooms. MATCH families participated in political lobbying, speaking before the Massachusetts legislature on behalf of charter schools.

Demystifying the college experience. As noted earlier, some of these schools aim to attract students who would be the first in their families to attend college; and, whether intentional or not, such students make up some portion of the population at all of the schools. The schools recognize that many of these students and their families will need specific information and support to help them through the getting-ready-to-go-to-college process, from preparing to take SAT or ACT exams to filling out college applications and financial aid forms.

YES provides parents with a six-session workshop series, plus each family receives a one-to-one counseling session to learn more about the college process as it applies specifically to their child. At Preuss, where none of the students' parents has attended college, Saturday workshops on college financial aid and preparation for university have been considered invaluable. Most of the profiled charter schools are making specific efforts to involve parents in the process so that everyone is working together to help ensure that students go on to college.

Several of the schools provide juniors and seniors with a class that offers both information and time to research schools and scholarships, to work on college essays, and to prepare for the SAT and ACT exams. At North Star, a local law firm sponsors juniors to take SAT preparation classes online. Some schools take their students on college tours to familiarize them with the college environment. One Preuss student says that friends at other schools "just seem to be so lost in terms of the future after senior year. They do not seem to know very much about applying to college. At Preuss it is our main ambition and we are pumped up to support each other."

Several schools are making an effort to keep track of how their graduates are doing in college. The aim is to learn from the college experience of their graduates how the school might improve its own program so that future students will be increasingly better prepared for and successful in higher education. MATCH pays graduates \$50 to send a copy of their college transcripts back to the school, and it has a MATCH Corps member serve as an alumni coordinator, e-mailing and otherwise communicating regularly with the graduates. In one instance, school

staff learned firsthand about the success of one of the graduates: The valedictorian of YES's first graduating class is now teaching seventh-grade English at the school after completing her undergraduate studies at Stanford University.

Schools Value Professional Learning

All of these schools profit from teachers and other staff who, by virtue of participating in the creation of the school or signing on to work because of its mission, are committed to and take responsibility for fostering the school's goals. At TSA, many of the arts teachers are themselves professional artists or musicians, inspiring students with an appreciation for the arts. But even TSA teachers in the core academic subjects are likely to be arts enthusiasts. Moreover, knowing that students have been attracted to the school by the arts theme, they capitalize on that interest in their own teaching when, for example, a math teacher asks students to graph a guitar's "D" chord.

High expectations for students at these schools are mirrored in high expectations for teachers—and not just in the classroom. At YES, for example, teachers are issued cell phones and considered to be on call for students until 9 p.m. during the week. In those rare instances when teachers are not in sync with the school mission or not meeting expectations, they stand out as exceptions. And just as these schools have the option of dismissing students who fail to carry out their part of the bargain (e.g., working hard), their charter school status makes it easier for them to hold teachers accountable, dismissing or failing to renew the contract of those who are not serving students well. And whereas at many public schools open teaching slots are filled based on applicants' relative seniority

within the school district, these schools can hire whomever they deem best suited to meet their students' needs. With all adults working together in the same direction to reach a school's goals and objectives, positive change is more easily achieved.

Principals as instructional leaders. Seven of these schools operate with a principal,* most of whom serve as instructional leader, working closely with their teachers to help improve teaching and learning. Their effectiveness in this role is enhanced by the fact that five of these leaders were the founding principals at their school and the other two have been at their schools for relatively lengthy periods. As a result, they have a deep understanding of their staff, what teachers' professional needs are, and what kinds of experiences might best serve them. Administrators at North Star spend time working with teachers individually on instructional practices, helping to analyze interim assessments, conducting classroom observations, and providing feedback, as well as providing feedback on lesson plans, and collaboratively strategizing reteaching and intervention approaches.

Teachers learning together. Just as these schools make every effort to support students to be successful, they tend to do the same for teachers. Because charter schools operate independent of a district, they make all their own decisions about professional development needs and how and when to address them. Thus, even though some may not have as much professional development funding as other public schools,

*The eighth school/MNCS is teacher-owned and uses a distributive leadership model in which all teachers assume responsibility for some aspect of leadership. For more information about this, see the MNCS profile, starting on page 43.

they are better able to ensure that professional learning experiences are both timely and relevant and aligned to the school's mission. A chief advantage of being a charter is the freedom to develop—and revise—the school's own schedule; these schools have used that flexibility to build in regularly scheduled, structured teacher development time during the week.

At some of these profiled schools, the principal takes the lead in planning professional development, using the information he or she collects while working individually with teachers, as well as from other sources (e.g., student testing), to identify teacher needs and plan how to address them. At TSA, which has a core of highly experienced teachers, teachers themselves make most of the professional development decisions. In other schools, a teacher is in charge of professional development.

The most common strategy for teacher development at these schools entails using some form of a professional learning community, often but not always facilitated by the principal. A number of the schools have made a point of building in regular and frequent opportunities for teachers to plan, reflect, collaborate, and learn together, as well as from each other. For example, every Friday MATCH Corps tutors take over the classrooms so that MATCH teachers can plan and work together. MATCH teachers also participate in "rounds" twice weekly (one at lunchtime, one after school), to review videotapes of each other's classes and to provide feedback and coaching to each other. Teachers at a number of the schools engage in informal study groups to read and discuss relevant articles and books. At North Star and YES, teachers work in teams, discussing student testing data and how to reteach concepts

the data have identified as needing more attention if students are to attain mastery. Some schools have implemented peer observation schedules, providing teachers with time and incentives to learn from one another in that fashion.

At Preuss, two hours every Friday are set aside for staff development. During this time, the principal and the designated staff developer (who is also a teacher at the school, with dedicated time for professional development work) facilitate reflective conversations, often focused on student work, with the aim of improving teaching and learning. Last year, the teachers immersed themselves in the practice of "lesson study"* to improve instruction. This year, they are using lesson study to examine their assessments and understand how to better measure student understanding (see fig. 9).

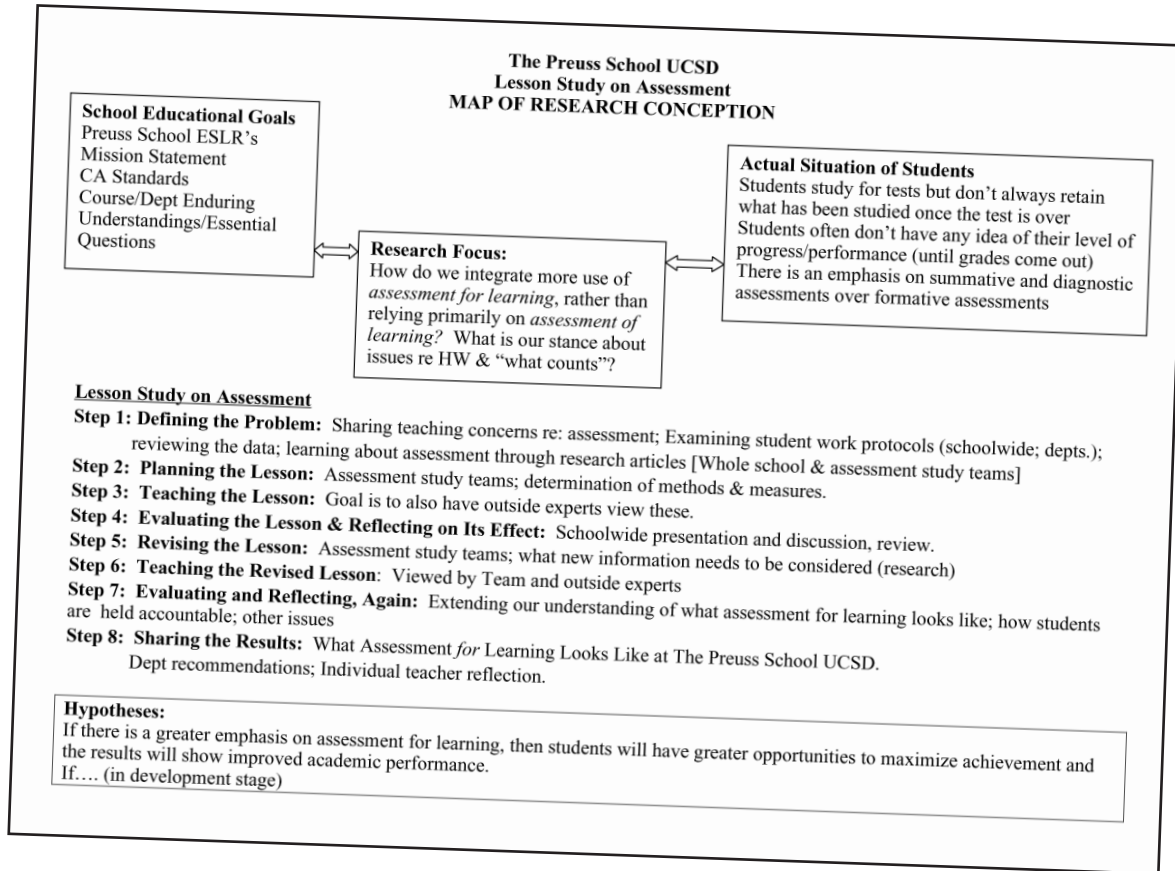
Teacher induction and retention. Recognizing that their teachers are the heart of the school program and that there are heavy demands on them, most of the schools have sought to create incentives to retain teachers, whether outstanding veterans or promising novices. One strategy has been to provide more time for teacher collaboration planning and mutual support. As noted earlier, several of the schools have structured systems for providing teachers with time to work together throughout the week for building collegiality and, as one school leader puts it, quoting Stephen Covey,[†] for "sharpening the saw."

Another strategy has been to encourage teachers to seek professional growth and renewal

*Lesson study is a process developed in Japan for teachers to improve their craft by jointly planning, observing, and analyzing lesson plans, refining the way concepts are taught, and creating dialogue about how to improve instruction.

[†]Covey is author of the widely read *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, first published in 1989.

Fig. 9: A Lesson Study Plan for Teachers at The Preuss School



opportunities outside the school. At SEED, for example, teachers are offered \$1,200 tuition reimbursement to take courses to continue their own learning. At YES, teachers are required to do 30 hours a year of professional development in order to renew their contract; funds are available to attend conferences, meetings, and workshops, and to visit other schools and bring back tools to share with their colleagues.

Schools also are tuned into induction needs. Some of their work with veteran teachers is designed to spin off knowledge and materials that can be used to support novice teachers.

For example, teachers at Preuss are expected to maintain professional portfolios to facilitate conversations about improving professional practice, but they also are seen as ways to generate illustrative materials to share with new faculty. Similarly, North Star teachers keep binders with lesson plans, assessments, their curriculum progression, and other materials to support their practice, and they are expected to share the binders with new staff. Preuss runs a new teacher "boot camp" in the summer, and Gateway is in the process of developing a beginning teacher support and assessment program to support teachers who are new to the school.

Schools Hold Themselves Accountable

Like all public schools that accept federal funds, these charter schools operate under NCLB accountability requirements. But for a variety of reasons having to do with their charter status, the schools are under additional pressure to ensure high student achievement: Their respective charters specify what they promise to do and how they will do it; their authorizers can shut them down or decide not to renew their charters if they do not perform adequately; they have governing boards whose sole job is to support and guide a single school (versus a local board of education that oversees an entire district); and their administrators and teachers sign on because of their commitment to a specific mission, as do their parents and students. At the same time, their flexibility as charters and their relative newness as individual schools enable them to shift gears quickly when change is called for.

Sound fiscal management. Many of these schools receive less funding than other public schools in the local district. For example, due to its charter school status, North Star is not eligible for the New Jersey Supreme Court-mandated Abbott Funding, additional state money given to poor urban districts so their per-pupil expenditures are equivalent to the average per-pupil expenditures of the state's wealthier suburban districts. As a result, North Star operates on 69 percent of the funds received by a comparable Newark public school. Similarly, Preuss, which exclusively serves students from low-income families, receives none of the busing money available to other San Diego public schools.

The governing boards at many of these schools take on the challenge of finding additional

dollars. MATCH and North Star have used New Markets tax credits* to finance building renovations and construction. Other schools have found other creative solutions to the challenge of school funding. SEED, with community support, successfully lobbied the U.S. Congress and D.C. council to amend the D.C. education budget to provide additional operating funds. As a result, \$30,500 of SEED's \$33,000 per-student cost comes from the D.C. council through its per-pupil spending formula. Another \$1,000 per student is allotted federal money (e.g., special education funds), leaving the school to raise \$1,500 per student.

Although each school has succeeded in raising enough money to cover operating and facilities costs, lean budgets require careful planning and spending. In this, MNCS has excelled, starting from the very beginning when, because the school did not receive any start-up funds, its teacher-owners took out personal loans to get things going. The per-student cost of \$9,100 is covered by state funding, and the state also provides \$100,000 a year in lease aid. The city of Henderson, Minn., provided tax increment financing[†] to purchase and improve the site. The school does little to no fundraising and is operating with a surplus. Education Evolving (a joint venture of the Center for Policy Studies and Hamline University, both in St. Paul) reports that MNCS spends 86 percent of its funds on instruction, a higher portion than any district in the state.¹⁶ At one point, when an anticipated funding shortage made it seem as if the school would need to cut an aide, teachers made the decision to each take a \$2,500 pay cut in order to preserve the aide position.

*For information on the federal New Markets Tax Credits Program, visit http://www.cdfifund.gov/what_we_do/programs_id.asp?programID=5. Last accessed on Sept. 12, 2006.

[†]For information on how tax increment financing works, visit <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/issinfo/tifmech.htm>. Last access on Sept. 12, 2006.

At Preuss, board members say they always have three or four versions of the budget, “plan A, B, and C,” just in case they are not able to raise enough money through their various efforts.

Dedicated boards. While the average local board of education is necessarily focused on districtwide issues, charter school boards focus on and take more direct responsibility for the operation and fiscal health of the individual school. Board members at several schools say they value their ability, bestowed by their school’s charter, to make decisions quickly and to empower administrators and staff to implement them expeditiously. These charter schools have very active boards, with some including parents. Board committees engage in fundraising, creating partnerships, securing buildings and facilities financing, and developing school goals and strategic planning (see fig. 10).

Some of these schools are authorized by organizations (such as local school districts) that those in surrounding communities may perceive as not being fully supportive of charter schools. In these instances, principals say, the board’s role is especially important in reaching out to the community to develop broader support, recruit students, and, in some instances, counter misinformation. The boards at two of these profiled schools—SEED and MNCS—are now active in efforts to replicate the school model elsewhere, seeing this as a way to broaden the effectiveness of a good program.

The board also is responsible for holding school staff accountable for results and has the authority to hire and fire the principal or director, other administrators, and teachers if they fail to advance the school’s mission.

Continuous improvement. Each charter school is held accountable for carrying out the plan outlined in its approved charter and is reviewed every five or six years by its authorizer. Some of these schools are authorized by their local district, others by their state board of education. Schools also receive direction from their boards, who monitor their schools’ progress and help to set new goals in response to new information or changing context. The boards at North Star, MATCH, and Gateway have all proposed modifications based on changing students’ needs: North Star families wanted high school added to the original middle school program; Gateway intensified its commitment to diverse learners; and MATCH shifted some of its focus away from technology, putting more on college preparation by requiring AP classes for all students along with innovative tutoring support.

These schools also consider themselves accountable to their constituents, and a number of them regularly survey students and parents. At MNCS, teachers participate in a 360-degree evaluation, which, in this instance, entails being evaluated by peers, parents, and students. At MATCH, the principal models an openness to feedback by surveying students about how he is doing his job (see fig. 11).

Implications

Some readers of this guide—especially those who are working in non-charter public schools as well as charter schools—may wonder about the wider implications of the themes that have been presented. The underlying themes of these charter schools are consistent with the principles outlined in the high school reform literature in general and, more specifically,

Fig. 10: Excerpt of Draft Gateway High School Board-developed Strategic Plan, Indicating Board Involvement

DRAFT STRATEGIC GOALS & OBJECTIVES NOTES

1. Student Achievement
 Foster student achievement for diverse learners through the development and implementation of a program which encourages individual strengths, expands each student's academic skills and content mastery and develops character.

Objectives

- Create flexible curricula for all students to reach their highest academic achievement.
- *Improve access to higher education for students who have typically been underrepresented*
- *Improve test scores without compromising the educational mission of the school*

2. Student Enrollment
 Enroll and improve the performance of students who have been typically underrepresented in higher education.

Objectives

- Attract and support the success of African American, Latino, English language learner and learning disabled students.
- Develop targeted outreach programs and increase awareness of Gateway's mission among underrepresented populations.
- Provide the services and support students with learning differences need to succeed

3. Parent Involvement
 Involve parents in supporting their students' success and participating in the life of the school.

Objectives

- Increase parent involvement
- *Support the development of a parent community*
- *Provide parent education opportunities that are responsive to the needs of the Gateway parent community*
- *Encourage parent usage of Gateway's resources*

4. Faculty & Staff
 Attract, retain, develop and support exceptional teachers and staff who are committed to the fulfillment of Gateway's Mission

Objectives

- Create a schedule that gives high priority to teacher collaboration and planning time.
- Create a teacher workload that is sustainable
- Establish priorities and a coordinated professional development plan
- Maintain teacher:student ratios at 100 per teacher or lower
- Prepare a plan for retention of key faculty
- Establish priorities and create ongoing, coordinated faculty professional development plan.
- Create pedagogy
- Create an effective decision-making process.
- Understand and address the ethnic, gender, and other gaps in student achievement.

the research on high-performing secondary schools. Such schools are shown to hold high expectations for students; offer rigorous curriculum; provide a range of instructional strategies to engage students and to connect their learning to real-world applications; foster strong connections between students and staff; have strong leadership and a school culture that is mission-driven; create a professional

community of learning among staff; and provide additional supports for students who need them.¹⁷ Other research underscores the need to make sure graduation requirements and college entrance requirements are aligned.¹⁸

One of the more insidious myths about education is that students who have traditionally been characterized as "at risk" cannot manage

Fig. 11: Student Survey of Principal Performance From MATCH

Dear Student,

As you know, you are evaluated eight or more times a year by teachers and tutors and some of you get to evaluate your teachers once or twice a year, but you never get to evaluate your principal. I believe evaluation is a very good method to help someone get better at his job. I want to get better so I am asking you to fill out the questionnaire below. You do not have to put your name, but you can. I just ask that you answer the questions with this in mind, "You want to have a principal who listens and wants to get better." Thank you.

1. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest, to what extent is your principal interested in you as a person and as a student? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.
2. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest, to what extent was your LAST principal (from middle school) interested in you as a person and as a student? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.
3. To what extent do you feel that you can talk with him about school issues? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.
4. To what extent do you feel that he enforces the rules of the school fairly? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.
5. To what extent do you feel that he listens to the students and their concerns? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.
6. To what extent do you feel that the monthly meetings are worthwhile? Yes / No Why?
7. Has he ever called you at home? Yes / No
8. How do you feel about receiving calls from him?
9. Have you ever been sent to the office for a disciplinary issue and had to meet with him? Yes / No
10. If yes, did he treat you fairly? Yes / No Why did you answer the way you did? Please give an example.
11. What area(s) do you feel he could improve in?
12. What is one strength, if any, of the principal?" "What is one area of improvement, if any, the principal should work on?"
13. On a scale of 1-10, how would you evaluate his overall performance? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.
14. Are there any questions I should have asked, but did not? Please list them.

YOU CAN MAKE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE BACK → → →
(They are welcomed.)

Thank you.

a rigorous college preparatory curriculum and that if pushed too hard they will drop out of school. The achievement outcomes at these profiled schools refute that belief, demonstrating that when presented with a demanding academic curriculum, high expectations, solid support, and data-driven teaching that is responsive to students' learning needs, traditionally underserved learners rise to the challenge.

The high college-going rate of these graduates, many of them the first in their family to seek higher education, also speaks to the value of exposing such students to a broad array of extracurricular experiences—from college tours to summer internships to international travel opportunities—in an effort to level the playing field and provide opportunities for them to expand their cultural capital.

At these schools high expectations are not reserved for students alone. Teachers are held to high standards as well. But like the students they serve, these teachers receive support to help them meet the high expectations. In addition to having the time to analyze and use the data they generate through frequent formative student assessments, teachers are given time to plan, collaborate, and reflect, both within and across departments. They are encouraged to collaborate across departments, an uncommon practice in public high schools. The payoff from these practices is clear in positive student outcomes across these eight schools.

While each of the charter schools introduced here is distinctive in its overall character and none implements the above research-based strategies in precisely the same way, they are all driven to embrace these strategies by the same underlying belief: that what we have been doing is not good enough, that we must and can do better for our adolescent learners. That conviction is evident at every turn. But it is not unique to these schools, nor need be their accomplishments.

It is true that chartering diminishes some of the constraints experienced by other school communities as they strive to implement research-based improvement strategies. Yet state and district policies vary, and they shape the specific context within which any reader must operate. Those intent on reforming their community's secondary schools will want to look carefully at perceived limitations, asking themselves whether the constraints are real or only assumed and, if real, whether they can they be eliminated or, at least, mitigated?

Take, for example, the essential role at these charter schools of a cohesive teaching staff unified in its willingness to “do what it takes” to

advance student learning—whether that means teachers being available to help students beyond the close of the school day, using data to guide their instruction, or collaborating with each other to advance their own learning. Building this kind of faculty is certainly easier for a charter school, which is able to hire whomever is best suited to meet the needs of students rather than having to take whichever applicant has the most seniority irrespective of commitment or qualifications. It is also easier to attract highly qualified teachers to work with underperforming students when offering incentives, as most of these schools do by ensuring that teachers have the time and support to plan and learn together and that their students have additional necessary supports beyond skilled classroom teaching.

Having a highly qualified and committed staff is not impossible for non-charter schools; everyone knows of ordinary public schools where extraordinary teachers are working together to ready students for success in college. But those committed to education equity—states, districts, schools, teachers, parents, and other concerned stakeholders—must consider what is needed to ensure that such staffs are in place at all schools, especially at those on the losing end of the achievement gap. They must consider what policies and practices either inhibit or support creation of this type of staff and advocate or make decisions accordingly. And if achievement gaps are to be closed, these stakeholders must apply the same careful scrutiny to all factors known to be supportive of successful secondary schools, examining what needs to be changed and the level of the education system at which the change needs to occur, in order to ensure that research-based strategies for improving student learning are in place across the board. The schools in this guide serve as a reminder of what can happen when they are.



Part 2

Profiles of Charter Schools Highlighted In Part I

Gateway High School

Media and Technology Charter High School (MATCH)

Minnesota New Country School (MNCS)

North Star Academy Charter School of Newark

The Preuss School UCSD

The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C.

Toledo School for the Arts

YES College Preparatory School, Southeast Campus

Gateway High School

San Francisco, Calif.

School Profile: Selected Variables	
Year First Chartered and Authorizer	1998, local district
Grades and Enrollment	9–12 and 440
Student Ethnicity	20% African-American 21% Asian American 23% Hispanic 32% white
Special Education	25%
Free and Reduced-price Lunch	33%
Graduation Rate	95%
Annual Cost per Student	\$8,255

Source: School records data from 2005–06

A visitor to Gateway High School sees its credo bannered at the entrance, in the students' own words: "Step up. Do right. Dream big." The school's founding goal was to serve students who have all kinds of learning styles and prepare them for college. But over time, says Gateway's principal, the school's vision has expanded to embrace the idea that "difference helps us all be better," reflecting the recent shift in the racial and ethnic composition of the student body to more closely represent the city's diversity.

The Gateway community is united around a commitment to providing a high quality college preparatory education to a diverse group of students in a safe, supportive learning environment. That commitment is grounded in a belief that all students learn differently and that a well-trained faculty can help all kinds of learners achieve success.

Gateway High School was founded in 1998 by six moms and a dad who sat around a kitchen table discussing and planning a school where their children, each with learning challenges, could be successful. They wanted to create a school where such students would not slip through the cracks. Together they worked tirelessly to conceive of a different kind of learning environment that would enable their children to master college preparatory material.

After interviewing several candidates, the team hired Peter Thorp as the founding principal. The former headmaster of Cate School, an independent boarding school in Carpinteria, Southern California, fell in love with Gateway immediately

and committed to making the founding families' dream a reality. The intent was to create a school inspired by the work of Mel Levine, the internationally known researcher in neurodevelopment and child learning. But when the planning team consulted with Levine, he expressed skepticism, asserting that the Gateway vision could not be implemented in a public school. Undeterred, the team moved forward with chartering, and a year later when Levine was invited back to be honored for his Schools Attuned work, he found himself pleasantly surprised, saying, "I never thought you could do this."

School Operations and Educational Program

Gateway offers its students, chosen by lottery, an award-winning, individualized college preparatory education. Its course of study aligns to the state curriculum frameworks and content standards, and the curriculum exceeds the requirements for eligibility for the University of

California system. To graduate from Gateway, students must meet certain credit and course requirements and pass the California High School Exit Exam. The course requirements are: humanities—four years; mathematics—three years; sciences—three years; languages other than English—three years; arts—two years; psychology—one year; college preparation—two semesters; physical education—two years; Project Week*—one per year; and community service—25 hours per year. In addition to required academic courses, students are offered honors and AP work in every subject area, performing and visual arts opportunities, sports and clubs, community service, and access to cutting-edge technology.

The hallmark of Gateway's innovative instructional program is achieving academic excellence through personalized, student-centered learning, where success is measured one student at a time. The program combines rigorous academics with an approach that supports individual talents and strengths. The Gateway approach is to differentiate instruction and provide comprehensive academic, social, and behavioral supports to ensure each student's success. Class sizes are small, typically about one teacher for every 22 students. During freshman year each student creates a personal learning plan outlining his or her learning style, goals, and plans for high school and beyond.

Gateway's core features are differentiated instruction, project-based learning, caring relationships between adults and students, assurance that individual talents and needs are identified and supported, self-discovery, and the fostering of intellectual curiosity.

Cultivating trusting relations between teachers and students is intentionally built into the structure of the school. Each student is assigned an

*Students select a week-long project to complete between winter exams and the start of the second semester.

adviser, a teacher-mentor who meets with advisees twice weekly in a mixed-grade group of 12–15 students over the course of their high school years, advising them about academic, social, and developmental issues. These groups are organized into four smaller learning communities, or "houses," within the school, to facilitate community-building throughout the school; house mentors serve as conduits for communication to link the houses. Additionally, the mentors meet regularly with the Care Team, consisting of the vice principal, the Learning Center director, college counselor, and mental health counselor. Each week the school holds an all-school assembly as an additional forum to make announcements, to address school-wide issues, for guest presenters and for students to perform, and to build connectedness to the schoolwide community. Advisers also have one-to-one time with each of their students once a month, minimally.

The climate at Gateway is safe, orderly, mission-driven and geared for every student to succeed. There is a full-time mental health counselor, college counselor, Learning Center director, and tutoring coordinator; there are two learning specialists, two resource service providers, and two paraprofessionals who provide in-class support; and there are many part-time tutors, special education specialists and advisers. Students report always having a teacher or other adults to go to, noting that at other schools they only received individual attention when they were somehow in trouble.

Gateway aims to have at least 25 percent of its student body be students with a diagnosed disability. Currently 18 percent of students require special education and another 7 percent are learning disabled, most with diagnoses such as dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or Asperger Syndrome. Thirty-three percent of the entire student body

qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and Title I services, which are designated for students from low-income families. Over the past three years, Gateway has seen the racial and ethnic composition of its student body diversify, the result of its strong reputation attracting a larger pool of prospective students and deliberate recruitment to underserved neighborhoods.

Assessment is well integrated into the Gateway instructional program. “I assess every minute of everyday,” explains a math teacher, “and I think others do as well.” Teachers constantly check for understanding and adjust instruction accordingly. Assessments can take many forms to correspond to the differentiated instructional practices and include artistic components, oral presentations, standard pencil-and-paper exams, writing assignments, short-term and long-term projects, portfolios, and daily work. Some assessments are customized for individual students, and some students require or prefer alternate kinds of environments for test-taking, such as that of the Learning Center. One teacher describes how his very high-performing science students were acing his tests, so he additionally required them to meet with him one-to-one to probe the content more deeply and to challenge the students’ thinking and understanding.

Family Involvement and Partnerships

Gateway recently moved to a new permanent facility in the Western Addition neighborhood of San Francisco, sharing the building with a charter middle school. According to the principal, Sharon Olken, “Building partnerships and connections in our new community is an important objective for us as we integrate into our new neighborhood.” In addition, the principal hopes over time to make stronger links with local universities for teacher professional develop-

ment support, as well as with the charter middle school that shares its new building.

Parents’ involvement and belief in the school’s mission are integral to Gateway’s success. The school has an active Gateway Parent Association that interfaces with the board and the school’s leadership team, helping guide the direction of the school. Parents participate in monthly steering committee meetings, are members of the board and the strategic planning committee, and are invited to attend schoolwide and grade-level meetings.

Parents help in several critical ways, including recruiting students, tutoring in the after-school program, providing outreach to underserved student populations, chaperoning field trips and sports events, planning and attending celebrations and school events, fundraising, and participating in community work days. The move to a new facility required more than 3,500 hours of sweat equity from students and families to complete improvements at the site. Parents and students have 24-7 access to PowerSchool, an online system that facilitates communication between home and school about student progress, concerns, and assignments and keeps track of how and when families were contacted.

Governing for Accountability

A board and a site-based leadership team govern Gateway. The board is a group of volunteers who guide the school—financially, legally, programmatically—and help the school at the direction of the leadership team, teachers, parents, and students. The leadership team consists of the principal and vice principal; subject area department heads in mathematics, science, Spanish, and humanities; the college counselor; and the director of the Learning Center. “Strong governance is key to running a charter school,” says a founding board member. And because of

chartering, the board and leadership team can define the school based on a clear mission and vision, hire teachers and administrators consistent with the mission, be nimble programmatically in accomplishing the mission, and control the budget to align with the mission. "What makes the board run so well," comments a longtime member, is that board members "spend a lot of time at school and we hold to the mission."

For its part, the school's leadership team ensures the quality of the instructional program and supports teachers in improving instruction.

The school's authorizer is San Francisco Unified School District. The principal speaks highly of the district, and considers those at the district to have "good relations" with Gateway's staff. She reports that the district "does a good job at oversight." The district also houses a charter schools office, which serves as a communication link and liaison between Gateway and the district. Reauthorization of the charter will take place in 2009.

Gateway's overall graduation rate is 95 percent and it has an average daily student attendance rate of 96 percent. The school also boasts a college application rate of 100 percent. Last year's students accepted admissions to 67 different

colleges and universities. For the class of 2005, 95 percent of students are attending college, 4 percent are working in jobs and 1 percent are in the military. Gateway students report a high level of satisfaction with their school. Some students credit the school for "saving" them. "At my old school," reflects one student, "I was screaming for attention." Gateway students report that they are consistently well supported by the teachers, that the curriculum is interesting, and that they experience a sense of community. Before coming to Gateway, one student remembers, "I had teachers tell me I was stupid, dumb, wouldn't amount to anything. Here it is okay to have learning differences. I'm comfortable being me because they don't let you fall, but if you do they pick you up."

In 2003 Gateway was selected as a California Distinguished School by the state board of education, and a year later it was ranked as one of the nation's top 56 schools by the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Foundation. In 2005, an independent evaluation rated it as one of its district's 13 schools considered "models of success for achieving diversity and raising academic achievement for African-American and Latino students."

Gateway: Evidence of Closing the Achievement Gap

In 2005, Gateway students scored 93 percent on English language arts and 85 percent on high school math proficiency, compared to San Francisco Unified School District's (SFUSD) respective scores of 66 percent and 72 percent.

SFUSD as a district did not make 2005 Academic Yearly Progress (AYP) due to subgroups of students (African-American and students with disabilities) not achieving proficiency targets in reading and math. In contrast, all Gateway students achieved 2005 AYP proficiency targets, even though 25 percent of them qualify for special education as compared to just 10 percent of the district's student population.

SFUSD's survey of the class of 2005 indicated that 76.6 percent of 2,756 seniors in the district planned to enter college or universities in the fall. In comparison, 95 percent of Gateway's 2005 graduates are attending college.

Media and Technology Charter High School (MATCH)

Boston, Mass.

School Profile: Selected Variables	
Year First Chartered and Authorizer	1999, state
Grades and Enrollment	9–12 and 185
Student Ethnicity	67% African-American 7% Asian American 21% Hispanic 5% white
Special Education	8%
Free and Reduced-price Lunch	72%
Graduation Rate	100%
Annual Cost per Student	\$16,000

Source: School records data from 2005–06

“Kids don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” explains the principal at MATCH. Preparing inner-city students to make it all the way through college, he believes, means giving them personal attention inside and outside the classroom and making help available 24-7. This is why every MATCH student has a personal tutor all year, someone who forges a strong relationship with the student and relentlessly pursues the students’ academic and behavioral growth.

MATCH is the brainchild of Michael Goldstein, who, while studying public policy at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, was staggered to learn that the national rate for college graduation among inner-city students was below 10 percent. Goldstein put together a team of like-minded people who helped create a vision for a school that would engage students in rigorous work preparing all to succeed in college. Goldstein’s search for a principal led him to suburban Framingham, Mass., where he met Charles Sposato, a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards-certified teacher. The 30-year veteran educator had no administrative experience and no interest in becoming a principal, but he had an outstanding reputation among students and colleagues. Goldstein recognized immediately that Sposato was the ideal person to run the new school and persuaded him to join the team.

MATCH opened in September 2000 and now serves 185 students, mostly African-American and Hispanic, selected by lottery and entering as ninth-graders. Its mission is “to prepare inner-city Boston students to succeed in college and beyond—including those who have no family history of college attendance.” The school sets high academic and behavioral standards in order to reverse underachievement, and it combines innovation and a “no shortcuts” work ethic to help students meet those expectations. Courage, discipline, and perseverance are the school’s core values. As the name suggests, MATCH recognizes the importance of media and technology in society. Yet, it integrates them into a solid college preparatory curriculum grounded in the humanities, math, and science. At the same time, the name serves as a metaphor for igniting the imagination of curious teenagers with a passion to learn.

School Operations and Educational Program

The MATCH high school experience starts with a five-week summer academy for all incoming freshmen. Held at MIT, the focus is on reading, math, and building the school culture. Many students enter the school with deficits in basic skills. Together they “straight forwardly approach these deficits,” says Goldstein. During the first two years, teaching focuses on remediation, for students who are several grades behind in math and reading to catch up. The junior and senior years focus on preparing students for college. As Goldstein explains, “Everyone feels the crunch—time is their most precious commodity and there isn’t enough.” Teachers and students all work hard, devoting hours to the mission of preparing for college. Typically students are at school until 6 p.m., and some as late as 8 p.m., working with tutors and teachers.

Graduation requirements include passing four years of math, science, and English (with passing defined as a grade of 70 or higher, although the local district high schools’ passing grade is 65), two years of history, plus two years of foreign language, and two freshman humanities classes at Boston University. All seniors take AP classes in one, two, or three subjects (literature, calculus, biology) and all seniors take undergraduate classes at Boston University. Juniors must take AP U.S. history. Any student who fails more than one class must attend MATCH’s summer academy. MATCH has the strictest promotion policy of all Boston high schools. There is no hesitation to hold students back until they can demonstrate proficiency. For extracurricular offerings, students can sign up for basketball, chess club, choir, cross-country running, drama club, hip hop dance, lacrosse, martial arts, newspaper, photography club, poetry club, step team, student council, tennis, and yearbook.

A special feature of this school is the MATCH Corps, whose 45 members—all college graduates—serve as tutors and teaching assistants for a year at the school. Every tutor works one-on-one every day with students from different grade levels, reviewing homework and reinforcing lessons to support their learning. Each tutor stays with the same students for the full year to provide continuity. These college graduates, housed at the school, did well in school themselves. The training for MATCH Corps members begins three weeks before school starts when they observe the MIT summer program. They attend workshops introducing them to the public school landscape, engage in role-playing scenarios, listen to guest speakers, discuss education readings that will help them as tutors, and participate in sessions on logistics and school culture with the principal.

Operating a longer school year of 188 days (compared to 180 days in local district schools), MATCH runs regular classes from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Fridays are “Corps-driven.” While teachers meet for professional development, MATCH Corps members facilitate the school program. Students take a morning assessment to see if they mastered the week’s lessons, attending an all-school assembly while the assessments are graded. If students pass all their assessments, they can leave after assembly and have an hour of silent reading. Otherwise, they have individual tutorial sessions.

The fact that MATCH is a small school enables students to form strong friendships across grade levels. “The seniors are role models,” one sophomore explains. For some, MATCH provided a fresh start. Others explain they wanted an academic push. When the work gets challenging, says one student, “the tutors keep you going. Here it doesn’t pay to give up.”

Family Involvement and Partnerships

Parents help plan MATCH events, such as appreciation breakfasts for the tutors and fundraisers for the school. Both tutors and teachers work to keep parents informed. Parents say that unlike their experience at other schools, MATCH teachers return their phone calls promptly. If students have academic or behavioral issues or are failing two or more classes, parents are contacted for a conference. Parents attend a financial aid night and other sessions to learn more about the college process. The school communicates regularly with families, sending a parent newsletter every two weeks, and tutors and parents typically talk three to four times per week. Teachers also call parents frequently.

Parents also have participated in political lobbying for MATCH, and groups of parents have spoken before the Massachusetts legislature on behalf of charter schools in general. The parent advisory council meets monthly. Parents feel their input is seriously considered at MATCH. On Martin Luther King, Jr. day, one parent was concerned that not enough was being done to recognize the importance of King's contribution, so she wrote a statement about courage, perseverance, and discipline that she read to the entire school. She felt empowered that the school was open and receptive to her efforts.

Boston University is MATCH's major partner, allowing rental of its gym next door three times a week and a hall for graduation, allowing seniors to audit for free two regular college classes per semester, and providing work-study tutors for which the university covers 50 percent of the cost. The university's dean of housing advised MATCH regarding dormitory issues when they were designing the MATCH

Corps program, whose members live on-site. Other partnerships include the MIT summer program and a variety of work-study programs at nearby colleges (including MIT, Boston University, Boston College, Harvard, and University of Massachusetts Boston), which provide students to serve as tutors and mentors. Local businesses, such as those in corporate law, technology, and venture capital, and the Red Sox, have hosted work-site visits for MATCH students. One donor sponsored the basketball team, and another paid for students to participate in athletic programs, such as Metro-Lacrosse, a sports-based character education program in the Boston area.

Governing for Accountability

MATCH is run by a leadership team consisting of the executive director, founding principal, the founder qua research director, academic dean and the MATCH Corps director. Goldstein and the school's executive director, Alan Safran, work closely with the school's board of trustees to develop tight relationships between these 14 trustees and the school. Once a month the school leaders meet with other Boston charter school leaders to discuss common concerns among charter high schools, including issues such as teacher retention and neighborhood safety. They are authorized by the state and receive an annual accountability visit. Last year their charter was renewed until 2010.

MATCH teachers engage in continuous learning. Every Friday, instead of teaching, they first hold one-hour department meetings, sharing strategies and discussing teaching, and then participate in grade-level meetings where discussion is student specific, aimed at troubleshooting and planning. Founding principal Sposato promotes the school's culture, acting as motivator for both teachers and

students alike, creating a safe, challenging environment where high expectations are explicit. It is a culture of rituals, he says, not routines. Sposato meets with each class five to six times during the year to listen to students' ideas, demonstrating he is interested, enthusiastic, open, and approachable. His priority is to build a climate of trust with the parents and students. He welcomes disagreement because, he says, "it causes me to reflect. I invite parents to push back so we can have open and sincere dialogue."

MATCH receives \$10,815 per student from the state and an additional \$700 per student from the Title I program. The school then raises approximately \$850,000 to support the rest of the school program. Its core academic costs are \$11,500 per student, facility costs per student are \$1,800, and residential tutoring costs per student are \$3,000, totaling \$16,000 per student. The school has a director of development who writes grants and organizes fund-raising efforts. One-third of its budget comes from three

outside sources: charitable foundations, trustees, and individual annual fund donors.

Alan Safran, Michael Goldstein, and Charlie Sposato each articulate the advantages of being a charter school as allowing them to offer a longer school day, a longer school year, tutoring on evenings and weekends, a summer program, and an innovative schedule for teachers. Safran also points to the benefit of hiring teachers on year-to-year contracts and being able to expect teachers to "do what it takes to get the work done." The small size of the school allows staff to develop personal relationships with students and their families. And there is time to call home to parents and time to provide individualized academic attention.

In 2000, the school received 204 applications for 80 seats. In 2005, applications climbed to 575 for 70 available slots. Sposato attributes the school's success to its culture of discipline and learning, the rigorous academics, the support provided by the MATCH Corps, and the extended academic program provided with tutoring.

MATCH: Evidence of Closing the Achievement Gap

Before coming to MATCH in 2002, only one of its students had scored in the top two levels, proficient and advanced, on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) math test. After two years at the school, this student and 71 percent of her classmates scored proficient or advanced in math, a higher percentage than that of most suburban districts in Massachusetts.

For three years in a row, all MATCH students have scored as proficient or advanced on the MCAS. In 2005, the school ranked fourth among Massachusetts' 338 high schools in the math section and 18th in the English section for the percentage of students scoring in the top two levels on the MCAS.

By June 2006, MATCH had graduated three classes and every student from the classes of 2004, 2005, and 2006 was accepted for admission by a four-year college or university (an average of three acceptances per student), including Boston College, Brown, Duke, Georgetown, Hofstra, Howard, Northeastern, Spelman College, and Trinity College.

Minnesota New Country School (MNCS)

Henderson, Minn.

School Profile: Selected Variables	
Year First Chartered and Authorizer	1994, local district
Grades and Enrollment	7–12 and 118
Student Ethnicity	2% African-American 0% Asian American 5% Hispanic 94% white
Special Education	24%
Free and Reduced-price Lunch	25%
Graduation Rate	83%
Annual Cost per Student	\$9,100

Source: School records data from 2005–06

An hour outside Minnesota’s twin cities, in the middle of rural farm country, lies Henderson, a small town of just over 900 people, in which one of the more prominent buildings is the Minnesota New Country School (MNCS)—one of the least typical high schools likely to be found. It looks like a modern version of a one-room schoolhouse: one large, central open space, a few adjacent rooms, such as a science lab, a library, art and recording studios, and a shop room. Students each have their own workstation with a computer, and in the center of the building is a stage, a dual-purpose conference and classroom made from a grain silo, and common tables for group work, lunch, and meeting space. Class banners like the one that asserts, “The world always steps aside for people who know where they are going,” decorate the walls, affirming the school’s spirit of independence.

Even more unusual than the building is the fact that MNCS’s teachers own and operate the school. In the early 1990s, a small group of teachers, aspiring administrators, and community members (including a brick layer and a meat cutter), each frustrated with traditional school models, started planning for an innovative high school. Sponsored by the Le Sueur-Henderson public school district, MNCS opened in 1994 with 65 students, the seventh charter school in Minnesota and one of the first 100 charter schools in the United States.

Its formal mission statement says “MNCS is a learning community committed to quality personalized project-based learning with demonstrated achievement.” But Dee Grover Thomas, who, as lead teacher in a school that operates without a principal, handles many administrative duties in addition to teaching, explains that

the school vision is much larger. The vision is to cultivate motivated students who have the skills and confidence to solve real-world problems. MNCS is not interested in the number of minutes or hours a student spends at a desk or works on a particular course. “I want students to know they can do postsecondary studies and be successful, whether that’s technical training after high school, college, or other pursuits,” says Thomas.

School Operations and Educational Program

MNCS provides two innovative elements—a teacher-owned cooperative and student-driven project-based learning. Serving 118 students in grades 7–12, MNCS offers a highly personalized learning program shaped around student

interests. Virtually the entire school curriculum is project-based. This means that teachers serve as coaches and facilitators rather than conductors of formal classes. Pursuing particular interests, students develop proposals with their adviser, which are signed off by a parent and their proposal team (i.e., the student's adviser and other teachers). Projects are evaluated by a team of school staff and others who determine whether the student has demonstrated mastery of state standards and earned academic credit. The number of credits for each project depends on its scope and quality.

"We eliminated courses as a way of dividing and framing the curriculum," explains Thomas, which means "we no longer needed bells, hallway passing, lavatory passes, class schedules, study halls, and all the other things that came along with a more rigid, time-based system." The underlying premise is that students learn best when they are motivated by what interests them and work at their own pace. As students' curiosity motivates them to learn, they will cultivate responsibility and develop skills they need in problem solving, reading, writing, math, technology, communication, and management.

To graduate, students are required to earn 60 credits, demonstrate they have met the state standards, pass the Minnesota Basic Skills Tests, and complete a senior project. In one learning project, a student researched the Victorian era and sewed 18th-century clothes. For another project, a student studied chemicals in fast food and intends to develop a nutrition seminar for his peers. Some students complete work-based internships for their projects. One student worked at an auto mechanic shop and then created a four-wheeler dune buggy.

Students are required to develop one quality public presentation and exhibition per grade level, not necessarily as part of the same project. The senior project, the largest in scale, requires students to

complete at least 300 hours of work that is multidisciplinary, incorporates technology, provides a service to others, and culminates in a 30-minute presentation to the community. Through the process of polishing their presentations, students gain experience in public speaking. Students keep track of their project progress by completing daily logs and journaling on the computer in Project Foundry, a database that allows teachers, students and parents to log in and see project updates and related communications.

Staff found that 80 percent of students enter MNCS two years or more below grade level in reading. In order for students to reach grade level, teachers develop a reading plan, require students to engage in daily sustained silent reading, and have students read with partners. The Northwest Evaluation Association provides longitudinal testing data for each MNCS student to measure growth in reading and writing, and teachers use that data to monitor progress over the year. In 2003–04, students that had been at the school for three or more years gained 15.3 percentiles in reading and 13 percentiles in Math.

Family Involvement and Partnerships

Parent involvement at MNCS includes attending student presentation nights, volunteering to share information and perspectives about their career field, chaperoning field trips, serving meals during fund-raisers, communicating regularly with advisers, and supporting student projects.

Parents communicate regularly with teachers by e-mail. The school holds conferences with parents four times a year, before the school year begins in order to set goals, again in October and February to ascertain student progress, and at the end of the year. At least seven times a year,

the school formally updates parents on student achievement through progress reports and report cards. Parents sign off on all student projects.

The school's main partnership is with EdVisions, Inc., which received a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant for replication and state dissemination of the MNCS model. The model includes student-directed, project-based learning, and school governance by teacher cooperatives.

MNCS has also developed partnerships with local universities. Minnesota State University (MSU) at Mankato, where several members of the current staff did their student teaching, has sent other student teachers to MNCS. The school's teachers also take classes toward master's degree credits at MSU, and the teacher co-op provides \$10,000 in scholarships for teachers to take graduate-level courses. In another school-university partnership, students can enroll in Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), taking college courses for credit paid by the state. Typically students study foreign languages, science, and advanced math. Some students, spending three days a week in the college program, find that because of their project-based learning they have better task management and time management skills than other students at the university.

Governing for Accountability

At MNCS the teachers are owners rather than employees of the school and operate a distributive, teacher-leader model of daily governance. Teachers make all school decisions through consensus. As part of their professional responsibilities, all teachers serve on site-based management teams in topical areas such as personnel, student discipline, curriculum, community involvement, special education, transportation-building-grounds, technology, finance, marketing, and senior presentation.

The teachers are organized as a small professional cooperative, rather than a large union, and they have control over school resources. At one point when money was tight staff decided to take a \$2,500 cut in pay so they would not lose an aide position. The lead teacher ensures compliance with state paperwork, handles public relations, and manages legal issues and administrative duties. The current lead teacher considers her role the "keeper of the culture, making sure they are maintaining the integrity of the program." The charter school has a board consisting of four teachers and three parents and they contract with the teacher cooperative for services. The seven-member board also oversees the fiscal management of the school, which spends 86 percent of its funds on instruction, more than any other district in Minnesota.

Teacher evaluation at MNCS is done through 360-degree evaluations, which consist of surveys by peers, parents, and students. Lead teacher Thomas explains that the whole staff recommendation process is time-consuming, harrowing, transparent, and difficult. As one founding teacher and board member says, "The real evaluative question is do you know your kids, community, and parents, and can you work with them on a personal basis?"

In lieu of teacher prep periods, the last Friday of each block is devoted to professional development meetings, as are three days of spring annual retreat and five days before school starts. Staff meetings are held every Tuesday morning and Thursday afternoon. EdVisions also sponsors institutes for teachers, such as two days when teachers from all the EdVisions schools come together and work as a professional learning community. Teachers also are encouraged to participate in observation exchanges with other schools. Comparing working at MNCS to traditional public schools, MNCS teachers comment

that they have to be able to give up control to the students. That is, the goal is to transfer learning responsibility from the teacher to the student. In seventh grade when students enter MNCS, the teacher still has 98 percent of the responsibility for ensuring that learning happens. By ninth grade, the responsibility is shared 50-50. By senior year, the students are able to take on the bulk of responsibility for their learning.

Parents express a high level of satisfaction with the school. One father of both a current student and a graduate chose to send his children to MNCS because the local high school had a reputation for student fights and drug use, and he felt the MNCS would be a better environment. Students consistently praise the school's learning style and social setting. "I was doing pretty bad at my other school," says one, "plus I was always being picked on. As soon as I got here I did better. My parents noticed the difference right away." Another student explains he did not feel challenged at his traditional school. "I didn't feel like I was really getting anything important out of it, and I was sick of the social setting. But here I can challenge myself, and I have friends of different ages."

Each year more students are going on to college after graduating from MNCS. MNCS students are scoring two points above the state average on the ACT for acceptance to midwest-

ern colleges. For the 15 seniors in the class of 2005, 90 percent took the ACT, and 100 percent applied and were accepted to college. Twenty percent of the seniors received merit-based scholarships for college. Eighty percent are in attendance at two- and four-year colleges and 20 percent of the seniors have made the decision to work for a year prior to enrollment or have gone directly into the workforce. This is an increase over prior years. That is, in 2003, out of eleven seniors, 25 percent were accepted by and chose to attend four-year colleges and 55 percent attended two-year colleges.

These college attendance statistics may not fully capture the impact of project-based learning on MNCS graduates. As a junior, one student entered MNCS reading at a second-grade level. He asked to learn to read for his project, and with 688 hours of work, he learned to read working with a reading assistant three hours a week, passing the Minnesota Basic Skills Test with a score of 94 out of 100. Another student, while not attending college, started his own Internet advertising business after graduating, a plan launched from his senior project experience. As lead teacher Thomas says, "We want students to be internally motivated—to do things because they are passionate about it. We want them to be lifelong learners."

MNCS: Evidence of Closing the Achievement Gap

Twelve percent of the students at the local high school district, Lesueur Henderson Secondary School (LHSS), qualify for special education services as compared to 24 percent of the students at Minnesota New Country School. Yet even with an alternative academic program, students at MNCS are on par with or outperforming their peers at LHSS.

In 2005, MNCS tenth-graders scored 80 percent proficiency in math compared with 73 percent of LHSS students.

MNCS students' average ACT scores in 2005 were 23.3 compared with a national average of 20.9.

North Star Academy Charter School of Newark

Newark, N.J.

School Profile: Selected Variables	
Year First Chartered and Authorizer	1997, state
Grades and Enrollment	5–12 and 125 (high school only)
Student Ethnicity	85% African-American 0% Asian American 14% Hispanic 0% White
Special Education	7%
Free and Reduced-price Lunch	90%
Graduation Rate	100%*
Annual Cost per Student	\$9,090

*100% in 2004 and one student did not graduate in 2005 and will finish in 2006.

Source: School records data from 2005–06

North Star was born when James Verrilli, a teacher in Newark public schools, and Norman Atkins, a journalist running a private foundation, set out to better the dismal reality facing Newark inner-city high school students. In the country's second poorest city, only 26 percent of graduating seniors were planning to go to college, only 6 percent actually going, and a mere 2 percent making it all the way through. Verrilli's and Atkins' vision was to create an uncommon public school that exceeded community expectations, with a staff that would aggressively combat the achievement gap, making sure every student was academically, culturally, and socially prepared to succeed in college. Originally North Star Academy was started as a middle school, but as parents saw the poor options for students after eighth grade, they asked North Star to create a high school, and its eight-member board, including two parents, agreed.

It is no surprise, eight years later, that North Star Academy's waiting list is over 1,600 students. Families know that if their children are selected through the lottery to attend, they will work hard, successfully complete high school, and go on to college. The reason, according to one visitor, is that North Star "leaders are determined not only to bridge the achievement gap but to obliterate it."

Currently in its ninth year, North Star Academy has opened a second middle school, adding one additional fifth-grade cohort of 75 students. The plan is to create two middle schools to feed into one high school in order to expand

the high school course offerings and curricular program. In collaboration with Uncommon Schools, Inc., the school will open two K–4 schools over the next five years and by the 2010–11 school year North Star Academy will serve a maximum of 1,300 students across five campuses—two K–4 schools, two 5–8 schools, and one high school. The school continues to recruit students from Newark public schools, with staff and others pounding the pavement to spread the word at churches, grocery stores, and local elementary schools, drawing students who are typically performing below the district average and effectively preparing them for college. And while working hard for

this preparation, every student pledges to live by the school's core values of caring, respect, responsibility, and justice.

School Operations and Educational Program

North Star now serves 384 students in grades 5–12, 99 percent African-American or Latino, operating on an 11-month school year with an extended day program. One hundred and twenty-five students are in high school. North Star Academy's devotion to preparing these students to succeed in college and life beyond is reflected in its graduation requirements. All students take four years of English, math, science, and history, and three years of foreign language, physical education, and arts, surpassing the New Jersey state requirements. Course offerings include AP-level classes in calculus, U.S. history, U.S. government, and English, as well as honors-level classes in math and science. All other classes are untracked and provide honors-level college preparatory work. North Star Academy students also are required to pass the N.J. High School Proficiency Assessment, complete a senior thesis as well as a senior composition, take the SAT at least twice, complete 40 hours of community service, and apply to at least two colleges.

One of North Star's most innovative features is the level of personalization and commitment to ensuring student mastery of the content standards. The school has developed a set of interim assessments, aligned with state standards and the curriculum, given every six to eight weeks. Results are analyzed by the teacher, department chair, and administrator, who look to see who

has mastered specific standards for that unit and who has not. It is then the teacher's responsibility to either re-teach the material in a different way if several students have not mastered it or to provide individual tutoring during afternoon study hall, before or after school, or during lunch, to ensure that each student has mastered those concepts before moving on to new ones. To support student learning, North Star also provides a Saturday school where students can receive extra help.

The school culture is first established in middle school with a morning circle, when all students and teachers gather to the call of the djembe drum. This is a time when students chant affirmations that they will go on to college and apologize to the community for any disciplinary infractions, such as tardies and poor conduct, and when teachers and students share positive stories about students. At one meeting, a teacher related that over the weekend every eighth grader but one had attended Saturday school and worked hard. Another shared that her students created a project of sewing slavery costumes and enacted scenes from a book they recently finished reading. One student thanked her peers for carrying her books while she was on crutches. Another acknowledged the helpfulness of classmates who helped her with homework and, in particular, a challenging assignment.

North Star gives students opportunities they would not have if attending their neighborhood schools. "If you get good grades, you can go on special programs," explains one student, "like I went to New Zealand last summer with 12 students and two teachers." Each summer students participate in special internships and programs,

such as a journalism program at Princeton University or the Junior Statesman program at Georgetown University. Another student talks enthusiastically about his summer business internship at Lehman Brothers.

Family Involvement and Partnerships

Communication between North Star Academy staff and families is strong. Typically, teachers are calling home about once a week to stay in contact with families. Every Thursday, students bring home a folder containing notices for parents and things for them to sign and return to the school. Unlike many high schools, North Star does not mail report cards. Parents must come to school to pick them up, at which time they have a conference with their child's teachers. Parents are full of praise for the school. One parent explains that her son was struggling in elementary school, but at North Star he caught up thanks to the teachers and the one-on-one tutoring. She likes the fact that students are kept really busy and do not have time to hang out and get in trouble. The school has a PTA, and two parents serve on the board. Parent committees help to organize schoolwide events, such as a Latino celebration, which was very well attended even though Latinos represent only 14 percent of the student body.

North Star has developed a few partnerships with community organizations and businesses to provide students with exceptional opportunities, often the kind that affluent students would have, that help to prepare them for college and life beyond Newark and high school. For example, students in good academic standing can

spend the school's summer-session month off campus in internships or at work sites, or traveling to other countries, or participating in outdoor leadership programs. Deloitte Consulting adopted the senior class and has been providing mentors for these 20 students since their sophomore year. The law firm Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham LLP adopted the junior class and pays for them to take online SAT preparation courses. The school is in the fourth year of a five-year federal GEAR-UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grant, partnering with Rutgers-Newark, to provide North Star students with tutoring and presentations about college.

Governing for Accountability

North Star Executive Director Paul Bambrick-Santoyo oversees the interim assessment process, develops the school budget, completes all of the bureaucratic requirements, including federal, state, and district forms, and meets monthly with the board. Purposely kept small for effective decisionmaking, the board of North Star Academy meets every two months to oversee the policy and school operations. There are two parents on the board and representatives from the Newark community that include a retired state senator, a former principal, and business community members.

Administrators at North Star truly are instructional leaders. High school principal Julie Jackson holds clearly articulated expectations for teachers. She tells them, "It's not enough to teach the curriculum; it is your responsibility to make sure students master the standards and concepts." In fact, a distinctive feature at North Star is its process for monitoring

student understanding and gauging the effectiveness of instruction. Trained in conducting classroom observations, Jackson and her North Star middle and elementary school principal colleagues do a daily walk-through, visiting at least 85 percent of the classrooms in the school and giving informal feedback. With data from these observations and from interim student assessments, teachers use the North Star Assessment Analysis Sheet and Instruction Plan template to draw connections between their instruction and student performance and decide what they need to do to help students master the standards. As Bambrick-Santoyo explains, if a student is not doing well, this process requires teachers to immediately ask the question, "How can I teach this differently or revisit this concept so that the student will achieve mastery?" He sees his role as actively working with teachers, raising questions, observing instruction and providing feedback, supporting curriculum development and lesson planning, and strategizing on an ongoing basis. Professional development is conducted internally and aims at raising student academic achievement.

Ninety-five percent of the 2005 graduates are attending four-year universities, such as the

University of Chicago, Mount Holyoke College, Boston College, Syracuse University, and Rutgers University. North Star Academy is keeping track of how its graduates are doing in college. Monitoring how students are doing in college informs practice at North Star. For example, the first class did not do well in college calculus, Bambrick-Santoyo recalls. "That was our problem: we needed to prepare them better." When they learned that graduates were struggling with college math, they promptly reexamined their curriculum to increase the rigor and accelerate learning at North Star.

One reason daily attendance averages higher than for Newark School District high schools and for the state is that students love the small school community and appreciate "dedicated teachers who will come early and stay late to give you one-on-one help. The teachers make sure you understand, they won't let you fall behind," says one student. A sophomore explains, "This is my home away from home." At regular public school, one junior says, "kids give up and there are a lot of fights. Here the teachers don't give up on you. They are working for your future, to help you go to college."

North Star Academy: Evidence of Closing the Achievement Gap

Over the past three years, North Star Academy students have consistently outperformed neighborhood and Newark district schools on state tests, scoring higher than the statewide average in New Jersey.

One hundred percent of North Star Academy's 12th-grade general education students in the class of 2005 passed the New Jersey High School Statewide Assessment (HSPA), compared to 85.1 percent of New Jersey students statewide, 44.2 percent of the Newark district students, and 19.5 percent from neighborhood schools.

North Star has the highest rate of four-year college acceptance and attendance of any school in the state of New Jersey, regardless of socioeconomic level served.

The Preuss School

La Jolla, Calif.

School Profile: Selected Variables	
Year First Chartered and Authorizer	1999, local district
Grades and Enrollment	6–12 and 772
Student Ethnicity	13% African-American 23% Asian American 58% Hispanic 6% White
Special Education	2%
Free and Reduced-price Lunch	100%
Graduation Rate	100%
Annual Cost per Student	\$7,551

Source: School records data from 2005–06

After Proposition 209 eliminated affirmative action at the University of California system beginning with the 1996–97 school year, Provost Cecil Lytle and other faculty felt strongly that the university itself should take action to ensure that the university system continued to serve students from low-income families of color. Keenly aware that high schools were not preparing the majority of low-income minority youths to enter and thrive in college, they proposed to the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) chancellor that a school be created on the campus to do just that. The first attempt was rejected by faculty who did not think it was the university’s responsibility and by critics who were concerned about the financial implications. But the chancellor and others, along with Lytle, were relentless, with Lytle even laying his job on the line. Finally, he and his new committee prevailed, and in 1999 the faculty senate agreed to launch a charter school consisting of grades 6–12 on the UCSD campus. The planning team recruited Doris Alvarez, an experienced principal from San Diego Unified School District, eager for a chance to work at a school where she could try innovative ideas like academies, strands, and detracking, which had been difficult to implement in her former inner-city school.

The school opened at a temporary facility on the UCSD campus, with 150 students learning in bungalows. The second year the school grew to 400 students and the university raised \$14 million from private donations in just five months to build a new permanent school building on the UCSD campus. Peter Preuss, a university regent, donated \$6 million to launch the school, now viewed as another department at the university, board members explain. Its mission is “to improve educational practices and provide an intensive college preparatory school for low-income student populations, which are historically under-represented on the campuses of the University of California. If these goals are realized, the school

will matriculate students who are competitively eligible to enter the University of California or other selective institutions of higher education.”

School Operations and Educational Program

The Preuss School serves 772 students in grades 6–12, all qualifying for the free or reduced-price lunch program and Title I services. In fact, such qualifications are requisite for applying to the school lottery, along with having parents who did not graduate from a four-year college or university. One senior explains she likes the

school's required uniforms because "it covers up that we are all poor." The intensive learning program results in both a longer school day and longer year, and has a block schedule with 100-minute periods. A Saturday enrichment program is available for students and parents alike. Classes are not tracked and all students take eight yearlong AP and honors-level courses, and complete the California subject requirements, known as A-G coursework. For electives, students also take fine arts, including choir performance, drama, orchestra, and art. In order to graduate, seniors are required to complete a research paper and present an exhibition about it, and engage in community service learning and a twelve-week internship.

Teachers and other staff hold high expectations for students and the school fosters an excitement about learning both inside and outside the classroom. The shared aim is that graduates will develop lifelong intellectual curiosity and dedication to continued learning. All students participate in an advisory program by grade level. Staying together in the same advisory group from sixth grade through senior year gives them continuity and support for their entire schooling experience at Preuss. During an advisory period, students have 30 minutes of "kick back and read time" and "kick back and calculate time" at least twice a week, and also receive tutorials for academic help using the school's I-CLEAR model (Inquiry, Collaboration, Linking, Evidence, Application, and Research).

Students are bused to the UCSD campus from towns near the border, such as San Ysidro and National City, as well as poorer communities in Southeast San Diego. Some students travel over an hour to the school, taking two buses or public transportation to the school bus to get to the Preuss campus. "We are from every part of

San Diego," one student explains. "Even though we take the bus for an hour, we use the time to talk and sleep." While an explicit citizenship code covers behavior, effort, attendance, and discipline, the dean of students points out how older students act as keepers of the positive school climate. Even on the bus home, by their own example they prevent rowdy behavior among the younger students.

Teaching and learning at Preuss are data driven. The principal explains how staff closely examine student assessment data to make teaching decisions and to meet student academic needs. For example, the math department has carefully examined student assessment data and made some program changes as a result. One group of students entered the school below the 50th percentile in math, so staff added a math elective for enrichment, MathQuest in seventh grade, providing time for teachers to teach math concepts in a different way. As a result, they found that student test scores went up. They also noticed that sixth- and seventh-graders were doing well in math, but there was a drop in algebra scores in the eighth grade. So they pulled in another teacher, lowering the class size to fifteen students for algebra and started examining teaching techniques for improving their algebra instruction. They also added two tutors to assist, so now in the eighth-grade algebra class, there are two tutors and one teacher for 15 students, which means each adult can sit with five students at each of the three tables to work closely with them on math concepts.

Family Involvement and Partnerships

The school works to involve parents in creating a community of high expectations for students. Parents have representatives on the

school's Advisory Council and one on the charter school board. "We honor parents by educating them about college, financial aid, teenage development, time management, and other relevant topics," explains Principal Doris Alvarez. The school orients families by hosting a "meet the principal" reception before the school year starts. Required to donate 15 volunteer hours each year, some parents attend sports events, others help out in Spanish classes or the library, some make and use phone trees for calling other parents to invite families to school events. There are parent meetings once a month on Saturdays. The school organizes parent workshops on college financial aid, and the monthly newsletter offers information about scholarships for which students can apply. During the Saturday enrichment program, parent meetings and events are held. For example, at a Preuss cultural day feast, a potluck was held to celebrate community and diversity.

Preuss is in many partnerships and collaborations with UCSD. The university provides interns and typically over 100 students volunteer as tutors each quarter at Preuss. It also pays the salary of the development director, who raises school funds and donates a nurse three days a week. The university serves as a tremendous resource for the school. For example, when Preuss students were in a school bus accident, UCSD provided counseling interns from their Ph.D. program to support students.

For the school's community mentor program, the volunteer coordinator at Preuss recruits UCSD staff and community members. Mentors meet once a week during lunch or advisory period with their student. The expectation is that it will be a long-term ongoing relationship for seven years. Preuss has 120 mentors who are "bending backwards for our kids," says Principal Alvarez.

Seniors can take advanced math classes at UCSD if they pass UCSD's placement test. Currently seven seniors are taking math tuition free at UCSD and Preuss pays for their books. Last year five to six students enrolled in courses at UCSD. Preuss monitors this activity carefully to make sure the students are mature enough to do well and to sustain their independence and motivation taking a college course. Seniors participate in 12-week internships at UCSD in various departments throughout the university. Students also have been summer interns at the cancer center, working at the university hospital.

Business partnerships with companies that have included Jack in the Box and Amylin Pharmaceuticals have provided \$30,000 to sponsor trainings about diabetes and nutrition. Called the Student Well-Being Advocacy Program, or SWAP, the goal is to raise awareness with students and families about the risks of obesity and diabetes.

Governing for Accountability

The administrative team at Preuss consists of the principal, dean of students, business manager, facilities coordinator, head counselor, and guidance counselor. The university vice-chancellor appoints the school's board, whose 17 members include the assistant vice chancellor, community representatives, educators, and UCSD faculty. They closely watch students' performance and monitor fiscal operations. Board members explain that the conditions of being a charter school allow Preuss to avoid having to deal with the seniority system in the San Diego Unified School District where those with the most seniority have first choice for open positions. Its charter status gives Preuss full control over hiring, enabling it to hire the teachers it needs.

Staff at Preuss consider themselves teacher-researchers. Teams of teachers have engaged in

lesson study, initially by department, focusing on an area of interest in math, writing, and assessment. Teachers plan a lesson together, observe it being taught, then reconvene to critique and improve the lesson to be taught again by another colleague. This process, engaging teachers in peer observation, analysis of lessons, and teaching revised lessons, has proved a powerful tool for teachers to work together to improve instruction.

This year Preuss received 800 applications for 110 sixth-grade slots. The school has been so successful an exemplar that other schools are looking to expand the Preuss model. Gompers Middle School in San Diego reconstituted as a charter school and approached Preuss administrators to learn from their experience. Those in other University of California programs at Berkeley and Irvine have approached the Preuss board about initiating charter school partnerships for their campuses.

Of the 55 seniors in the class of 2004, 90 percent were accepted to four-year colleges and 10 percent to two-year colleges, guaranteed a spot at UCSD if they did well at the community colleges. Sixty-seven percent of the 2004 class attend four-year colleges and 33 percent attend two-year colleges. In the class of 2005, out of 75 seniors, 91 percent were accepted to four-year colleges and 9 percent to two-year colleges. Approximately

84 percent went on to attend four-year college and 16 percent to two-year college. Preuss graduates in 2007 will be the first to have started the school in the sixth grade. San Diego Unified School District under the authority of the UCSD chancellor has renewed Preuss School's charter for seven years, more than the five typically allotted, due to strong test results.

Parents applaud Preuss's culture of high academic performance in an environment that encourages risk-taking, the art of questioning, and logical and critical thinking. Many found low standards and expectations in the San Diego public schools and poor communication from teachers to students and parents. At Preuss, teachers will call home and contact parents and they appreciate this. Parents point out that the principal knows every student and that students are busy. They are grateful that their children are bused out of unsafe, crime-prone environments to attend school on the UCSD campus. "Everyone sacrifices to do well here," says a parent whose child wakes up at 5:15 a.m. and does not return home until 7 p.m. One parent with four students at the school explained, "The dream team all-star teachers make it worth it." Another parent whose daughter is now in her second year of college explains that the Preuss work ethic "carried over," which is why she is doing well. "It's like winning the lottery. I feel in my heart she will make it and be a role model for her two sisters."

The Preuss School: Evidence of Closing the Achievement Gap

Preuss 10th-graders outperformed San Diego Unified School District high school students on the state English language arts and math tests, with 100 percent scoring proficient in English language arts and 99 percent scoring proficient in math.

No high school in the San Diego Unified School District serves as high a percentage of economically disadvantaged students as Preuss.

The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C.

School Profile: Selected Variables	
Year First Chartered and Authorizer	1998, Washington, D.C. PublicCharterSchoolBoard
Grades and Enrollment	7–12 and 320
Student Ethnicity	99% African-American 0% Asian American 1% Hispanic 0% White
Special Education	13%
Free and Reduced-price Lunch	78%
Graduation Rate	100%
Annual Cost per Student	\$33,000

Source: School records data from 2005–06

When cofounding the SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C. (SEED), Eric Adler started with the premise that all children can succeed in school, regardless of social or economic barriers, if given the right environment and support. SEED defines such support as round the clock, and this is what makes its learning environment unique: SEED is the only charter boarding school in the country. Here, students live where they learn because boarding students, as one teacher puts it, “is about building a community, our own little mini-culture, focused on one common goal: academic excellence and getting students to college.”

SEED’s mantra—“We’re preparing these children for college”—is evident in the high expectations that are the norm. Parents support the rigorous curriculum and structured environment and encourage their children to stick it out even when it seems too hard. On the boarding side, life skills staff teach social skills, explicitly designed to help the children succeed in the world. The school also provides numerous outside enrichment activities, including trips abroad and internships.

When SEED opened its doors in 1998 with 40 seventh-grade students, the school was housed downtown in Capital Children’s Museum. Now located permanently in the Southeast section of Washington, expanded to include grades 7–12, and serving its full capacity of

320 students, the school retains as its mission, “to provide an outstanding, intensive educational program that prepares children, both academically and socially, for success in college.”

Students are clear about what the mission requires of them. “You can’t just come in and say you want to do it and then two weeks later you want to get out of here,” says one senior. “You got to really be committed to it, because you will be here for six years. You have to come here with an open mind, to be willing to try new things.” Another senior agrees. “It’s a really hard commitment because of how rigorous the curriculum is and how much you have to put into it to get an output. It’s not for everybody.” But he believes it is worth it, adding, “It’s a life-changing experience.”

School Operations and Educational Program

Boarding fosters the kind of communication that is not possible in conventional schools. Students see adults from the time they get up until the time they go to sleep, at breakfast, lunch, and dinner, in class, and in study halls. Security, maintenance, and kitchen staff also interact with the students. The school wraps services and support around students 24 hours a day, says one of the founders. “Resident assistants can influence how they think,” explains Student Life Manager Gerald Taylor. “I model certain behaviors. They watch everything you do.” As one 11th-grade girl sees it, students have their parents at home and the adults at SEED act as another set of parents.

SEED’s 320 students, evenly split between boys and girls, are 99 percent African-American and one percent Hispanic. While 13 percent of SEED’s students are served by a special education teacher through an inclusion model, expectations for them are the same as for other students: They will be prepared for college. Seventh- and eighth- grade students must prove they are capable of doing high school work by passing through a “gateway” before advancing to ninth grade. If middle school students have not mastered the skills necessary to move on to high school, SEED offers them an additional “growth” year to finish middle school.

The academic program provides both breadth and depth, covering all subjects required for college. For example, SEED high school students take four years of English and math, four years of social studies, and three years of science. The school follows a rigorous curriculum based on

its “power standards” that explains in detail what students are supposed to master and how they will know they have mastered it, in each subject at each grade. Placement, instruction, even professional development are all data driven.

A typical day for students begins at around 6 a.m. They have breakfast in the cafeteria before heading off to classes, which begin at 8 a.m. After a morning of biology, precalculus or writing, students and faculty eat lunch together in the cafeteria. Following afternoon classes, which end at 3 p.m., there are numerous activities, many organized and led by the students themselves. From roughly 4:30 to 5:30 p.m., students receive their Habits For Achieving Life Long Success (HALLS) lesson, which includes such things as etiquette, budgeting, and conflict resolution. After dinner, students have community time, followed by study hall, which is monitored by life skills counselors and volunteer tutors. Students spend the last half hour or so in “quiet” time before lights out at 9:15 p.m. It is a highly structured day.

Through the HALLS program, SEED also teaches life skills, such as grooming, time management, and making good choices. HALLS lessons focus on five core values: respect, responsibility, self-discipline, compassion, and integrity. Students are consistently reminded of such values in a gentle way. For example, Principal Josh Edelman, on morning rounds, may ask, “Did someone steal your tie again?” or say, “Someone pulled your shirt out of your pants.” There are clear and thorough procedures for disciplinary actions; at the same time, programs are set up so students can earn rewards for good behavior and citizenship.

Many seventh-grade students enter SEED two or three years behind academically, and it is not unusual for some to have attended several different schools. To elevate them to grade level, the school provides double classes in math and reading, tutoring, study halls dedicated to specific subjects, and extra tutoring when they need it. At SEED, say school officials, there is no “social promotion” by which students are promoted to the next grade irrespective of their academic performance in order to keep them with their same-age peers.

Family Involvement and Partnerships

Assistant Head of School for Student Life Lesley Poole knows that most schools struggle with the issue of parent involvement. “That’s not our story,” she says. “Their children spend so much time here that parents want to be included, too.” About 75 to 85 percent of parents respond when Poole calls a meeting. They may fuss about it, but they come. There are many opportunities for parents to get involved, such as serving on committees, shadowing their children for a day, and chaperoning activities. There are also parent workshops, developed with input from parents, support groups for parents of struggling children, and activities, such as parent literacy night. “Our ability to communicate to parents that we need them is a strength,” she says. “We spend a lot of time shaping what communication looks like.” In response to parent desires for more communication, SEED created what it calls the “Friday checkout folder,” into which school staff place information for parents to pick up when they come to gather their children on Friday afternoon. Parent involvement is critical to the success of SEED

students, Poole says. “Parents trust us to push their children beyond their comfort zone.”

SEED has extensive partnerships with community entities, which help fulfill the school’s mission. “They all provide access and opportunities that lead to preparation,” according to Head of School John Ciccone. A full-time staff person cultivates and nurtures external partnerships and also raises funds for the school. Partnerships with such organizations as the Kennedy Center, the DC Arts and Humanities Education Collaborative, and the Shakespeare Theater allow students to attend concerts and plays that would otherwise be unavailable to them. An extensive partnership with the U.S. Department of the Interior provides many opportunities, including tutors on campus, book forums, and museum tours. SEED has a unique partnership with the Embassy of Greece, which allows eight students each year to visit Greece. A former Greek ambassador visited SEED and was so impressed he decided to create the relationship. Experiment in International Living also has provided opportunities for students to travel abroad to places like Spain and Australia.

Governing for Accountability

As part of its wraparound approach to supporting both the social and academic growth of its students, SEED has staff on day and night shifts, a life skills staff housed at the school, and an academic staff whose members go home at night, though often quite late. This dual or complementary structure is reflected in the management of SEED. Ciccone, who is responsible for all operations, his assistant, the principal, and assistant principal, all work together

as a team to manage the academic portion of SEED. Ciccone and Poole handle the boarding portion of the school, and Poole also handles admissions and parent outreach. A 15-member board of trustees, which includes parents and both founders, oversees the school.

Chartering has allowed SEED to become a boarding school, uniquely combining college preparation with a life skills curriculum. Chartering also has allowed it to create the “gateway” between middle and high school, a system that provides students an additional year to finish middle school in order to master the skills and knowledge needed to do high school work. Being a smaller school with smaller staff allows for close communication and fosters a sense of community. It is easier to make decisions and changes at SEED because there is little bureaucracy. SEED staff are highly motivated, in large part, because of the opportunity to be a part of something unique, a boarding school. Chartering also has allowed SEED to require and cultivate parent involvement in various ways. For example, parents must come to the school to get an application form and participate in the application process, seeing firsthand what a boarding school is like. If their children are selected, parents must participate in the detailed orientation process. Additionally, they must pick

up their children on Fridays and drop them off on Sundays.

“We’ve only had two classes graduate,” says one teacher, “but all of them have gone on to an impressive array of colleges, with tremendous amounts of help from adults in this building, at every level. You know, at a large public school, you wouldn’t have that.” SEED has received a huge amount of press since it opened, and visitors come from all over the country to learn more about the model. One indication of SEED’s growing reputation in D.C. is that its lottery has become a major event; there are far more SEED applicants than there is space for them in the school.

SEED staff are particularly proud of the support students continue to receive once they have left. “Almost weekly I talk to one of the three students from my department who’ve graduated,” says a teacher, “and offer them support or guidance, or help them follow through with something they’re feeling challenged with.” One parent whose daughter graduated and who has enrolled two other children calls SEED a godsend. “This is the best gift I could have given them,” she says. The combination of academics and life skills, says another parent, “prepares children for the world outside a four-block area. I wish every child could go to a school like this.”

The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C.: Evidence of Closing the Achievement Gap

SEED students are outperforming their peers in D.C. schools. In math and reading, 56 percent of SEED students were proficient on the Stanford 9 assessment, used districtwide, compared to the D.C. target of 33 percent for math and 29 percent for reading.

Of 13 seniors in the class of 2005, 100 percent were accepted to four-year colleges, with 88 percent going on to attend four-year colleges and 12 percent accepting jobs instead.

Toledo School for the Arts

Toledo, Ohio

School Profile: Selected Variables	
Year First Chartered and Authorizer	1999, Toledo Board of Education
Grades and Enrollment	6–12 and 379
Student Ethnicity	37.5% African-American 1% Asian American 5.1% Hispanic 56.4% White
Special Education	5%
Free and Reduced-price Lunch	44%
Graduation Rate	97%
Annual Cost per Student	\$7,138

Source: School records data from 2005–06

Entering the Toledo School for the Arts (TSA), one sees students passing through the hallways with musical instruments slung over their shoulders, walking to class with a purpose, past walls covered with superb murals and collages. Instead of a bell ringing, music plays over the loudspeakers to announce the end of class. Next to the administration office, an art gallery displays paintings commissioned for Sea Gate Convention Centre, African masks made of clay, pottery vases, and an assortment of creatively painted furniture. Looking at the professional quality of this work, all done by students, and feeling the special ambience, it comes as no surprise to learn that this charter school for grades 6–12 is dedicated to bringing the arts to academics.

The mission of TSA is “to provide students with creative opportunities to achieve personal and academic success through arts-based learning. TSA prepares students as life-long learners and productive members of society with appreciation of, and competence in, the arts.” TSA Director Martin Porter explains, “We want to use the arts not just in the studio setting but also in the classroom. We believe that arts-based education is the best tool to work with creative kids.”

In the late 1980s, a group of local educators, parents, and art patrons collaborated to set up an arts school but could not get funding. Then in 1997 when Ohio passed its charter school law, six members of the original group saw their chance; a director was hired in June 1999 and TSA opened 77 days later.

School Operations and Educational Program

TSA offers a college preparatory curriculum to 379 students in grades 6–12 who come from 13 different school districts throughout northwest Ohio. While fully integrating the arts, the academic program is rigorous, aligned to state standards, and, according to several parents, better than the neighborhood schools. For example, TSA has more course requirements than the local district schools: TSA requires two years of a foreign language and four years of social studies, whereas Toledo Public Schools requires no foreign language and only two years of social studies.

The arts curriculum includes music, dance, theater, and visual arts. Music includes instrumental

orchestra (wind, string, and percussion) and ensembles; a jazz and pop music program; and chorus, piano, and guitar classes. For practices and composing, the school has a recording studio as well as practice rooms and a computer lab with computers connected to musical keyboards. Dance spans modern, ethnic, ballet, and stage dance (jazz and pop), and junior high students receive an introduction to each of the four art disciplines: dance, music, theater, and visual arts. Theater encompasses acting and training in technical staging, and students participate in local community theater productions after school and during the summer. The visual arts program covers photography, two- and three-dimensional studio arts, graphic design, introduction to color and design theory, different media, art history, and art criticism. TSA collaborates with the Toledo Museum of Art to support the curriculum.

Many students enter TSA not ready to learn on grade level, but teachers use a variety of support structures to bring them up to grade level. This year, TSA received Title I money for the tutoring of struggling students at the high school level. Also this year an intervention specialist began coming to TSA daily to work with students who are failing or in danger of failing one or more classes. Porter is proud of the results: After 12 weeks, nearly 50 percent of the students receiving this support tested back into their original class. The teachers also have created and provide an ACT-preparation course before and after school and on selected weekends.

Along with the innovative combination of a college preparatory program with a rigorous arts curriculum, come extensive opportunities. TSA students give about 90 performances

per year in front of audiences that add up to approximately 15,000 people. Local organizations and companies often hire TSA students to perform at various events. They also perform regular “gigs” at local clubs, restaurants, and festivals.

TSA cultivates an inclusive environment where teachers and students alike feel welcome and encouraged to express themselves. Porter explains that most Toledo schools are very traditional and if you’re not a “jock or genius” you will not find your niche. The dynamic of an arts-integrated curriculum eliminates the self-esteem issues many kids feel in other schools because the arts provide an outlet for the students and encourages their strengths—be it in the classroom or through performances. Teachers are strongly committed, and many are artists themselves. TSA’s math and science teacher, voted Northwest Ohio teacher of the year, is also a song writer and performer. She took a \$6,000 pay cut to be at TSA and says she has never once regretted her decision.

Family Involvement and Partnerships

TSA has high parental involvement and a very active parent organization. Porter talks about parents’ “great volunteerism,” especially in the early years when the school was getting started—painting walls, cleaning bathrooms, laying tiles. Among the many fund-raisers for the school, parents work the concession stand at the Mud Hens minor league baseball games. They are motivated to raise funds for students to attend conferences and competitions at the state and national levels. One

parent describes parents' involvement at TSA "as more of a partnership."

Communication with parents is key and is handled systematically at TSA. For example, starting in students' junior year, parents receive a month-by-month calendar highlighting important college information and testing dates. In a system initiated by the parent organization, every parent or guardian also receives a weekly phone message with school announcements. Nine newsletters each year highlight significant student awards and accomplishments, announce upcoming testing data, and include articles about other school-related events. Starting next year, all parents will have access to MyGradeBook.com and will be able to look at assignments and grades earned by their children.

TSA excels at developing "ARTnerships" with numerous local organizations. Porter defines an ARTnership as another community or cultural institution that shares the school vision and can contribute to student education in the arts. They join with TSA's efforts and commit their expertise and other resources to help students realize their dreams. For example, every student enrolled in a TSA string instrument course receives weekly instruction from Toledo Symphony Orchestra musicians. The Toledo Opera provides opera lessons, with TSA, the opera, and students sharing the expense so it costs \$5 per week for students. The Toledo Museum of Art, an ARTner of five years that is located five blocks away from the school, has created an extended docent program and museum staff work with teachers to create meaningful experiences for students. Classes visit the museum 15 times a year, guided by the same docent, who highlights certain pieces of art that relate to what the

students are learning in a particular class. Porter believes this is a great way to make sure that the arts have a voice in the academic classroom.

The Toledo Repertoire Theatre allows TSA students to use the theatre space twice a year for major productions. Last year 13 students performed in the Toledo Repertoire Theater's "Christmas Carol." Eighteen students were in the Toledo Jazz Society's "Harlem Nutcracker" last year, and over a dozen performed in the Toledo Ballet Association's productions of The Nutcracker and Coppelia. For three years, TSA has shared a staff member with the Center of Science and Industry, a physical science teacher who helps bridge the gap between school-learned science and science as a profession.

Governing for Accountability

The school is led by an administrative team and its 17-member school board. At the school level, TSA has a strong leadership group. Its director, Porter, not only works at the school but also serves on the Toledo Ballet board and plays trumpet professionally. Howard Walters, the academic principal for three years, supervises the academic staff, handles all discipline and attendance issues, and is in charge of teacher evaluations. The artistic director supervises the art teachers and the development director for the past three years is a former TSA teacher. After successfully raising funds and soliciting in-kind instrument loans and donations for his percussion class, he was brought on full time as the development director. This team meets twice a week to discuss the school's budgetary needs and school program issues.

Professional development occurs three or four times each year, during in-service days. In the past, TSA has hosted technology trainings in-house and also has used the Toledo Museum of Art to demonstrate how to integrate arts into the academic curriculum. This year, the staff—as part of their professional development—did an item analysis on the state tests in which they examined student performance on each item to see which standards students mastered and which questions they got wrong and decided to implement a new computer-based program.

Eleven of last year's seniors earned the President's Award for Outstanding Academic Excellence. The graduating class of 2005 had 39 seniors, of whom 65 percent went on to attend four-year colleges, 8 percent went on to two-year colleges, and 2 percent went into the military. Twenty-five percent took jobs or entered into advanced study in the arts; for example, one graduate is in the Broadway touring cast of "Wicked." Thirty percent of graduating seniors have received merit-based scholarships. Parents describe the changes they have seen in their children since attending TSA. One parent says her daughter "wouldn't be the person she is today" and would not have the level of confidence she has now. All

parents agree that TSA "changes kids" and they like how active and busy their children are—going to school during the day and then involved in production or rehearsal after school. Another parent explains that after a year of commuting to the school from a rural Ohio town over an hour away, she relocated her family to Toledo in order to be closer to the school so she could be more involved in the parent organization and her daughter could attend rehearsals at night. For the upcoming 2006–07 school year, there are 153 families on the waiting list for about half that number of openings.

Even though there is more schoolwork and homework than at the schools they would have otherwise attended, students feel privileged to attend. "Before I came here," says one, "I wasn't interested in anything. One thing about this school is they push you to try new things and break out of your box." A 12th-grade student says, "I think this school is amazing because over the years it kept me out of trouble. I would be in jail or dead right now, because a lot of my friends are in jail or dead." As another student concludes, "We may not have the money or the best facilities, but we have the most motivated people."

TSA: Evidence of Closing the Achievement Gap

State indicators for 2004–05 show that TSA students are performing far better than their local district peers. On the Ohio 10th-grade graduation test, the percentage of TSA students at or above proficiency was 95.6 in reading and 86.7 in math as compared to similar district or state scores of 82.9 and 63.5, respectively.

In 2005, TSA was rated "Excellent," an improvement over its 2003 school designation of "Continuous Improvement" on the Ohio Department of Education's annual school assessment as well as its 2004 rating of "Effective."

YES College Preparatory School Southeast Campus

Houston, Texas

School Profile: Selected Variables	
Year First Chartered and Authorizer	1998, state
Grades and Enrollment	6-12 and 665
Student Ethnicity	5% African-American 1% Asian American 92% Hispanic 2% White
Special Education	2%
Free and Reduced-price Lunch	78%
Graduation Rate	100%
Annual Cost per Student	\$7,205

Source: School records data from 2005–06

Just off a busy main highway, along what was until recently a country road, now dotted with small business-industrial parks and new housing, three neat rows of portable-like structures house YES College Preparatory School, Southeast Campus (YES Prep). Along these rows, flapping in the Gulf Coast breeze, inspirational banners proclaim the school's philosophy: "Excellence is a Habit," "The Students of Today Are the Leaders of Tomorrow," "The Only Way to Lose Is to Quit Trying." One banner, declaring "Whatever It Takes," holds special meaning for students, families, and teachers as YES Prep's recipe for success. For Keith Desrosiers, the school's third principal and former YES Prep teacher, "whatever it takes" means "not letting obstacles prevent us from reaching our goal." And the goal is ambitious: matriculation from high school as well as acceptance to and success at a four-year college.

YES Prep's mission is "to provide a rigorous and comprehensive educational program that prepares low-income students for success in a four-year college or university," which is interpreted as "pursuing excellence, building positive relationships, serving and improving communities, and creating new opportunities and experiences." The school's structure includes an integrated sixth through 12th-grade academic and developmental program, a longer school day, monthly service learning (i.e., community service) experiences on Saturdays, annual three-week summer sessions and summer enrichment opportunities, and class-wide spring trips to colleges and universities.

The idea for YES College Preparatory School was born when Chris Barbic, a dedicated and visionary Teach for America corps member at

Houston's Rusk Elementary School, and a small group of parents saw Rusk's graduating students slip academically and disengage from learning while attending their neighborhood middle and high schools. "High rates of illiteracy, truancy, and juvenile crime were consuming students in the East End," says Barbic. The impetus for a new schooling model, says one board member, was seeing "good work being lost" as students entered the large and low-performing local schools where there was "no one to catch them when they fell."

In 1995, through a charter with the Houston Independent School District, Barbic and others opened YES Preparatory school, a middle school program for students at Rusk. By the time the first cohort of sixth-graders graduated in 1998 the vision for an integrated sixth

through 12th grade program had evolved and a new charter was obtained to open the state's only chartered public middle and high school district. The first school in the YES system, YES College Preparatory School, Southeast campus, opened that same year. Since then the YES system, still headed by Barbic, has opened two other campuses, with another campus opening this fall.* Currently, the southeast campus is the only one fully integrating all middle and high school grade levels. Desrosiers says the "plan is to operate 13 campuses in Houston neighborhoods within the next 10 years."

"Our intent is to change the face of public education," he says, "by making sure that all kids in Houston, regardless of where they live, get the best education and by changing their expectations along the way." The ultimate goal, he adds, is "to create a critical mass of college educated students who can then return to Houston and bring real change to our underserved neighborhoods and communities."

School Operations and Educational Program

YES Prep offers its students, selected by lottery, an award-winning rigorous college preparatory curriculum and enriching social experience. The curriculum is a content-based detailed scripted sequence of instruction—developed by YES Prep faculty and based on Pre-AP and AP course outlines—specifying student outcomes for each nine-week grading period. AP work is offered in every subject area. Students also report a thriving social experience at YES, talking of dances, community service projects, sports competitions, summer enrichment activities, and more than 30 mixed-grade clubs from which to choose.

*YES grows each campus by one grade level each year until the campus has a complete middle and high school program.

The YES Prep course of study is aligned to state standards and has augmented requirements. To qualify for a diploma, students are required to earn 22 credits, including 4 in English, 4 in mathematics, 3 in foreign language, 4 in science, 4 in the social sciences, 1-1/2 in physical education and health, 1 in both fine arts and technology, and 1-1/2 in electives ranging from painting, video production, and photography, to psychology, yearbook, and robotics.

Trusting relations between caring adults and students are promoted through the structure of the school. All students participate in the APSD (Academic, Personal, and Social Development) program, which addresses nonacademic issues relevant to their lives. During APSD time, students receive counseling and support and discuss tragedies like the death of a classmate and information about puberty, dating, health, body image, and sexuality. Students also learn about career and academic planning, money and time management, and how to study. By their junior year, APSD becomes a twice weekly seminar, and by senior year a daily seminar, to address issues about the transition from home and family to roommates and college, and facilitate the college search, application, and acceptance process.

YES Prep students report high satisfaction with their school experience, crediting good teaching and caring adults for their successes. Teachers give one-to-one time in class, out of class, after class, through e-mails or cell phone calls. Issued cell phones, all teachers are on call to students until 9 p.m. each school night and on weekends. "Teachers want you to understand information, not memorize it, and make us redo work until we get it right," says one student. They "find new ways to teach until you understand." Another student declares, "Knowing they honestly care is my safety net."

Class sizes are small, typically one teacher for every 13 students, the largest class sizes not

exceeding 28 students. Having time to work individually with students is key to the school's success. As described by one veteran YES Prep teacher, the school is committed to moving beyond "book knowledge and taking thinking to the next level, to interpreting, analyzing, challenging children." A new teacher talks about "making material relevant" and "keeping content exciting," explaining that he teaches mathematics by using examples and by inviting guest speakers from applied fields, like meteorology and psychology, and from the computer industry. "Ask anyone, even the custodian," urges Desrosiers. "Every single person knows why they are here—to get our kids into college and ensure that they are successful when they are there."

Assessment is integrated into the YES Prep instructional program and is used to develop tutorials, to target individualized instruction and remediation, and to designate time for pullouts or enrichments for students below grade level or struggling to master content, especially in reading and mathematics. Teachers report routinely working in teams and departments to disaggregate data in order to make sense of them and understand what they suggest for subsequent teaching.

Family Involvement and Partnerships

Parents' belief in the YES Prep mission and involvement in bringing it to fruition are central to the school's success. Parents sign a "contract of commitment" to affirm their role in the "Whatever It Takes" approach. Desrosiers explains that while working multiple jobs prevents most parents from spending time in the classroom, they are active in many other ways. A Parent Advisory Association provides a range of needed support services, such as fund-raising, special events planning, office assistance, monitoring the cafeteria, and helping to supervise Saturday service activities. According

to parents, communication with teachers and the administrative staff is routine, and they feel the school is open to ideas, suggestions, and concerns. Communication is generally maintained through e-mail and telephone contact.

"We will work with anyone who wants to work with us," declares Desrosiers. The YES Prep model relies on long-term partnerships from an expanding pool of community organizations and businesses that support the school's mission. Many are contracted to provide fee-for-service enrichment opportunities and clubs for the students. All students participate in service-learning projects and interface with the greater Houston community through their stewardship efforts. Examples of such projects include building paddocks at a humane horse ranch, cleaning beaches and parks, and tutoring elementary school students. During summer, many students are placed at university summer school programs or in volunteer internships or real work experiences or work shadowing opportunities at local businesses.

YES Prep maintains an extensive network of relations with college recruiters, frequently hosts college and university representatives and alumni to meet with students, and takes students to visit campuses across the nation. A partnership with Houston Community College allows YES Prep students to take dual enrollment courses in pre-calculus, calculus, and literature and composition, as well as to make up course work during summer sessions.

Since acceptance to a four-year college is a graduation requirement, and since many students are first-generation college bound, the school works directly with parents to support them through the "letting go" process. A designated full-time faculty works with each student and family to identify colleges and universities, apply, select "the best fit" from among the offers, secure financial aid or scholarships, prepare for the transitions, and provide alumni support once they are enrolled.

Governing for Accountability

A board and site-based leadership team govern YES Prep. The board, comprising a group of 21 business and community leaders, sees chartering as an innovative tool that can be used well or poorly. YES, says one board member, is using the tool effectively to “create a different culture in education—a culture of success.” The on-site management team, consisting of the principal, the middle and high school deans, and the director of college counseling, meet weekly to address operational and other “hot topic” issues. Together with some of the department heads and nominated teachers and staff, they form the campus-based leadership team, who addresses budget, personnel, and student affairs.

As a charter school, YES Prep has the flexibility and autonomy to innovate, solve problems, and do “whatever it takes” to meet the academic, behavioral, social, and developmental needs of students so that each graduate succeeds at a four-year college or university. Desrosiers says, “Now that we have an ‘army’ of alumni in four-year colleges and universities, it is easier for our students and families to see that they are

capable of achieving the same results. Success breeds success.”

Since 2001, 86 percent of YES Prep first generation college-bound students were accepted to 170 colleges and matriculated from 56 campuses nationwide. Among the students graduating since 2001, there have been three AP scholars with distinction, three AP scholars with honors, 25 AP scholars, four honorable mentions from the National Hispanic Recognition program, two Gates Millennium scholars, ten Vanguard scholars, and one Jackie Robinson Foundation scholar. YES Prep also has a college application rate of 100 percent, with 100 percent of its students being accepted to one or more four-year colleges or universities each year since 2001.

Out of nearly 200 charter schools in Texas, YES Prep is the only school to receive the Texas Education Agency ratings of “exemplary” or “recognized” every year of operation. In 2002, it was one of nine schools nationwide to receive the Hewlett-Packard High Achieving Schools award. In 2003, it was one of 20 schools to receive the Education Trust’s Dispelling the Myth award for educational excellence in low-income communities.

YES Prep: Evidence of Closing the Achievement Gap

Outperforming the Houston Independent School District (HISD) on the 2005 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exams in reading and math, 98 percent of YES Prep students passed the English language arts exam and 95 percent passed the math exam compared with 74 percent of HISD students passing reading and 52 percent passing math.

Ninety-nine percent of 11th-grade YES Prep students passed the TAKS English exam and 100 percent passed the math exam compared with the Texas state average of an 88 percent pass rate in English and a 77 percent pass rate in math.

In HISD, 30 percent of high school students take the SAT compared with 100 percent of YES seniors. The average YES score on the SAT was 1025 in 2005, higher than average for their local district in Texas (937) and higher than the national average for Hispanic students (937).



APPENDIX A

Research Methodology

The research approach is a combination of case study methodology and benchmarking of “best practices.” Used in businesses worldwide as they seek to continuously improve their operations, benchmarking has more recently been applied to education. Benchmarking is a structured, efficient process that targets: key operations and identifies promising practices in relationship to traditional practice, previous practice at the selected sites (lessons learned), and local outcome data. The methodology is further explained in a background document,¹⁹ which lays out the justification for identifying promising practices based on four sources of rigor in the approach:

- ◆ Theory and research base;
- ◆ Expert review;
- ◆ Site evidence of effectiveness; and
- ◆ Systematic field research and cross-site analysis.

The steps of the research process were: defining a study scope, seeking input from experts to refine the scope and inform site selection criteria, screening potential sites, selecting sites to study, conducting site visits, collecting and analyzing data to write case reports, and writing a user-friendly guide.

Site Selection Process

For this guide, over 400 charter secondary schools from 25 states and Washington D.C.

(out of 40 states that have charter school laws) were considered. These states had the largest numbers of charter schools and charter school legislation old enough to have schools beyond the start-up phase. Based on recommendations from the advisory group, information from state department staff and state association leaders, and review of achievement data, the initial list of 400 schools was narrowed to 70 charter high schools that served students through grade 12, had already graduated a class of seniors so that graduation and college-going data were available, and had met AYP for at least the past two years.

The list of 70 schools was narrowed to 26 by selecting schools that either demonstrated high academic achievement on state testing, or outperformed comparable local schools, or demonstrated increasing achievement with a predominantly low-income or minority population of students. Information about program features and additional outcome data were gathered on these 26 schools, using phone interviews to fill gaps in information. From this group of 26 schools, eight schools were selected as case study sites based on the compiled information and criteria ratings in a screening matrix. (See next section for more on criteria.) Demographic variation, a range of promising practices, and geographic location, along with achievement data, were all considered in the final site selection.

Site Selection Criteria

A cross section of schools were selected to highlight secondary charter schools successfully meeting the needs of traditionally underserved populations of students (e.g., low income, special education, African-American and Latino students), with strong high school programs serving a range of grade configurations (e.g., 9–12, 5–12, 7–12) and in a range of geographic locations (i.e., seven states including rural, urban and suburban schools), all making academic achievement gains. Schools were selected based on the following criteria, prioritized by the advisory group as key issues for consideration.

DEMOGRAPHIC CRITERIA

Many schools demonstrated that they were working hard to educate students who have been largely underserved in traditional public schools. The schools that were selected had two or more of: 40 percent or more free and reduced-price lunch, 40 percent or more African-American and Hispanic students, 20 percent or more special education students, or rural location.

ACHIEVEMENT CRITERIA

Schools selected met AYP targets for at least two consecutive years, including the most recent year for which data were available. Researchers looked for schools that scored at least a baseline of the 50th percentile in math or reading on state standardized tests with demonstrated evidence of continued improvement over several years, or schools that were consistently high achieving in the 90th percentile range annually. Data from state Web sites and SchoolMatters.com provided achievement information.

ACHIEVEMENT GAP CRITERIA

Researchers looked for additional evidence that schools were making progress eliminating achievement gaps. A school was considered to be narrowing the achievement gaps if, internally, gaps among students of different races and socioeconomic backgrounds were closing over time or if the school was demonstrating higher achievement for low-income, minority, or special education students in comparison with a similar population of students in its local district public schools.

Study Framework and Data Collection

A conceptual framework was developed to guide the study of the selected sites. While many things happen at a busy school site, each case study needed to focus on those practices most likely to contribute to a school's success. The framework used in this study was an adaptation of the framework used in the previous guide on charter schools in this Innovations in Education series,²⁰ which was derived from the research literature on charter schools and on organizational effectiveness. The major categories in the framework were mission-driven school, school operations and educational program, external partnerships, and governing for accountability. The framework for this study of charter high schools additionally highlighted issues of particular salience in secondary schools, for example, issues related to transitions both into the school from the lower grade levels and out of the school to college or work. These key secondary issues were determined through a review of the high school reform literature

and the input of the researchers on the project's advisory group. Sites also offered their own views of the key factors in their success, which constituted additional input to the analysis.

A site visit was conducted at each school to gather the information for this guide. Each site visit lasted for one or two days and included informal observations throughout the school, attendance at events, and interviews. The primary source of data was interviews with a variety of role groups, including students, parents, teachers, board members, administrators, and school partners. An interview protocol was developed based on the study framework and adapted to each role group. That is, separate but overlapping sets of questions were developed for teachers, administrators, parents, etc. Most interviews were tape-recorded with key interviews later transcribed for more detailed analysis.

Documents from each school served as an additional source of information. Collected during the site visit, these documents included such items as school schedules, sample assessments, lesson plan forms, teacher planning protocols, newsletters, application forms, brochures, charter plans, and report cards. Principals and executive directors also completed a standard form to facilitate consistent compiling of school demographic and outcome information.

Analysis and Reporting

A case report was written about each site, and reviewed by site administrators for accuracy. From these case reports, artifacts, and transcripts of interviews, the project team identified common themes that contributed to success across

the sites. This cross-site analysis built on both the research literature as reflected in the study scope and also emerging patterns in the data.

This descriptive research process suggests promising practices—ways to do things that other educators have found helpful, lessons they have learned—and practical “how-to” guidance. This is not the kind of experimental research that can yield valid causal claims about what works. Readers should judge for themselves the merits of these practices, based on their understanding of why they should work, how they fit the local context, and what happens when they actually try them. Also, readers should understand that these descriptions do not constitute an endorsement of specific practices or products.

Using the Guide

Ultimately, readers of this guide will need to select, adapt, and implement practices that meet their individual needs and contexts. Schools coming together in learning communities may continue the study, using the ideas and practices from these sites as a springboard for their own action research. In this way, a pool of promising practices will grow, and schools can support each other in implementation and learning.



APPENDIX B

Resources

Charter Schools

The U.S. Charter Schools Web site provides a wide range of information and links to resources to guide charter schools in every phase of their development—from start-up to expansion, to renewal. The site includes a national calendar of events and a community-exchange feature.

<http://www.uscharterschools.org>

The Education Commission of the States includes both charter schools and charter districts as issue topics on its Web site. The site includes a searchable database on high school research and high school policy topics, including closing the achievement gap.

<http://www.ecs.org>

Based at the Center on Reinventing Public Education, the National Charter School Research Project is developing a database of studies on charter school achievement and collecting charter school data from the states. This project is generating several research studies, focusing on student achievement in charter schools and on building capacity to scale-up charter schools.

<http://www.crpe.org>

Education/Evolving is a Minnesota organization working to help create and sustain an “open sector” in public education—a “space” in public education for new schools that are started from scratch by teachers, parents, community organizations, and multi-school networks. Change strategies including fiscal, organizational, and policy changes are highlighted on this Web site.

<http://educationevolving.org>

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Web site provides a variety of online publications related to charter school development, policies, and performance, a charter blog, and a database for comparing charter school policies.

<http://www.publiccharters.org>

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation provides links to major studies and to over 50 other organizations’ Web sites in the area of charter schools and choice.

<http://www.edexcellence.net>

The Center for Education Reform provides up-to-date reports on charter schools and choice activity around the country. The Web site also links to “fast facts” and resources designed with parents in mind. A searchable database identifies resources and charter schools in each state.

<http://www.edreform.com>

The Office of Innovation and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education operates the Public Charter Schools Program, which supports the planning, development and initial implementation of charter schools. Other grants target support for charter school facilities.

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/charter/index.html>



Achievement Gap

The Education Trust Web site provides reports, resources, data, and policy information about the achievement gap.

<http://www2.edtrust.org/edtrust>

SchoolMatters is a Web site by Standard & Poor's that provides national-, state-, district-, and school-level information about school demographics and student achievement. It includes a search tool to identify charter schools and another tool to compare their data to those of other district and state schools.

<http://www.schoolmatters.com>

High School Reform

The National Conference of State Legislatures Web site contains links to information and a tool kit for legislators about high school reform policy, research, and recommendations to improve high schools.

<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/HSReform.htm>

The National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) provides information on high school improvement for states, districts, and regional comprehensive centers. Research on high school improvement is available from this site as well as a map of regional comprehensive centers and contact information for technical assistance liaisons.

<http://www.betterhighschools.org>

Comprehensive School Reform

This Web site contains information and a clearinghouse of resources compiled by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory regarding comprehensive school reform.

<http://www.ncrel.org/csri>

The National High School Alliance is a partnership of nearly 50 organizations working on high school youth advancement issues. This Web site includes links to reports about high school reform.

<http://www.hsalliance.org>

Based at Stanford University, the School Redesign Network Web site provides resources and information about research on small schools and redesign of schools into small learning communities. The site also provides links to organizations that support school redesign.

<http://www.schoolredesign.net/srn>

EdVisions, an intermediary organization that emerged from the development of the Minnesota New Country School, works with communities to develop effective small schools that are teacher-led and that primarily use project-based learning to help students prepare for success in college and other post-secondary efforts.

<http://www.edvisions.com>

Notes

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