school must be placing greater reliance on some of the other strategies Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), and Steele and Aronson (1998) recommend, like communicating high expectations, building trust between staff and students, and engaging families and the community.

School Culture

"A Family." Almost universally the members of the NHCS community speak of the school as a family. The headmaster says of NHCS, "We're accountable to each other, because Neighborhood House really operates as a family." As mentioned earlier, when addressing the benefits of the school's small size the middle school dean comments, "When anybody asks me this question I always talk about family because I think it really does feel like a family community." A teacher says of NHCS, "I would say that it's [NHCS is] like one big family, that would be the first thing that would come to my mind. Everyone who works here is very much dedicated to the school and to the students." Another teacher contrasts the family-style student-teacher relationships at NHCS with the more distant relationships in district school contexts, saying of a common student interaction:

> And it just amazes me at the fact that right before you came to see me, I sent you out of my class because you were being so disrespectful! And now you're coming back and you're apologizing and you want me to listen to what you have to say. That's the type of relationship you have in a family. You do things, you apologize . . . and the kids actually apologize for what they've done. Which I think in a regular public school, they kind of see the teacher as this person in front of the classroom, like [another teacher] said, who doesn't understand them, does not want to relate to or talk to outside of the classroom.

Similarly, a parent describes how school staff responded to a crisis in her family and contrasts the family-style home-school relationships with what takes place at other schools: "it's more of a family focus that I like here. Every day they called me to see how me and my daughter was doing, my son was doing, so it was like the school took. . . anything happening in your family, they take you on as family. It's not like some Boston Public Schools." The family-style environment at NHCS undoubtedly promotes the strong relationships between teachers and students that Darling-Hammond (1997) and Steele (1992) identify as important to teachers ability to understand and meet students' needs.

All constituencies emphasize the critical role of the family learning contract and family involvement initiatives in the culture of the school. The Headmaster explains, "I think there's a real sense of accountability among the students. They really understand why they are here. I think they're accountable to their parents and because of our family learning contract, I think that also helps parents understand the mission of the Neighborhood House Charter School..." NHCS engages in robust parent outreach efforts including workshops for families on topics ranging from effective parenting strategies to how best to help their children with homework, counseling services for students and families provided for free through a partnership with Family Services of Greater Boston, monthly Parent Council meetings which involve the participating families in various projects including fundraising, and high school placement counseling. According to the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, "A school based parent center offers valuable resources and services ranging from parenting courses on child behavior management to medical service referrals. Parents can request and receive translations

services, get help with domestic issues, or help with children going on medication" (p. 6).

The school social worker who supervises the Parent Center was interviewed by the

NHCS 2004 Inspection Team and reported that "the school has conducted a variety of

workshops for parents that include teaching them effective parenting skills as well as

strategies for providing effective homework help" (p. 20). The family environment

NHCS seeks to cultivate is reflected in parents' enthusiasm for the Parent Center. For

example, according to the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, parents "like the fact that they

can still use the Parent Center as a resource even after their children have graduated from

NHCS. By doing this, NHCS has become a community resource for these parents." (p.

21) One parent describes the school's outreach to parents as follows:

> But I find that what the school does is educate the parent how to become
> involved in the child's education through different meetings that you have
> with the child and the teacher, the phone calls that they get--that we get--
> every week, this is of course for middle school. Every week we get a
> phone call and I think that's wonderful because that's one way that the
> parent knows just what's going on with their child each week, as opposed
> to some schools who will do it every time there's the end of a marking
> period and you don't find out that your child is doing terrible until after the
> grades have been posted.

One Board member comments on parent outreach, "There's parent counseling, there's a

parent center, if there's something going on with a particular child, they're over there at

the parent's house trying to get involved with the problem and nip it in the bud right

away." Interestingly, both school leaders emphasized the presence of a five hour parent

volunteer hours requirement, but acknowledged that the school has not yet succeeding in

achieving full participation in the volunteer requirement.

A teacher links the frequency of home-school communication to families'

investment in partnering with teachers to support improved academic performance:

"when parents have someone that's calling their house every week about their child not

doing their homework, or their child doing homework... It makes them feel like, 'Oh well, second quarter grades are out and my child hasn't improved. I know that I receive these phone calls every week saying that my child's not doing their homework. What am I doing to help rectify that?'" The middle school dean explains, "Well, for one thing, we report out to parents eight times a year on students' academic progress. So they have quarterly grades and then they have mid-quarter updates, so pretty much every four to five weeks you're getting feedback." Ogbu and Simons (1998) advocate this kind of consistent personal communication by school staff with parents as a way to both concretely support parents in helping their children achieve and to promote greater trust in the school among students' families. NHCS also creates opportunities for parents to engage directly with the school's academic programming. According to the NHCS 2004 Renewal Inspection Report, "The math taskforce has sponsored events such as Mega Math Mania and Jammin' Math Jamboree as a way of getting parents involved in building their children's math skills" (p. 18). Describing the extent of collaboration between NHCS and parents, one parent notes, "If they find out that something is going on with your child, they'll call you. And I've had a personal experience with that, where they saw something that was developing--not happening--but it was developing. I got a call saying, 'You need to check out what's going on because something's going to happen.'" Another parent speculates that the school's family involvement initiatives may benefit from the school serving grades K-8; she notes "if you come elementary school, by the time you get to the middle school you know what the expectations are, that there's a high emphasis and value on parent expectation, versus if you come in maybe later and don't kind of catch that culture, or come in in the middle school."

Staff-Student Relationships. The sense of family at NHCS extends to the relationships between staff and students. The middle school dean explains:

> I think as much as our kids grump about, 'I don't want to be in this
> school,' or 'This school is mean or strict,' or whatever, the number of 8th
> graders who get up at graduation and say, 'This really . . . thank you for all
> the times that you pushed me to do this and not giving up on me, or
> enforcing this.' The number of parents who say those kinds of things, the
> number of graduates who come back and just hang around because it's like
> a home to them, also says a lot.

A teacher contrasts the kinds of relationships she has with students at NHCS with the relationships she was able to have in a previous teaching position: "I taught in a public school in New York. I'm the type of person who wants to be able to go out and throw the football around or kick a soccer ball around. In public schools you can't really do that because it's frowned upon, What are you doing? But here it's nice to be able to go out and kick a soccer ball around and go and just talk to a kid outside the school. It's definitely— [as another teacher] said--it's definitely a family atmosphere here." A Board member marvels at the closeness of the student-teacher relationships at NHCS, "The people we have, the teachers we have teaching these students are so involved with them as people, it's absolutely incredible." Darling-Hammond (1997) argues that such close relationships can contribute directly to student learning because teachers who know their students well can adapt their instruction to be responsive to each student's unique strengths and weaknesses.

Student Ownership. A key finding of the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report was, "The classroom environment at the Neighborhood House Charter School encourages students to take ownership of their learning and provides them with opportunities to demonstrate their subject area knowledge" (p. 16). Describing the academic culture in the NHCS classrooms, the 2004 NHCS Inspection Team wrote that students:

> ...understand that they are a part of a community of learners. This was evident in the middle school where students demonstrated the ability to provide each other with constructive feedback about how they can improve their work. By helping each other to successfully complete their assignments, students played a role in making the classroom more student-centered and minimized their need for constant teacher feedback (p. 16).

In addition, the NHCS 2004 Inspection Report describes an annual goal setting activity which "gives students the chance to have a say about the things that *they* would like to accomplish during the school year. Parents clearly stated that they see value in this activity because it helps students to 'feel in control of their destiny'" (NHCS 2004 Inspection Report, p. 16). The middle school dean describes the high school placement process as a vehicle for reinforcing student responsibility for their academic careers; she explains that the NHCS staff talks with students about "where they're going to go and what opportunities are going to be available to them based on what their achievement is like. Both, so that we can make better matches and not waste time in the application process, but also so we can create a culture of, 'Hey, I want to strive for that.'"

Celebrating Achievement. Rewarding and celebrating achievement also plays an important role in the NHCS culture, just as Perry (2003) would advocate. The NHCS 2004 Inspection Report reinforces this point: "Neighborhood House Charter School staff tries to reinforce students' ownership of their learning by constantly recognizing them for their academic work and contribution to the larger NHCS community. Teachers do this by displaying students' work throughout the building and using the 'Student Spotlight' at Town Meetings to recognize and honor those students who have achieved or continue to strive for success at NHCS." (p. 17) NHCS, like the pre-*Brown* segregated African-American schools Perry (2003) describes, uses the mechanism of an all-school assembly to promote student identification with achievement and affirm values critical to school

success. The middle school dean explains the privileges that come with the honor roll:

"Our honor roll you have to have 80s or above in all your classes, and for high honors,

you have to have 90s or above. And those kids have certain privileges: They get to dress

down every Friday, they don't have to serve homework detention." In addition, the 2004

NHCS Inspection Report describes the NHCS middle school's consistent use of a school-

wide management system based on merits and demerits. A parent explains:

> they get demerits and they get merits. When you get demerits, then you
> got to . . . there's a punishment. You have to stay after school. But if you
> get merits, you can go . . . you know, go to the store, and you can wear
> whatever you want, those kinds of things. So it kind of motivates the child
> to know that if they do what they're supposed to do, then they're going to
> get a reward for it. And if they keep doing that, they'll realize, 'If I keep
> doing the right thing, it's going to work for me. And if I do the wrong
> thing, it's not going to work for me.' And that's something that students,
> children need to know.

Another parent cited the school's initiatives to connect the middle school and lower

school as an important privilege for students as they grow. She explained that her son

mentored a kindergarten student and it "was a great experience for him, and not often do

you see a school with children, middle school and lower school, having the middle school

interact with the lower school to show them an example so that they lower school can

look forward to." A Board member described the school's Friday assemblies as having

similar benefits, "This school, all eight grades, meet as a group on Friday mornings,

which further develops the community spirit. So when you're at the school and come as a

young kid, you know you're part of a very special community as you work your way up,

and the older kids don't taunt or harass the smaller kids, they in fact help the smaller kids.

There's no competition here between grades. Everyone thinks of themselves as being part

of a big family or a big community." Ogbu and Simons (1998) and Perry (2003) argue

that role models of African-American achievement can be a powerful tool to combat the

risk of disidentification from school – at NHCS, middle school students are used as just such a model for lower school students through both formal mentoring relationships and the whole-school assemblies.

Community Partnerships. Consistent with the vision of the founders, community partnerships, a full range of social services, and diverse extracurricular activities remain central components of the NHCS educational program. According to its report, the 2004 NHCS Inspection Team "concluded that through its various community partnerships, NHCS has been able to successfully implement an effective full service model that enables its staff to foster and monitor students' progress towards key academic and emotional developmental milestones that are instrumental in their ability to achieve 'success anywhere'" (p.21). Describing the core curriculum, a Board member explains "There's a focus that Arts education needs to be here. We have this unique academic program called "The Kids Lab" which brings Science and Art together." The 2006 NHCS Annual Report describes the school's extensive extracurricular offerings, noting "In the middle school, in addition to their music and art classes, students choose between a variety of electives including Instrumental, Visual Art, and Knitting." The 2006 NHCS Annual Report also describes the range of initiatives comprising the full-service model including:

- Educational and Recreational Programs and Services: test preparation, basketball, high school placement counseling, various community partnerships to provide after school and summer opportunities, tutoring and mentoring initiatives with college students

- School Health Care Services and Partnerships: nursing services through community-based health centers, hearing and vision screening through an area hospital

- In-School Counseling and Referrals to Outside Agencies: in-school therapy, violence prevention programming, grief counseling

Continuous Improvement. A final important feature of the NHCS culture is a commitment to continuous improvement. Despite the school's strong academic performance and the recognition the school has received, both the headmaster and middle school dean emphasize their sense that there is much work to be done to strengthen the school and both talking about the need to continue raising the percentage of students who achieve proficient or advanced on the MCAS. The headmaster emphasizes that NHCS is at a stage where it must now ask as a community how it can bridge the gap with more affluent schools:

> Is the gap narrowing between Roxbury Prep, Neighborhood House, APR and Andover schools and Newton schools? That's where we're narrowing the gap. So we have got to take a broader look at that. I think our look is too narrow. We're looking at just how we're doing within Boston, being the best Boston school. You've got to start looking outside that, especially once you start getting into your second and third charter.

Trustees echo the headmaster's approach. In describing how the school is accountable for its performance, a Board member explains:

> I can start by saying a little more than four years ago we had a strategic plan committee on the Board that hammered out a strategic plan and that included goals and objectives for the schools and how we were going to measure our performance against those. I can say that with the exception of maybe one or two academic goals, we have discussed and met all of the goals and objectives in that strategic plan. It's probably now time to do another one.

Another trustee adds:

> I think school, faculty, administration and Board of Trustees has set a very high expectation for the school. So we could, for example, just benchmark ourselves against other urban school and say, 'OK we're outperforming,' but we don't. Because we have this "succeed anywhere" motto and we have this larger mission, so we push ourselves to say, 'How are we looking compared to these other populations?'

The middle school dean summarizes the task of shepherding the school's

evolution by saying "It's just a process of continual improvement and continual

growth."

Summary

At Neighborhood House, the school's key constituencies consistently describe the

school as using its autonomy with respect to budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction,

and school culture to create a family environment that helps disadvantaged students to

gain access to greater opportunity. The trustees, school leaders, and staff cite bridging

the achievement gap as a central motivation for decision-making while emphasizing that

NHCS truly aspires to leave no child behind.

NHCS has used its autonomy with respect to its budget to maintain a small overall

enrollment and small classes, to invest in professional development aligned with the

school's approach to culture and instruction, and to support the school's full-service

model. The school's key constituencies emphasize that the budgetary decisions to be a

small school with small classes are responsible for creating a school culture characterized

by the close relationships between teacher and students Darling-Hammond (1997) and

Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) link with school success. In particular, the school

leaders and staff emphasize that – just as Miles (1995), Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine

(1996) and Achilles and Finn (1999) would predict – the small student loads per teacher

at NHCS translate into greater time for teachers to invest in planning, assessing, and coaching individual students. Extended learning time at NHCS, which facilitates extensive tutoring during and after school, provides more time on task which Davis and Thomas (1989) linked to improved student outcomes, but also reaffirms the cultural message that NHCS is a family in which those who struggle receive extra support. NHCS also invests in fostering close staff relationships. The school dedicates significant staff resources – including a half-day each week – to professional development that focuses on collaborative problem solving just as Darling-Hammond (1997), King and Newmann (2000), and Birman et al. (2000) would recommend. NHCS also invests in external professional development and consultants to support the school's specific academic goals. The school's decision to respond to concerns about student math performance with both the introduction of a new computation class for the 6th grade and professional development for the school's math teachers around equipping students to solve rigorous math problems reflects the organizational coherence Sebring and Bryk (2000) and Newmann et al. (2001) found effective in raising student achievement. NHCS's full-service model, including both in-school supports and complementary out-of-school services , not only exemplifies the kind of school and community-based organization collaboration Heath and McLaughlin (1994) propose, but also sends a cultural message of commitment to student success that may both combat the anxieties described by Steele(1992) and Steele and Aronson(1998) and reverse the doubt or cynicism about educational institutions that Ogbu and Simons(1998) see as worryingly common among low-income, African-American students.

NHCS has used its autonomy in recruiting, hiring, managing, and firing staff to screen for staff who are aligned with the school's family approach to education and high standards for achievement, to build a staff culture characterized by dedication to hard work and professional learning, and to select and retain a founding leader who serves as an inspirational father-figure within the school family and a middle school dean who serves as a true instructional coach. Comments from both the NHCS Renewal Inspection Report and NHCS parents suggest that NHCS has succeeded in recruiting a staff that is committed to NHCS's vision of reaching high standards through individualized attention and support. The combination of high expectations and concern for student well-being on the NHCS staff is consistent with the kind of teaching Ogbu and Simons (1998) believe is necessary to overcome disidentification with school among African-American students. Central to the NHCS screening process for high expectations is the notion that teachers with strong academic aptitude, as evidenced by the college they attended and by their writing, are more likely to provide academic rigor – a presumption perhaps supported by Ferguson's (1998a) finding of a link between teacher test scores and student performance. One indicator for the school's key constituencies, including teachers themselves, of the depth of teachers' devotion to their students is their willingness to work hard including staying late into the evening and coming in on the weekend. Although this intense work ethic does not feature prominently in the research literature on practices effective in bridging the achievement gap, charter advocates like Nathan (1999) certainly suggest that charter schools hold the promise of attracting and retaining more entrepreneurial staff. The NHCS staff is also distinguished by the dynamic roles afforded teachers as Darling-Hammond (1997) advocates – including

service on tasks forces with real policy impact – and the commitment of substantial time to reflection and collaboration which Talbert and McLaughlin (1994) and Cohen and Hill (2000) consider important for achieving improved outcomes in urban schools. Where teachers fail to demonstrate alignment with the NHCS expectations for staff, they are counseled out, much as charter advocates Wilson (1992), Nathan (1999), and Finn et. al. (2000) would predict. Teachers and parents alike frequently link their passion for the school to their belief in the headmaster. His role in the school culture – setting high expectations, counseling teachers who struggle, and insisting on strict behavioral expectations – is consistent with Fullan's (2002) claim that successful school leaders exhibit moral purpose and coherence-making ability and Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom's (2004) description of effective school leaders as capable of building a shared vision for school culture and establishing high expectations for performance. His persona and use of all-school assemblies to deliver his message are also reminiscent of the pre-desegregation African-American heads of school in the South praised by Perry (2003). The headmaster's role is complemented by a middle school dean who by all accounts is deeply engaged in advising teachers on their practice, analyzing assessment data with teachers, co-planning with teachers, and facilitating collaboration across the staff. These instructional leadership tasks are precisely the ones endorsed by Elmore (1999) and Sebring and Bryk (2000). Even the school leaders' fears about teacher retention and the sustainability of both the NHCS pace of work and salary scale can be linked to their deep concern for the welfare others, another school leader quality identified as important by Sebring and Bryk (2000).

In terms of curriculum and instruction, NHCS has sought to use its autonomy to establish high academic expectations, to "normalize" the MCAS for students, to implement differentiated instruction that is responsive to individual needs, and to improve student outcomes by responding to patterns in assessment data. All constituencies at NHCS report that NHCS teachers demonstrate their belief in the students' capacity (which Ferguson (1998b) sees as essential to teacher efficacy) and their rejection of negative stereotypes about the students (which Ogbu & Simons (1998) identify as critical) through implementing a high expectations academic program which they liken to the caliber of private schools. The school staff even sees the school's robust supports for special education students and struggling students as an extension of the school's insistence that all students meet high academic standards. The NHCS school leadership is committed to ensuring that school staff do not dwell on how challenging the MCAS is or question its reliability as an assessment tool, but rather accept the MCAS as non-negotiable. This mind-set is communicated to students by aligning the curriculum with the Massachusetts frameworks and asking students to regularly complete in class the most challenging components of the MCAS (like writing an essay to a prompt, or providing written explanations of how to solve multi-step math problems). Even as the NHCS teachers endeavor to hold high standards, they also – in the view of the school's key constituencies – seek to differentiate classroom instruction based on student skills and to provide individualized attention to those who struggle. This approach is consistent with Elmore's (1995) finding that superior results for urban students are achieved when teaching is responsive to students' prior experience and knowledge. Although the school leaders and teachers at NHCS describe a private-school like degree

of teacher autonomy with respect to curriculum development, the school leaders and teachers seem to describe a "tights-ends, loose-means" approach in which the school establishes non-negotiable outcomes (i.e., success on the MCAS and preparation for college prep high schools) but then provides flexibility in how teachers reach those outcomes. A key tool for the staff in figuring out the path to reaching the school targets is the on-going analysis of assessment data. Although NHCS does not have the extensive system of data analysis Shepard (2000) recommends, the school leaders see improving data systems as priority and the staff is committed to responding rapidly to patterns on student performance with shifts in financial and human resources. The school's intensive focus on math performance after disappointing internal and external assessment results reflects this approach. Interestingly, both cultural responsiveness within the curriculum and staff diversity are lacking at NHCS, yet families and the staff report a high degree of student buy-in to the school's expectations. This suggests schools need not implement all the recommendations to combat disidentification with school advanced by Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), and Steele and Aronson (1998), but rather intense investment in some of those strategies (communicating high expectations, building trust between staff and students, and engaging families) may be effective.

In shaping its school culture, NHCS has used its autonomy to create a climate of mutual accountability among staff, families, and students through an emphasis on frequent communication, trust-building, community partnerships, and the celebration of success. Close communication with families, as Ogbu and Simons (1998) would recommend, is a high priority for NHCS. The key constituencies describe a variety of mechanisms through which NHCS successfully engages families in their students'

learning including asking each family to sign a family learning contract when they enroll their children, family involvement events such as Mega Math Mania and Jammin' Math Jamboree, and consistent personal communication with families including regular calls home to report on successes as well as struggles and frequent progress reports. NHCS is also committed to providing support to families that are struggling both formally through the school's parent center and informally through close staff-family relationships. This support serves to deepen the trust between families and school staff which Sebring and Bryk (2000) see as a critical resource for school success. The staff at NHCS also develops close relationships with students just as Darling-Hammond (1997) and Steele (1992) would recommend both through academic routes (like individualized attention in the classroom and tutoring) and non-academic routes (like impromptu after school athletic activities). The NHCS staff also encourages students to become active participants in their learning through personal goal setting which further solidifies teacher-student trust when teachers can use students' own goals as a rationale for asking more of them. The trust between the staff and families and staff and students is augmented by NHCS's reliance on community partnerships to offer additional supports to families including family counseling, healthcare services, and enrichment classes. Similar to the schools described by Perry (2003), NHCS takes care to celebrate student achievement from the 'Student Spotlight' at each week's Town Meeting to the special privileges awarded to students who earn honor roll. The school's key constituencies also view the Town Meeting as a place where middle school students can model academic focus and good character for the elementary students - providing very accessible role models of color just as Ogbu and Simons (1998) would recommend.

As with Roxbury Prep, many of the strategies for bridging the achievement gap found in the educational research literature are present in the NHCS story. The analysis chapter attempts to weave together elements of the stories of Roxbury Prep, Neighborhood House, and Academy of the Pacific Rim to identify common themes and places of divergence.

Academy of the Pacific Rim Case Study

Introduction

Academy of the Pacific Rim Charter School opened in 1997 with a mission "To empower urban students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to achieve their full intellectual and social potential by combining the best of the East – high standards, discipline and character education – with the best of the West – a commitment to individualism, creativity and diversity" (APR Annual Report 2005-06, p. i). In a 2004 *New Yorker* profile of Academy of the Pacific Rim, the author characterizes APR as one of the "oddest" of the nation's charter schools because of its unique blend of cultures and then describes the school's founding:

> [APR] was the inspiration of a Chinese-American dentist and father of three named Robert Guen, who believed that Boston's black-and-white politics were leaving Asian kids underserved by public schools. After Guen was appointed to the Boston school board, in the early nineteen-nineties, he and another public-schools activist, Robert Consalvo, began to think not just about different school policies but also about a different sort of school: small, marked by strict discipline, character education, and compulsory Tai Chi and Mandarin Chinese classes (p. 165).

Although the initial vision for the school was to focus on Asian-American students, the large numbers of African-American and Latino students in Boston historically underserved by the district schools resulted in a student population similar to that of the district as a whole. During the 2003-04 school year, the APR student population was 66% African-American, 22% White, 5% Asian-American, 7% Hispanic and 54% free

and reduced price lunch eligible.[7] APR, however, has tried to stay true to its promise to

blend the best of American and Pacific Rim educational approaches. The school's 2005-

2006 annual report describes the school's "bi-cultural approach" and explains that all

students beginning in the 7th grade take Mandarin Chinese and study Chinese culture and

that the high school seniors have the opportunity to travel to China. Beyond these

curricular connections to the Pacific Rim, the school's budget, staffing, curriculum and

instruction, and culture reflect the characteristics Guen and Consalvo hoped for –

including "small, marked by strict discipline [and] character education" – and is

effectively using those characteristics to bridge the achievement gap.

Budget

The Executive Director describes maintaining fiscal health as one of his top

priorities and explains that doing so "involves both managing our resources carefully and

cutting certain costs as much as possible to devote more towards the priorities of

instruction and the road to college." At APR investing in instruction has translated into

the decision to stay small and to have small classes (209 middle school students in 2005-

06 with an average class size of 21.5 students), the investment of significant financial

resources and human capital in extended learning time, and an acceptance of the negative

consequences of paying teachers less than competitor schools and districts in order to

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[7] Currently, the Boston Public Schools student population is 41% Black, 35% Hispanic, 14% White, 9% Asian, and under 1% Native American. Within the Boston Public Schools, 71% of students are free and reduced price lunch eligible. (See http://boston.k12.ma.us/bps/bpsglance.asp#students.)

have more staff overall.[8] Like virtually all charter schools, a significant challenge for

APR has been and remains facilities (the cost of which consumes about 14% of the

school's budget according to the 2005-06 APR Annual Report (p. 22)).

Small School, Small Classes. Asked to explain the importance of school size, the
Executive Director says:

> It's crucial and I should have put it in the list when you asked me what's
> different or why our kids successful on the MCAS. I always make the
> analogy to, if I go shop at Home Depot or if I'm over in Quincy I go to
> Curry Hardware. I go to Curry Hardware because even though I pay more,
> people know me and they say 'Hi' to my daughter and she sits on the
> counter. If they don't have what I want I just get immediate attention... I
> think small schools are just . . . we're more expensive, but it works better
> because no one slips through the cracks because of those relationships that
> you can build with kids, with families over time.

A Board member echoes this sentiment when asked to explain the school's success on the

MCAS: "I think part of it is kids don't get lost here. Someone is always watching you and

keeping an eye on you and trying to work through issues with you." Another Board

member pithily emphasizes the relationship between school size and results, saying "I

like to think of it as the kids can't escape...They're trapped into a culture that almost

forces them to achieve." This focus on the relationships made possible by the school size

is reminiscent of the arguments offered by Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) and

Darling-Hammond (1997). The Executive Director also sees a connection between the

school's size and the school's messages to students about their obligation to work hard:

"If you're in a large system, you feel perhaps less accountable for your own performance

or whatever, but when you know your teachers and your advisor, your family knows the

school and there's just more accountability there." One parent sees a positive link

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[8] As of 2005-06, the average enrollment in a Boston Public School was 508 students. (See
http://www.boston.k12.ma.us/schools/schlevel.asp.) As of the 2002-03 school year, average middle school
class size within Boston Public Schools was 29. (See
http://www.boston.k12.ma.us/bps/budget03/classsize.asp.)

between the school's small size and the school's ability to establish an achievement-

focused culture:

> Now in a large public school environment, the tendency is that the most
> common denominator, or the weakest link, gets a little bit more attention
> or causes more aggravation, or holds back the achievement of other parties
> in there. If you have a large group of people who are not there with the
> requirement to participate, to learn, to achieve, then that other group that's
> there that's trying to do that can be held back. In an environment like this,
> the larger group is here to learn and to achieve, and that to some degree
> forces the other group to get with that larger group, or move out.

Another parent sees the small size as important to APR being a safe school because of

"the small environment, the teacher and administrators recognizing pretty much every

student around here, being able to call them by name... [and] the quick, firm and even-

handed response at an early stage to small problems before they become big ones."

Finn and Achilles (1999) similarly argued that a lower ratio of students to staff would

produce fewer disruptions of learning and behavioral issues. Where some other charter

schools (particularly those associated with for-profit education management

organizations) have chosen to mirror the school size of district schools, APR has made a

philosophical choice to remain small – and their key constituencies credit that choice for

a part of the school's academic success.

Extended Learning Time. Asked to compare APR to district schools, the first

thing the Executive Director lists – echoing Davis and Thomas (1989) – is the greater

time on task: "We simply have more time with the kids. The kids spend more time here, a

couple of hours a day. Depending on the student, or whatever, but for the majority of our

students an extra month or six weeks." To explain why APR out-performs other schools

on the MCAS, he adds, "I always go back to a fairly simple equation. We've got more

time, less distractions..." A teacher sees the school's investment in extended math

learning time as critical for the school's results, noting, "I think there are a lot of things structurally that the school sets up to make sure the students are at a level where they want. For example, in the 6th grade, they have Math twice a day for two trimesters. When you have that much time devoted to Math, your skills will improve, no matter who you are." APR is in session 7:45 AM – 5:00 PM for 190 days. When combined with the summer remediation program for struggling students (during which students who are on track academically participate in internships), APR students get between 15 and 64 days more instruction than students in the district school over the course of a school year (APR 2005-06 Annual Report, p. 3). In addition, the school provides students with academic support after school from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM – including tutoring, a homework center (for students who struggle with homework completion), and MCAS preparation sessions. The extended learning time at APR begins to approach Heath and McLaughlin's (1994) call for all-day, all-year programming for students.

Providing additional support for struggling students is a core budget priority for APR. The Executive Director explains:

> I think we do an excellent job with special ed. and we spend a good deal of resources to do so, but I think it's important we have special ed. administrator, and then we have four other full-time case managers, the equivalent of part-time speech language, part-time occupational therapy, and 80% counselor. That's a lot of resources, but I think, someone once said inclusion is a wonderful thing, but like most things, it's not free. If you want to do it well, you have to devote the resources to it.

Much of the additional support provided to special needs students occurs during non-academic class time – during study hall periods or during enrichment classes – or through push-in service providers, which means staffing these services at a level beyond the requirements of special education law. This inclusion approach requires more staffing than simply creating a separate special education track, but reflects the school's

philosophy of matching high expectations with intensive support. Significant human capital is also invested in tutoring for students who are "at risk" of academic failure but not identified as having special needs. According to the Executive Director, as a teacher "in the middle school you teach three classes and then a fourth period during the day you're tutoring kids. Then you have the advisor who is meeting formally with 10 advisees, 12 advisees once a week, but also checking in with parents formally twice a trimester, but for some students it's more." The small student load per teacher at APR, Miles (1995) and Shepard (2002) would point out, no doubt makes it easier for teachers to invest time in providing tutoring. A key additional intervention for struggling students at APR is the review block, a four week period beginning in June and extending into July during which students who are passing participate in internships and failing students remain at school for intensive remediation. It is critically important to note that the extended learning time opportunities not only provide additional academic practice but also reinforce one of the school's core messages – if you are struggling, work harder. Ogbu and Simons (1998) describe an ambivalence among involuntary minorities to the American dream and the accompanying marriage of hard work and success because of the involuntary minorities' consciousness of the barriers erected to their success by contemporary racism and the legacy of institutional racism. The APR message around tutoring – if you're struggling, stay longer and we (the school staff) will help you get it – may serve to combat that skepticism.

The Struggle to Pay Teachers Well. Asked to summarize the school's strategy for retaining its strongest teachers, the Executive Director says, "The main strategy is to [give] them responsibility and initiatives and ownership of program. The less formal

strategy is to kind of create . . . opportunities for them to mentor others." However, he

worries that the school is not able to provide adequate financial incentives. He explains

that as a result of APR's salary scale, "less experienced APR folks do actually fairly well

compared to the district and their peers, but our higher end are not making $70,000, or

whatever they would make in a district position, or $70,000+ because they're working

more here." The Executive Director describes the Board and school leadership as

interested in experimenting with salary bonuses, sabbaticals, and funding for different

professional development opportunities to try to bridge the salary gap with competing

districts for more experienced teachers. If he had an extra $100,000 for the coming

school year, the Executive Director explains, "I would put it into a faculty endowment for

professional development... [The] number one sustainability item for me is 'How can we

reward people who are really working hard here?' and trying to give them some kinds of

opportunities, travel grants, and things like that." The Board shares the Executive

Director's interest in thinking through the relationship between salaries and staff

retention. One Board member describes the challenge as follows:

> I think that we're still wrestling with what's the best staffing model for
> the school? Is it, you just know that you're going to have a certain amount
> of turnover because you can't compete with the Boston Public Schools'
> salaries? Or does it make sense that there's some teachers you want to
> keep for a longer period of time and therefore you structure the salaries in
> that way?

The 2004 New Yorker profile of APR points out, "Blasdale's faculty, four of whom had

advanced degrees from Ivy League schools, earned an annual salary of about forty

thousand dollars. Calculated at an hourly rate, this wasn't much more than several of the

seniors commanded working after school at Krispy Kreme. Blasdale's teachers worked in

spite of, not because of, market incentive..." On the other hand, the APR budget tries to

build market incentives back into teacher compensation through merit bonuses. The Executive Director describes the system as follows: "5% is based on a parent survey that we do at the end of every year, 45% is based on individual performance. At the end of the year there are different categories of teaching, collaboration, etc. And then the other 50% is based on MCAS improvement... school-wide. That's my bonus, that's our Chinese teacher's bonus, our business manager's bonus, how much improvement that kids make over the course of the year." Large-scale national studies of charter schools have suggested that in comparison to traditional district schools, charter school faculties are less educated (SRI, 1997; Miron & Nelson, 2000; AFT, 2002) – yet APR is able to retain teachers with advanced degrees from Ivy League schools while paying less than district schools. One factor in keeping teachers at the school may be the school's investment in professional development. Teachers described the school's professional development initiatives as including a $250/teacher grant to be used at teachers' discretion, five or six half-days on which the half-days without students are dedicated to discussions about curriculum and instruction, three cycles of peer observations, feedback from department chairs, grade-level team meetings, and an annual performance review. One teacher expressed particular enthusiasm for the opportunity to spend her $250 grant on professional development activities outside of the school, saying "It provides a springboard for something you can discuss with people here, whose opinions you respect and whose experience you respect."

    <u>Facilities and Private Fundraising.</u> Given the lack of public funding for charter school facilities in Massachusetts, APR's Board and leadership have had to invest significant time in private fundraising. According to the Executive Director, "We're not

fundraising for a core operational classroom. However, we have been . . . we've raised probably close to $2 million, or just about that mark, over the past seven years, and probably 80-90% has gone into the facility." A Board member emphasizes that in his view fundraising for core program costs is not consistent with the policy rationale for charter schools:

> I think that you have to operate on the per pupil cost, period. The reason for that is, if you become with soft costs, soft money paying for your operational costs, that soft money is going to end, and then what do you do? And we should do like any other school system that says, 'This is what the taxpayers give you to spend and you get the most you can for it." Otherwise, there wouldn't be an experiment that charter schools can do better than traditional public schools...

The lack of more extensive private fundraising is an obstacle to addressing the Board's and school leaders' concerns about teacher compensation, particularly since such a significant portion of the school budget must be directed to facilities. However, looking ahead five years with optimism, the Executive Director explains, "I think that there will be more [public] resources available and that means cutting our facilities' cost and maybe owning this building or another building." Despite a commitment to running core operations on only public dollars, APR's facilities needs have forced the school leadership to devote significant energy to private fundraising which has undoubtedly distracted them from other priorities just as UCLA (1998), Kane and Lauricella (2001) and Wells and Scott (2001) would predict.

Staffing

Rigorous Selection. Describing what he looks for in teacher candidates, the Executive Director says "I'm looking for people who are tough with high expectations,

and at the same time they love doing what they're doing. They love the humor involved and the craziness of what we do and they build relationships with kids." The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Team observed the very qualities the Executive Director describes, "APR teachers have solid subject area knowledge and an unwavering commitment to student success... During focus groups and interviews, teachers confirmed their confidence that all students at APR can succeed and reiterated their dedication to helping their students thrive. In class visits, Renewal Team members observed classes that were rich in content." (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 14) The Renewal Inspection Team's focus on solid subject knowledge aligns with the finding by Monk (1994) that teacher subject-knowledge positively correlates to student achievement. To identify people with these qualities, the Executive Director explains that APR implements a rigorous selection process: "Bringing them through a rigorous [process] from the first phone interview to the first interview to the second interview, which is sample teaching, debrief, and then checking as many references as I can possibly get, and then making sure that they spend some time here once we've hired them before the faculty orientation in August." The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes "One recently hired faculty member indicated that the hiring process helped her get an idea of the culture and the demands of teaching at APR" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 17). Interestingly, the APR staff, on average, does not reflect the concern typically voiced about urban charter schools that they over-rely on young, inexperienced teachers (see SRI, 1997; Miron & Nelson, 2000; AFT, 2002). According to the 2005-06 APR Annual Report, the average APR teacher has taught for 6.2 years, 3.3 of them at APR.

<u>Hard Work and The Challenge of Sustainability</u>. Of the school's culture for teachers, the Principal says "[The] atmosphere, climate for faculty is that it's rewarding, but extremely challenging, overwhelming, exhausting, that there are supports from faculty and administration." The balance of demanding expectations for staff and support from the school leadership is echoed by other constituencies. A parent comments appreciatively about the teachers' work ethic, saying "If you come here at 7:00 AM, there's someone here. If you come here at 6:00 PM, there's someone here. As soon as the bell goes in the district school, it's over." Another parent sees this work ethic as an important sign of love. "They're not like just teaching because they're being paid to do it, they're teaching because they love the kids. You can see the love for the kids. If the kids fail then they're concerned. They're so committed. They're like very dedicated people. They stay over-time to get stuff done." She adds that she is motivated as a parent by the teachers' dedication: "They believe in what they're doing, and that's why the result is like this because they're so committed to helping our kids. It's not like they're being paid to do it. It's not a 9:00 - 5:00 thing. Any hours of the day, they're here. And that's why I'm committed to doing anything they ask me to do. Because they show the commitment to my kids, I'm going to help in any way I can. They believe in what they're doing and I believe in what they're doing, because of their commitment and their dedication toward my child or my kids." The dedication to students reflected in the willingness to come early and stay late may serve as an important signal of the staff's faith in their students helping to overcome the suspicion Ogbu and Simons (1998) describe involuntary minorities as having about institutional staff harboring negative stereotypes.

However, due to the driven staff culture, the Principal expresses deep concern about the issue of staff sustainability. She worries that perhaps the school's approach to education might be incompatible with staff longevity. To change the school's pattern of only retaining many teachers three or four years, she explains that:

> [T]here would have to be a really radical rethinking of what we do in order to have people be able to stay for longer. I wonder then would that come at the sacrifice of some of the things that I think we do that are critical. Because teachers [might say], 'I just want to teach.' Well, it's important to be an advisor, it's important to teach the electives, it's important to do all of that, so part of me just thinks building a great school, it takes your whole life commitment and I don't know if you can have a balance...

This worry about substantial non-instructional responsibilities negatively impacting teacher longevity echoes the worries identified by SRI (1997), UCLA (1998), Miron and Nelson (2002), and Burian-Fitzgerald, Luekens, and Strizek (2004). The Executive Director also worries about sustainability as the founding staff ages: "I use the example of when I started there were eight of us. One person had a child at home, and now 45% of the staff has kids, and mostly between the ages of 0 and three. So there are more limits on time and it's more of a struggle when we look at sustainability issues." The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report notes, "teachers commented on the demands of the job adding that the longer school day and school year can take its toll" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 19). Neither the Board, nor the school leaders, nor the teachers themselves are able to articulate solutions to address the issue of sustainability. Indeed, all constituencies seem acutely aware that the combination of financial constraints and ambitious academic goals are likely to continue to translate into a heavy burden on staff and a significant risk factor for the long-term sustainability of the school's results.

Culture of Collaboration. The Principal sees the high degree of teacher collaboration and the dynamic role of teachers within the school as key reasons teachers choose to work at APR. She argues that teachers are attracted by "...being a part of a committed group of educators, a real team approach. I think the opportunity to be empowered is very real here, so by necessity, but also by philosophy. Whether that's in title or just in terms of there's so much as an individual you can bring to the school and create on the short ladder of charter schools where you can become the department chair frequently." Asked to describe what she would tell a prospective teacher about the experience of teaching at APR, a teacher says, "I would say that a huge part of working here is the collegiality that goes on between teachers. I think there's this emphasis on teamwork and I think that on the days when I feel the length of the school year, or the length of the day, or the demands of the schoolwork the most, what keeps me going is the fact that I so respect the people I'm working with, and that I feel like I can really get behind other teachers..." Another teacher adds, "There's an emphasis on teamwork, whether it's with the departments, or within grade levels, and I see the school as having been pretty open to trying different models of ways that teachers can communicate and ways that teachers can work together." A parent observes about teachers, "They work together. They don't work like individually, they work together as a team, so it's like a big family here. So that's the main thing." The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report describes the influence of teacher collaboration on curriculum, "Teachers meet informally to exchange ideas, ask each other for advice and design thematic units of study. For example, the Social Studies curriculum treats aspects of Chinese history as a way of reinforcing students' understanding of the culture, people and language" (APR

Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 14). The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report

goes on to describe co-grading as a unique feature of APR's collaborative staff culture:

> Faculty co-grade student work samples once every two months to ensure
> consistency of grading judgments, particularly important in open ended or
> rubric scored work. In an interview a teacher said, 'Co-grading is useful
> for new teachers and inter-departmental development' because it elicits
> conversations about teaching and learning that are at the core of the
> educational process (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p.16).

Describing their observations of teacher collaboration and the feedback they heard from

teachers about the staff culture at APR, the Renewal Inspection Team wrote, "The

Renewal Team saw many instances of teachers working together in their shared

workspace. In a focus group, teachers mentioned many reasons for working at APR

including 'the camaraderie,' 'the support,' and 'the teamwork'" (APR Charter Renewal

Inspection Report, p. 23). The author of the 2004 New Yorker profile reached similar

conclusions to the Renewal Inspection Team, after describing the "bleak financial

picture" for APR teachers, the author explains "For those teachers, the consolation— a

considerable one—was the company of passionate, analytical colleagues." (p.169) This

collaborative culture – as Talbert and McLaughlin (1997), Darling-Hammond (1998), and

Cohen and Hill (2000) would likely predict – not only helps retain teachers at APR, but

helps them to be more accountable and more effective.

One teacher's comment about how APR differs from BPS suggests that the

school's collaborative staff culture translates into mutual accountability. She emphasized

that the difference she saw between the teaching experiences she had at a BPS school and

APR was a difference in staff behavior and expectations. She described her former BPS

colleagues as having low expectations and even cited a racially insensitive remark she

had heard. She added about low expectations comments, "Things that if I ever heard

here, colleagues would be calling people out on things left and right that I just didn't see there." Another teacher addressing the school's accountability to external constituencies adds, "But I think that we as faculty hold ourselves to even higher standards than any public school probably would." A Board member describes peer pressure as central to the enculturation of teachers: "It's the peer pressure from the Director on down that this is how we operate, this is how you're supposed to be... You came to work here because this is how we operate, so you either come and work how we operate, or go somewhere else and work."

Staff collaboration at APR has allowed for the development of consistent routines across the school. Asked how BPS might be made to look more like APR, the Principal explains:

> You've got to have a smaller community to have a strong culture, and that culture needs to be guided by a few key principles that every single teacher and administrator buys into and supports. Even be pervasive and permeate every classroom, every conversation, every . . . and I would say the critical part of that culture has to be high expectations, no excuses for all students. The key is having all faculty believing in that and working toward that.

School-wide routines are evident from the start of each class: the learning objective for the day is posted and students know to immediately begin working on a two-five minute "Do Now" and copying the night's homework from the board. At the conclusion of every class, students and staff stand and exchange thanks for a productive period of instruction. The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Team witnessed these routines in action and wrote that they "visited each teacher at least once and noted these routines in all classroom visits. These routines impose a sense of regularity and order to the day's activities, creating a climate that is businesslike and purposeful while remaining attentive to personal interactions" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 14-15).

Beyond collaborating with their peers, significant instructional support is provided to APR teachers by the school leadership team. The Principal explains "Teachers who are new to the academy participate in an induction program and then an induction and mentoring program, and so they have a mentor they meet with every week. That person is typically their department chair, or it might be a grade level companion depending..." In her role as instructional leader, the Principal notes, "I observe on a daily basis, provide snapshots or feedback to teachers in writing and then conversation and follow-up on an on-going basis to all teachers." She also completes, along with the executive director, mid-year and end-of-year performance evaluations. Additionally, teachers conduct peer observations five times a year. When teachers struggle, according to Principal Hollingsworth, they receive additional support. She explains, "I've met with them weekly and we do lesson plans together and observed more than weekly--several times a week with written feedback--and those were sort of struggling teachers. Trying to give more support as needed." This system of consistent, thorough feedback and purposeful modeling and mentoring is the type of instructional leadership Elmore (1995) found to be successful in District 2 in New York City. In addition, the school leadership team works to develop professional development initiatives aligned around school–wide themes – just as Sebring and Bryk (2000) described in Chicago schools with superior performance. The Principal explains, "One of our focuses last year and going into this year is the school-wide literacy initiative, and then so our professional development is focused on literacy and then that plays out in every department. Again, that is coordinated by me and the department chairs."

Even the administrative team and Board are committed to working collaboratively. Although the school leaders' roles are defined hierarchically (principal reporting to the executive director) and with sharp distinctions between their areas of responsibilities (external v. internal), both speak about their relationship as more of a partnership. The Principal explains, "On paper there's clearer delineation than I think there is in reality. He and I work very well together and very closely together, and so we work really hard to present a united front to the faculty and to the board and to families." She adds, "So essentially, he's supposed to . . . he's in charge of Board PR, fundraising, facilities, and I'm teachers, students, kids. But we each have a hand in the other things and we don't make drastic decisions without consulting with the other one." The Executive Director links his partnership with the Principal as central to his job satisfaction, "I always work best with a partnership and co-director, working with Piel in the past five years has been great." However, in 2004-2005, the school changed its administrative structure – replacing the role of principal with middle school and high school directors, both reporting to the executive director. Board members, both in describing the administrative structure of an Executive Director and a Principal and in describing the new structure of an Executive Director, High School Principal, and Middle School Principal, emphasized that the proper role of the Board is to support the school leaders. Summarizing the comments of multiple Board members, a Board member defines the role of the Board as "to encourage the leadership of the school to have a vision and to support them in real life in that vision. So whether that means funding strategies or facility strategies or whatever it means…" The clarity around roles for the Board and the school leaders at APR sounds like the constitution described by Korach

(2002) as essential for charter schools to succeed – the process for problem solving is clear in advance.

High Standards Although Unevenly Enforced. Both the Executive Director and the Principal conduct performance reviews. The reviews involve four categories: curriculum and instruction, classroom management, professional demeanor, and goals. The reviews are based on frequent classroom observations; one teacher comments, "Here people are always walking into classes all the time, so it's based on those conversations..." The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report says of teacher evaluation at APR, "Staff evaluation is comprehensive and multifaceted. The Director and Principal visit classes throughout the year and then co-write a performance appraisal at mid-year and at the end of the year." However, teachers did not express uniform enthusiasm for the evaluation and feedback process. For example, one teacher complained about the infrequency of feedback from administrator observations: "I very rarely get feedback from those observations until the very end and I see something on the review." However, in contrast to the number of schools in which teachers are rarely if ever observed and where evaluations lack rigor and specificity, it is perhaps a sign of what is going right that a chief complaint about administrator oversight at APR is that teachers want even more observations and even more feedback.

The Principal describes four or five teachers as having not had their contracts renewed at the end of the 2003-04 school year because of under-performance. She recounts, "We said, 'These things must improve in order for your contract to be renewed. We need to see tangible improvement in these four areas based on this many observations.' So it was very clear to those people that it did improve or it didn't." In

describing the kind of teacher whose contract the school has not renewed, the Executive Director explains, "[I]t's hard to quantify, but in general it's just not a good teaching fit. The person can't enforce school culture, or students aren't able to . . . it's mainly around classroom management and creating a coherent, organized lesson." The zealous defense of school culture by letting go of teachers unwilling or unable to sustain that culture in their classrooms is precisely the approach to staffing Wilson (1992), Nathan (1999), and Finn et al. (2000) describe as a unique strength of charter schools. Interestingly, the Principal describes herself as quicker to reach the decision that an under-performing teachers might need to have their contracts terminated than the Executive Director. She worries that the school's standards are not high enough and notes, "I think there would be a sense among some faculty, like, 'what the hell does it take for you to get fired?' This is another odd situation based on the 'org' chart where it's not my final decision. [The Executive Director] can overrule me, and that has happened." In contrast, a Board member expresses a high degree of confidence in the Executive Director's vigilance about staff alignment: "I think everyone is part of that program. I don't get the feeling that there's a whole lot of freelancers in this building. I think people really are with the program or not. If they're not, they're not here." Here again, the tension between the Principal and Executive Director on whether the school's standards are high enough and enough under-performers are being let go suggest the presence of a genuine culture of staff accountability.

Curriculum & Instruction

A Focus on Planning. The Principal describes the curriculum

development process at APR by saying,

> We have department chairs who oversee their curriculum in their specific
> departments. They have biweekly meetings, and we have established the
> curriculum and then we're always tweaking and changing and refining,
> and specifically developing what we call 'Gateways,' or non-negotiables
> in skills-based assessments. Then I work with all the department chairs on
> coordinating that across grade-level.

The Principal explains that among her top priorities is careful alignment of teacher-

created curricula across grade-levels, saying the staff asks as a team, "So now we have

this exit standard..... have we mapped everything to get all the kids there academically?"

Using Gateway assessments – that capture what students must know and able to do at

each grade level in each discipline in order to achieve "on track for college" proficiency –

and using student performance on those assessments to guide revisions of curriculum and

changes in instruction is consistent with the Shepard (2000) approach to using data

systematically to raise student achievement.

Since success on the MCAS is non-negotiable at APR, alignment with the MCAS

plays a critical role in curriculum development. According to the Principal:

> Our teaching is very strong and is informed and we as a school have also
> bought into the MCAS. As other successful schools, meaning successful
> by that standard, the MCAS standard, typically it's part of the culture,
> that's become our mantra, 'We do well on the MCAS,' and it's a challenge
> put out to every student. We build kids up to it. Essentially we prepare
> them fully for it...

However, the curriculum is not designed around test prep but rather the state frameworks

the MCAS is intended to assess. The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report offered

this description of curriculum development at APR: "All curricula in the core subject

areas are based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and several content areas complement the MA standards with national and/or international standards. Teachers and Department Chairs review curricula on an on-going basis for its alignment to the frameworks, for its balance of breadth and depth, and for its relevance to student needs" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 5). APR appears to approach its curriculum with the careful attention to nurturing understanding and responsiveness to students' prior knowledge that Elmore (1995) recommends. The Principal adds, "The [Massachusetts] frameworks guide our teaching. I wouldn't say that the MCAS guides our instruction in the way the frameworks do. Every discipline has written their own standards, and certainly they're guided by the frameworks, but also pulling on other national standards..." The Executive Director offers a similar description of the evolution of the APR curriculum: "We, from the very beginning, said in a sense we got kind of a jumpstart, we said here are the state frameworks. This is the baseline, we can't just develop our own thing outside. We can use these state frameworks as a baseline and then go beyond." He adds that he believes the MCAS is assessing the right things, rejects the notion that alignment with the MCAS diminishes the curriculum, and explains that "What it [MCAS-aligned instruction] looks like here is ensuring students know fractions, decimals and percents, and can construct a written response around a question that asks them to extend the dimensions of a poster by 30%. Those are good questions..." A teacher recalls "From the very beginning of the school's existence, teachers were always involved in writing the standards, looking at the state standards, national standards, all of these dense documents about what kids are supposed to be learning when."

Teachers have internalized the central importance of the MCAS. Asked how the

school is accountable for results, a teacher responds exactly as Wilson (1992) might have

hoped when he was writing in support of early proposals for charter school in

Massachusetts, "In some direct ways, our charter is tied to our MCAS results. Being a

charter school we have to perform in order to retain our charter. Our performance

bonuses are... tied to the MCAS." A Board member contrasts APR with the Boston

Public Schools and emphasizes that APR focuses on getting students to score at the

Proficient or Advanced level (3 or 4 on a 4 point scale) while the Boston Public Schools

high schools with which she works as a business partner focus only on moving students

from Failing to Needs Improvement (from 1 to 2 on the 4 point scale). In her view

passing the MCAS is too low a bar: "That's not good enough. It's not good enough for

these kids to have a future." A parent attributes the school's success on the MCAS to

both the curriculum and the school's commitment to providing extra support:

> So I think the teaching on the whole in the school is very structured.
> Their system and they know exactly what the child needs. That's what I
> find. They know exactly what my daughter need. And if they need, extra
> work, they'll give them extra work without even be paid for it. They're
> really . . . they're child-friendly in terms of trying to prepare the kids for
> the MCAS ...When the MCAS come it's like, my daughter said, "Mommy
> that was so easy." Stuff that they're getting all day in the 6th grade.

Another parent adds that "by the time that test comes around, they have gained

knowledge, they have been tested" and says of the resulting earned confidence: "that is

very critical, [to] them going in and achieving good results, a positive expectation that

they can do, from themselves and from others."

Emphasis on Effort. Valuing hard work, or effort, plays an important role in

assessing student performance. The Principal explains, "We work really hard to have a

'no excuses' culture. We have extensive and rigorous homework every night in every

subject. That factors pretty heavily into a student's grade, which is our manifestation of valuing effort, very different from most schools because a student can be retained, even though they pass all of their tests but they didn't do homework." The role of gateway assessments – APR's interim assessment system – in students' grades also reflects the school's commitment to promoting an ethic of success through hard work. According to the Principal, "[T]hey are roughly 10% of students' grade. You can retake, retake, retake until you get [it]... you either get nothing or you pass it." APR has rigorous standards for the promotion. According to the APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, "Students are not promoted at APR until they demonstrate mastery of essential skills and content at the 70% level in all five core courses: English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, History, and Chinese." The school's approach to assessment – setting a high bar based on consistent effort – reflects the values the school seeks to inculcate, like the Aristotle quotation in the school's stairwell: "We are what we repeatedly do." APR's approach to rectifying the disidentification with school that worries Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), and Steele and Aronson (1998) relies in part on academic systems that train students to have academic perseverance.

Data Driven Instruction. Instruction at APR is data-driven. According to the Principal, "we spend a lot of time and energy [at APR] in analyzing our MCAS results, on several different levels. School-wide aggregate, you know when we do look at those [gaps]: racial gap, the gender gap." She adds, "[W]e sit down with the data and we look at the analysis and we note trends and that changes our instruction over the course of the year, what is this specific content, this specific skill? What is it where our students' weaknesses are? What do we need to teach?" The Principal explains that the school is

similarly intentional about the use of internal assessment data: "We actually look at internal data on a monthly basis just student grades, specifically, and what are trends that we notice, and what teachers might need support or what individual kids might need more support?" The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Team found that "frequent faculty conversations about student performance drive both short and long-term curricular decisions" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 6). APR's "Gateway" interim assessments not only provide data for teachers and students, but help students target their own efforts to improve their skills. A teacher explains, "They are given unlimited times to try the Gateway and pass it prior to a certain point in the trimester, but it's just to ensure that next year, when they go into the next grade level that we don't have to spend much time going over that skill." A parent links the Gateway assessments to her child's success on the MCAS, saying:

> I think we mentioned that they do a lot here is the Gateway exam. They do that. Two of the Gateway exams that they do is preparing for the MCAS, also. They have to pass that within a certain time. But the good thing about it, they got like several chances to do it over again until they get it perfect. They won't get past it unless they do it correctly, and I think that Gateway testing helped my daughter a lot in her subject area.

Both thoughtful teacher reflection on student performance on interim assessments and careful student analysis of their own performance are central to Shepard's (2000) vision for advancing student achievement through the systematic use of data.

Internal Achievement Gap. Despite the school's success in producing higher African-American student achievement, the school's leaders worry about their internal achievement gap. The Principal expresses frustration with what she identifies as her failure to get the faculty to buy-into an ethic of cultural responsiveness which she

believes, like Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), and Steele and Aronson (1998),

would help to address that gap. Of culturally responsive instruction, she says:

>We don't have enormous consensus that that's important. We've done . . .
>I've done trainings for faculty and some workshops, we've worked with
>Dr. Noguera at the Harvard Ed. School, you know the pathway study here.
>He did some professional development and we're really split as a faculty,
>and that has been a tremendous source of struggle for me personally as
>wanting that to . . . I feel like that's something I was not able to bring to
>the school or even in terms of full realization that that's critical.

The Executive Director echoes these concerns, saying of the cultural responsiveness of

the curriculum, "It's something that we've actually begun to tackle this year and are

focusing on so we continue to look at the achievement gap, etc. next year. I think there

are other schools that do it better than we do and we need to learn from that. Certain

teachers are much better than others, but there's not the kind of consistency that I'd like to

see." One teacher commented on cultural responsiveness, "We've spent some time

talking about 'how do you do that?' How do you integrate it throughout curriculum? How

do you make curriculum relevant to the child's experience? I think it's something that

we've considered, but it's not a priority over academic achievement." Another echoed

this sentiment, saying that beyond integrating diverse authors into English classes, "It's

not a priority. It's so far behind, 'Are you understanding the concepts that you need to

understand?'" Interestingly, two teachers in the focus group re-focused the discussion

away from cultural responsiveness and toward strategies for making the curriculum

relevant to students which they identified as a strength of APR. As an example, a teacher

offered: "Even things like hair braiding and the geometric designs that were involved in

hair braiding was one of the topics of discussion in class. I remember a student actually

came, an old student that we had last year, came to me at the end of the year, she was

going back to visit, and pulled a student's head to me and said, 'See the design on this? I

did that and it's all Math!'" Another teacher offered the less glamorous, but important example that APR teachers try to write math problems using student names and topics familiar to them. It may be that teachers' emphasis on instructional relevance points to a more subtle dimension of culturally responsive instruction.

High Expectations. A Board member notes that creating a culture of achievement in a context where students receive many countervailing messages is a central challenge of the school:

> To the degree that I think there is evolution, I think it really is around how do you struggle with some of the cultural, educational, class, race, ethnic issues of urban kids and create an environment that really does motivate learning and success over time, when that may not be something that they know that well. I think that's hard work and something that [the Executive Director] and the leadership in the school really struggle with and keep trying to improve.

For APR's staff, the decision not to track is linked to the school's commitment to communicating and demanding high standards for all students. The Executive Director describes the decision not to track as a critical distinction from district schools: "I'd say [we differ in] setting a high bar and not having ability grouping from 6 through 12th grade." The Principal makes the identical point: "I think what we bring that's different [from BPS] is high expectations for all of our students. There's no tracking." A teacher adds, "Part of the mission is just making sure that those high standards are held across the board and everyone's expected to meet them." APR's intentionality about communicating uniformly high standards to students echoes Ferguson's (1998b) and Steele's (1992) prescriptions for effectively bridging the achievement gap.

School Culture

Data-Driven Decision-Making. Using data to assess the school's performance and drive decision-making is cited by all constituencies as fundamental to APR's success. Asked to name his priorities for the school year, the Executive Director says, "Number one is student academic performance and college matriculation, so that I want to ensure that our students are well prepared for their entry into college, you back that out and look at the other academic performance indicators." Asked to explain how the school is accountable for fulfilling its mission, the Principal says, "By our accountability plan, which with all of its indicators, college acceptance, promotion retention, attrition, standardized tests, culture audits that we conduct, analyzing the discipline data. There are tons of data sources that we look at to see how we're doing toward these goals. We set interim goals, because it gets too broad." The accountability plan the principal references is the document the Commonwealth requires schools to create in order to articulate how their fulfillment of their charter should be measured. The Executive Director describes the annual process by which the Board and the school leadership review the accountability plan and develop internal goals, "So looking at our eleven different objectives and the kind of performance indicators we have, everything from MCAS scores to achievement gaps to student attrition and all of those things I think we set the bar pretty high internally, maybe higher than the external bar." The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report describes in detail the school's Beyond 70 initiative as an illustration of data driven decision making. As part of this initiative, which reflects many of the principles of Shepard's (2000) model for the systematic use of data to improve

student achievement, teachers committed to develop strategies to raise student academic performance above the 70% required to pass. A teacher task force met to prioritize essential higher-order skills to promote across classes and then committed to continuously review as a team student performance in each of these areas. Of this initiative, the Renewal Inspection Team writes, "This is a critical example of how the school identifies a need, brainstorms strategies, pilots a plan, and assesses the plan's effectiveness to help them learn, grow and improve." (p. 13)

"Gambatte": Effort = Success. According to the APR 2005-06 Annual Report, "The central theme of the Academy is the spirit of 'gambatte.' Translated from Japanese, this means 'to persist, put in your full effort, and never give up.' In all we do at the school, we emphasize the mantra that effort determines success." The ethic of hard work APR seeks to instill is captured in one parent's description of the school mission: "I think the mission of the academy, because my daughter has been in here since the 6th grade, she had to repeat twice, I think the mission is to try to get kids of color to kind of get motivated, try to help them see what they're missing and try to keep them focused in their learning experience." That same parent when asked how she would describe the school to a prospective parent says, "The reason I would recommend this school to other people is that there's no social promotion. If you want to get promoted, you have to work to be promoted." Together, her comments suggest that for this parent, retention delivered a message of "not yet, but with hard work you can achieve proficiency" rather than a message "school isn't for you." Another parent describing the school's mission, says APR is committed to "Helping them [students] to see that they can expect and work for good results and achieve that." The principal notes that families appreciate teachers'

extraordinary efforts on behalf of their children even as they sometimes worry that the school asks too much:

> Families, you know some of the consistent themes that families hit are teachers are prepared here, you will not let my student drop the ball or fail… but that we go the extra mile and we work really hard to support all kids. Another common theme that comes from parents is that it's too hard, too much homework, it's too long, it's overwhelming.

A teacher explains that the school has achieved strong MCAS results "through a lot of accountability for the students or at least a definite sense of accountability, combined with types of personal attention to sort of make those things happen," and describes homework center and the advisory system as key interventions to prevent students from "slipping through the cracks." She elaborates by describing the virtuous cycle of student effort, assessment with feedback, and renewed effort: "The kids do make-up work, which means that there's a motivation to see what my mistakes are and correct them because I can actually turn it in again and get a better grade on it. Obviously, evaluating your errors and correcting them is a great way to learn, and it's a great way to not make those mistakes again." According to the APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, students are internalizing the school's message, "[I]n focus groups with both middle and high school students, students talked about the high standards and academic support that they receive with a sense of pride and confidence. They were able to speak accurately about the mission in their own words" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 23) The report goes on to say, "Students were overwhelmingly positive about life at APR although they acknowledged how demanding it is to be a student at APR. When asked about the best aspects of the school, middle school students made comments such as, 'The standards are set high, but they get us ready for the real world.' 'In other schools I wasn't learning.' 'The teachers, they really want us to learn'" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p.

23-24). APR's blend of high expectations, intensive support, and consistent

reinforcement of the message that effort yields success reflects the vision for "wise-

schooling" offered by Steele (1992) and the vision for schooling effective in addressing

the risk of disidentification from school as result of involuntary minority status that

worries Ogbu and Simons (1998).

The school seeks to invest students in a vision of themselves as academically

successful and on the path to college – much like the pre-*Brown* schools in the segregated

south described by Perry (2003). The Executive Director explains, "I think from the kids'

point of view what they most often say, my guess, what I've heard them say, is, we don't

have the best athletic teams or whatever, but where they feel pride is our MCAS scores

are good and our students are going to good colleges." One Board member sees APR's

culture of achievement as its chief difference from BPS:

> I think the mission of the school is to save the lives of 350 kids who I
> believe were not being properly served in the traditional Boston Public
> Schools, and probably still aren't being served properly in the traditional
> Boston Public Schools. And I believe that if you believe in the kids and
> you say to them, 'You can learn, you're going to learn, and this is how we
> operate, kid, and whether you like it or not, you're going to learn,' they
> learn. To me, that's the mission of the school.

APR's goal appears to be instilling in students a sense that applying oneself academically

is synonymous with being a member of the APR school community.

Consistent Communication with Families. The APR Charter Renewal Inspection

Team was particularly impressed with the school's outreach to families:

> Partnership with families is one of the cornerstones of APR. As stated
> previously, contact with families is routine from frequent academic
> progress reports to the weekly journal. In addition, families, students and
> the school sign a contract to work together. In a focus group, parents
> commented that contact with families is not always negative; that teachers
> frequently call to inform parents of positive achievements or events by
> their children (APC Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 22).

The school's partnership with families is codified in a family contract that lays out the hard work required at APR. In the contract, parents/guardians commit to partnering with APR in their children's education, ensuring that their children arrive at school on time and prepared to learn, volunteering at the school (although no specific time commitment is required) and participating in school activities, reviewing biweekly progress reports and attending parent-teacher conferences, and maintaining regular communication with their children's teachers. A parent emphasizes that the home-school relationship at APR is focused on academic accountability: "[W]hat I noticed with the charter school is that they try to get the parents involved in the kids' work, not to be focused on the kids alone, but to say, 'You as a parent, you have to be accountable for that child's work also.'" APR students regularly review their grades with both their parents and their advisors through a system of bi-weekly progress reports. A parent references these reports to illustrate how APR leverages home-school communication to reinforce the principle that hard work drives achievement:

> I'd like to make a comment on the progress report, I found that it's a useful vehicle to sit down with the child and communicate. I could sit down with my son and say, this is where you are, this is what your results are showing, and we could look at each area, class participation, or your quizzes and identify right off the bat where the problems are, and put a strategy together to help him improve in those areas.

Perry (2003) worries that "African-American parents, as the first generation of African-Americans to experience racism and its impact on achievement in an allegedly 'open and integrated' society, might possibly not have figured out how to develop institutional formations and pass on psychological coping strategies to their children that respond to this next context" (p. 100). APR is trying to meet this challenge by providing families with the tools they need to support their children's achievement.

Trusting Relationships. Parents have great trust in teachers' relationships with their children and in teachers' commitment to partnering with families. A parent comments on the responsiveness of the staff: "My daughter, she has to get a lot of individual attention and she does get it. That's one of my positive about the school. You can always call the teacher, they're accessible any time…" Another parent, citing the APR Advisory system, echoes this sentiment: "Each kid get an advisor like I can say to another parent here. Anything, they have a problem, they can consult with that person. One of the teachers will advise one of them. They can go to that person with any question, any problem that they have and they always help them out." The advisory system was also cited by the APR Charter Renewal Inspection Team as a critical factor in the school's results. According to the Report, "One student reported that advisors are 'guardian angels because they watch over you and maintain contact with parents'" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 13). Interestingly, one parent cites even out-of-school suspension as an important vehicle for home-school communication, saying, "Out of school suspension the kids know the parents are going to have to be involved. If I have to be involved in my daughter's out of school suspension, she's going to hear it from me."

The Principal – echoing the findings of Bryk and Schneider (2002) – identifies trusting relationships between staff and students as a key driver of achievement: "I think in the middle school, for a lot of kids it's the individual relationships that they have with teachers. I think that's true throughout, I think that's true of adolescence. I connect with you, therefore I perform for you." When students struggle with motivation, the Executive Director explains, "[We] try and provide a hook . . . or what's most successful is a certain faculty member, a certain advisor, a certain school program where they're building

relationships with their peers and teachers or administrators." As the 2004 New Yorker

profile notes:

> The emphasis on discipline was balanced by a student's closeness to his
> assigned "academic adviser"—the staff member whom students thought of
> as "belonging to me." This adviser followed a child's progress from grade
> to grade, fought for his interests, got to know his parents, and helped him
> with his algebra. At Pacific Rim, teachers spent nearly a quarter of their
> work lives tutoring and counseling individual students.
> Strict & Structured. In its 2003-04 Student and Family Handbook, APR explains

that the school "strives to create an environment focused on learning and student

growth." The school's strict code of conduct is enforced via a set of progressively

serious consequences: detention/after school cleaning of the school, suspension from

class, in-school suspension, and out-of-school suspension. The 2004 New Yorker profile

notes, " [A] student who disrupted teaching at Pacific Rim, or even turned his back on a

teacher, faced parents, principal, and a round of intense behavioral instruction" (p. 168).

The Principal explains that "[At APR,] we strive for it to be a culture of respect and with

clear expectations articulated for all stakeholders, really – starting with students, that it's

consistent. Expectations are consistently applied as well as consequences and incentives

so that it's fair for kids." Much like Hill, Foster, and Gendler (1990) found in the

interviews they conducted for their study of "focus schools," the APR Principal describes

the school's high behavioral expectations as a key difference from district schools:

> We strive to teach more than academics, that we've embraced and
> purposefully really try to teach character, and that's a priority for us...
> [W]e have very high expectations for behavior in the classroom and if
> you're not ready to learn then you need to not be in the classroom and you
> need to write and reflect and have a serious conversation about your
> behavior, give a sense of teaching responsibility, integrity, respect.
> Describing the centrality of character education to APR's school culture, a teacher

comments:

>One of the big things that visitors say . . . that I've heard visitors say when they come in is just the level of respect students can give to adults, shaking hands. I remember talking to my roommate the other day, and she said, 'You shake your students' hands?' And I said, 'Yes, why?" And she found that so bizarre. I guess I'm so used to things like that it doesn't impact me. Just small things . . . I think there's just a huge level of respect between students and teachers here."

A parent celebrates APR's success in inculcating an ethic of respect:

>The system in this school is the discipline that teach[es] them how to respect each other and respect other people, the elders, their parents, so this is a great thing. Back in my country, to do that, I grow up somewhere where they have to beat you, you know? To make you go straight. But in this school, I'm so glad to see the way they're doing it without beating them up.

A Board member explains the commitment required to sustain a structured school culture, recalling an incident early in the life of the school where the school suspended a student who violated the Code of Conduct,

>And the parents came up to us and said, 'You don't understand urban kids.' I remember that clearly. And we said, 'You don't understand us. Everybody's treated the same way.' And they came around, but if they were in a public school, the public school would have said, 'Oh, gee, OK I don't want to get in trouble and if that's what you want I'll do it.' So what happens is you have five or six kids controlling the whole school. You don't want a few kids upsetting the whole school.

The strong commitment from the adults in the school community – administrators, teachers, parents, and board members – to creating a safe and structured environment translates into a palpable sense of orderliness at APR, leading the Department of Education 2005 Site Visit Team to note "the school provides a very safe environment that allows teachers and students to focus on teaching and learning."

Comparing APR with district schools, the Executive Director says, "[APR has] uniforms and discipline . . . we treat the little things in a big way, so if a student is overheard making some big verbal threat, most likely are in school suspension. Whereas I don't know as much about this in a district school, but my guess is more of those things

slide. There's perhaps a stronger institutional response here." A teacher notes, "One of the good things here is that you can focus a lot more on the learning than I've seen in other schools because the discipline issue is not so big." Contrasting APR with BPS, a teacher notes "[T]he students sort of reflect on how different it is, things like the higher expectations and just the sense that there are so many things that would fly in a public school that wouldn't fly here." Asked to explain how BPS schools could be made more like APR, a teacher answers simply "Discipline" and when asked to elaborate, explains:

> Hold kids accountable. Like for behavior, and yeah, that probably looks like being stricter, but it looks like them not being [allowed] to call out without consequence, or disrupt the classroom or come in late without consequence, or pull out their cell phone without consequence, or use a disrespectful tone without consequence. Like if you want to create a community of people who are focused on learning, you need to say that these distractions, all of them, have a consequence, from the big to the little.

Another teacher adds, "One thing that we do well, is when you're a new student at APR you come for two half days before any other student comes and you're basically only learning about our discipline structure, our character education and exactly what's expected of you, and then it's reinforced throughout the year." Emphasizing the importance of a commitment to strict discipline at APR, a teacher comments that "I would add that when you interview to work here, it's made really clear to you, basically, that that's part of your expectation." She adds that in the district schools,

> I'm sure there are some that probably do model their classroom this way, but then they probably spend half their day hearing, "Well, Mrs. Jones doesn't do that, and Mr. so and so doesn't do that." It happens here of course, because it happens everywhere, but you can't . . . no kid would ever say, "Miss Weston lets me chew gum in her class." Everyone would just laugh in your face if you tried to say that. It's so obviously not true.

A parent comments favorably on the contrast in behavioral expectations between APR and district schools, saying that at APR,

> The expectation is clearer and there's follow through with the expectation, especially in the area of discipline. They establish the rules. These are the rules, if you do this, do that, these other penalties, consequences, and there's that consistent follow through. Where in some of the . . . a lot of, well public schools I've visited, that's not there.

Another parent adds, "The public school, you can have many fights in a day, but nothing – sometimes they don't even call the parents at school to tell them, unless that thing is on the TV news, you can see that. But here, they learn. The discipline is set." However, it is important to note, that one of the teachers interviewed connects the safe and structured environment at APR to the selection bias inherent in the charter school admissions lottery system: "By virtue of even having parents who are ready to sign you up for a charter school, I think that there is a certain level of interest in the students' well-being that eliminate some of the hugest, most severe discipline that you could find in that Boston Public School, which makes it a little bit easier to maintain the focus on academics."

Intentional About Character Education. Although the notion of combining Eastern and Western education traditions does not feature prominently in how each constituency talks about the school's approach to instruction, it is more frequently referenced in connection with the school's emphasis on character. A teacher summarizes the school's mission by saying, "We are here to combine the best of Eastern traditions of education and Western traditions of education, with high standards and enforcing consistent discipline and teaching character education in the hopes of sending all of our students to college." The school's approach to character education is reflected in the school's seven core values of the acronym K.G. – P.R.I.D.E. (listed on p.10 of the 2005-06 APR Annual Report) which are taught and reinforced in classrooms, the school's hallways and common spaces, school events, and the school's routines and rituals:

- <u>Kaizen</u> is a Japanese principle meaning continual improvement of ourselves and our community. We engage in daily rituals and routines that help us grow as individuals and as a community.

- <u>Gambatte</u> is a Japanese word meaning "persist and never give up." It is our belief that our success is based on our effort not on luck.

- <u>Purpose</u> is having goals for each action and interaction throughout the year.

- <u>Respect</u> is treating others with politeness, consideration, and appreciation.

- <u>Integrity</u> is being true to your values and doing the right thing when no one is looking.

- <u>Daring</u> is mustering the strength and will to do what you know you should do, even though you are afraid of embarrassment, failure, or danger.

- <u>Excellence</u> is striving for a high standard in your daily actions no matter how big or small.

APR rituals and routines include that reflect K.G. – P.R.I.D.E. include Zheng Li (cleaning time that is structured into each student's schedule), Hans (in which small groups of students work together), Hansei (weekly journal writing based on inspirational quotes) and the Gambatte award (which is given to students that persevere in their search for academic excellence). The use of group-based rewards and consequences to develop a sense of community responsibility (an element of kaizen) is an additional example of the school's efforts to operationalize these values. A parent says of this aspect of APR, "The way they handle peer pressure and giving rewards based on how the class does as a whole… forces the students to get either alienated by the class, or encouraged or

supported by the class because of their own behavior." In addition, to operationalize the value of respect, students stand to greet their teachers when they enter the classroom. A Boston magazine article, describing the culture at APR reports:

> "The structure and discipline absolutely allow for caring, love, and creativity," says Blasdale, who personally greets each of the students with a handshake when they decamp from the bus every morning. From there, all middle school students attend a daily morning assembly, where a different student is honored each day for exhibiting the spirit of gambatte, a Japanese word that roughly translates to "success through perseverance." (Boston Magazine, "A Class of Their Own").

Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), Steele and Aronson (1998), and Perry (2003) all suggest that a key strategy for combating disidentification from school is providing students with models of African-American achievement and culturally responsive curriculum and instruction. However, APR's success in building school rituals and approaches to character education around its Eastern education theme suggests that perhaps community-building in and of itself can provide similar benefits even if the community-building does not focus on students' own cultural identity.

Continuous Improvement. The Executive Director explains that the combination of freedom and accountability attracted him to charter schools initially and continues to inspire him in his work at APR, "So it is that kind of that whole entrepreneurial ownership, the idea that we can do something better and if we don't, there's no one to blame other than me. I've got the authority to do it, so it's up to me to do it. I like that." The 2004 New Yorker profile highlighted the Executive Director's deep sense of responsibility for the school and his resulting commitment to its continuous improvement:

> "I want to think that good things happen here, but I'm probably not the best person to wave the banner," he said. "I'm always worrying about where we are weak. Take the Advanced Placement tests in English. Our

kids are scoring very low on the essays— one of several signs we're not doing enough to promote analytical writing. We're trying to work on that this year." That, and a thousand other things (p. 165).

As a means of sustaining and building on APR's success, the Executive Director explains

"Every year we also have an external audit. . . . you know we've audited our Mandarin department and our Math department and our English department, and this year was the overall cultural audit, but we bring in four to five people to spend a day plus and write up their observations...." A Board member said of the culture audit, "we were concerned last year about what we saw . . . some of us saw a slippage of the culture of respect and discipline and achievement in the school." Commenting on the Executive Director's response to the report, the same Board member said, "I've never seen anybody take criticism and use it like [the Executive Director] has, he's just remarkable that way." The Principal and Executive Director explained that the 2003-04 culture audit played a key role in the decision to divide the role of Principal into a middle school director and high school director going forward as a way to ensure that one administrator would be able to focus on continuously strengthening the culture of each set of grades. A teacher's comment further illustrates APR's commitment to continuous improvement:

> [I]f you ask any one of us, we could go on and on about the things we wish we did better, and the flaws in our school, but I think that what's really key to this place is that teachers--well, not just teachers--everyone who works here is constantly thinking about that, and constantly in a dialogue about what can we improve and how can we do it different and better? ...We're so much more demanding of ourselves that I think that it has led to a lot of success. That sort of motivation and the willingness to look at all of your mistakes and your problem areas is key to the school that we have so far established.

In a similar vein, a Board member says of the Executive Director, "He's very honest about the flaws that he sees and the areas where he needs to develop or the school needs to develop, and I think that's very unique in a person and certainly in an educational

administrator." According to the APC Charter Renewal Inspection Report, "APR faculty and administration operate in a way that is constantly assessing and evaluating programs. Internal program evaluation is built into the culture of the school through teamwork, task forces, department, grade level and faculty meetings, peer observation and co-grading" (APR Charter Renewal Inspection Report, p. 22). Ultimately, one of the school's best tools for teaching gambatte and achievement through effort, may be the staff's modeling of working continuously to improve the school and their teaching.

<u>Summary</u>

APR's founders envisioned blending what they saw as the best elements of Eastern education ("high standards, discipline, and character education") with what they saw as the best elements of Western education (" a commitment to individualism, creativity and diversity") to create a high achieving urban school (APR Annual Report 2005-06, p. i). APR has used its autonomy with respect to budget, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture to operationalize the founders' vision and in so doing is bridging the achievement gap for its African-American students.

With respect to its budget, APR uses its autonomy to invest in small school size, small classes, an extended school day and year, and support for struggling students. As Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) and Darling-Hammond (1997) would predict, the key constituencies at APR believe that APR's investment in small size of the school and classes is critical to the development of close relationships between teachers and students. Interviewees at APR also linked a climate of student accountability for their performance to the school's small size and small classes as well as the school's safe and orderly

learning environment (which Finn and Achilles (1999) identified as a by-product of small class size) in Tennessee. APR's financial commitment to an extended day (7:45 AM – 5:00 PM) and extended year (190 rather than 180 days, plus summer remedial classes or internships for all students) begins to approach the all-day, all-year school programming promoted by Heath and McLaughlin (1994) and certainly provides the added time on task Davis and Thomas (1989) see as important to the efficacy of schools serving low-income students. APR commits significant human resources to supporting students at-risk of academic failure, including a robust special education staff, a period of tutoring per day for each core academic teacher, and intensive summer remedial instruction. These commitments are made easier by the small student load per teacher as Miles (1995) and Shepard (2002) would predict. APR's combined commitments to extended learning time and extensive opportunities for tutoring and remediation reinforce the school's key cultural message about the connection between hard work and academic success which may combat what Ogbu and Simon (1998) describe as ambivalence about the promise of the American dream among the youth of involuntary minority groups, particularly African-American students. APR's school leaders and trustees worry about two major long-term financial challenges: the schools' inability to match district salaries and the significant resources necessary to support the costs associated with school facilities. APR's decision to maintain small school size and small class size and the costs of leasing private space (since public facilities are not available to Massachusetts commonwealth charter schools) constrain the school's ability to match Boston Public Schools salaries or those of neighboring districts. The school has tried to combat the risk of losing teachers for salary reasons (and so far avoided the drop off in charter school teacher education

noted by Miron and Nelson (2000) and AFT (2002)) by providing other incentives including dynamic roles, merit pay, and funding for professional development. APR has responded to the challenge of covering facilities costs, particularly renovations costs, through private fundraising risking the distraction to the school leadership that worries UCLA (1998), Kane and Lauricella (2001) and Wells and Scott (2001) about charter schools.

APR uses its autonomy in staffing to implement a rigorous hiring process to identify teachers with strong content expertise and deep belief in students' potential, to maintain a staff culture with an intense work ethic and strong commitment to collaboration, and to enforce high standards for teacher performance. Both the school leaders and the APR renewal inspection team emphasized the extent of teachers' expertise in their subject-matter – a teacher qualification that Monk (1994) finds correlates positively with student outcomes. The Executive Director's description of the value the school places on hiring teachers who believe deeply in students' capacity to excel was also reflected in the observations of the renewal inspection team. This belief in students' potential may be linked to the tenacity with which the APR staff approach their work. All constituencies emphasized the long hours put in by APR teachers. Interestingly, parents viewed teachers' work ethic as an indicator of their love for students which may help to overcome some of the suspicion about educational institutions that Ogbu and Simons (1998) see as characteristic of involuntary minority communities. Although the trustees, school leaders, and teachers all seem to worry about the sustainability of the intense pace for the staff and the risk of burn out – a common phenomenon in charter schools described by Miron and Nelson (2002) and

Burian-Fitzgerald, Luekens, and Strizek (2004) – these constituencies all see the staff intensity as essential to the school's success. Despite the long hours, many teachers draw great satisfaction from the school's collaborative culture. Teachers celebrated both APR's formal opportunities for cooperation (e.g., curriculum planning, co-grading) and the informal collegiality that characterizes the staff culture. Talbert and McLaughlin (1997), Darling-Hammond (1998), and Cohen and Hill (2000) all identified precisely the kind of teacher collaboration that takes place at APR as important to school success. The staff's high-degree of cooperation has also translated into an environment of mutual accountability where staff members appear to exert positive peer pressure on each other around their performance in the classroom. By providing consistent feedback and coaching – just as Elmore (1995) found effective – the principal appears to further strengthen the focused, collaborative environment at APR. Positive cooperation and a clear focus on outcomes also seem to characterize the work of the school leaders with the school's Board, including a high degree of clarity around roles which Korach (2002) found essential to charter school success. When staff members are not aligned with the APR ethos of high standards, hard work, and openness to collaboration, the school leaders use the school's performance review process to provide specific actionable feedback and, if that feedback is not implemented, to terminate or decline to renew the one-year staff contracts (as charter advocates like Wilson (1992), Nathan (1999), and Finn et al. (2000) would hope). Interestingly, one of the few areas of tension between the Executive Director and Principal is whether APR has been rigorous enough in removing mediocre teachers.

In guiding curriculum and instruction, APR uses its autonomy to emphasize careful planning, insisting on and rewarding student effort, data-driven instruction, and high expectations. Much as Shepard (2000) would suggest, APR's process for curriculum development is tightly linked to the school's use of assessment. Departments build the design of each course around Gateway assessments that reflect the standards teachers want students to be able to reach at the end of each school year. Teachers then plan backwards from these assessments to create their unit and lesson plans. The staff at APR believes proficiency with respect to the standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework reflected in success on the MCAS is non-negotiable and central to the terms of the school's bargain with the state embodied in the charter. Therefore, teachers in general, and department chairs in particular, spend significant time ensuring that the school's curricula are aligned with the state standards and seek to equip students to exceed the level of rigor required by the MCAS. As Elmore (1995) would suggest, teachers report being guided in the curriculum development process by students' prior knowledge and the need to cultivate deep understanding. To incentivize students to work diligently toward mastery of the school's standards, grades at APR rely heavily on students' on-going effort (particularly the quality of their homework) and the Gateway assessments (which students must re-rake until they pass). APR has rigorous promotion standards and requires students to earn a minimum of 70% in order to pass. APR thus seeks to combat the disidentification with school described by Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), and Steele and Aronson (1998) through teaching students academic perseverance. APR also uses its external and internal assessment (particularly the Gateways) to shape both instruction and intervention. As Shepard (2000) would

advocate, teachers carefully review assessment results to figure out what they need to tweak about their teaching and which students need additional tutoring or other supports. One of the lessons of their data that APR's school leaders believe they have not sufficiently responded to is an internal achievement gap despite the school's success in raising the achievement of African-American students. A final noteworthy element of APR's approach to curriculum and instruction is that the school staff attributes their decision to reject tracking and instead focus on tutoring and remediation for struggling students to the school's commitment to maintaining high expectations for all students.

The school culture at APR reflects the use of the school's autonomy to make data-driven decisions, to inculcate in students a belief in the Eastern principle of "gambatte," to maintain close communication with families, to cultivate trust among staff, families, and students, to enforce high behavioral expectations, and to systematically teach character. The school leaders and staff at APR believe, as does Shepard's (2000), that external and internal assessment results should not only shape curriculum as described above but should be at the center of school-wide decision-making. This approach is best illustrated by the teacher task-force that was created to develop and implement a plan for pushing students to achievement levels above passing - "beyond 70" – by emphasizing higher order skills. The Japanese notion of "gambatte" which in English is translated as "to persist, put in your full effort, and never give up" is a central tenet of the APR culture. From the school's rigorous promotion standards to the intensive investment in tutoring and remediation to the homework center and advisory system, the school staff is constantly communicating to students directly and indirectly that hard work and perseverance are valued at APR. According to the APR inspection report, students have

internalized the message that their teachers expect a lot from them and are prepared to

work hard alongside them to ensure that they reach high standards. APR's approach to

teaching students academic perseverance aligns closely with Steele's (1992) description

of the "wise schooling" necessary to help students overcome stereotype threat. APR has

developed strong systems of communication with families that reinforce the messages the

school seeks to send students including a family-school contract that sets clear

expectations about the important of punctuality and diligent completion of homework and

bi-weekly progress reports that indicate with great precision how students are doing

academically so that parents can help students strategize about how to improve. Perry

(2003) worries about the lack of a post-segregation paradigm for African-American

parents teaching their children to cope with racism and overcome various structural

obstacles to African-American success, but APR seems to be developing just such a

paradigm by providing families with guidance on how to support their children's

academic success. The advisory system – matching teachers with small groups of

students who they are responsible for coaching around school and life issues and whose

families they communicate with closely – seems to be effective in facilitating the

development of the kind of trusting staff-family and staff-student relationships that Bryk

and Schneider (2002) found to be critical to the success of urban schools. Just as Hill,

Foster, and Gendler (1990) found in the focus schools they studied, APR's key

constituencies see the school's strict rules and consistent enforcement of consequences as

critical to students' success. Beyond providing structure, APR also seeks to more deeply

shape student behavior and choices through character education. APR's seven core

values reflect the founders' vision of integrating Eastern educational principles into the

APR educational model. From engaging students in cleaning the school each day to a system of group based rewards, APR supplements direct instruction around the core values with reinforcing routines and rituals. Although APR's approach to character education draws on Eastern traditions rather than African-American ones, the school's emphasis on community-building and celebration of positive values may serve similar purposes to the initiatives proposed by Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), Steele and Aronson (1998), and Perry (2003) to overcome African-American students' disidentification with school.

Like Roxbury Prep and Neighborhood House, APR can be said to be using its autonomy to implement many of the strategies for bridging the achievement gap identified in the research literature. The analysis chapter seeks to unite the stories of the three schools into a single framework that describes patterns in the choices the three schools have made about their budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture.

V -- ANALYSIS

Introduction

In seeking to explore if and how three Boston charter schools are using their autonomy to successfully bridge the achievement gap, the preceding case studies focus on answering four central research questions:

- Budgets: How, if at all, do the case study schools allocate their resources to advance student achievement?

- Staffing: How, if at all, do the case study schools recruit, support, evaluate, and retain school staff to advance student achievement?

- Curriculum and Instruction: How, if at all, do the case study schools develop, assess, and refine their curricula to advance student achievement?

- School Culture: How, if at all, do the case study schools cultivate and sustain a student, parent, and staff culture to advance student achievement?

The case studies detail the specific strategic decisions each of the schools has made with respect to budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction, and school culture. In each area, the decisions the schools are making map back to what the contemporary literature on practices effective in bridging the achievement gap would suggest successful schools ought to be doing. Yet, to simply conclude that these schools are helping their African-American students perform at levels near, commensurate with, or even above their White, suburban peers by implementing a list of research-based education reforms would risk repeating the critical error of the effective schools researchers of the 1960s, 70s, and early

80s. For each of these schools the sum is more than its parts – the decisions each of these schools, and more specifically, school leadership teams, have made about their budgets, staffing, curriculum and instruction and school culture translate into a unique gestalt within each school that is at the foundation of their unusual results. However, although their cultures are unique there are important commonalities that can be traced to a set of common hypotheses about how to bridge the achievement gap.

Common Hypotheses About How to Bridge the Achievement Gap

There is a powerful moment in the Roxbury Prep promotional video (which was created to tell the school's story to prospective teachers, prospective families, and prospective donors) in which founding teacher Debby Saintil says that what Roxbury Prep does is to "teach students how to *do school*." In that simple statement Ms. Saintil captures one of the most intriguing commonalities among the stories of Roxbury Prep, Neighborhood House, and Academy of the Pacific Rim – the three schools are tightly coupled: in other words, they actually do what they say they do. Most urban school leaders would say that they intend for their schools to be places where teachers teach and students learn, where students are not allowed to disrupt class and the learning of others, where students are provided with the academic skills they need for college, where teachers collaborate to improve instruction, where school staff form positive mentoring relationships with their students, and where decision-making is data-driven. Yet despite these claims, it is clear that at many schools – particularly schools that serve predominantly low-income students of color – these intentions are not translating into

reality. What comes through clearly in the Roxbury Prep, Academy of the Pacific Rim, and Neighborhood House case studies is that they have built cultures in which they live their intentions. All three schools have a common set of hypotheses about how to bridge the achievement gap – although they articulate them somewhat differently – and all three schools, particularly their school leaders, are vigilant about operationalizing those hypotheses. This is consistent with Rosenholtz's (1985) finding that in effective schools "there is tighter congruence between values, norms, and behaviors of principals and teachers, and the activities that occur at the managerial level are aligned closely with, and facilitative of, the activities that occur at the technical level" (p. 360). Each of these hypotheses has significant implications for how the schools deploy their financial resources, the kind of staffs they hire and the ways they manage them, and their approach to curriculum and instruction - but fundamentally they are hypotheses about the school's culture -- the beliefs and behaviors that define each school community. An analysis of the three cases reveals five key hypotheses that shape the schools' practices, and ultimately the results, in these schools:

- A Culture That Teaches Effort Yields Success

- A Culture of High Expectations That Shapes Student Beliefs

- A Disciplined Culture That Yields A Physically and Emotionally Safe Context for Learning

- A Culture Built On Relationships That Yield Trust

- A Culture of Excellence in Teaching That Challenges and Inspires

This chapter will draw on the preceding case studies to explain how each of these hypotheses plays out in each of the three schools and seek to provide a window into the

relationship between the schools' success in bridging the achievement gap and their

school cultures.

A Culture That Teaches Effort Yields Success

A central concern of sociological theories of the achievement gap is students'

beliefs about the path to success. In their cultural-ecological theory of the achievement

gap, Ogbu and Simons (1998) make the claim that voluntary minorities (who chose to

immigrate to the United States) have internalized the belief that education and hard work

are the key to prospering in the United States, while involuntary minorities – particularly

African-Americans – value education and hard work, but do not commit to full

participation in institutional education because of their intense awareness of the barriers

to success posed by the nation's racial dynamics. Steele (1992) and Steele and Aronson

(1998) offer a psycho-social theory of the achievement gap that focuses on the experience

of stereotype threat – under-performance as a result of consciousness of the intense biases

against one's group. Steele and Aronson describe self-protective African-American

disidentification with school, essentially a phenomenon in which students conclude that

"I can't confirm the stereotype that I am not smart, if I don't try." Both the Ogbu and

Simons hypothesis and the Steele and Steele and Aronson hypothesis suggest that

African-American students are likely to fail unless they internalize the belief that their

effort will in fact yield genuine academic success. Perry (2003) explains how this

challenge has become even more acute in the post-Civil Rights era and details the need

for contemporary schools to draw on African-American educational history to craft an

appropriate response. At Roxbury Prep, Academy of the Pacific Rim, and Neighborhood House, a key cultural message students are being sent – albeit in different ways – is that effort yields success. This message is communicated explicitly through language and modeling, in the tradition of the pre-*Brown* segregated schools in the South described by Perry (2003), and implicitly through the school's academic systems.

<u>Language and Modeling</u>

Language and, more importantly, modeling – particularly for middle school adolescents who crave opportunities for social identification – can powerfully shape students' behavior within schools. Key constituencies at all three of the schools describe using their character development curricula, school rituals, and school events to communicate to students that effort is the key to achievement, but APR is the most explicit. For example, according to the Academy of the Pacific Rim 2005-06 Annual Report, "The central theme of the Academy is the spirit of 'gambatte.' Translated from Japanese, this means 'to persist, put in your full effort, and never give up.' In all we do at the school, we emphasize the mantra that effort determines success." (p. 4) The Gambatte message deals directly with the potential oppositional or ambivalent relationship to school that worries Ogbu and Simons. Students are explicitly taught that their ability to succeed within APR will depend on their hard work and that when they succeed they will be recognized by the institution for their efforts.

In addition to the language they use, all three schools model the relationship between hard work and success through teachers' remarkable work ethic. APR school leaders, teachers, and parents all describe the long hours that teachers work because of

their commitment to the students. Evidence of the symbolic value of teachers' long hours can be seen in the words of one parent who says of the APR staff, "It's not a 9:00 - 5:00 thing. Any hours of the day, they're here. And that's why I'm committed to doing anything they ask me to do. Because they show the commitment to my kids, I'm going to help in any way I can." Similarly, NHCS teachers contrast the driven staff culture at NHCS with traditional district schools; one teacher comments "You don't find many schools where you'll come in on a weekend and find teachers here working, which is what you get here. Or you don't have at other schools, teachers that stay until 6:00, 7:00 during the week at night doing things for the next day or the week." A Roxbury Prep parent draws a similar contrast, saying of Roxbury Prep teachers, "it's not like school where you're leaving at 2:30 and that's the end of it. They're here 'til way after 6:00, and they're readily available to however many students needs them at that given time." The leaders in all three schools talked about their high expectations for the hours their staffs would work and the trade-offs they knew they were making as leaders with respect to staff retention. Reflecting Leithwood et al.'s (2004) finding that effective school leaders establish shared goals and shared understanding of the activities necessary to achieve those goals, the school leaders at RPC, NHCS, and APR have succeeded in establishing norms of long hours – and even formally reinforce these norms through contracts [e.g., Roxbury Prep requires teachers to stay late for tutoring two days per week as part of their contracts]. The staff at each of the three schools clearly believes that they can provide their students with greater opportunity by putting in more hours – they believe hard work will yield results and they model that principle for families and students through their choices.

Academic Systems

The academic systems at each school reinforce the message that effort will yield success. At APR, homework completion is a substantial portion of students' grades and the principal explains that this policy is intended to be a "manifestation of valuing effort" as students see that you cannot successfully perform well in a class on test and quiz grades alone, but must be diligent about your work throughout the semester. Teachers at APR also allow students to re-do work in order to improve their grades. A teacher characterizes this strategy as a way to teach students to look for their errors and correct them – a way to persevere academically. A parent of a student who had been retained concisely communicates how effectively APR has delivered the effort yields success message when she explains with pride that there is no social promotion at APR and that, in her words, "If you want to get promoted, you have to work to be promoted." Tutoring plays a similar cultural role at all three schools to the grading system at APR. Both APR and RPC require teachers to tutor at least one period per day as part of their contracts. At NHCS, teachers can require students to stay after school whenever there is an academic concern and do so regularly. Moreover, at NHCS students who fail to submit homework assignments are required to stay after school for the following week to complete their homework at school. At RPC, students earn demerits when they fail to submit homework and each time they reach three demerits they are required to serve after school detention. Students who are chronically delinquent with respect to homework are required to participate in the Homework Center which lasts throughout the entire trimester.

All three schools provide significantly more instructional time than traditional district schools, as much as two hours a day. This is consistent with the argument put

forward by Davis and Thomas that, "Science has confirmed beyond any reasonable doubt that academic engagement – time on task – is indeed the single most crucial factor contributing to student achievement." However, beyond the direct benefits of extra time on task, the extended days at each school reinforce the belief across school constituencies that these schools get results through the hard work of staff, families, and students.

A Roxbury Prep teacher explains the school's superior performance on the MCAS in comparison to district schools by saying "[b]ecause we teach them longer and better." As a result of the Roxbury Prep's extended day (which goes to 4:15 PM rather than the 2:00 PM dismissal time of most Boston district schools), Roxbury Prep is able to provide students with two 50-minute periods of math instruction (one focused on math procedures, one focused on math problem solving) and two 50-minute periods of literacy instruction (one focused on reading comprehension and literature, one focused on writing and grammar). A report by a Massachusetts-based education advocacy organization notes that RPC students' extraordinary achievement in math "affirmed Roxbury Prep's decision to require double math classes for all students and suggests that the pedagogical premise upon which this decision was based—more time equals more learning—is legitimate." (p. 15-16) In addition to its extended academic day, Roxbury Prep also invests in extended-learning time through after school tutoring, Saturday School for students who are struggling in math, and a summer program (including academic remediation for some students and enrichment for others). At APR, a teacher describes the extended day in the context of achievement being the product of hard work, saying "in the 6th grade, they have Math twice a day for two trimesters. When you have that much time devoted to Math, your skills will improve, no matter who you are." The

conviction that more time on task can unlock the door to improved performance is also at play in APR's extended school year- a four week period from mid-June through early July – in which students who are struggling academically receive remedial instruction while their classmates participate in internships. RPC and NHCS also provide summer instruction for struggling students: four weeks at RPC and five weeks at NHCS. At all three schools, significant efforts are made to ensure that the instruction students receive during the summer responds directly to the deficiencies identified in their spring assessments. In fact, at Roxbury Prep, the requirement to attend summer school is linked directly to performance on the school's comprehensive assessments (final exams and final projects) and passing summer school depends on passing a second battery of comprehensive assessments. The underlying philosophy at work – that given enough time, every student can make academic progress – is fundamental to the culture of all three schools.

When a student is handed a paper with a bad grade, the three most likely emotional responses are: I am not smart therefore I failed, I am smart but my teachers can't see that so why bother, and I can get smart if I learn from my mistakes. As Ogbu and Simons, Steele, and Steele and Aronson explain, the sociological impact of the race – disidentification with school as a response to institutional racism or stereotype threat – often results in students adopting either the notion "I am not smart – at least in ways that matter to society – therefore I failed" or "I am smart but my teachers can't see that so why bother." Roxbury Prep, Academy of the Pacific Rim, and Neighborhood House are trying to teach students to see failure or under-performance as delivering a message of "not yet" to which the best response is perseverance in the form of hard work ("I can get

smart if I learn from my mistakes")or, as they say at APR, "gambatte." Language,

modeling, and academic systems are the vehicles for transmitting these messages.

A Culture of High Expectations That Shapes Student Beliefs

During the1970s, education researchers associated with the effective schools

movement identified high expectations as a critical feature of schools that are able to

produce significantly higher student achievement than the other schools serving

demographically similar populations of students. (Weber, 1971; Brookover, Beady,

Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Edmonds, 1979) The generations of education

researchers that have succeeded the effective schools movement in studying practices that

drive higher achievement for low income students of color have similarly emphasized

high expectations as an important feature of successful schools. Unlike the researchers of

the effective schools movement who often generated lists of important features without

conducting much research on how those features were achieved or sustained, subsequent

generations of educational researchers have sought to offer greater insights into

development of high expectations school cultures. These researchers have tended to

focus on three areas: teachers' beliefs about their students, the rigor of the school's

academic standards, and the use of data to drive continuous improvement in student

outcomes. With respect to teacher beliefs, Ogbu and Simons, Steele, and Steele and

Aronson argue that one of the most important ways schools could help minority students

avoid the downward spiral of disidentification from school is for teachers to persuade

their students that they reject institutional racism and stereotypical views of their

students' capacity. Ferguson argues that teachers' beliefs about what students can achieve shape their approach to curriculum and instruction. Ferguson (1998b) says of teachers, "If they expect black children to have less potential, teachers are likely to search with less conviction than they should for ways to help these children to improve, and hence miss opportunities to reduce the black-white test score gap." (p. 312) Rigorous academic standards are an important way that teachers translate their belief in students into classroom messages. Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk found in their research on school reform in Chicago in the 1990s that the schools that had the greatest success in boosting student performance were marked by "instructional program coherence" in which the content covered in the school curriculum, pedagogy, and assessments were all aligned vertically (grade-to-grade) and horizontally (across grade-levels) to ensure a focus on key learning outcomes and successively greater rigor as students move through the grades. To ensure that students receive the instruction necessary to reach high standards, Darling-Hammond and Falk (1997) argue that teachers must use data from assessments "to inform teaching decisions, to trigger special supports for student learning, and to evaluate school practices." (p. 191) Both Guskey (2003) and Shepard (2000) describe the importance of teachers examining areas where students have under-performed on assessments, identifying alternative strategies for teaching the relevant concepts or skills, and providing students with further opportunities to demonstrate proficiency. Guskey likens this process to the behavior of a successful coach: "Immediately following a gymnast's performance on the balance beam, for example, the coach explains to her what she did correctly and what could be improved. The coach then offers specific strategies for improvement and encourages her to try

again. As the athlete repeats her performance, the coach watches carefully to ensure that she has corrected the problem." (p. 11) Interestingly, the feedback loop Darling-Hammond and Falk (1997), Shepard (2000), and Guskey (2003) describe has the potential to both communicate high expectations and reinforce the previously described message that effort yields success.

Teachers' Beliefs

The beliefs of the staff at each school about what their students can achieve are immediately evident in how they talk about their schools' missions and are demonstrated daily by the teachers' expectations in the classroom. Roxbury Prep's core mission of "preparing students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college" permeates the culture from the classrooms named after colleges, to the annual trips to college campuses, to the instructional references to the relationship between what students are learning in middle school and the academic work they will need to do in college. The RPC Charter Renewal Inspection team reports, "Teachers express clear expectations that all students can achieve at a high level, supporting the school's belief, stated in the mission [statement], that 'all students can succeed in college preparatory programs'." (p. 13) Notably, a Roxbury Prep co-director describes high expectations as a non-negotiable requirement of staff, "We expect teachers not to make excuses for our students that they had a difficult night at home, or that they are at a 3rd grade reading level so they are never going to be able to learn. That type of thing. That's just not going to happen here."

At Neighborhood House, the Board and staff reference the school's commitment to be "a neighborhood-based school that integrates education with social services and

health care programs" not to deflect responsibility for student achievement onto factors beyond the school's control, but rather to emphasize the role of human services in fulfilling the school's commitment to ensure that students reach proficiency. The robust supports that comprise NHCS's full-service model serve as an additional vehicle for communicating to students the school's confidence that every NHCS student, with the proper assistance, can achieve. The NHCS headmaster, who multiple constituencies describe as the chief spokesman for the school's vision, sees the school's integration of educational and social services as necessary to prepare students to compete with anyone and, in a phrase often heard at NHCS, to be able to "succeed anywhere." It is noteworthy that the NHCS headmaster's role in creating a culture of high expectations appears to encompass not only the vision setting that Fullan (2002) and Leithwood et al.(2004) describe, but also the commitment to providing teachers with the resources they need for success that Sebring and Bryk (2000) identify as critical to building the trust between staff and school leaders necessary for school success. The middle school dean contrasts the academic climate at NHCS with that of traditional district schools, "If I had to say, I would say we have a higher set of expectations and structures in place so that we're able to hold kids accountable to a higher level of academic work..."

The findings of the NHCS Renewal Inspection Team echo this "high expectations, high support" theme: "When asked to describe the level of difficulty of their assignments, the six middle school students who participated in [the focus group] said that while the work was hard they get enough support from teachers which makes it easy for them to complete and understand what is expected of them." (p. 15) Like NHCS and RPC, the staff at APR seeks to create an environment that uniformly communicates

high expectations. The APR Charter Renewal Inspection Team found, "During focus groups and interviews, teachers confirmed their confidence that all students at APR can succeed and reiterated their dedication to helping their students thrive." (p. 14) An APR Board member describes APR as a school in which academic achievement is non-negotiable, saying "And I believe that if you believe in the kids and you say to them, 'You can learn, you're going to learn, and this is how we operate, kid, and whether you like it or not, you're going to learn,' they learn. To me, that's the mission of the school." In a comment reminiscent of remarks made by parents at all three schools, one NHCS parent summarized the impact of teachers' beliefs on students by saying simply, "So if you set the bar high, they'll try to reach for it. You set the bar low, that's how high they're going to go too."

Rigorous Academic Standards

The school leaders and teachers at all three schools take great pride in having written their own standards and curricula for their classes. At all three schools the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks serve as a foundation, but then the schools supplement those standards to push the students further faster and to allow teachers to identify and enhance areas where they feel the Massachusetts standards provide insufficient depth or rigor. At Roxbury Prep, "Teachers use standards from the Massachusetts state frameworks, Advanced Placement exams, Core Knowledge, and other nationally recognized sources to establish specific, rigorous, clear, measurable, and manageable academic standards that clearly define what each student should know and be able to do upon completion of each unit of each course" (p. 1) The school's written

materials and staff characterize the curriculum as "Massachusetts state standards plus."
During a three week period each August, the school's teachers develop and refine
curricula using an instrument called a Curriculum Alignment Template. Teachers
literally identify every standard to be taught in each course during the school year,
activities they can use to teach that standard, and how they will assess – on a formative
basis – student proficiency with respect to each standard. Critical to this process is
thinking through the prior knowledge and skills students will bring into each course. A
teacher explains that for teachers in the 6th grade, Roxbury Prep's grade of entry,
equipping students to meet rigorous 6th grade standards means "they [the Math teachers]
start with the 4th grade standards to make sure kids understand the procedural aspects of
Math and also… the conceptual and the thinking parts of it." The APR principal offers a
similar description of that school's curriculum development process beginning with the
state standards: "The [Massachusetts] frameworks guide our teaching. I wouldn't say that
the MCAS guides our instruction in the way the frameworks do. Every discipline has
written their own standards, and certainly they're guided by the frameworks, but also
pulling on other national standards…." At NHCS, a teacher explains their curriculum
process as beginning with the state standards, explaining, "I teach backwards from the
standards, so if they have to understand the different characteristics of the planets in
Astronomy and how that relates to Earth, you can do a lot of fun activities with that and
incorporate different learning styles while you're doing it. In the end, they've learned a lot
about the planets, they've had a fun time with it, and they understand it to where they can
take that with them to high school…." The approach of using standards as a starting
place for designing engaging instruction is precisely the approach Darling-Hammond

asserts schools that ensure diverse students meet high standards follow when she writes, "Teachers in these schools offer students challenging, interesting activities and rich materials for learning that foster thinking, creativity, and production." (p. 193) The systems that the school leaders at RPC, NHCS, and APR have put in place to support the development of rigorous curricula are consistent with the practices Elmore (1999) describes principals in successful New York City district schools adopting.

The staff at all three schools also see the MCAS as a reasonable measure of the MA standards--fair questions about important content. The APR Executive Director explains, "What it [MCAS-aligned instruction] looks like here is ensuring students know fractions, decimals and percents, and can construct a written response around a question that asks them to extend the dimensions of a poster by 30%. Those are good questions...." A NHCS teacher speaks in glowing terms of the cross-grade and cross-discipline collaboration around analyzing the math vocabulary on the MCAS and developing strategies to teach that vocabulary across the school. While some critics of the accountability movement might call that "teaching to the test," at RPC, NHCS, and APR teachers see both the state standards and the MCAS as drivers or rigor. One of the Roxbury Prep Co-Directors distinguishes between ensuring student proficiency with respect to the Massachusetts standards and what he sees as less educationally sound test prep:

> People ask me a lot, do our teachers teach to the test... And I say, 'Well, if that means that we spend the week or ten days before the MCAS cramming down our students' throats just to make sure that they do well on the MCAS, no, that is not what happens here. And if we did that, it probably wouldn't work. If that means aligning our curriculum with the state standards, you know, looking at the test, creating questions on comprehensive exams at Roxbury Prep that look similar to MCAS tests. If it means making sure that our students know the information that's going

to be on the test, yeah, that is what we do.' But it's also what we're supposed to do.

This characterization of the role of the MCAS in the Roxbury Prep curricular and instructional systems is echoed by Roxbury Prep teachers, which suggests that the Roxbury Prep co-directors are delivering the instructional program coherence that Newmann et al. (2001) identified as critical to school success. Similarly, a NHCS teacher distinguishes ensuring students are equipped to do well on the MCAS from teaching to the test, "It's not teaching to the MCAS, but teaching about it…. Teach them what they should be looking for, not just on the MCAS, but on any kind of test or assignment…." Parents at all three schools also explain students' success on the MCAS in terms of students having learned what they need to know for the MCAS all year long. An APR parent's comment that, "When the MCAS come it's like, my daughter said, 'Mommy that was so easy.' Stuff that they're getting all day in the 6th grade." suggests that the schools' emphasis on curricular alignment may be effective in lowering some of the test anxiety or stereotype threat Steele and Steele and Aronson worry about. Students who feel confident in the content and in having learned what they need to excel on the MCAS are far less likely to worry about their poor performance confirming stereotypes about African-American under-performance.

Data-Driven Instruction

School leaders and teachers in the study all describe each of their schools as having a culture of data-driven instruction. The APR principal explains the data analysis process at the school: "[W]e sit down with the data and we look at the analysis and we

note trends and that changes our instruction over the course of the year, what is this specific content, this specific skill? What is it where our students' weaknesses are? What do we need to teach?"'" To illustrate the depth of APR's commitment to data-driven instruction, the APR Renewal Inspection Report describes the school's "Beyond 70" initiative in which a task force of teachers worked collaboratively to identify key higher-order skills students needed, implemented teaching strategies aimed at developing those skills, and then assessed student progress to drive further improvements in instruction. The APR Renewal Inspection Team said of this initiative, "This is a critical example of how the school identifies a need, brainstorms strategies, pilots a plan, and assesses the plan's effectiveness to help them learn, grow and improve." (p. 13) APR's detailed progress reports for families even provide a vehicle for data-driven family involvement in their children's education. The middle school dean at NHCS describes a similarly data-driven culture, particularly with respect to the MCAS, in which teachers continuously reflect on student learning: "[A]ll teachers who are teaching in MCAS tested grades are using sample questions from released tests, are discussing the work that they're doing with their kids either with other teachers or with administrators, or both, [and] are analyzing patterns of achievement on assessments." Moreover, the middle school dean at NHCS meets with teachers to discuss their students' in-class assessment results and how to address weaknesses identified on those assessments. At all three schools various constituencies talked about the schools' ability to respond quickly when student performance on assessments does not meet their expectations. For example, teachers at NHCS restructured math instruction – adding time for instruction in basic procedures in smaller classes – because their students were not doing as well on the math MCAS as

they wanted. Describing this experience, the middle school dean comments, ""That's something that we can kind of turn on a dime and implement over the course of a two to three month period because we have the freedom and flexibility to do that." The 2002 DOE Site Visit Report for RPC describes a similarly data-driven approach saying, "Evidence given by teachers suggests that past student performance significantly impacts the curricular refinements and revisions that teachers and administrators make." (p.2) A RPC teacher explains the careful process of analysis of assessment data that the school staff uses:

> I don't know any [other] place where teachers look at the exam that they've designed and given, and go through question by question. How many students got it right? How many students got it wrong? What did people choose otherwise, and they have to turn that in to the administrators of the school so they're accountable to the school.

The RPC Charter Renewal Inspection Report describes a culture in which data-driven instruction carries over from the MCAS and Stanford 9 to internally developed exams and projects to even day to day instruction:

> In addition to Comprehensive Assessment, quizzes, and nightly homework, teachers' questioning strategies (such as polling students for their answer choices or having students hold up index cards with their answers) allow teachers to gauge quickly which students understand a concept and which ones need further work. In the classes visited, teachers immediately used the results of a poll or check to reteach a concept if needed. (p. 15)

In many ways, the staff at APR, RPC, and NHCS describe their schools as approaching Shepard's (2000) vision of the ideal role of assessment in school culture:

> We have not only to make assessment more informative, more insightfully tied to learning steps, but at the same time we must change the social meaning of evaluation. Our aim should be to change our cultural practices so that students and teachers look to assessment as a source of insight and help instead of an occasion for meting out rewards and punishments. (p. 13)

One of the key strategies used at APR and RPC to use data in ways that drive instruction is the development of interim assessments – periodic staff-generated internal assessments that measure student progress against the school's standards. At APR, the high expectations for each course are expressed in Gateway assessments that reflect the essential skills teachers intend for students to acquire in each course. The principal explains that performance on the Gateway assessments constitutes a significant portion of each student's grade for each course, ""[T]hey are roughly 10% of students' grade. You can retake, retake, retake until you get [it]... you either get nothing or you pass it." The "retake it until you get it right" approach conveys two core values: (1) the high expectations conviction that every student can succeed; and (2) the belief that the path to success is hard work, trying again and again in order to get it right. An APR parent links the Gateway assessments both to students' preparation for the MCAS and to students' ultimate development of proficiency, "Two of the Gateway exams that they do is preparing for the MCAS, also. They have to pass that within a certain time. But the good thing about it, they got like several chances to do it over again until they get it perfect. They won't get past it unless they do it correctly, and I think that Gateway testing helped my daughter a lot in her subject area." Similar to APR's Gateway assessments, Roxbury Prep has a system of comprehensive assessments which teachers design and/or refine during the summer curriculum development period. A teacher says of these comprehensive assessments, "And so when I come in August and I write my first trimester comprehensive assessment, I know where kids need to be by November and December. If it's October and I'm not on track, I'm very aware of that, and so it makes every day feel very important and every minute feel very important." Teachers at

Roxbury Prep and the RPC Charter Renewal Application describe a process in which teachers analyze each trimester's comprehensive assessments question by question to determine which standards students are mastering and which standards with which students are struggling. Teachers then work individually and with the Co-Director of Curriculum & Instruction to develop plans for refining instruction in response to the data and plans for providing intensive tutoring/support for the weakest students. At Roxbury Prep, a similar process of analysis and planning is followed with the results of standardized tests as well. The high degree of engagement of Roxbury Prep's Co-Director of Curriculum & Instruction and the NHCS middle school dean in the work of using assessment data to refine instruction is consistent with Elmore's (1999) finding in his research in New York City's District 2 that successful principals are not merely business managers, but instructional leaders who spend their time coaching teachers around how to elevate student achievement.

Ultimately, the culture of high expectations that is present at Roxbury Prep, Academy of the Pacific Rim, and Neighborhood House as a result of teachers' beliefs (the conviction that the students can achieve and the rejection of stereotypes about the capacity of low-income students of color), rigorous standards (aligned with the Massachusetts standards and designed to equip students with the academic skills they will need in college), and data-driven instruction (in which assessment data is used to refine teaching strategies and target intervention services) provides the climate for African-American achievement called for by both education researchers focused on educational practices effective in bridging the achievement gap (from Elmore to Darling-Hammond to Sebring & Bryk) and the anthropologists and sociologists concerned with how schools

might overcome the psycho-social obstacles to achievement like Ogbu and Simons (1998), Steele (1992), Steele and Aronson (1998), and Perry (2003).

A Disciplined Culture That Yields A Physically and Emotionally Safe Context for Learning

All constituencies, but particularly parents, at RPC, NHCS, and APR passionately believe that the fact that the schools are remarkably safe and structured is vital to their students' achievement. Yet, although safety is almost uniformly cited by education researchers as a feature of high-performing schools, little attention is paid to how safe school cultures are attained and maintained in the effective schools literature, the successor literature on educational practices effective in raising the achievement of low-income urban students of color, or research directed at understanding the achievement gap. Darling-Hammond and Falk, citing approvingly the opportunity-to-learn standards of the New York School Quality Review Initiative, note that "students should encounter an environment that is respectful, purposeful, physically and psychologically safe, and personalized...." (p. 197) However, beyond emphasizing the importance of advisory groups, they do not delve deeply into how safe school environments can best be established and preserved. Sebring and Bryk explain that principals in higher-performing schools serving urban students "secure academic and social support services for students in need, so that classroom disruptions are minimized." (p.441) However, Sebring and Bryk don't explain why in one school a long list of student support services may be merely a symptom of a culture of disorder, while in another school a long list of student support services may be critical to creating a culture of order. For RPC, NHCS, and

APR, safety and order seem to be a by-product of the deeply held conviction that student learning time is sacred and should never be disrupted. This conviction is operationalized through high behavioral expectations and the consistent and vigilant enforcement of those expectations.

High Behavioral Expectations

All of the schools require students to wear uniforms and have strict codes of conduct. The APR Executive Director attributes the school's success to what he calls a simple equation: "We've got more time, less distraction...." He views enforcement of the school's strict code of conduct as critical for maximizing instructional efficacy and teaching good character, and explains, "[W]e have very high expectations for behavior in the classroom and if you're not ready to learn then you need to not be in the classroom and you need to write and reflect and have a serious conversation about your behavior, give a sense of teaching responsibility, integrity, respect." APR teachers set a low threshold for when students need to be sent of class for disruptive behavior and being sent out of class is always met with consequences. One parent's particularly colorful observation about APR's strictness is that they are able to achieve a level of discipline through their approach to school culture that this parent had only previously seen achieved with more severe measures: "Back in my country, to do that, I grow up somewhere where they have to beat you, you know? To make you go straight. But in this school, I'm so glad to see the way they're doing it without beating them up." The key constituencies at Roxbury Prep link virtually every aspect of the school back to the theme of accountability, particularly student accountability for being where they are supposed to

be and doing what they are supposed to do. Of the school's small size, a teacher says, "I can walk out of my office and I know every child that is not in class and I can ask them why they're not in class and why they're not walking faster to class? Kids feel that adult presence and so many adults per child and there's one hallway. There's nowhere for them to get lost." Commenting on a discussion of student accountability for behavior at Roxbury Prep, a teacher says of the school that is has "structure like you've never seen before, [and] that allows you to teach a full period to every class and work with amazing people and amazing kids." A Roxbury Prep parent explains that she is reassured by these high behavioral expectations, saying, "There's zero tolerance for behavior so you know you can't get away with anything. That was my main fear of middle school." At NHCS, strictness is discussed through the recurring theme of family in that NHCS constituencies speak about high behavioral expectations as an expression of love and caring. This feature of the NHCS culture is evident in the headmaster's strategy for conveying to new parents that the school will be a strict place:

> One of the things that he always says, and it kind of cracks me up when
> he says it, I kind of scan the audience to see what the parents' reactions are
> to it, but he always describes himself as "Old School." One of the ways I
> interpret that, Old School means there's a clear distinction between who
> the adult is and who the child is... My job is to teach you and to help you
> . . . and to teach you how to be an adult. You are not that now. There's a
> safety that comes [with that]...

A parent notes that students are well aware of the NHCS behavioral expectations and says that when incidents occur: "they're [students are] very well aware of what could happen, what consequences can be if it continues to evolve into anything bigger than what it shouldn't be. It's very safe here." Another parent, agreeing with that characterization of the schools, adds "one thing about [the Headmaster], you can always see that he cares about what goes on. I don't care how small it is. He cares about what

goes on in this school, and you can see it in his actions, you hear it in his words, and I think that's what makes the school the way it is." Given the central role in school discipline played by the school leaders at RPC, NHCS, APR (who are each responsible for enforcement of their school's code of conduct), it is important to note that all six school leaders talk about strictness and high expectations for behavior as central to their vision of effective schools. Their success in cultivating parent buy-in around that vision suggests that they have been able to develop trusting partnerships with families – a key skill of successful principals identified by Leithwood et al. (2004) and Bryk and Schneider (2002).

At each of the schools adherence to high behavioral expectations goes beyond strict rules to adherence to a core set of community values – a disciplined approach to life. At APR, this set of community values is known by the acronym K.G.-P.R.I.D.E. and explicitly connects APR's expectations for student conduct to the intention in the school's mission to combine the best of Eastern and Western education. These values are emphasized on the school's walls, through the school's code of conduct, and in the school's character education program. These values are also operationalized through rituals like the Zheng Li ritual wherein students have a scheduled time to assist with cleaning the building and the Hansei ritual wherein students respond to inspirational quotations through journal writing. Interestingly, the value of Kaizen (meaning continual improvement of ourselves and our community) is reinforced through the use of group-based rather than individual consequences and incentives that teach students to take responsibility for their peers. Roxbury Prep, like APR, strives to have students internalize the belief that self-discipline is essential for academic success. The school

uses a weekly character education class to teach the values of its school creed:

scholarship, integrity, dignity, responsibility, perseverance, community, leadership,

peace, social justice, and investment. These values are reinforced through "Creed Deeds"

which are a system of merits students can earn by demonstrating the values in the creed

and use at periodic Creed Deed auctions to redeem prizes like lunch with a teacher and a

friend. Like the Gambatte award at APR, Roxbury Prep awards the "Spirit Stick" to one

student each week who has exemplified the values of the school creed during the school-

wide Community Meeting that occurs each Friday. As part of the awarding of the "Spirit

Stick," students perform a skit about one of the creed values the student has exhibited and

a teacher describes how the student has distinguished himself or herself. The RPC

Charter Renewal Inspection team reports that the school's efforts to teach self-discipline

are being internalized by students:

> In focus group interviews, for example, students commented that
> wearing required uniforms helps them focus attention on academics. This
> expectation has quickly been internalized: one girl mentioned that she
> removed her earrings because she thought they might distract others.
> Hearing middle-school-aged students make statements like this helped the
> Team understand the mission in action and seemed to exemplify a climate
> in which students make decisions that encourage growth. (p. 18)

At NHCS, character education is not an explicit part of the curriculum. However,

there is a systematic effort by teachers to use classroom experiences to teach and

reinforce an ethic of responsibility – both responsibility for self and responsibility for

one's community. For example, students at NHCS participate in an annual goal setting

exercise that is designed to help them take charge of their learning. Teachers regularly

encourage students to check each other's work which, as the NHCS Renewal Inspection

Report explains, "is significant in that it helps students to be responsible for each other's

learning. As a result, they understand that they are a part of a community of learners." (p.

16) Students who have shown notable diligence in seeking to achieve academically are highlighted each week – like the Gambatte award at APR and the Spirit Stick at Roxbury Prep discussed above – in the NHCS school-wide assembly. Although character education at each of the three schools varies in form, it is clear that each school sees high behavioral expectations as something to be not only enforced, but also taught directly and internalized.

Consistency and Vigilance

Academy of the Pacific Rim and Roxbury Prep take what could be characterized as a "broken windows" approach to student discipline, similar to the law enforcement theory popularized during the 1990s across the country. The broken windows theory in law enforcement – developed by criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling, described in detail in Kelling and Coles (1996) and explained sociologically in Gladwell (2000) – reasons that crime is a by-product of disorder. An unattended broken window sends a message of community indifference and inevitably leads to more broken windows. Similarly, minor crimes like graffiti and turnstile jumping in the subway set a tone of disorder that invites more serious crime. Applied to a school context, the broken windows theory would suggest that the failure to address less egregious misbehavior is not addressed (like calling out in class or threatening remarks), a message of disorder will result, and significantly more serious misbehavior will follow and significant instructional time will be lost.

Thus, APR and RPC prioritize consistent and vigilant enforcement of their codes of conduct. An APR parent praises the school's uniform enforcement of high behavioral

expectations by saying "They establish the rules. These are the rules, if you do this, do that, these other penalties, consequences, and there's that consistent follow through. Where in some of the . . . a lot of, well public schools I've visited, that's not there." The Executive Director at APR contrasts the school's vigilant enforcement of its code of conduct with the inconsistency of expectations at other schools, saying "we treat the little things in a big way, so if a student is overheard making some big verbal threat, most likely [they] are in in-school suspension. Whereas I don't know as much about this in a district school, but my guess is more of those things slide. There's perhaps a stronger institutional response here." The APR Executive Director also sees the school's small size as critical to the consistent and vigilant enforcement of high expectations: "If you're in a large system, you feel [as a student] perhaps less accountable for your own performance or whatever, but when you know your teachers and your advisor, your family knows the school and there's just more accountability there." An APR parent makes a similar connection, saying that the school's size makes possible "quick, firm and even-handed response at an early stage to small problems before they become big ones" which ensures that the school is a safe environment. The consistent discipline at APR yields a palpable sense of order in the school, leading the Department of Education 2005 Site Visit Team to report "the school provides a very safe environment that allows teachers and students to focus on teaching and learning." The Roxbury Prep 2002 DOE Site Visit Report offers a similar characterization of Roxbury Prep's approach to discipline: "A culture of order and respect is cultivated and students are expected to adhere to it. As one student put it, 'When you aren't allowed to get away with little things, there is no way for the big things to happen.'" (p. 5) According to the RPC

Renewal Inspection Team "The focus in all classrooms at RPCS is clearly on learning rather than discipline. Classroom management is clear and consistent across the school." (p. 14) In addition to ensuring orderly classrooms, a Roxbury Prep Co-Director sees the school's strict code of conduct as supporting effective instruction in other ways:

> So they [the students] feel safe physically but I also think they feel emotionally where they can come and they can take risks in class. They can raise their hand in class and not fear sort of being made fun of because they know that there will be consequences for the person if they make fun of them, but also, taking risks is what we want them to do.

Asked to explain what distinguishes Roxbury Prep from districts schools, a parent responds: "I would say consistency. I think that they're consistent with their rules. From day one they've been consistent, whereas other schools may start to sway..."

Key constituencies at NHCS do not refer to vigilance and consistency in the context of strict enforcement of the code of conduct, but rather in the context of identifying and addressing students' social needs. The headmaster explains how the school's high expectations, high support philosophy plays out with a students struggling to focus on academics in class and at home: "I know little Johnny's mom is this and that, no matter what the culture is, but hey, he's still got to get his homework done in the morning. I'm sorry if there's lots of chaos going on in the house. Maybe we need to help that and maybe he needs to be at school with us more, so at least when he comes to this environment, he'll have his stuff done." A teacher describes a team approach to identifying the proper supports: "If it's not improving, then we can see that this child is struggling... Then we'd observe them for a period of time. We'd first decide on what we were going to observe them for and after a period of time, we'll meet and compare our notes and see what we should do next, decide on that." The school leaders, teachers, and parents also emphasize that the regular communication between school and family

provides a vehicle for early intervention when students are struggling behaviorally and in

need of greater support. An NHCS parent explains:

> [A]gain, the teacher/parent relationship is there. If they find out that
> something is going on with your child, they'll call you. And I've had a
> personal experience with that, where they saw something that was not
> developing--not happening--but it was developing. I got a call saying,
> 'You need to check out what's going on because something's going to
> happen.' ...To let me know they care about my child enough to make sure
> that nothing hurts the child in one way or another. . . I am very
> comfortable with now my son who's here. My son is very safe.

The fact that consistency and vigilance at NHCS differs in form from consistency and

vigilance at Academy of the Pacific Rim and Roxbury Prep suggests that the means of

ensuring high behavioral expectations need not be the same at nigh functioning schools –

but that establishing and maintaining a safe, orderly culture must be an absolute priority.

This notion of safety as critical to a successful academic environment is consistent with

the findings of Hill, Foster, and Gendler (1990) and Darling-Hammond (1997). Just as

Hill, Foster, and Gendler (1990) observed in the schools they studied, structure and order

are critical at RPC, APR, and NHCS to students' willingness to show academic

enthusiasm and curiosity to their peers. As Darling-Hammond (1997) found in her study

of small schools, the safe environment at RPC, APR, NHCS facilitates the development

of close teacher-student relationships which help teachers better understand their

students' needs and motivate students to do well academically in order to please their

teachers.

A Culture Built On Relationships That Yield Trust

Roxbury Prep, Academy of the Pacific Rim, and Neighborhood House have

succeeded in developing school cultures characterized by trusting relationships between

staff and students, staff and students' families, and among the staffs of each school.

Darling-Hammond explains that "Recent research has found that students experience

much greater success in school settings that are structured to create close, sustained

relationships between students and teachers." (p. 194) Similarly, Steele argues that one

of the best ways schools can combat the impact of stereotype threat on student

performance is through the development of relationships between teachers and students

in which students feel valued by their teachers and sense their teachers' faith in them.

Ogbu and Simons also see teacher-student relationships as a tool for overcoming

disidentification with school when those relationships help students to see that their

teachers have their "best interests at heart." (p. 180) In their book, *Trust in Schools: A*

Core Resource for Improvement, Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue that a foundation of

"relational trust" between the adults in the school community is essential to the healthy

day-to-day functioning of schools and a critical element in efforts to raise student

achievement. They argue that a central responsibility of school leaders is to create

structures that support positive, constructive communication among the adults in the

school. Bryk and Schneider argue that both keeping schools small and "voluntary

association" through parental choice can create the right climate for developing trust

within schools – and certainly these features are present at Roxbury Prep, Academy of

Pacific Rim, and Neighborhood House: small schools to which families must apply for admission via lottery. However, all three schools are also taking many affirmative steps to develop relational trust between staff and families that are consistent with Bryk and Schenider's findings – including creating effective vehicles for regular two-way staff-family communication, ensuring that the schools delivers on their promises to parents, and providing teachers with training and support around partnering with students' families. Like trust between staff and students or between staff and students' families, trusting relationships within a school staff are critical. Elmore (1999) argues that a key problem in education is the tendency toward teachers working in isolation – focused on their own classrooms with little opportunity to share, reflect, or learn together with their colleagues. In Elmore's research, the principals of high-functioning urban schools are able to achieve a paradigm shift such that school staffs become communities of learners in which teachers share ideas, test each other's hypotheses, visit each other's classrooms, and work together to improve instruction. Similarly, Sebring and Bryk report that in higher-performing schools "principals make sure that there are regular opportunities for reflective dialogue among teachers about practice, pedagogy, and student learning. Teachers open their classroom doors and share their work with peers." (p. 442) Fullan (2002), similarly, identifies relationship building within the school staff as central to the work of school leaders and argues "Well-established relationships are the resource that keeps on giving," and explains "Creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership. Information, of which we have a glut, only becomes knowledge through a *social* process." (p. 18) Similarly, Rosenholtz (1986) emphasizes that close relationships between principals and teachers can have a positive impact on student performance, but

only if those relationships facilitate activities that are aligned with the school's goals and support the school's norms for effective instruction.

Students and Staff

At all three schools, the school's key constituencies, like Bryk and Schneider, link the school's small size to the importance of trust-building relationships. This view is consistent with Darling-Hammond and Falk's assertion that "Teachers are more effective when they know students well, when they understand how their students learn, and when they have more time with students to accomplish their goals." (p. 194) The NHCS middle school dean connects the school's small size to the quality of teachers' attention to their teaching and attention to exactly where their students are academically. She also connects the small class size (average of 22) at the school to the quality of teaching, noting that the school has committed significant resources to making it possible for math computation to be taught in classes of 11, and adding, "so in class there's no doubt that if you're teaching 11 kids you can individualize instruction a whole heck of a lot more than you can if you're [teaching] 22, and at 22 you can do a lot better than if you're teaching 35, which is what I used to teach in California." An RPC co-founder echoes this sentiment saying "Any teacher who's ever been in the classroom will tell you that it's more productive to have 20 kids in the room than 40 kids." The benefits of small classes are certainly evident to parents. A RPC parent notes "I like that the classrooms are very small, the setting. So your child gets the attention that he or she needs." At APR, the