Making School Completion Integral to School Purpose & Design

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For Presentation at the Conference on:

**Dropouts in America:
How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention
and prevention?**

In 1992 and 1993, the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and its New York City affiliate, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), collaborated with the New York City Board of Education (BOE) on the Coalition Campus Schools Project (CCSP), which was co-directed by Deborah Meier and Dr. Marcia Brevot. The intent of the CCS Project was two-fold, to pilot a model for transforming the large urban comprehensive high school, which was failing students at ever higher rates, and to create a new model of secondary school education which would enable its under-served students to succeed. The BOE decided to phase out two of its lowest performing, highest dropout rate high schools: Manhattan's Julia Richman HS, which in 1992 had a four-year graduation rate of 36.9%, and the Bronx's James Monroe, which in 1992 had a 23% graduation rate. At the same time the Coalition created 11 new high schools in separate spaces. In the first cohort they created the Coalition School for Social Change, Landmark HS, Manhattan International HS, Manhattan Village Academy, Vanguard HS , and the Legacy High School for Integrated Studies (which withdrew from the Project prior to this study); in the second cohort, Bronx Coalition Community School for Technology, Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom HS, the New School for Arts & Science, Wings Academy, and Brooklyn International HS. Now eight years later, serving students demographically comparable to those who attended the schools that were closed, the new schools' 4-year graduation rates are substantially higher and their dropout rates substantially lower than Richman's and Monroe's. Eight schools remain in external spaces and three are located in the buildings of the closed high schools, which are now educational complexes housing multiple schools.

BOE officials describe the student admissions process to the CCSP schools as an ambiguous hybrid of the Optional Education and zoned admissions plans. The schools and the

BOE computer each select 50% of applicants with the reading level distribution of 16 % both above and below grade level and 68% on grade level. (As indicated by the statistics on entering students' reading scores in Table 1 on page 6, the reading level distribution formula is not operative.) Preference is given to applicants residing in the zone of the high schools replaced by the Project schools. The BOE assigns additional zoned students at the beginning of the school year. This means that CCSP schools select no more than 50% of their students.

Without changing the demographic nature of the student population (see Table 1), the Coalition Campus schools improve graduation rates and lower drop rates by making school completion integral to their purpose and design. In this paper, we look at the how the schools integrate school completion into their purpose and design; what practices make the greatest difference; and how the CCSP design responds to issues of grade retention and "over-age" graduation. We have organized the paper into six sections: 1) introduction, 2) methodology, 3) school and student outcomes, 4) how school completion is integral to school purpose and design, 5) practices that make the greatest difference, and 6) conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to address the following research questions: 1) what difference does the CCE/CCS Project appear to make in terms of student outcomes and 2) What organizational and pedagogical practices appear to affect student outcomes. We used three primary data collection methods to address these questions: 1) semi-structured individual or group interviews with students, teachers, and school and BOE administrators; 2) observations of classrooms, schools, staff meetings, and network meetings; and 3) review of student, teacher, school, BOE, and project documents such as samples of student portfolios and transcripts, curriculum, schedules, meeting notes, e-mail exchanges, and

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BOE and school reports on student outcomes. Principals selected the teachers and students whom we interviewed. Students interviewed reflected an academic cross-section of their school and teachers interviewed and observed represented a range of grade levels and experience. All participated voluntarily.

We conducted a total of 86 interviews with 8 complex administrators, 10 school administrators from 9 schools, 28 teachers from 7 schools, 31 students from 7 schools, and 4 BOE officials. We observed 15 classes in 6 schools, 14 portfolio presentations in 6 schools, 7 faculty meetings at 5 schools, and 6 network meetings. Data collection occurred from July 1997 through November 1998. One school chose not to participate in the research. Another school (Legacy) was not included in the research because it had dropped out of the project.

We coded and triangulated the multiple sources of data according to organizational and pedagogical practices significant to school continuance and analyzed the data from the evidence assembled from this category. Themes emerging from the data were integrated into the narrative. For example, the themes of student-teacher bonds and small size schools and classes, which emerged from the data, are integrated into the paper. Names of school faculty members are used in conjunction with their statements only where permission was granted.

SCHOOL & STUDENT OUTCOMES

In order to understand the effects of the CCSP on student academic and social outcomes, we primarily used school level data widely available from New York City Board of Education Annual School Report Cards. Table 1 summarizes our findings. We found that on average, that the Project schools serve a student population that is less well prepared and more economically stressed and of color than the New York City public schools on average. At the Project schools, 93% of the students are of color, 78% receive free and reduced price lunch and only 35.3% enter

9th grade reading at or above norms. In comparison, 84.2% of New York City high school students are of color, 44.2% receive free and reduced price lunch and 50% enter 9th grade reading at or above grade level. Despite these differences, students in CCSP schools attend school at the same frequency as NYC high school students as a whole (87%), graduate at a higher rate (52.3% compared with 50%), are much less like to drop-out[1] (10% compared to 18%), and are more likely to remain enrolled in school if they are unable to complete high school during a four year period (38% for CCSP schools, 32% NYC average). Students in the CCSP also attend college at a significantly higher rate (74.5%) than the NYC schools overall (58.1%).

Student outcomes at CCSP schools compared to the schools they replaced, Julia Richman and James Monroe, are even more impressive. CCSP schools cut the pre-closing drop out rate in half. Their four-year graduation rate is twice that of pre-closing James Monroe.

Compared with existing, large, comprehensive, zoned and unrestructured (i.e., traditionally organized) high schools similar to those that were closed by the BOE, CCSP schools also demonstrate strong results. While serving comparably under-prepared students, CCSP students drop out at one-third the rate of students at Manhattan Comprehensive HS and Bronx Comprehensive HS. Graduates of Project schools are also much more likely to attend college than graduates of these two unrestructured, comprehensive zoned high schools (75% compared to 60.3% at Manhattan CHS and 39.4% at Bronx CHS). The four-year graduation rate at CCSP schools is twice that of Bronx CHS and significantly higher than Manhattan Comprehensive's (52% for CCSP schools compared to 34% at Manhattan CHS). Students who do not graduate within a four year period are more likely to stay in school if they are enrolled at CCSP schools (38%) compared to Manhattan CHS (33%), though they are slightly less likely to

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1 A student is considered a dropout when s/he leaves school and does not enroll in another school or GED Program.

stay in school compared to students at Bronx CHS (42%). Graduates of Project schools are also much more likely to attend college than graduates of these two unrestructured, comprehensive zoned high schools (75% compared to 60% at Manhattan CHS and 39% at Bronx CHS).

Finally, the CCSP schools demonstrate impressive student outcomes in relation to other BOE reform projects that also phased out existing failing high schools and replaced them with new small schools. Although CCSP schools serve students who are less prepared and more economically disadvantaged, their daily attendance rates are comparable to "other project" schools. The 4-year graduation rate is higher in the CCSP than in two of the three other projects. The "A" Project high schools' graduation rate is somewhat higher than CCSP, but its poverty index is significantly lower and the average student enters with a significantly higher reading score. The CCSP schools' college admissions rate is also higher than at two of the other reform projects. The third, "D," has a higher college admission but a lower graduation rate.

Table 2 provides data on the highest level of math taken in CCSP schools. These data were gathered by examining the transcripts of twenty randomly selected students from the 1994-95 cohort during the 1997-98 school year. These figures reveal that a significant majority of students in CCSP take and pass math courses including, and more advanced than, algebra. Since algebra is considered a gatekeeper subject to higher level study and college enrollment, we consider these findings to be evidence of college preparation.

Table 1

Characteristics and Outcomes of CCSP compared to New York City Public Schools and Other Reform Efforts*

	% of 9th Graders reading at or above norms **	% Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch	% Minority	Average Daily Attendance	4-Year Graduation Rate	Drop Out Rate	Still Enrolled	College Admissions Rate
CCSP Average	35.3%	78%	93%	87%	52%	10%	38%	75%
NYC Average	50%	44.2%	84.2%	87%	50%	18%	32%	58.1%
Other Reforms***								
"A" HS	51%	21.3%	99%	89%	60%	9%	31%	65%
"B" HS	51.2%	72%	99%	86%	43%	18%	39%	43%
"D" HS	41%	38%	99%	88%	38%	29%	33%	79%
Julia Richman HS (pre-closing, 1992-93)	N/A	32.3%	96.4%	72.2%	37%	24%	23%	N/A
James Monroe HS (pre-closing, 1993-94)	N/A	45%	100%	69%	23%	19%	30%	N/A
Unrestructured Comprehensive High Schools***								
Manhattan Comprehensive HS	35.4%	79.3%	99%	81%	34%	33%	33%	60.3%
Bronx Comprehensive HS	36.3%	36.3%	99.4%	75%	26%	32%	42%	39.4%

* All data gathered from 1998-1999 Annual School Report Cards except for college enrollment figures from MVA, Vanguard, and Fannie Lou Hamer which were unavailable on school report cards and were thus collected by contacting the schools directly.
** CCSP average does not include data from International schools as they are not available.
*** Names of schools are not used.

Table 2

Highest Level of math taken and passed as of 1998 by the 1994 entering cohort in CCSP schools*

N=96	Frequency	Percent
Algebra	28	29.2%
Pre-Calculus	25	26%
Geometry	19	20%
Trigonometry	13	14%
Integrated Algebra/Geometry	9	9.4%
Pre-Algebra	2	2.1%

*Figures drawn from a random sample of twenty students from the 1994 entering cohort at Coalition School for Social Change, Landmark, Manhattan Village Academy, Vanguard, and Fannie Lou Hamer. Manhattan and Brooklyn International High Schools and Wings Academy did not participate in this aspect of the study.

HOW SCHOOL COMPLETION IS INTEGRAL TO SCHOOL PURPOSE AND DESIGN

The response of the Coalition Campus schools to the issue of high school dropout can be found in their understanding of the meaning of high school completion. They see high school completion not only as an significant rite of passage, an important gateway to the future, whether that future is post secondary education or the world of work, but also as a reflection of their effectiveness in getting students to use their mind well. They respond, therefore, not to the phenomenon of dropout but the long-term challenges of school completion and its multiple meanings. In particular, they respond by making high school completion integral to their conception and design of school as a caring and intellectual community, characterized by:

- Strong, trusting, personal bonds between students and faculty and strong faculty affiliation with the schools' educational vision;

- Close correspondence of curriculum, instruction, and graduation requirements all anchored to a common set of intellectual habits of mind;

- The coupling of intellectual press and support targeted to school completion;

- The preparation of students for a future beyond high school; and

- Self-organizing for continuous improvement.

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The possibilities for school completion and all that it means are embedded in these characteristics and the norms of practice they promote, which we now discuss.

Teacher-Student Bonds

Across the schools strong, trusting teacher-student bonds made possible by intense, intimate student-teacher relationships motivate and encourage unconfident students to achieve and complete school. As Vanguard social studies teacher, Nancy Gonzalez commented, "A lot of what takes place in our class and what [students] achieve is based on trust. If they feel safe and trust me they will go that extra mile."

A Vanguard student said: "My math-science teacher instilled drive in me to do good and not settle for less. He made me want to graduate high school. I was really motivated."

Another who chose Vanguard as an alternative to a restrictive special education setting, said, "I was bad all the way back from elementary and junior high school. I would have got lost in the system. I would have dropped out. I needed someone to be there to show they care about me for me to be motivated."

A Manhattan Village Academy student explained, "I was pregnant last year. The teachers were really behind me. I am still in school and I'm doing good in my classes. The teachers are really behind you here. They push you. They want you to graduate."

The easy access students have to these relationships provides them with opportunities to resolve personal and academic issues that, unattended, could be obstacles to school achievement and completion. "Every student has one or two teachers they can turn to for help. If you are struggling, you can go to them and they help," explained a Social Change HS student.

"Teachers give you their phone numbers," commented a Landmark student.

As a Manhattan Village Academy student who had to move out of her family's home

explained, student access to helpful teachers knows no term limits:

> Teachers helped me when I moved out of my parents' house. Even through the summer, the teachers were there for me. They taught me to be independent. They encouraged me a lot. They showed me that I could make it in life, that I have the potential to do what I want, that I can strive for what I want. They are there for me. Now they are helping me to get into college.

The organization of the schools into interdisciplinary teams of teachers and students provides the structure and opportunity for a small group of teachers to develop close relationships with a small group of students, to interact with them frequently and regularly and formally and informally, to know them well, and to leverage those relationships and that knowledge for higher levels of student performance and school completion. Teachers share their knowledge and collaborate on strategies to support student achievement, school completion and beyond. Strong trusting student-teacher bonds coupled with organizational structures such as advisories, which enable teachers to regularly monitor students' progress, and low student-teacher ratios, which enable teachers to provide individual attention to students facilitate the kind of in-your-face, caring-teacher nagging that gets students beyond their resistance to do the tasks and revisions of work necessary for achievement and school completion.

Teacher Affiliation with School Educational Vision

Since the tasks required for graduation demand particular teaching behaviors across subject areas, strong teacher affiliation with their school's educational vision promotes students' school completion. Teachers are expected to design curriculum that engages students and teach the skills they will have to demonstrate in order to graduate, such as the application of a common set of intellectual habits of mind. Teachers are expected to adapt their teaching to the learning needs of students, to expand their role beyond that of classroom instructor to include emotional and social support, and to devote the extra time (only sometimes compensated) required for the

portfolio process by which students graduate.

Across the schools, teachers demonstrate high levels of commitment to these demands. They take on multiple roles. Across content areas, they anchor their instruction in their school's intellectual habits of mind. They customize curriculum to engage students such as at Fannie Lou Hamer HS where, for example, in conjunction with reading *The Power Broker*, students take field trips into their own Bronx neighborhoods to investigate the effects of Robert Moses' policies on their communities. All teachers serve on students' graduation committees. They use a wide array of instructional strategies, which students perceive as efforts to engage them in the work. "Teachers work around the differences in how kids learn to help you complete your projects," commented a Vanguard student.

"T[eachers] take individual time to sit down with you, to give you practice stuff to do so you get a better understanding, so you don't get stuck. The teachers help you with whatever you need help in," explained a Manhattan Village Academy student. In all of the schools, students are cognizant of teachers coming early and staying late to help them.

The schools hire teachers according to a system-wide option contractually negotiated by the BOE and teachers union. The option waives teachers' seniority rights for schools that want to hire teachers with compatible values, pedagogy and role expectations. Teachers who do not work out can transfer to more suitable settings. This option facilitates schools' efforts to develop strong faculty affiliation with their educational mission.

Correspondence of Curriculum, Instruction, and Graduation Requirements

The close correspondence of the schools' curriculum, instruction, and portfolio-based performance assessment process, by which students are awarded a diploma, supports students' preparedness for school completion and beyond. (An agreement with the New York State

Education Department granted under the former commissioner waives the Carnegie unit system, Regents exams, and all but English and math Regents Competency Tests. Instead the schools use a customized performance assessment process to graduate students.) Beginning in the 9th grade, the schools' strong emphasis on reading, writing, revising, research, and extended projects develops the skills necessary for their graduation process and college success. Their classroom exhibitions in the various content areas rehearse them for the oral defenses they will mount before graduation committees. Classroom instruction also emphasizes those habits of work required for school success: perseverance, revision, time-management, proper preparation, and organization.

Across the schools curriculum organization corresponds to the ways students will be expected to organize projects for their portfolios. For example, students: problem solve to design a playground in mathematics or an amusement park in physics; engage in inquiry based on *essential questions* such as *Who is an American*; analyze controversial issues, as privacy in the US Constitution; and interpret literary works. In their classroom investigations, reports, and presentations students distill their data through the filter of their school's intellectual habits of mind; i.e., they demonstrate their capacity to weigh evidence, express knowledge of multiple perspectives, make connections, speculate on alternatives, and assess the value of phenomena. These habits of mind are also the criteria used by graduation committees to judge the depth and quality of students' knowledge and skills as demonstrated in their portfolios and oral defenses. The recurrence of these curricular and instructional patterns across content areas and through students' years in their school brings coherence, cohesion, and continuity to students' intellectual development. This systematic and systemic reinforcement helps students to effectively use the intellectual tools by which they will ultimately be judged ready for high school completion and

beyond. After a while, the practice they get in classes makes them pretty good at this stuff.

Intellectual Press and Support

Presenting students with rigorous, academic tasks that require time, thought, organization, analysis, revision, and persistence does not does not produce an automatic improvement in the quality of student work because students do not necessarily know how to do them. To ensure that students complete such tasks—which include their graduation portfolios— the schools couple intellectual press with and supports. By intellectual press we mean not only the challenging curricular tasks the schools present to all students across all content areas, but their persistent, systematic, and systemic demands on students to complete them. These demands are sustained by a school wide infrastructure of formal and informal supports and interventions that help students accomplish the tasks.

Formal interventions are structured into the organization of the schools. One variety includes mechanisms such as advisories, house, and family group that enable teachers and other adults to systematically monitor students' progress and provide individual help. One Fannie Lou Hamer HS student explained that teachers, "Push you. If you don't do what you're supposed to do, they are on you."

Said one Manhattan International student, "You learn to be responsible here."

Expanding the school day, week, and year is another structural intervention used by the schools, almost all of which make time available before and after-school for students to do their work and receive help to improve their performance. Some have Saturday programs. Bronx Coalition Community HS has a Saturday school, which was described by one faculty member as: "Three hours with peer tutoring and individual attention to help students complete portfolios."

Any of these programs as well as summer school helps students who have been retained

in a grade to complete never-started or unfinished tasks or revisions required for them to progress to the next grade or division. Several CCSP schools are organized into divisions that combine grades 9 and 10 and 11 and 12. In order to move along, students are required to satisfactorily complete required tasks, even though that may expand their time in school beyond four years. Most students graduate in four years, but some take up to six years. Because CCSP schools value students demonstrating that they use their mind well, as assessed, not by seat time, but by their standards and graduation process, o*ver-age* graduation is not problematic.

Another form of structural support is instructional. Students are taught the knowledge and skills that curriculum and graduation tasks will demand of them. For example, ninth grade students entering Landmark are taught immediately how to use the library so that they can use it for the research required for their courses and portfolios. Often, skills are taught in the context of actual projects the students produce. At Manhattan Village Academy, 10th grade students assigned to do a research paper are taught research skills—how to collect, organize, analyze, and present data. They are not left alone to chance or their own devices.

Informal interventions, those unscheduled and conducted on an individual, as-needed basis, capitalize on student-teacher attachments. Landmark's Winifred Patterson, a humanities teacher said, "Kids are looking for teachers' feedback on their work to improve it. The personal relationship—the conversation does this." In almost every interview, students connected teacher push to improving their motivation, effort, and work, to completing tasks, and to graduation. Since timing is crucial to the effectiveness of an intervention and the voluntarily contribution of extra time by teachers motivates students by making them feel deeply cared for, informal support is vital to students' progress and school completion. As overwhelming student testimony indicates, feeling cared for by teachers who also push them to learn can have powerful effects,

transforming marginal into distinguished performance and failure into achievement. By using a systemic and systematic approach with both formal and informal components that reaches all students, the schools can sustain their demands and ensure that intellectual press and the supports necessary for students to respond to it are distributed equitably, instead of idiosyncratically or unevenly, to students. By organizing for students' equal access to effective social, emotional, and learning supports, the schools expand the possibilities for all students to complete school.

Preparing for a Future

The schools also make completion meaningful by connecting it to students' future. They connect school completion to authentic, post-graduation possibilities by providing students with diverse external learning experiences and supports: students participate in diverse workplace internships; take college courses with college students on college campuses; make overnight visits to tour private and state colleges, where what college-life looks like and feels like can become real; attend college recruitment and financial planning events organized by their schools; and work intensively with staff members who guide their college application process. The graduation process focuses students on their future by requiring an autobiography portfolio in which students reflect on their accomplishments, struggles, and growth and develop a post-graduation plan, which they review and revise under the guidance of their advisor. These activities can give graduation a real life purpose, make it concretely meaningful, and transform despair, emptiness, anxieties, fantasies, and inchoate notions students may have about their future into concrete possibilities that are reality tested by their experiences and trusted adults who know them well. These experiences help to move students along to the end of one phase of their lives—high school graduation—and to the beginning of another.

Self-Organizing for Continuous Improvement

The schools are self-organizing, that is they "create and learn [their] way into the future" (Stacey, 1996, p. 10). Through a process of regular and intense communication in team and faculty meetings, they self-examine and self-monitor their various interacting components (such as curriculum, instruction, use of time, class organization, professional development, student performance etc.) in order to improve their behavior and the behavior of the system they comprise so that it works coherently and effectively toward students' school completion. In effect, they create a system of internal accountability. Instead of being rigidly bound by structure as is common in bureaucratically organized schools, they use structure, and they restructure, as a strategy to achieve particular goals, including those factors essential to students' school completion. What drives the self-organizing principle of the schools is students' learning, achievement, and assessment performances, including their graduation portfolios, i.e., factors that lead students to school completion.

We see a school "learning its way into the future" in Wings Academy's expansion of their two-year graduation portfolio process to four years, which was in response to learning that students needed more intense preparation to develop their graduation portfolios. They also increased student self-monitoring tasks and made the corresponding organizational and curricular changes. Similarly, when Brooklyn International staff learned that students did not understand the math for a physics project, explained principal Sara Newman: "We talked about it a lot and we decided that we'd add another class to our curriculum. We'd shorten the other classes from 75 minutes to 60 minutes and we'd use that time to have a class called *Support Class*."

PRACTICES THAT MAKE THE GREATEST DIFFERENCE

Researchers have identified a set of organizational and pedagogical practices that are

important for student achievement including: communal organization, personalization, professional community, school autonomy, teacher authority, academic press, authentic instruction, a common core curriculum, performance assessment, collective responsibility, and small school size (Wasley, et al., 2000; Lee & Smith, 1999; Gladden, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Ancess, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995; Newmann & Associates, 1996; Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Raywid, 1995; McLaughlin, 1994; Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993; and Sizer, 1992, 1984). We find that these practices also contribute to students' high school completion possibilities. However, we have identified five that make the greatest difference to school completion in the CCSP schools: small school size, small class size and low student-teacher ratio, intellectual habits of mind, graduation by portfolio-based performance assessment, and staffing.

Small School Size

Smallness is necessary for the schools to be caring and intellectual communities and to implement the conditions and practices that support school completion. The small size of the Project schools (300-375 students) makes intense relationships and strong trusting bonds between teachers and students over an extended period of time possible. These relationships become major arteries to school completion and beyond. Because teachers leverage them for student achievement, they are the schools' most powerful tool to get students to graduation.

As comments made by Fannie Lou Hamer Co-Director Nancy Mann reveal, small school size supports higher standards of student performance, intellectual press, and the assistance students need to respond to it:

> It is important to keep schools small in order to socialize students into taking on more rigorous academic demands. Portfolios motivate older students but the ninth graders think it is torture. Teachers need to spend more time with students, which they do. But

that is wearing when you have a lot of kids.

As the Brooklyn International support class anecdote illustrates, it can be relatively uncomplicated and quick for small schools to make organizational changes that can improve students' access to knowledge and opportunities to learn. Small size makes self-organizing for improvement easier. Faculty can more easily and productively engage in intense whole school debate and communication, reflective dialogue, and collaborative knowledge building and apply their learnings to student achievement and school completion. Size, as Nancy Mann explains, affects the development of professional community and the cohesion of intellectual community:

> If you grow too big, you lose some of the intellectual intent. You're not building an intellectual base among the teachers or an intellectual field where the teachers are working. You're just constantly introducing the same concept over and over, and the concept itself doesn't particularly grow, because it doesn't have a deep enough medium to do it in.

Small Class Size and Low Student-Teacher Ratio

At the CCSP schools, small size classes and the low student-teacher ratio—about 20 to 1—are intellectual equity strategies. They ensure that diverse students have equal access to knowledge and opportunities to learn, thereby making graduation more attainable to all. Teachers can teach a more challenging curriculum to more needy students, thereby providing them with more equitable access to kind of the demanding tasks that enhances both their graduation and post-graduation possibilities. Vanguard's Linda Brown, who has taught for 22 years, explains:

> Small size means I can do a literature seminar with the bottom 20% of kids in the city. I can have them write short essays on works like, *Of Mice and Men.* Kids who didn't read are reading books like *Jane Eyre* to write their essay. We can work with them during lunch. You find out who can't read, type, etc. These are the kids who would sit in the back of the room, be in the bathroom, and would deliberately get lost. You couldn't do this work if you had 150 kids. I know dedicated teachers in big schools who teach 150 kids. They can't do this.

A Vanguard history teacher explained that with classes, teachers can teach to greater depth and higher levels by appealing to students' diverse interests and personalizing the challenges of his rigorous demands, challenges they will confront in the graduation portfolio process:

> I can use in-depth approaches and assign college level research projects. We teach students research skills and essay skills so that they can do a minimum 20-page research paper in history. I give them internal motivation to come up against the challenge. They choose the topic. We develop their topic together. We develop an angle to the topic. This gets them into the different sides of the topic. They are stimulated and internally motivated because it is something they want to learn.

With student-teacher ratios low and classes small, teachers have time to give students enough individual attention to develop the skills, knowledge, and understandings needed to meet graduation standards. They know students and their work well. As a Landmark student put it, teachers know "whether you got what you were supposed to get and then how to help you."

Habits of Mind

The habits of mind are the schools' intellectual compass; they unify the schools and keep them on course as intellectual communities. They support students' high school completion by providing clear expectations and coherence to what is often a fragmented experience. They concretize for students what it means to use their mind well: that students demonstrate that they are in the habit of thinking, analyzing, and making meaning in a particular way, by weighing evidence, by expressing awareness of diverse points of view, by seeing how things are connected, by imagining other possibilities, and by assessing the social and personal value of things. From students' beginning projects to their graduation portfolios and presentations, these habits of mind are the common framework by which their intellectual progress and achievement are assessed and their readiness for graduation judged. The habits of mind provide continuity in

curriculum and assessment: by the time students are presenting their graduation portfolios, they will have been applying their school's habits of mind across the academic disciplines for the entire time they have been there. In addition to assessing students' intellectual behavior as it appears in classroom interactions, work products, portfolios, and presentations, faculty use the habits of mind as their common lens, common language, common set of values—i.e., common ground—for analyzing their curriculum and developing norms of practice targeted to achieving their school's goals. Beyond their value for high school graduation, these particular habits of mind have personal appeal because they are appropriate and applicable analytic lenses for college and life.

Portfolio-Based Performance Assessment

The portfolio graduation process supports high school completion in ways similar to the habits of mind. It provides an intellectual framework for students to demonstrate in multiple and complex ways that they have met their school's standards for graduation and it also concretizes the school's expectations. This system also provides students with intense, highly personalized teacher support and guidance. It builds students' ownership and confidence in their intellectual capital by integrating multiple opportunities for self-correction and -improvement. Students see themselves getting smarter. Although more challenging, the portfolio process is highly consistent with students' prior classroom experiences and is both a learning and assessment experience.

Through the portfolio experience, students accumulate evidence about their understandings and capacities. They find that they can develop fluency and expertise in academic areas. When they demonstrate in depth knowledge, competent skills, and that they use their mind well, they learn that they can persuade a committee representing their school community to grant them a high school diploma. Often, they discover that they can succeed

beyond what they might have imagined. The portfolio process raises students' standards for their performance and expectations for their future. Invariably, students report that the portfolio process is the most powerful learning experience they have had at their school. These students' comments are typical: "You get to do most of the thinking when you work with your portfolio. You have to explain in detail how to do something, or why something is important, so that someone who doesn't know it can really understand it;" and "Portfolios make us show what we know, explain what we learned."

Staffing

A faithful execution of the schools' ideas and values about school completion and beyond depends on staff who are committed, or at least favorably disposed, to taking on the perspectives, roles and responsibilities such implementation demands. Having the will, school staff must then possess the individual and collective capacity to transform these ideas and values into an organization and practices that effectively transport students to school completion and beyond. That requires hiring the right people, organizing them to have the desired effects on students and each other, providing time and resources for professional development to develop their capacity for quality practice, and supporting professional community so that their collective knowledge, skills, and practice sustain the school as a caring and intellectual community.

As discussed earlier, the school-based option teacher-hiring plan gives the schools the opportunity to hire teachers with compatible values and ideas. The organization of teachers into interdisciplinary teams provides them with opportunities for collaborative planning, problem solving, and sharing to build their skills. Cross team interactions such as participation on student graduation committees and curriculum committees broadens the possibilities for sharing new knowledge and effective practice. Whole staff activities such as reviews and revisions of the

graduation process build common understandings and clarify standards of practice, helping teachers to fine tune their teaching. All of these activities strengthen the staff as professional community and illuminate the nature and cost of their commitment to school completion and beyond and make continuous recommitment possible.

CONCLUSIONS

By correlating their values, their instructional, curricular, relational, and professional practices, and their organizational behavior to the assessment process by which students graduate, the Coalition Campus schools make completion integral to their purpose and design. They root school completion in their culture. From the beginning, students learn about the demands, activities, and rituals that comprise the journey to graduation—the reading habits, writing and research skills, inquiry and problem solving, reports and projects, habits of mind, exhibitions, portfolio development, revisions, oral defenses, performance standards etc. They learn from their older schoolmates, their peers, teachers, and experiences in classrooms and on the graduation committees of their counterparts. Students' participation in the school community, along with their omnipresent battles with resistance, anxiety, low confidence, and poor work habits that many wage (in collaboration with persistent teachers), settles the majority of them into the school culture, which, we assert is the most powerful force in achieving graduation. Participation in the school culture makes students "graduatable." And the more that students are "graduatable," the more they graduate, the more graduation becomes a norm of the peer culture, with the result that more students do what they have to do to graduate because that's the way life is in their schools.

There are a number of important issues this paper does not address that are worthy of examination to further illuminate dropout intervention and prevention. These include student

transfers to other high schools, local and state policy contexts, and the relationship between pedagogical practices and graduation rates across diverse models of comparable high schools restructured to improve graduation rates. This study does not address student transfers to other schools because no BOE or State Education Department data are available—or perhaps even exist—on individual school student transfers. An examination of student transfers would provide important understandings of the limitations of the CCSP and identify areas for their reflection.

Local and state policy contexts have been critical to the CCSP. Over the course of the Project there have been two governors from opposing political parties, two mayors from opposing political parties, two state education commissioners, three BOE presidents, four BOE chancellors, four sets of standards, three assessment systems, three sets of requirements for high school graduation, and legislation that recentralized the governance of the NYC school system. Unsurprisingly, there has been dramatic change in the policy environment.

Although all of the BOE chancellors have actively supported the CCSP graduation process, the New York State policy that supported variation in local assessments, that brought about the CCSP, has given way to one that unilaterally mandates standardized examinations for students' high school graduation. Current state policy makes the CCSP's future uncertain. The longitudinal policy context raises questions that are important to examine. For example, how do these policy changes affect the CCSP schools and what is the consequence to students? What are the broader consequences of policy inconsistency on effective innovations, the students they serve, and the professional work force? What is the nature of state education agencies' accountability to commitments made by prior administrations to innovative schools and to their student, professional, and parent communities, and what are the consequences? How does what

constitutes educational quality across economically, racially, and linguistically diverse communities change and what are the implications of the findings?

More studies of school completion in "restructured" schools also would be valuable. Studies that compare school organization and pedagogy of different models with comparable student populations and contexts would provide additional knowledge about those factors that make significant differences in school completion. Lastly, we believe that studies on diverse, effective exemplars would provide a knowledge base for exploring the challenges of scaling up so that opportunities for high school graduation and beyond, such as those enjoyed by CCSP students, are more widely accessible.

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