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Success of Theme Implementation: Small Leadership Theme High Schools in New York City

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Success of Theme Implementation:
Small Leadership Theme High Schools
in New York City

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in <u>Policy Studies</u>

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Success of Theme Implementation:
Small Leadership Theme High Schools in New York City
By Samantha Wiese
May 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction: This study reports the research results of small public high schools in New York City whose founding was centered around the theme of leadership. As an undergraduate student who interned in one of these high schools, the researcher has witnessed the disconnect that can exist between a school's name and its curriculum. While there are many high schools in New York City that support the development of leadership in their students, the 15 high schools studied in this project were selected because they included the word "leadership" in their title. These schools were selected because they are more obvious in their display of commitment to the ideals of a leadership theme. The results from this study will be presented in a report to the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University as a Capstone Project.

Methods: The data collected in this report were gathered from the websites of the high schools studied and through interviews with the principals of those schools. Of the 14 high schools contacted, 4 responded, providing a response rate of 35%. The study reports statistics for all 15 leadership theme high schools, with more extensive data for the 4 respondents.

Similarities: A school's peer index is based on academic achievement, the number of students in the special education program, and the age appropriateness of the students for their grade levels. 53% of leadership theme high schools in New York City have a peer index between 1.76 and 2.25 (of a possible 4.00). A lower peer index indicates a higher need population (DOE Progress Report, 2009).

A school whose student body is comprised of at least 40% of students who meet the poverty criteria is eligible to receive Title I funding. This effort helps a school implement school-wide programs to help work against factors of poverty. 54% of leadership theme high schools in New York City have Title I funding eligibility between 80-100%. A school with more Title I eligibility is a higher poverty school.

Each academic school year is assessed by the Department of Education, and 56% of leadership theme high schools in New York City received a "B" on their Progress Report for the 2008-09 school year. However, only 30% of all New York City high schools received a "B" on their Progress Report in the same year. 78% of leadership high schools perform in the bottom 40% of all New York City public high schools.

The four schools interviewed for this research study provide a small amount of insight into the actual practices of leadership theme high schools. 75% of the schools interviewed truly seemed to hold students accountable for their behavior and performance. 100% of the four schools have an advisory program, though the extent to which this is used as a forum for discussions about leadership is questionable in at least one of the schools.

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INTRODUCTION

This study reports the research results of small public high schools in New York City whose founding was centered around the theme of leadership. This project grew out of the fact that it is simple for a school to not uphold the ideals upon which it was founded. However, this only misleads students and their parents, and reinforces a school's failure. When a school adheres to its theme, students may attend schools where the theme is apparent and serves its purpose of engaging students. When a school does not adhere to its theme, it is at a higher risk of attracting students who will not be satisfied with the school's curriculum.

In Spring 2009 the researcher took part in a semester-long internship at a small leadership theme high school in Manhattan. She witnessed the disconnect that can exist between a school's name and its practices. While the school was meant to teach leadership skills, it struggled for its students to meet standard graduation requirements. Many New York City high schools fall into similar patterns. Through speaking with our school's principal and various faculty members, it became clear that there was a desire to improve the school and integrate the themes of its title with its activities. Staff and faculty realized the difficulty in implementing a new curriculum, and they were also unsure of the most effective way to integrate a theme into the school.

This study was designed to identify current practices of leadership theme high schools. By identifying "best practices" of what is being used, it is easier for other schools to develop similar practices and work to turn themselves around. In addition to the importance of fostering academic success, the goal of all leadership theme high schools should be to successfully implement the theme into its school.

METHODS

This section identifies the methods used for obtaining information in the study.

This study faced many limitations. While the researcher sought to visit 14 leadership theme public schools in New York City, only four principals agreed to meeting. It would be recommended for someone who has a connection to these schools to do a similar study in order to learn more about the actual practices of these schools. Due to a personal investment in one of the leadership theme high schools, the researcher did not wish to meet with the principal of this school for this study. This school's statistics are included, but the principal was not offered an opportunity to participate in an interview.

Regents scores are important, but there are additional indicators of a school's success. This study takes into consideration the graduation rates, percentages of graduates with firm career plans, and how leadership theme schools perform compared to other New York City high schools.

While the researcher was not able to meet with as many schools as have been included in the study, there is a wealth of information available through the DOE website. However, there was uncertainty among professionals regarding the reliability of many of these statistics. Unfortunately, it was the only information available in some cases, and as it was published by the New York City Department of Education (DOE), the researcher decided to use this data in the instances where there was none other available.

The DOE has a proposal application for outside researchers who wish to do research in NYC schools. While a proposal was submitted for this study, there was no response from the DOE, despite numerous follow-up emails and phone calls. Approval by the DOE would have given the study a greater chance of being accepted by principals. There were two additional principals who were willing to participate in the study, if approval had been received. Unfortunately, the researcher was not aware of the DOE's policies for research and the application was submitted later than it otherwise would have. There was still ample time for a

decision to be made by the DOE, but additional time may have produced a different outcome.

Many of the leadership theme high schools were developed in the past few years and have not yet produced a graduating class. More information would have been useful in this research. The author recommends another study in a few years, once these schools have become more established.

Two schools used in this study are transfer schools. Progress Reports for schools serving transfer students are currently in development, providing for limited information for these two schools.

Principals were assured anonymity in this project as a means to increase participation. For that reason, the names of all schools used are listed in Appendix VII, but they are not identified in relationship to their statistics and/or interviews.

This section identifies the resources used to learn more about the topic. It is divided into five sections, which discuss the beginning of theme high schools, theme implementation, school size, student selection, and success.

Projects and research related to my work were found through database searches at the Syracuse University library, and electronic searches of education publications and related newspaper articles. The New York Times has an extensive amount of information in the archives of the Education section regarding theme high schools. This information dates back to the founding of theme high schools in the early 1990s and includes updates about their expansion and present status.

An article by Ancess and Allen (2006) is related to my research as it reviews the idea of theme high schools. However, this article does not concentrate on schools of a particular theme. The study reviews a variety of theme high schools in New York City in respect to their methods for implementing a theme.

The Beginning of Theme High Schools in New York City

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) has undergone many reform efforts, seeking to increase academic performance and abolish insufficient practices. "New York City first began to create small theme high schools as a systematic strategy to improve students' high school engagement and achievement in 1992" (Ancess and Allen, 2006, p. 2). In 2002 the DOE launched another round of school reform, seeking to close underperforming, large, comprehensive high schools. These were transformed into high school campuses, with multiple high schools functioning independently within the same building. This movement was a "response to the failures of traditional comprehensive high schools" (Ancess and Allen, 2006, p. 1).

Theme high schools were developed as a means to gain student interest and increase academic achievement. "Embedded within the theme component are powerful beliefs and promises: that there is a relationship among student

commitment, engagement, and achievement" (Ancess and Allen, 2006, p. 2). The intention of having a theme is that it will ideally attract and engage students, and further their educational outcomes.

Theme Implementation

A themed school must fulfill the same New York State standards that all high schools are held responsible for following. There are no guidelines or written expectations when it comes to a school upholding its theme. "The Education Department has no formula for how a school should fulfill its theme, and no one is watching to make sure this happens" (Gootman, 2005, para. 19). Theme schools are not held responsible for carrying out the theme they originally proposed to adhere to. While a theme school may have been created with intention to integrate a theme, many find themselves struggling to maintain proficient standardized test scores. "The pressure of having accountability for standardized test scores also diverts the faculty from developing strategies that use the theme as a lever for student engagement" (Ancess and Allen, 2006, p. 3). Since test scores are important to the DOE, as a measure of school success, the focus is shifted from nurturing theme integration, to increasing a test scores. This action is contradictory, considering that a significant component of creating theme schools was that it would help to increase students' test scores.

Ancess and Allen propose that there are three "degrees of thematic integration." The first is nominal, "in which the theme exists in name only" (p. 3). The second is marginal, where the theme is separate from the core instructional program, but is visible through the electives offered, and programs and activities within the school. The third is integral, in which "the theme's influence can be seen in the daily life of students and teachers… [and] in the content of the curriculum…" (p. 4). These labels help sort the various ways theme high schools operate.

School Size

In 2003 the Gates Foundation announced a large grant that was being given to the DOE. This grant was provided with the purpose of opening more small theme-based schools in New York City. The Chancellor's senior counsel for educational policy acknowledged that size is "the platform for being able to do the kinds of rigorous academics that are needed…" (Herszenhorn, 2003, para. 11).

The importance of school size is often debated. James Huguley responded to a publication entitled "Small Schools and Urban Youth: Using the Power of School Culture to Engage Students" (2008), and discusses the idea that decreasing the student population in a school will not automatically improve the school. "School size acts as [a] facilitating factor for other desirable practices… that tend to promote student learning" (para 5.). While a small school may find supportive attributes in its size, including a sense of community, the size is not sufficient in itself for creating a successful school. A small school size is helpful, but it does not provide a means to automatically determine the success of a school. A small school may perform better than a large one in some cases, but that is also probably accompanied by an engaging curriculum and teachers, as well as other positive factors that facilitate learning.

A book called Engaging Schools by the National Research Council also points out that while small schools could help achievement rates, particularly for disadvantaged students, they may also have fewer course offerings and resources. The book discusses a variety of means by which to engage students, but claims that "The fundamental challenge is to create a set of circumstances in which students take pleasure in learning and come to believe that the information and skills they are being asked to learn are more important or meaningful for them and worth their effort, and that they can reasonably expect to be able to learn the material" (p. 14). Theme high schools were created to be another means by which students could be engaged in learning required material and find value in it.

Student Selection

Theme schools have had many obstacles as they have attempted to gain educational ground in New York City. Many struggled to find directors, buildings, and students in the beginning of their existence (Dillon, 1993). Unfortunately, the problem of finding students who were interested in the schools' themes continued during the next decade, and "…teachers often find themselves having to sell a school's theme to students who were placed there not because of any passion for [the school's theme], but simply because there was no room elsewhere" (Gootman, 2005, para. 3). In many ways, New York City's school selection system fails its students by placing them in schools where they are not interested in the theme. A school that has failed academically in past years is unlikely to attract students. This causes many of the students who end up attending to have had low grades, as opposed to having an interest in the school's theme. By default, students are placed at lower-performing high schools when their grades and test scores are not desirable to well-ranked schools. Under these circumstances it can be difficult to utilize the theme for its purpose, as the students did not seek out the school because of its theme.

In Jonathan Kozol's article entitled "Segregated Schools: Shame of the City" (2006), he claims that there are small schools intended for upscale, wealthy families, and there are "small academies for black and Latino students with names like Academy of Leadership, or the Academy of Business Enterprise." The idea of a leadership theme high school is associated with poverty, with people who cannot and will not do anything about being placed there. Similarly, Ancess and Allen also claim that themes of "social justice and leadership are often associated with poor communities" (2006, p. 5). Kozol argues that the racial divide in New York City's high schools "is the devastating end result of the failure to educate black and Latino children effectively from the age of two and a half up to their 8th grade year" (Kozol, 2006, para. 3).

Noguera stated during a presentation at the coalition of Essential Schools Fall Forum in Washington, D.C. in 2002, "You can't force middle class parents to send their children to bad schools. You can only force poor parents to do that"

(Ancess & Allen, 2006, p. 7). Before browsing a high school directory, middle class and wealthy families know which schools are respectable and can be considered, and which need to be avoided. Families who live in poverty, are immigrants, and/or do not speak English are unable to make that judgment.

Success of Theme High Schools

It takes careful planning and thoughtful, intentional implementation to have a theme high school that remains true to its founding ideals. "In order to integrate themes effectively, school staff need to take collective responsibility and the DOE needs to provide support and technical assistance for strong internal accountability" (Ancess and Allen, 2006, p. 4). It is impossible to display a name over the front door and expect those who make up a school to follow its implications. A doorway that boasts "Leadership" above it will not produce a student leader. When well-chosen and implemented, "themes can greatly enhance the motivation of both students and faculty members and greatly improve the outcomes for high schools" (Raywid, 2006, p. 656).

This section identifies which characteristics the 15 schools have in common. It is divided into three sections, including school population, success, and environment.

School Population

Peer schools are identified by the NYC DOE and have similar student populations. Peer indexes are determined by three factors: 1) the average English Language Arts and Math exam scores of students from eighth grade, 2) the percentage of special education students, and 3) the percentage of students who enter high school 2 or more years overage. A lower peer index indicates a higher need population (DOE Progress Report, 2009). Of the leadership theme high schools in New York City, 53% have a peer index between 1.76 and 2.25 (n=13).

Title I funding eligibility is an indicator of the poverty level of a school. The reauthorization of Title I legislation in 2002 encourages high poverty schools to plan and implement programs designed for all students to achieve high academic standards. All Title I schools in New York City with at least 40% of students who meet the poverty criteria are eligible to receive funding in order to implement school-wide programs that will help work against these factors. A school with a higher percentage of Title I eligibility is a higher poverty school. 54% of leadership theme high schools in New York City have Title I funding eligibility between 80-100% (n=11).

School Success

School improvement is assessed each academic year by the DOE. It is viewed as relative to the school's peer group, or similar schools. 56% of leadership theme high schools in New York City received a "B" on their Progress Report for the 2008-09 school year (n=9). Comparatively, 30% of all NYC high schools received a B. 22% of leadership theme high schools received an A, while 45% all of NYC high schools received an A. The data for the Progress Report

Grades for leadership theme high schools is not conducive to the representativeness of grades for all New York City public high schools.

Each New York City high school is compared to one another, in terms of how well they perform. 78% of leadership high schools perform in the bottom 40% of all New York City public high schools (n=9).

Percent of NYC High Schools Each Leadership School Outperforms, 2008-09 (n=9)	
Leadership H	84%
Leadership O	75%
Leadership M	40%
Leadership F	38%
Leadership L	35%
Leadership E	35%
Leadership C	30%
Leadership I	25%
Leadership J	20%

School Environment

53% of leadership theme schools in New York City have 6-15 clubs (n=15). This data is flawed because it was not confirmed by every school. There is the possibility that not all of the clubs a school claims to have exist. The number of clubs may be significant for understanding the programs a school supports. A school with more clubs may be more invested in engaging its students and committed to offering leadership opportunities outside of the classroom.

The "Teacher Turnover Rate" for a specified school year is determined by the number of teachers in that school year who were not teaching in the following school year, divided by the number of teachers in the specified school year, and expressed as a percentage (NYC DOE Accountability and Overview Report). A high teacher turnover rate may be due to the establishment of alternative teaching

programs, such as Teach For America and the New York City Teaching Fellows. Under these programs, participants are required to teach for two years in New York City public schools. While many choose to remain for a third year, or longer, many serve the required two years and then pursue a different career. 50% of leadership theme high schools in New York City have a teacher turnover rate of 0-19% (n=12).

FINDINGS: STATISTICS

This section reports basic information and statistics for the 15 leadership theme high schools in New York City.

Leadership A

Borough	Brooklyn
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	300 (12/2008)
Grades Served	9-12
Opening Year	2006
Attendance Rate	82.5% (2007-08)
Number of Clubs	20 (according to DOE profile)
Teacher Turnover Rate	50% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	86.6% (2008-09)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Six-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	No Information Available
Progress Report Grade	No Information Available
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership A	No Information Available
Peer Index	2.24 (2008-09)

Leadership B

Borough	Brooklyn
School Selection Method	Transfer School
Total Enrollment	203 (2010)
Grades Served	9-12
Opening Year	2008
Attendance Rate	65.3% (2009-present)
Number of Clubs	7 (according to DOE profile)
Teacher Turnover Rate	No Information Available
Title I Eligibility	No Information Available
Four-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Six-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	No Information Available
Progress Report Grade	No Information Available
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership B	No Information Available
Peer Index	No Information Available

Leadership C

Borough	Brooklyn
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	447 (2007-08)
Grades Served	9-12
Opening Year	2003
Attendance Rate	81.8% (2006-07)
Number of Clubs	27 (according to DOE profile)
Teacher Turnover Rate	23% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	86% (2007-08)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	66% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	75.2% (2008-09)
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	91% (2007-08) • 61% attending a 2-year college
Progress Report Grade	B (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership C	30% (2008-09)
Peer Index	2.05 (2008-09)

Leadership D

Borough	Brooklyn
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	163 (2010)
Grades Served	9-11
Opening Year	2007
Attendance Rate	83.3% (2009-present)
Number of Clubs	10 (2009-10) (according to direct contact)
Teacher Turnover Rate	8% (2008-09)
Title I Eligibility	No Information Available
Four-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Six-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	No Information Available
Progress Report Grade	No Information Available
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership D	No Information Available
Peer Index	1.97 (2008-09)

Leadership E

Borough	Bronx
School Selection Method	Educational Option
Total Enrollment	538 (10/2007)
Grades Served	9-12
Opening Year	2002
Attendance Rate	73.5% (2007-08)
Number of Clubs	27 (according to DOE profile)
Teacher Turnover Rate	43% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	74% (3/2009)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	48.5% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	57.6% (2008-09)
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	38% (2007-08) • 18% attending a four-year college
Progress Report Grade	B (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership E	35% (2008-09)
Peer Index	1.96 (2008-09)

Leadership F

Borough	Bronx
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	313 (3/2009)
Grades Served	9-12
Opening Year	2005
Attendance Rate	75.2% (2007-08)
Number of Clubs	11 (according to school portal)
Teacher Turnover Rate	No Information Available
Title I Eligibility	93% (2008-09)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	56.5% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	No Information Available
Progress Report Grade	B (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership F	38% (2008-09)
Peer Index	2.00 (2008-09)

Leadership G

Borough	Queens
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	240 (2008-09)
Grades Served	6-9
Opening Year	2006
Attendance Rate	97.9% (2006-07)
Number of Clubs	18 (2009-10) (according to direct school contact)
Teacher Turnover Rate	0% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	73% (2007-08)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Six-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	No Information Available
Progress Report Grade	No Information Available
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership G	No Information Available
Peer Index	No Information Available

Leadership H

Borough	Brooklyn
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	266 (10/2007)
Grades Served	6-12
Opening Year	2003
Attendance Rate	92% (2006-07)
Number of Clubs	8 (according to DOE profile)
Teacher Turnover Rate	18% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	92% (2007-08)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	80.4% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	95.7% (2008-09)
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	95% (2008) • 50% attending a two-year college
Progress Report Grade	A (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership H	84% (2008-09)
Peer Index	2.60 (2008-09)

Leadership I

Borough	Bronx
School Selection Method	Educational Option
Total Enrollment	649 (10/2007)
Grades Served	9-12
Opening Year	1993
Attendance Rate	87.3% (2006-07)
Number of Clubs	22 (according to DOE profile)
Teacher Turnover Rate	15% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	70% (2007-08)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	65.8% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	72.8% (2008-09)
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	19% (2007-08) • 18% to the military
Progress Report Grade	C (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership I	25% (2008-09)
Peer Index	2.35 (2008-09)

Leadership J

Borough	Manhattan
School Selection Method	Educational Option
Total Enrollment	693 (10/2007)
Grades Served	9-12
Opening Year	1993
Attendance Rate	85.3% (2008-09)
Number of Clubs	12 (2009-10) (according to direct school contact)
Teacher Turnover Rate	56% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	86% (2009-10)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	57.6% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	68.9% (2008-09)
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	77% (2007-08) • 55% attending a four-year college
Progress Report Grade	C (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership J	20% (2008-09)
Peer Index	2.33 (2008-09)

Leadership K

Borough	Queens
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	233 (12/2007)
Grades Served	7-11
Opening Year	2005
Attendance Rate	96.3% (2007-08)
Number of Clubs	9 (according to school portal)
Teacher Turnover Rate	9% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	57% (2008-09)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Six-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	No Information Available
Progress Report Grade	No Information Available
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership K	No Information Available
Peer Index	2.76 (2008-09)

Leadership L

Borough	Bronx
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	438 (5/2008)
Grades Served	9-12
Opening Year	2002
Attendance Rate	81% (2006-07)
Number of Clubs	24 (according to school website)
Teacher Turnover Rate	41% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	60% (2007-08)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	60% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	88.1% (2008-09)
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	97% (2007-08) • 47% attending a two-year college
Progress Report Grade	B (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership L	35% (2008-09)
Peer Index	2.13 (2008-09)

Leadership M

Borough	Brooklyn
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	467 (2007-08)
Grades Served	6-12
Opening Year	2004
Attendance Rate	93.7% (2007-08)
Number of Clubs	34 (according to DOE profile)
Teacher Turnover Rate	30% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	61% (2008-09)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	76.3% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	0% • 100% plan unknown
Progress Report Grade	B (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership M	40% (2008-09)
Peer Index	2.25 (2008-09)

Leadership N

Borough	Queens
School Selection Method	Limited Unscreened
Total Enrollment	121 (2008-09)
Grades Served	9-10
Opening Year	2008
Attendance Rate	90.8% (2009-present)
Number of Clubs	8 (according to school portal)
Teacher Turnover Rate	No Information Available
Title I Eligibility	No Information Available
Four-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Six-Year Graduation Rate	No Information Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	No Information Available
Progress Report Grade	No Information Available
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership N	No Information Available
Peer Index	2.58 (2008-09)

Leadership O

Borough	Manhattan
School Selection Method	Screened
Total Enrollment	406 (2007)
Grades Served	6-12
Opening Year	1996
Attendance Rate	94.1% (2007-08)
Number of Clubs	12 (2009-10) (according to direct school contact)
Teacher Turnover Rate	10% (2006-07)
Title I Eligibility	85% (2008-09)
Four-Year Graduation Rate	96.7% (2008-09)
Six-Year Graduation Rate	Information Not Available
Percentage of Graduates with Firm Career Plans	100% (2007-08) • 94% attending a four-year college
Progress Report Grade	A (2008-09)
Percentage of Schools Performing Lower than Leadership O	75% (2008-09)
Peer Index	2.97 (2008-09)

Comment: The six-year graduation rate is unknown, as the Progress Report for Leadership O stated information contradictory to its four-year graduation rate. The Progress Report stated that the six-year graduation rate was 95.6%.

This section identifies information received through interviews and observations in four of the leadership theme high schools. It is divided into seven sections for each school.

Introduction to Leadership C

Leadership C did not anticipate opening in the fall of 2003, so when they did, the students who attended did not necessarily have an interest in the school's theme. The principal said "There was no 'Come and meet the staff of our school, and we're going to change you and transform you and teach you how to change the world.'" The first class of students was placed at the school because there was not enough room at other schools. Leadership C had 447 students in the 2007-08 school year, split between four grade levels. The current principal founded the school and has led it since its opening. The school's website claims it has "grown into a successful high school…that endeavors to serve the students in the [local] community."

Founding Ideals

From its conception, the principal had a strong desire for the school to be community-based by serving local students. She said "For me, I think it was about providing a place for all learners, for all students, where all kids can develop and learn, and hopefully you can etch out something that they enjoy."

Leadership C has a sister school located nearby, and the principal originally worked there. The planning for Leadership C began when one of the community partners for Leadership C's sister school asked what the high school needed to improve. The response was "another school." Leadership C opened out of a need for additional space for kids in the community.

Curriculum

Leadership C has an advisory program that splits students up by grade and gender, and provides them with a teacher to mentor them. The principal claims

that the conversations about leadership and developing leadership skills are apparent through the advisory. My conversation with the principal was very scattered and many of the comments and responses did not follow a logical path. She kept interjecting and interrupting herself. It felt like she was digging for little pieces to try and make a puzzle that did not exist. Unfortunately, I was not able to observe a classroom during my visit to Leadership C, so I am unable to comment directly on student performance and attention in the classroom setting.

Grading and Assessment

Leadership C did not discuss any alternative grading or assessment practices. I assume that this is because they do not engage in alternative assessments and choose to follow standard grading procedures.

Quality of Faculty and Staff Leadership

The principal at Leadership C seemed very committed to the community surrounding the school, as she has been working there for 30 years. She opened Leadership C after working in an overenrolled local high school, performing many different roles. She claims that "the majority of teachers are young and energetic and enthusiastic." Though the school originally included many New York City Teaching Fellows and Teach For America corps members, out of the interest of sustainability, the school does not look to hire short-term teachers any longer. She said "…it got to the point that, like 2 years ago, I lost 13 staff people because, you know, they served their time."

Student Diversity

Leadership C does not selectively recruit to enroll the brightest and most self-motivated students from New York City, rather the school seeks to serve local students, "regardless of their prior academic performance." The principal also spoke about her open door policy, which I witnessed while I was meeting with her. We were interrupted several times, both by students and an administrator. I understand the open-door policy idea and support it. It is

something I heard about and saw in the other schools I visited. However, disruptions in the other schools never seemed to interrupt the conversation. That is, someone might walk into the room where I was meeting with staff and/or faculty and the person would apologize and either quickly ask their question or excuse themselves to return later, once we were no longer meeting. While I was present, the principal of Leadership C had to speak with a student who had defaced a desk by writing his name on it, resulting in his suspension, a student who came in asking about a hat that had been taken from him, an administrator who came in to show the student his hat was, in fact, not in the principal's room, and the principal had to step into the hallway because kids were banging loudly on the lockers. These are not traits I would expect of leaders, even if they are high school students.

Expectations

Leadership C has a community service day twice each school year. This allows the school to venture into the community by advisory group and develop relationships with organizations. The principal did not mention whether or not this is a community service requirement for graduation.

Introduction to Leadership D

Leadership D opened its doors in the fall of 2007. It is part of a campus of high schools, a reminder of the single failing high school that originally occupied the building. Leadership D had 163 students as of January 2010. The school currently serves grades 9-11, and will expand to include a twelfth grade in the 2010-2011 school year. The current principal played an important role in designing the school and has served as principal since it opened.

Founding Ideals

When reflecting on the proposal for the school, the principal noted that schools opening at that time were supposed to have a theme. It was not enough to be a small school or a college-preparatory school. "I very firmly believe in a

liberal arts education and I don't think it's appropriate for eighth graders to be deciding what it is they're going to do for the rest of their lives in eighth grade." The principal and planning team sought to integrate a broad theme that would allow them to do all of the different liberal arts things they wanted, but could still be claimed as a theme. Rather than viewing leadership as an organizational position for someone to hold, "…we're very much talking about leadership as personal leadership, so making good choices for yourself, being a responsible person, being a respectful person…"

Curriculum

Leadership D has an advisory program called "Crew." The principal said that the school believes "…that being a leader, in large part, means being able to work with other people well. That means teamwork, that means communication skills, and that can live safely in the Crew structure." Crews form at the beginning of each school year and provide a "team" for a school-wide competition in community service. Throughout the year, each Crew can earn points for positive actions, and lose points for negative ones, such as earning a detention, or disrupting class.

Leadership D has a unique extracurricular program, where electives serve the purpose of extracurricular activities. Doing so allows for students to earn academic credit and meet requirements toward graduation by taking part in an after-school activity. The list of electives changes each trimester, based on student interest. The groups meet two times each week, for 45 minutes after school hours. "It's very small credits because the amount of time they're spending in these classes is miniscule, but it's fun for them and it's something a little different."

Grading and Assessment

Leadership D assesses leadership characteristics in the grading of each student. The school operates on four core values of "learning, leading, contributing, and exploring." After defining what these skills look like in an academic classroom, teachers assess students on those values in every class.

Including this section in student report cards, "…allows for a conversation around leadership and responsibility that…is harder it you don't separate those things out." At the end of each trimester, students select a choice piece of work from each subject area and put it into a presentation for student-led conferences. They receive feedback from a panel, which includes his or her crew leader, another teacher or outside community member, and any family members who can attend. The students use the feedback they receive to set goals in their advisory class.

Quality of Faculty and Staff Leadership

The principal at Leadership D seemed very committed to the future of her students and her school. I felt that she was very energetic, innovative, and passionate about the work she does. She seemed incredibly honest with me, telling me great things about her school, but openly recognizing things they could do better and have yet to implement fully. She spoke highly of the teachers in her school, claiming them to be dedicated and energetic. "I think that they are really passionate about teaching and learning, they care about the students tremendously, they go the extra mile." Many of the teachers at Leadership D are fairly young, but the principal views this as a benefit for the school's evolution. "…I think that the youth, and to a certain extent, the inexperience that we have, is what enables us to experiment and try new things and be willing to say over and over again, 'well this is our vision, this is the direction that we're going, and let's stop and change directions.'"

While I visited Leadership D I observed a 9th grade science class. The students were sitting with their desks in groups for four students. After completing various parts of the experiment they would write the numbers they were finding up on the front board. The teacher praised one group when they saw that their numbers looked very different than those of the other groups because they decided that they would redo the experiment.

A student came into class late and it seemed that she had not been there for a few days. The teacher instructed her to get someone from her crew to help

her with her notes, rather than spend the class period copying someone else's when she could be assisting with and learning from the experiment.

A third group was not being very productive or working together to complete the assignment. The teacher approached the group and they had a conversation about being a part of a community. He told them that they had a responsibility to the other group members. One person's decision to not do work affects another person's ability to do the work. After he left, the group seemed to work together much more actively.

I was very impressed by the leadership style of this teacher and impressed with his integration of the school's core values into his classroom. I also particularly liked the class rules posted on the wall. They read "Be present and active. Be trusting and empathetic. Be aware and mindful. Be truthful and unguarded. Be collaborative and innovative." I found these to be very mature and applicable to the school. Though this was only one classroom observation, it was a random selection; the principal did not instruct me to visit this classroom, I stumbled upon it and asked the teacher if he minded that I sat in to observe.

Leadership D is a part of a school model that is carried out in multiple public high schools. There is a larger organization that functions above the school and includes its own teaching models and professional development. I believe that much of the strength and potential strength of this school is a product of this model.

Student Diversity

Leadership D is a very diverse school because they have not enrolled fully during any of their years as a school. For that reason, they "…get a lot of what are very recent immigrants, English Language Learners who just came to the country a day before they walked in the door…" The principal voiced apprehension of becoming a popular school and filling up during the traditional enrollment process. It was important that the school have seats for the students who were recent immigrants because it helps the school remain diverse. The principal felt that that diversity is a key piece of the school's leadership. "It's only when

students learn to work with people who are different than them that they are really developing those skills." It was unclear as to whether or not it was always the principal's intention to focus on diversity, and what role this was originally thought to have in the school's atmosphere. Regardless of the original intention, diversity is a valued component of this school, and the school finds it necessary for the education it seeks to provide.

Expectations

The principal at Leadership D said that she just wants "to make sure that they know what's next" when it comes to plans post-graduation. She hopes to continue to work with families to remove the expectation that graduating from high school is enough, because although a feat for many families, many professions require more credentials. This is a difficult concept for many families to accept, but the principal hopes to show them that that the students from her school can get into college, and that it can be affordable.

Introduction to Leadership G

Leadership G opened in 2006. The school served 240 students, split between grades 6-8, in 2008-09. The 2009-10 school year is Leadership G's first year with a ninth grade class. The school is expanding to include another grade each year, until it becomes a full middle school and high school, ultimately serving seven grade levels. The staff and faculty I met with spoke highly of the school's principal and her collaborative leadership style.

Founding Ideals

Leadership G prides itself for its expansive arts curriculum and "investment of teaching to the whole student." The staff and faculty I met with recognized the different strengths and learning abilities of their students and noted that the school's teachers and curriculum were intended to cater to those different abilities. They believe that the school is "…a very open space, progressive atmosphere, that empowers people to do what they do best, and to have that

expertise, and to share it with the group." Both of the people I met with attributed a great deal of the school's successful environment to the school's principal and her collaborative leadership style.

Curriculum

Leadership G has an advisory program that can serve different purposes for students. "It has gone glorified study hall, it has also gone 'I'm crying my eyes out' therapy and you want to find a nice in-between with that…" The advisor is in a mentor role for the students, assisting in and out of the classroom. "We do a lot of goal setting in advisory and how you plan to get to that goal, and obstacles we have to overcome."

Grading and Assessment

Leadership G has a considerable focus on group projects, allowing students to collaborate, work in teams, and help classmates based on their strengths. They help students learn "… how to step forward and step back." They claim that this is " a leadership skill you don't think about, everybody assumes that leadership is about taking control, and that it is about having a loud voice, but sometimes it's about keeping your mouth shut and letting somebody else talk, and we push that a lot here." Leadership G also hosts student-led conferences where the students "…speak about their own learning, what they're going to do for the next semester, what their grades are." The staff members I met with stated that the school is "…very into our students being able to articulate what they're doing and what they need to do." It seemed as though the students at Leadership G take part in a very active self-assessment process.

Quality of Faculty and Staff Leadership

The staff members I met with at Leadership G doted on the school's principal for the majority of our conversation. One of the women stated, "I also think that the principal, as an amazing leader, builds leadership in by empowering everyone, that they have a voice…everyone is important, everyone has a role,

everyone is to roll their sleeves up – everybody does that, and because of that, it doesn't feel like a hierarchy." They claimed that she takes a backseat in her leadership role much of the time, allowing others to take the lead and solve problems. They also proposed that "The students learn a lot about listening, and a lot about giving people their chance to shine" from watching the principal in her role.

When we spoke about teacher selection, they defined their teachers as "a mix of ages" and also stated that they "…do primarily look for some experience teaching because we know that the capacity to do well, there are so many hats you have to wear." The school has hired two teachers directly out of undergraduate education programs.

Student Diversity

Leadership G takes a great deal of pride in the amount of diversity represented in its students. "You can't label our students as easily as some other New York City schools can, because ours is kind of like a fan. I think that definitely adds to the culture. It's an empowerment of culture, it's also a struggle with culture." Each year the school hosts an International Day, allowing all of the students' cultures to be represented at a dinner for the faculty, staff, students, and their families. While there are occasionally cultural clashes, the staff I met with was thankful for these because they provided the opportunity for conversation around the topics.

Expectations

Leadership G calls itself "…an early college and career awareness sort of everything." They tell students "you're going to college," not "if you're going to college." One of the faculty members whom I met with teaches 6th grade drama, and claimed that her students can articulate that they are going to go to college and that they are excited about it. College attendance is an expectation built into the environment of Leadership G.

Introduction to Leadership O

Leadership O opened in 1996. The school served 406 students in 2007, split between grades 6-12. Students apply to attend the school when they are in 5th grade, though some spots become available in the transition from 8th to 9th grade. The school's faculty and administration stress that they look for students who are motivated to learn.

Founding Ideals

The idea for Leadership O came about after a news reporter in Milwaukee, who was doing an education special, noticed tragic trends in the schools, including high dropout rates, pregnant students, teenage mothers, and students who were going to school but were not engaged. The reporter wanted to start a public school for students who did not have the opportunity to go to private schools. The staff member I met with claimed it to be "...sort of like a recipe with a lot of ingredients, and the students we bring here is a piece of it, but being a small school is another important piece. The leadership component is an important piece, having dynamic teachers is an important piece. All of those things put together are what make this place function and work really well."

Curriculum

Leadership O has an advisory program, which is a 20-minute class each day. The staff member I met with said "…some days it is just about taking attendance and filling out a form, or doing whatever administrative things need to be done. Sometimes it's a reading period, but more often it's sort of like a group counseling kind of a class that they have their advisor that stays with them the whole year and has about 15 students in the advisory." The school has a set of life skills curricula for grades 6-12. These lesson plans include topics such as organization, leadership, personal needs, relationships, and academics. It is useful for teachers to be able to use prepared lessons when it is appropriate to do so.

Leadership O recognizes the functional use of its leadership theme, realizing its strength as a central component of the school environment, rather

than a particular position held by certain students. "I think sometimes someone from the outside might assume leadership means you're the president or you're the vice president of that, and that's not what happens here. …leadership is sort of infused throughout the curriculum." There is no doubt in my mind that this school is doing an excellent job, but I am not sure of the role that the leadership theme plays in that. The school has been established for a while and does not seem as innovative or open to change as it, perhaps, could be. The staff member whom I met with said that in his opinion he "would like to see more stuff that are hooks to get kids." This comment struck me because the school's theme of leadership is intended to serve this purpose. If the school is not doing this, it is natural to ask "how are they engaging these kids?" They are taking leadership of their college educations, demonstrating personal leadership, but why are kids not creating their own hooks?

Grading and Assessment

Leadership O did not report any alternative grading or assessment practices. Based on my personal perceptions of the school, I believe that they do have them, but it did not arise during my conversations with staff.

Quality of Faculty and Staff Leadership

While the staff at Leadership O did not refer to the principal in either a positive or a negative light, I felt that her leadership is regarded positively. She has had a great deal of experience in New York City public schools, working in an elementary, middle, and high school setting, prior to taking the role of principal at Leadership O. One of the staff members I met with believes that a background in teaching as an education major helps promote teacher success. "More often than not, teachers who go into math and science are not going in with the goal of becoming a teacher." But there's desperation for teachers in these fields so they get temporary certification, which causes "less creativity…in math and science, because the teachers only know how to lecture and give information…"

Student Diversity

Leadership O has an application process for students to complete during the fall of 5th grade for admission to the school's 6th grade program. The process includes an application, interview, which seeks to find the students' desire to attend an all-girls school and her desire to attend college. Leadership O also takes the attendance report into consideration. The school looks for students who are average or a little below average, "but have the potential to be solid students in the right environment."

Expectations

Leadership O has created a "culture of success" through its continued accomplishment of sending high numbers of students to four-year college programs. The college advisor stated that they have "created a culture in the school that the whole college process is exciting and a certain energy around that." College is not an option when students attend Leadership O, it is the option.

Conclusions

While it seemed that there were positive components to each of the high schools, Leadership O has the statistics to stand behind its practices. Leadership D and Leadership G are in their early years, without a graduating class at this point. Leadership C, though more grounded, seemed very different than the other three schools. It felt like a public high school, as opposed to the small, welcoming communities the other schools provided.

It may be useful to consider the success of each school's theme implementation in terms of Ancess and Allen's (2006) degrees of thematic implementation. A "nominal school" is one that claims to be a leadership theme school, but lacks the programs necessary to make this true. A "marginal school" is one that provides electives, programs, and activities outside of the core instructional program. An "integral school" is one that integrates the theme throughout the school and its curriculum. Additionally, effects of theme implementation can be seen in students' and teachers' daily actions. Based on the

researcher's interactions with the four schools interviewed, these degrees of thematic implementation are applicable. Leadership C is a nominal school. While the school claims to incorporate its theme of leadership, the actions of students does not reflect this in reality. The admirable intentions of the principal and other creators fall short of successful implementation. Only 66% of students graduate in four years and only 30% of all NYC high schools perform lower than this school. If the theme of leadership does exist within the school, then it is not serving its purpose. The initial passion and commitment to integrate the theme of leadership seemed to be present, based on my interview with the school's principal, who was also a founder. It seems that the rush to open the school may have caused these ideals to dissipate quickly. Unfortunately, it does not seem as though the school was ever able to attain its ultimate mission.

Leadership D is an integral school. Though the school is still growing and developing, its potential can be seen through the principal's vision. While the researcher was only able to sit in on one class, it was selected at random, and the theme of leadership was clear throughout the class session. Leadership D has promising intentions that faculty and staff are carrying out. The theme of leadership is being integrated into the classrooms and students are being exposed to leadership ideals daily through the core values, learning targets, class projects, and student assessments. Staff members within the school are taking responsibility for implementing the theme. While the principal noted that some teachers were grasping the idea of theme implementation better than others, she recognized that faculty have come a long way and that these ideals are beginning to be more innate in their daily teaching.

Leadership G is an integral school. The theme of leadership can be seen in the daily life of students and faculty. Students are expected to take responsibility for their actions, education, and decisions. There is an emphasis on equality in the school, as opposed to a hierarchical school structure. Each member of Leadership G is expected to act respectfully and be accountable for the actions he or she takes. The school also uses student-led conferences, an example of the school's belief that all students should take personal responsibility for their educations.

Leadership O is an integral school. The theme of leadership can be seen in the daily functioning of students, staff, and faculty. The school has a commitment to teaching students about personal responsibility and ownership. This can be seen in the impressive rate of students who are college bound. College is an expectation of students in this school, and all students who enter Leadership O are aware of this fact. A majority of the classrooms are arranged in a way that encourages collaboration and group work. Students speak up when they have something to say, and are able to listen to and learn from their classmates. While Leadership O did not feel as dynamic as Leadership D and G, there remains a strong emphasis on leadership in daily performance.

There are many important factors to consider when a school seeks to successfully implement the theme of leadership. There is not one outlying feature that will determine whether or not a school is successful, rather it is a combination of multiple aspects, many of which have been considered in this study. Regardless of the school's practices, it is vital that the theme of leadership is consciously implemented, because it will not sustain itself. Successful implementation requires a thoughtful plan that is supported and executed by all members of the institution.

PROPOSED PRACTICES

This table shows the practices of the four leadership high schools the researcher visited. It allows for evaluation of the success of those practices, as seen through the school's 4-year graduation rate. While each school may do, and probably does, more, this shows what was spoken about or observed during the researcher's visits. For a more in-depth view of each school, see Appendix II for full transcripts.

	Peer Index	4-year Graduation Rate	Practices Discussed During Interview
Leadership C	2.05	66%	- Advanced Placement courses available - Advisory - Community Service Days - College assistance - Open door policy for students - Opportunity to receive college credit - Student opinion sought for school change
Leadership D	1.97	NA	- Advanced Placement courses available - Advisory - Alternative Assessments - Community Service Requirement - Diversity among students - Portfolio development in progress throughout high school - Student-led conferences - Varying extracurricular activities that contribute to elective credits - Young, innovative teaching

Leadership G	NA	NA	- Advisory - Collaborative book clubs - Diversity among students - Expectation of College - Focus on the arts - Great leadership within administrators - Open door policy with faculty and administrators - Student-led conferences
Leadership O	2.97	96.7%	- Advanced Placement courses available - Advisory - Community Service Requirement - Expectation of College - No desks – all sit at tables

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This section identifies recommendations for future researchers who seek to perform a similar study. It was generated based on the researcher's experiences in this study.

While the researcher sought to visit 15 New York City public schools, only four principals agreed to meeting. It would be recommended for someone who has a connection to the DOE and/or these schools to do a similar study in order to learn more about the actual practices of all leadership theme schools in NYC.

The DOE has a proposal application for outside researchers who wish to do research in NYC schools. This proposal should be completed with consideration for the length of time it will take before the DOE will either approve or reject the research study. It is likely that if the study has been approved by the DOE, that there will be an increased response from principals.

A similar study should be completed in a few years. This would allow the younger leadership theme high school to become more established. Additionally, the DOE is currently working to create Progress Reports for transfer schools, which would provide a better overview of their success. A better report would be compiled with more statistics and information for the schools included in this study.

APPENDICES

Table of Contents

Letter to Principals
This letter was e-mailed to the principals of the 14 leadership high schools in November 2009 seeking participation in the study. A similar follow-up e-mail was sent a month later.

Mr./Ms.,

I am contacting you as a fourth year undergraduate at Syracuse University. In addition to completing major requirements in Social Work and Policy Studies, I am in the Renee Crown University Honors Program. I am currently working on my Capstone thesis which is titled "Success of Theme Implementation: Small Leadership Theme High Schools in New York City." In this project I seek to better understand the different ways in which high schools with a theme of "leadership" function, as there are many ways in which this can be done.

I am requesting a meeting with you so I can better understand your school and its programs. I would greatly appreciate your assistance with this project. Please understand that while the findings of my research will be presented in a study, each school will receive full anonymity. I plan to meet with the principals of 15 leadership theme schools in New York City and each will be presented in the study as "Leadership A," "Leadership B," and so on. The names of the schools included will be stated collectively in the report, but will in no way be directly connected to the data received.

I am planning a trip to New York City soon and it would be great to meet with you. Please e-mail me back if you are interested.

Thank you for your time! I look forward to hearing from you.

--
Samantha Wiese
Syracuse University Class of 2010
Social Work and Policy Studies

Interview with Leadership C

C: So our high school originated as almost like an addition to our sister high school. I worked at that school and I helped found that school, as well. They opened in 1993, and they were housed in a building in East New York and then they finally got their current building in 1999, I think it was. The population of that school was such that, because it was one of the only small schools in the community at the time, it was getting very crowded. It had thousands of applicants, literally, each school year. I was the guidance counselor at the time, and I also taught English, I did all the data and administrative work with the principal. One of the community-based partners asked me to think of that high school and asked what it needed and I said "another school." But I felt that we needed to try to develop students younger, get them in 6th grade. So I said a 6-12 would be ideal, but we really needed another school. So with that in mind, conversations began about possibly opening a sister school. Those talks started in 2002 and I was part of a committee, again of community-based organizers, educators, myself, clergy, people from the area. We wrote a concept paper and submitted it to the Chancellor to open this school. So the original proposal for this school was for a 6-12 school. So one of the things we talked about when we were putting this school together in the writing, you know, really conceptualizing what this school would be about, was whether or not it would be a theme based school. So a lot of ideas were around. For me, I think it was about providing a place for all learners, for all students, where all kids can develop and learn and hopefully you can etch out something that they enjoy. We try to create programs for the arts and we have a musical program and a very strong foreign language. We do a lot of things like that. So that was my idea. We did the concept paper, we wrote it, it was submitted. We were supposed to open in September of 2003, we did not have building, so they said we were going to wait until 2004. And then I received the call at the last minute to open the school. Okay. So we opened at the very last minute, I had no students, every student who started here was a, they knew nothing about us, there was no "Come meet the staff of our school and we're going to change you and transform you and teach you how to change the world." No. It was more of, kids didn't have a school because it was during a whole restructuring here in New York City during the 2003 so it was like "we don't have enough seats, so the school's going to open and you're going there." So it was a bit of a challenge when we first started, but some of the things that we try to do here in trying to create students who were leaders is to, we have an advisory program, which provides students, it meets every day, students have a teacher who becomes almost a mentor to them, we do advisory by grade level, and by gender. So, for example, if you were a 9th grade girl, you would be in an advisory with other 9th grade girls, and the ideal situation would be for you to have a female advisory teacher. And the same thing for our young men. And we've been pretty successful in that regard, and it meets every single day. And through the advisory program a lot of these conversations come out where students learn

about leadership and developing leadership skills. In addition to the advisory, and working through the advisory, we do community service day, twice a year, the whole school goes out twice a year, what we've done and what we're trying to do now is we're trying to get advisories to develop relationships with organizations. So this year they went to a location for a community service activity and now they're going to go back to the same place in the spring. Some kids went to soup kitchens, some went to the nursing home around the corner. Some went to elementary and middle schools. They went all over to all different places. And it was really, it was good for them. Depending on where they go, they're placed in a position where they have to make decisions, and actively involve themselves in a community, and I got a lot of feedback, it was good. In addition to that, we do our college trips through advisory. Students go out and learn about colleges and we start the college trips in 9th grade. We also are an AVID school, Advancement Via Individual Determination. So this is our first year where we have a full four-year AVID program, so we have 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th and 12th grade. We're going to have our first graduating AVID class this year. Through AVID, it's a group of students, in most schools it's more of the middle group, for us it's the top students, but students agree that they're going to commit to really looking at college and really looking at how they're going to move forward. And then, in terms of our, we do a lot of things. We, kids pretty much, we have a Student Council, which is very active, I have a really good coordinator of Student Affairs. She just took it on this year, but last year we had a different coordinator who's now working in guidance, we have an active student government, students have a voice. In advisory, there's an advisory leader. And our student council meets weekly, sometimes monthly. They, you know, will come to me with agendas or items, things that they want to talk about. We try to get kids involved in, you know, in decision making. So rather than have kids complain about dress code, which they can do, quite loudly, you know, at the end of each year we reflect about the dress code, and each advisory has conversations about, you know, how we should proceed, and then their leader goes to a meeting and then there's an open conversation. Through that process decisions are made about dress code. And then they have a small group that eventually comes to this table and brings their proposals to me, and then we make decisions, and then they go back and share the information with others. So the kids really have, I think, a sense of empowerment in that they feel that they're able to bring ideas and to bring about some kind of change in the way we do things. And how we handle things, how we address things here at school. For example, our announcements, we do announcements every day, second period, and again this is something new that we're doing this year, the students do all the announcements, it's all student-generated. They go around, they have to collect the agendas, they have to come up with ideas, and they have to come to me for approval and then they have to make the announcements and any follow-up work. We just had a blood drive yesterday, we excelled our quota and that's because they kids were motivated, they met after school, they planned it, they organized it. I don't allow kids to just come in and complain. I say you need to come up with a plan. "So what are you going to do about it?" is my answer back. So it's good, it gets kids thinking about

what they're going to do next. They, what else do they talk about, for example we're opening a library in the east wing. We had a relationship with a local business, so the kids have worked with architects and designers and picked the colors and what the layout of the library is going to be like. So the students are, I want to them to make the decisions. Right now I have to finalize colors and finish, the kind of paint finish. The kids, a whole bunch of them were just here, but I'll call them and they'll come back because we have to go over there to the library and make the choices because I don't want it to be all "The principal made the choices." I want the kids to do it. I brought them to meetings with me in Manhattan, they get really excited, it was good. So even the computers that we have here in the school, the kids have done all of that. The kids created the, when you open it up it has a background and it has a picture and all that…

S: The desktop?

C: Yes, there's another word. They created the whole thing, they worked with DOE technicians. We have a MOUSE squad, if something goes wrong with a computer, the kids come and fix them.

S: The kids head that up?

C: Yeah, the kids come and do it. The kids do everything. I have here, working at this school, six of my former students are now employees. They don't all come from this school. One of them, who's my techie, he's a graduate of this school. But the others were my former students at ABC. They came, you know, my guidance counselor, my dead, they were all teachers, I have two girls from my advisory at ABC. I have a social studies teacher… So you know, I encourage, the conversations we encourage are not just the "Oh, you gotta get out of this community." No, it's that you're going to go into the world, you're going to use your skill and your talent, to bring back to your community, to share with the growth and development of your community. So that's what we try to really work towards and build towards. It's a process every single day.

S: So kids who are coming here, are they coming from the community?

C: Absolutely.

S: Okay, what do you think that does? I mean, do they look at the school and say "Ooh, I want to learn about leadership, I want to be a leader" because I'm assuming that, I mean, if there's a high school right down the street, are there a lot of high schools in the area?

C: No, that school across the street is our sister school. We weren't originally here, we were a couple of blocks away. Originally there was a large comprehensive high school here, which housed almost 5,000 students. It was huge, it was a warehouse. And in 2003 they closed it and… And then I don't

know if you're familiar with what they're doing with the larger comprehensive high schools, they close them and then they open up learning communities.

S: Like multiple schools within…

C: So they opened up three new schools where there used to be 1,000 seats for incoming 9th graders, there were 300 seats. So the number of schools in the area, even thought the number of schools may have increased, the seat capacity decreased. So that's why it appears as though there's a lot of schools here, but there's a large community here, as well.

S: So when students come here what do you think – is it just a high school that they have to enroll in and it's here so they do, or are you encouraging the bigger picture? The college focus, do you have APs, and what kind of college prep…

C: We do have Advanced Placement English, since our first year that we opened we had Advanced Placement Spanish. And we have 100% pass rate. We have a college program, which helps students as early as 9th grade, taking courses downtown, and they actually get college credit for their courses. So we have that, we have a relationship with a local university, but those you have to pay for. And we have AP classes, we have AP Physics this year, and we have AP English and AP Spanish. Those are the three AP courses. We are also doing a calculus course this year. So it's hard to really, you know…

S: One of the statistics on your website said that one-quarter of students get daily pull-out for ESL

C: Not necessarily pull-out. We don't necessarily have a pull-out program. We have meetings, students will receive the mandated services for English Language Learners [ELLs], so they might have a period for stand-alone services, but for example, 10th graders, our 10th grade English Language Learners who are going to take the global Regents will have an ESL teacher work with their global studies teacher in the content area. So we're trying to do more and more of that. We do have 25% of our students are ELLs here. And we have 90% poverty. We have a lot of challenges.

S: Yeah, definitely. What are your interactions like with parents – if there are language barriers, cultural barriers, and if students are coming in here and there's an expectation of college or even just working toward graduation, then what have you experiences been like with their parents?

C: We have very good parent participation. We have a lot of people who are bilingual here and able to communicate, that's something I'm invested in. I, myself, have been working in the community for thirty years, so I'm committed to this community and I've been here my whole career. In regards to expectations, a lot of our students are first-generation going to college. So we have a lot of

phobias that we need to help parents to overcome. Some of them are the financial "Oh my goodness, I can't afford it." So we tell them, you know, there's a college for everyone and it is affordable, there are ways to go about doing it. So we work with a local business partner of ours to try to do finance programs for parents to do to help them to save, or we do, when we do the college application process for students, we do everything from soup to nuts. We do the investigative part with them, we help them with their essays, we do the application, we help them with their follow-up if they're applying to a SUNY school and they have follow-up applications that they have to submit. And when it comes to financial, we sit here and do financial aid workshops with the parents, and we help them with the FAFSAs. Everything.

S: Are they getting the college guidance through their advisory courses?

C: Absolutely. And this year we have a new college initiative working with us because I found that one of the things we were able to do really well, we were able to get students to apply to college, but sustainability: getting kids to stay, which I think is a problem across the country. So I said it's something we need to work on, so this program has been helping my guidance counselor and with that, we've had more representatives come in from colleges, we've had much more exposure for kids, after school, working with them on the computers. Full-speed ahead, and then some. And that's what we're talking about, having to build the capacity with the rigor in our courses to try to get the kids so they're better able to compete once they get to college. It's been a challenge, but…

S: Do you think that they're prepared? I mean, that you guys are providing, but that they're soaking it up? That they're invested in becoming leaders and that they're responsible for their own achievement.

C: I think for the most part yes. I think that students come in in 9th grade and by the time you see them at the end of 11th grade and 12th grade they're very different people. It's a process. We're trying to help them grow and to support them along the way, and let them know that even if they do make mistakes, we're here to help them so they can correct whatever mistakes they've made so they can still graduate on time and, you know, to be able to go to college and do well.

S: I was wondering if you could speak at all to teacher turnover. And what you're looking for in the teachers who come here: older, younger, what type of certification. What do you think is the best for what your school has to offer?

C: I don't know if you looked on the website, the majority of my teachers are young and energetic and enthusiastic. When we first opened we had a lot of Fellows and Teach For America people and it got to the point that, like 2 years ago, I lost 13 staff people because, you know, they served their time and then, you know, I'm in touch with all of them, but they're in law school or medical school or you know, have another career now as a writer, you know. But we do hiring

here by committee and that includes having students on the hiring committee as well, teachers, parents and one of the things that we did last year when we're looking to bring on new staff when the 13 staff members left was how we're going to look for staff who are going to have some sustainability.

S: So not so much with the Fellows and TFA categories.

C: Yup.

S: Do you by any chance have a list of extracurricular activities or course selections or something?

C: A list? I don't have a list off the top of my head. It's on our website, I think.

S: I looked on your school portal and it wasn't there. Is it on the Bushwick Leaders site?

C: The DOE website – it should be there.

S: Nope – you click on it and it shows up blank. The mission is there, but the Extracurricular Activities link didn't have anything.

C: Okay then go to our website. There's a lot of information there.

S: Sounds great. Thank you so much for meeting with me.

Interview with Leadership D

Sam: Okay, I know sent out my email out a while ago, but the basic idea is that I'm doing my undergraduate thesis on the idea of implementing a leadership theme in high schools. I actually worked at one in New York City before, and what really got me interested in the topic was just seeing the desire to have this theme, and the idea behind it, and how great having a theme could be, but the school couldn't quite do it. They couldn't quite get over that "well, they're not passing their Regents, they're not passing their classes, they're not graduating," and so the idea of having a theme in the curriculum, or in the school, was really just more than they could handle because there were all these other problems. I really just want to learn more about your school and how it came to be, and what you do.

Sar: We opened in 2007, the planning year, which would have been 2006-2007 school year, I was working with a team to develop a new school proposal. At that point in the new school movement it was very clear that no schools were going to be approved that didn't have a theme. You were not supposed to be opening a school just to be a small school or just to be a college preparatory school. So while we had a very clear vision that we wanted all of our students to graduate, we wanted all them to go on to college, we are not, we are very intentionally not trying to serve students who have an interest in going into a particular vocation. There's nothing sexy about saying "we are just a college prep school," it wasn't going to get approved. I personally had difficulty writing a proposal for a school that was going to have such a narrowly defined theme, that it was really only going to attract a certain demographic of students. So I had no interest, despite my own background, for example, in architecture, I had no interest in writing a school proposal for the school for architecture. I did not want to do a pre-med school, I didn't want to do a school for theater studies. I very firmly believe in a liberal arts education and I don't think it's appropriate for eighth graders to be deciding what it is they're going to do for the rest of their lives in eighth grade. I get really uncomfortable at those high school fairs when we actually are usually next to schools, two because it's alphabetized, there's a school on either side that I will leave nameless for now, that both have very clear, defined themes that are really, really narrowly defined. I'm often trying to create a contrast between us and them when I'm talking to families and say "really, you're 13 years old and you're really positive that you want to do that?" I like to talk to students about the idea that high school, and to a certain extent, college, really ought to be about trying new things and opening doors, not about closing doors. So to be honest, the original reason we came up with the notion of leadership as a theme was "what's something broad enough that's going to allow us to do all the different things in liberal arts that we want that we can still also claim is thematic." That having been said, it also does have a lot of meaning to us. I think we are a young school and there are a lot of things that we are continuing to fine-tune that we can do better,

but I think that as a theme, leadership does live in our school in a couple of different places. We first of all defined leadership in a way that I think is helpful in that when you look at our mission and vision statements and in our core values we're very much talking about leadership as personal leadership, so making good choices for yourself, being a responsible person, being a respectful person, we talk about leadership for the immediate community that you may have, which might be your family or your friends, or our school. We talk about leadership on a larger scale and the idea that we want to scaffold the steps for students so that they first are making good choices for themselves and then are making good choices that have an impact on the immediate community and hopefully by the time they get to be juniors or seniors with us they might start thinking a little grander about how what they do may create a positive impact on, whether its Brooklyn or New York City, or the country or the world, or a particular community beyond their immediate family and their immediate friends. And that's a tough order, it turns out. So what we have done, like other similar schools, is have a class called "Crew." It is similar to an advisory, but it is not actually an advisory in that is a place where we try to let some of the leadership instruction really live. We think that being a leader, in large part, means being able to work with other people well. That means teamwork, that means communication skills, and that can live safely in the Crew structure. The other thing is that we very explicitly, in terms of our grading and assessment, we assess leadership characteristics. If you look at our student's report cards, they get assessed for academic levels of achievement, and they also get assessed for leadership. Our four core values, which are learning, leading, contributing, and exploring. And we have defined what that would look like in an academic classroom to do those four things, and so in every single class students are being assessed on those four core values. Some teachers, I think, do a better job than others right now, of really doing it on a daily basis, being very transparent with students, saying, "You know what? Today I'm really going to assess you, while you're working on whatever academic content, I'm also going to be assessing you on contributing. Are you contributing to your group? This is what I'm looking for." And students know it and it's there. For other teachers it still feels a little bit fuzzy coming up with those final assessments, but the fact that it's there and I can sit down with a child at any point and say, "Well, you're getting 3's and 4's in all of your leadership learning targets, or leadership standards, in these classes and this one class, you're getting 1's. That says something's wrong here." It allows for a conversation around leadership and responsibility that I think is harder if you don't separate those things out. We have also tried to really define leadership in ways for the larger community in terms of building and lots of opportunities for community service. There is a service requirement to graduate and we have community service, I would call them even competitions that happen within the school where crews compete against each other. We do a community clean-up twice a year where, the first time we did it we were actually shocked because the kids started emptying all the furniture out of the classrooms, were mopping and sweeping, and really took ownership of the building. It's something that I know that the gentlemen who cleans up every afternoon always comes to me the day we do it

and says "You guys are the greatest!" The building is spotless when we do our community clean-up and they really do take pride in making the rooms look great for their own crew. We also have developed a competition we call Crew of the Year, which to an extent, we kind of say it laughingly, similar to what you see in the Harry Potter movies, where the houses compete against each other, but it's a little more defined and less athletically based. Over the course of the year, individual students and entire crews can earn and lose points based on how they are demonstrating the core values. The crew that wins community clean-up day wins a whole mess load of points for that for their Crew of the Year competition, but if you get a lunch detention because you've been disruptive in class, you have now lost five points for your crew. Teachers can, at will, give out points towards the Crew of the Year, to students who are displaying really positive core values during class. So we're trying to make it more tangible. One of the things that we noticed our first year was that nobody, not students or teachers, could name the core values, let alone explain what they were all about. So we tried to address that and what you'll see if you go to our Community Meetings now is that the Dean will get up and she always at the beginning of the meeting will say "Alright, who can name the core values?" and somebody will raise their hand and we now know that they know what the core values are. We try to make that a part of the conversation that's happening. So that's my overview.

Sam: What was it like when you first opened, since this is only your third year of operation so it's not like you can look at graduation rates or anything like that, but what kind of response did you get? To me, this is a really new idea, but really just very innovative, so what was community response?

Sar: We've actually really struggled. I don't know how much you know about Brooklyn or New York, but this part of Brooklyn is very diverse. It's a pretty significant immigrant population. Historically fairly Italian and that demographic has shifted in the last 20-25 years, to be a very large immigrant Chinese population, as soon as you walk out of the building you'll probably see people doing really cool dance things across the street. So there's a very large immigrant Chinese population, very large Russian and Polish communities. If you travel up the subway line you'll get to Sunset Park, which is very large Hispanic population. It's really interesting that a lot of things that we try to do as a leadership theme school means our curriculum looks a lot different. We try to do things in a more hands-on active way than you would find in a traditional high school. And that was a little hard, I think, for people in the community to wrap their brains around. And I think part of that is language barrier, part of that is cultural barrier. A lot of families that we have talked to have a very clear sort of schema of what school is and we're not fitting into that. The other thing is, which had nothing to do with us personally, was the stigma of this building. The campus that we are in used to be a larger high school and this high school was closed the same year that we opened, after years of really terrible press and some pretty poor performance. There was still great teaching going on and some really great learning going on, but they were about a third of their capacity in terms of

enrollment, I think their graduation rate had slipped below fifty percent, their name had been in the paper a lot due to, according to the reports, whether or not it's true, high incidents of violence, and really unstable leadership within the building. There was, among the community, there was a lot of fear and people saying "Don't send your kid to that school" and that meant that the two other high schools that are in this community were actually severely overenrolled, while this school was dramatically underenrolled and although the school has phased out, they're in their last year now, they only have about 20 kids left, we are still holding onto that bad press. It's very interesting when I go to kind of recruit students and I am still introduced as the principal of that school and I have to start with, "No, they aren't here anymore, there are actually five schools in the building, I am representing one of those schools." But there definitely is a feeling in the community of that's dangerous, that's bad. A lot of how high school recruitment really works is around word of mouth and its around "Well, I know somebody who has a sister at that school and that's why I know it's a good school." So we're too young to have a lot of that stuff, but I will say that the number of kids we have who are family members of other students we have is remarkable. So I think speaks highly of how we're doing. We have only 160 kids on register, and we have at least 20 family relations within that. And that's you know sisters and brothers, that's cousins, and then we have maybe another 15 or 20 who came because they are the neighbor of somebody who goes here. So we are slowly getting that word out, which is good. One of the things that I hope we always maintain is the incredible diversity that we have right now. Unlike a lot of New York City high schools and a lot of the small schools in general, because we have this broad theme, we have been able to meet the needs of a lot of different students and we are not only serving kids that fit into a really narrow ethnic or cultural background. I hope that that continues, but I think that it requires us to do a lot of really strategic recruitment. It also may become a challenge for us as grow, if we become more popular. One of the reasons we're so diverse is that we actually haven't enrolled fully every year so we get a lot of what are very recent immigrants, English Language Learners who just came to the country a day before they walked in the door, so they're arriving in August and September and coming to us because we're one of the few schools that has seats. I love that, but if we get to the point where we're a very popular school and we fill up through the traditional enrollment process, we won't have seats for those students and that will definitely impact our ability to remain as diverse, but that diversity, I think, is key to our leadership piece. It's only when students learn to work with people who are different than them that they are really developing those skills. We definitely still have our cliques, like all schools do, you will find that students of similar language backgrounds sit together in the cafeteria, but you will also find that teachers work carefully to try to break some of that up in the classroom so that while you may not be best friends with somebody who is of a different ethnicity, or a different language background, than you are, you're going to have an opportunity to work with that person and that automatically is a good fit.

Sam: So when staff sets up the crews, they're 12-15?

Sar: Yes, and totally randomly assigned.

Sam: So you're getting a lot of the diversity within those groups and working very closely within them. Do the students have internships at all in the community?

Sar: That is something we're working on, it's part of our mission, it's a vision, I guess. We have very carefully crafted graduation requirements to require community service or internships, up to a certain hour.

Sam: How many is that?

Sar: It is 50 hours total, by graduation. We're keeping it pretty low right now, but I expect that actually to increase over time. The trouble with internships is an incredible amount of manpower on behalf of a school to put those in place and we just don't have the capacity yet in terms of the adults in the building to make that happen. I anticipate that if you were to come back in three years that system would be in place so that juniors and possibly seniors, if they're not too swamped with college applications, would all be doing weekly internships. We've actually already set up a schedule that would allow the time for that, that Wednesday afternoons students leave school early to allow them to do community service or internships. We just haven't had the capacity to reach out to different organizations and find those internships for them.

Sam: In the school enrollment profile it says that extracurricular activities are based on student interest, so have you guys had time to generate clubs and activities?

Sar: Yeah, so when you came in you mentioned the struggle of another school and trying to help kids graduate so we are very strategic in trying to make sure that we are doing things that students are going to enjoy in terms of their extracurriculars, but that also are going to meet requirements towards graduation. On Tuesday and Thursday afternoons we run a longer day and it is not required for students to stay for the longer day, but most students, at some point in their high school career, do stay for the longer time and during that time they can take an elective. Those electives are something that our teachers and students are passionate about, whatever it may be. Their last trimester we had 10 electives, this trimester we have 10, so right now they have a choice between something called "Fighting for Fitness," I'm a little nervous about the name still, but they're working on kickboxing, not against each other, but purely as what you would see if you went to the gym. There's a yoga elective. Those are both intentionally geared to help students fulfill their PE requirements, but do it in a different way, and they're being taught by teachers, one, in a addition to being a fabulous ESL teacher, is also a personal trainer. She's very happy to come in and do that. We have an English teacher who is also a yoga instructor. For a health credit we offer a cooking and gardening class. For students who are interested in our yearbook we

have designed it to be a class around publishing so that they're actually learning the software and learning all these things, not just like a yearbook club, but that can give them an art credit as well because they're learning graphic design. We've done poetry electives, which is obviously an English credit, we have a model UN, what in most schools would be a club, but since we're having them do research around global studies and things like that, we're able to give them an elective credit in global studies. It's very small credits because the amount of time they're spending in these classes is miniscule, but it's fun for them and it's something a little different. It's fun for the teachers because it's something that they're interested in, as well. And we've had students make requests. I have a background as a fencer and some students keep asking me when I'm going to do a fencing elective and so right now we're trying to get some money together to buy the equipment, but it is, when we can, driven by the student interest; they'll ask for something and then we'll do it.

Sam: Do you by any chance have a list of the electives? What has been available, what is available.

Sar: I can print one out.

Sam: Great. Okay, you said total student enrollment was 160?

Sar: Yes, well actually now we're down to 157. We had a couple of kids move, one had to go back to Honduras, one had to move to Manhattan and the trip's too long. That was our peak at October 31, 2009 we were at 160. That's the sad thing about the economy and what's going on around here is people are moving with work.

Sam: What would you say your average class size is?

Sar: It really varies tremendously. We have a couple of classes that are 4-6 students and our max. class is 30 students. Last trimester we had a class of 34, but that was simply because of unanticipated enrollment in our 11th grade and we broke that up for second trimester so its now two classes of 17.

Sam: How have Regents scores been? The reports that are available on-line are only 2007-2008.

Sar: We've been doing very well in our math Regents, none of our students have taken English yet so I have no data available, this is the first year they'll be taking it. We have had greater challenges in getting students to pass the US History Regents, which is traditionally an 11th grade test. We were offering US History to 9th graders and having them try to take it as a 9th grade assessment. We have stopped doing that because it was not working out for the kids. But what we are discovering is our students, despite the fact that they are coming in as level 3 on their 8th grade assessment, or even level 2 on their 8th grade assessment, when we

do our own assessments of reading, we're finding that they are typically around 4th and 5th grade reading levels by our standards. So a lot of our focus as a school is on literacy development. We spend a tremendous amount of time on reading. We have book clubs that happen four days a week in the middle of the day as a second English class for students. Without reading everything else falls apart. We are finding that there are students who really understand the math and science concepts, but what's getting in the way is reading the Regents exam. So we're very intentionally looking at reading as a way to help students access the Regents exams. And we'll see. We're definitely seeing improvement in kids reading scores as we kind of focus on those areas and I think with time we're going to see more and more improvement in those areas. I think this is a big and interesting year for us because we're going to have our first class of students taking the Global 2 Regents exam, we haven't had anyone take that yet, so I'm very curious and sort of tracking their interim assessments along the way to see how we're progressing towards mastery on that. We have a target ourselves of trying to get to at least 75% passing on the first sitting, which doesn't sound that high, but that's a big goal. And we'll see.

Sam: It's going to be really interesting to see, at the end of this, when you have your first graduating class, what they're doing and if they're going to school or if they have firm career plans, even if it's not college, and if it's a two-year school or its military or whatever.

Sar: That's definitely something we're hoping to be able to track, we'd like to stay in touch with our students and see where they end up. But nobody's walking out of this door with that diploma without having some plan in place. I want to make sure that they know what's next.

Sam: That's one of the really disconcerting things I was looking at some of the other Comprehensive Reports and some schools have 80% with "unknown" career plans. You go through four years of college, college, college, and then what are you doing with it? I think it's going to be really neat to see where the students from your school are going because it seems like you're supporting them along the way.

Sar: One of the other things I think that is interesting is that among our students a huge percentage of them will be first-time high school graduates from the family. And certainly, because of that, first time even thinking about college. A lot of the effort that we need to make and I think that we are still working on making this effort, I will not say that we're successful yet, is actually working with the whole family and advocating to them about why this is important and how they can be supportive of their child in that process and not just finishing high school, which is a big thing for some families. I think it's a very easy thing, if everybody in your family has dropped out, to be another person who drops out from high school. It's a very easy as a family to say "yeah, yeah we want Johnny to graduate" but not really make the moves that are going to support Johnny in actually graduating

high school. We try to work very closely with the families, but I think that's something that's going to be really important that we continue to develop in is how do we support a family in coming to terms with the fact that maybe Johnny isn't going to go straight to work after high school and is not necessarily going to be a source of income for your household because that's a really big burden for some families; they're really counting on that kid to, as soon as he's finished with school, to be able to get a full time job. There aren't really full time jobs out there necessarily with a high school diploma. So getting more credentials is really helpful, but that's hard, I think, for some families to grasp because it feels like just another burden that is being shouldered by the family.

Sam: How much family contact do you say you have? Because I know you must get so wrapped up in just managing the school.

Sar: I think that I have less as we get bigger. We have a pretty defined sort of chain of communication with families and the crew leaders, the teachers that advise each crew, are the first point person with families. Pretty much if you were to go to any teacher, crew leader's cell phone you would find all of their parent's phone numbers in it, and vice versa, the parents know their crew leaders. That's a way to try to make sure that there's this one adult in the school who really knows the child well, but also that if the kid's doing well that somebody hopefully does pick-up the phone and let Mom know that the child's doing well, but if the child is struggling, that Mom isn't getting eight different phone calls, but instead getting the one call that kind of pulls it all together and says "well, this is the pattern that we're seeing and come in for a meeting if you can, and if you can't we're going to at least talk on the phone and strategize." This is the first year we've actually had a Dean, in the past I've handled all of the discipline things in conjunction with crew leaders, now the Dean kind of has removed that from me, which is why I have less parent contact because I think a lot of the contact I had before was around we had this problem in class and we need a conference with the family, something that was generally discipline related. So she now does most of that work for me so my contact, luckily, is not all negative, which is nice when I meet families. I would say compared to some of my colleagues I have a lot more parent contact than they do. I think it's interesting, if you were to walk the halls with me, I'm used to it now, but I'm struck often when I go to other schools that students don't know who their principal is. Whereas when I walk through the hall you will see that kids know me, they're comfortable with me talking to them, I am not just the principal. I am a friendly face most of the time, but I am somebody not to be messed with when I have my serious face on. So I think that because I have good relationships with the kids, for the most part, there are some whom I'm sure could do without me, I think parents get that, they understand that their child is respected and cared for in this place and they come in wanting to work with us, which I think is good.

Sam: The portfolio is something else that I noticed on the website, how does that get put together? Is that something in the crew?

Sar: It's definitely a work in progress, right now what it looks like for students is selecting a choice piece of work from each subject area at the end of each trimester. Those pieces are put together into a presentation for student-led conferences. That's a moment where students actually will show work from their portfolio and describe how it demonstrates their mastery of the learning target, which is equivalent to a state standard. Then the people on the panel, which is always their crew leader, one or two students from their crew, at least one other adult who is either a teacher or an outside community member, and hopefully if we can get them here, a parent or multiple family members. All those people then have the opportunity to ask students questions about the work in their portfolio. And then work together so the student can work to make a plan of action so that student can meet goals that they previously set with their crew leader based on what they did in the past trimester. So right now I would say that the portfolio is kind of a tool for us to reflect and hold student-led conferences. We want it to get to the place where it actually is a comprehensive portfolio of student work that could, in theory, be sent to a college or employer and say "look at what this child has accomplished." I don't think it's that professional yet, so we're still working on it, and we're trying to get it to the place where it's all digital, but we're working with limited technology right now.

Sam: Right, so where does your funding come from for all these field trips and the different technology in the building?

Sar: Right now we are almost completely funded through the DOE. We are, as a new small theme high school partnered with a particular organization, there was a $400,000 grant that we got to start off with so it's approximately $100,000 a year, but all of that money goes specifically to teacher professional development so we use that to send them to trainings, to pay them per diem for work that they do outside of school hours. The grant has purchased some, very small amounts, of instructional materials. The grant is narrowly defined as being in support of implementation of expeditionary learning, which is a curriculum model, an instructional model in the school. So it's not meant for student materials, resources, and activities. The other thing that we have gotten is in the past we have gotten very small, what are called "ResOA Grants," which come from City Council. We also received some from one of our partner organizations, which applied for grants on behalf of all their schools and then divvied up amongst us so that's added up to maybe around $40,000-$50,000 each of our three years, specifically targeted at buying technology so that's why we do have at least some Smart Boards in our classrooms and laptops and things like that. That has afforded us the technology that we're seeing. As the budgets are being cut I'm getting more and more nervous and so we just brought on staff somebody who is really predominantly going to be working as a grant writer because our hope is that for next year we will secure the funding to have a one to one ratio using netbooks with students so they will each have a laptop that they can bring from class to class. Right now I think we have about 80 laptops shared by 160 students,

but they're in these giant carts that get wheeled from room to room and teachers then have to fight over who's going to have the carts during a certain period. And if one goes down because a kid has been particularly rough with it, it's just a nightmare. So what we would rather do is actually find a way to have every child have their own and if you damage it: it's your problem. You know, we'll charge you for the fee to repair it… (laughs) No, no no, but we're hoping that we'll build some responsibility for the students to maintain their own laptops and it also means then that they'd be able to use those at home if they don't have access to a computer. So that's where we're going with this. And to get back to your original point of being here, I think that the technology is tied to the leadership and there's no career out there that our kids are going to have, other than pretty minimum-wage jobs, where they're not going to have contact with technology. It is definitely something that, even if a kid doesn't have a computer at home, they all have their phones that have internet capability. It is their first language and it's not ours so our ability to teach using technology, I think, is very important for the students.

Sam: And in a productive manner rather than sitting in class and texting. One of the other things I noticed when I was looking at the school was that you have more teachers now than you did when you first started, but was it originally five teachers?

Sar: A little more than that, I think we were at seven.

Sam: And how many do you have now?

Sar: Right now, actually, full-time teachers who are in the classroom, 100% of the time, would be 14. And then we have another two teachers that teach a half-load and the rest of the time they're doing other things.

Sam: And then that 60% of them had had fewer than 3 years of teaching experience so what kind of affect do you think that has on the school and I mean, are they more innovative?

Sar: I think it's a mixed affect. I think that on the positive side you have incredible dedication and energy. This is a group of teachers that I think is unmatched at other schools. I think that they really are passionate about the teaching and learning, they care about the students tremendously, they go the extra mile. Obviously teaching is a craft that has to be learned. I mean, it's funny, I was actually talking to somebody last night who is a future teacher, she's in the teacher preparation program right now and was looking for some advice and I said, "It doesn't matter who you are, how well you're trained, your first two years of teaching suck." I mean, they are hard, they're really, really hard. The best you can hope for is to be at a school that's supportive and recognize you're a new teacher, you're going to make mistakes, and support you in trying new things. I think some people have certain personalities and traits that will enable them to

pick things up quickly and become a better teacher, faster, but I do think that teaching is a series of skills and you can build those tools. And that's really what I think expeditionary learning is all about is saying what are the best practices of teaching that have been discovered through research and trial and error, frankly, over the last 20 generations, and let's put them together in a single model. I think by using the expeditionary learning framework we are supporting all of our teachers, whether they're brand-new or have two years or three years or ten years of experience, in becoming better teachers. It's a challenge at times, this is really hard work and unless you're in the classroom doing it, I don't think you can really appreciate how hard teaching is, but as I said, these are dedicated teachers and I think that the youth and to a certain extent the inexperience that we have is what enables us to experiment and try new things and be willing to say over and over again, "well this is our vision, this is the direction that we're going, and let's stop and change directions." We are probably on our eighth different bell schedule since we opened. We don't wait until the next school year to make a change. If something's not working we stop, we talk about it, and we try something new. I think that's a lot harder when you've been doing something in a very set way for years and years. So maybe that's one of the benefits of working with a younger staff is that they're willing to say, you're right, this isn't working. Okay, we'll toss it and just do something else. It's hard, but we do it.

Sam: How do they go about getting teaching experience or training? I'm not really sure exactly how certification in New York works, if you can just come in without a degree in education?

Sar: There are multiple pathways, there's the traditional pathway that most people are familiar with, which would be either as an undergraduate, or more typically in a graduate program for one year after you completed your bachelor's degree, you take those teacher preparation courses in a pedagogy and developmental psychology and your practicum, where you're actually in a classroom, practice teaching and getting feedback on it. That's the traditional route. You complete one of those programs and you become certified through a traditional school. The other two main routes that are in use in NYC are the NYC Teaching Fellows and Teach For America. Those are a little more similar, I think, to what you were describing, as you don't have a teaching background necessarily, but both those programs have intensive summer training programs where they are bombarding the person with the theory and the practice all at once over a summer and then continue to provide mentorship and coaching through the first two years that the person's in the classroom. If you look at the statistics, certainly somebody who was traditionally prepared has better outcomes in the first year of teaching than somebody who was not traditionally prepared. But once you get to the end of your two or your three, that difference actually is negligible. In some of the studies that I've seen, TFA teachers are actually outperforming traditionally prepared teachers by the third year, if they stick to the third year. That may have to do with the demographics of who goes into TFA, sort of what their own personal backgrounds were prior to going into the market. But I think that what is more

important, as a school leader, because I'm only with my students and my teachers, right now, is looking at each individual teacher, regardless of what the training was, I mean you could go through a traditional training program that was complete garbage and you could be a TFA person who had minimal training, but you know, is the equivalent of a "teacher-natural." It's really about saying who is this teacher and what do they need to be successful, just as I would expect every teacher to look at each child and say okay, where are they and what do they need to be successful? So we have in place in our school, in addition to four to five weeks of new teacher training over the summer, and that new teacher is defined as new to expeditionary learning, not necessarily new to teaching, just to become familiar with the model and how we design curriculum and how we think about learning and assessment, as well. But also we have one person who works full-time, she's called an instructional guide, just working on coaching teachers, she's the teacher of teachers in the building. And that's a really critical role because principals, as much as we all aspire to be instructional leaders, we spend tremendous amounts of time dealing with administrative and bureaucratic stuff. I mean, it's just a lot of things that need to be done from budgets to discipline to the accountability pieces that pull us away from really becoming a teacher of teachers, so funding somebody whose job that is, is very important. We also have another person who works for one of our partner organizations, called a school designer, that comes in, for us right now, since we're a new school, she's in our building on average two times a week. Again, also coaching teachers, but also supporting the instructional guide in how we can better implement these ideals of learning in our school.

After meeting with the principal I walked around the hallways for a few minutes and spoke with a teacher who agreed to let me sit in on his 9th grade science class. The learning targets that the principal had mentioned were very clear in this class. On the whiteboard were learning targets for the lesson, which included:
- I can evaluate data.
- I can model data.
- I can establish a relationship between allele frequency and malaria.

The learning targets for 9th grade science were posted on the wall, stating:
- I can design, follow, and explain the rationale for protocols.
- I can evaluate data.
- I can use data from an experiment to support my conclusions.
- I can write a lab report based on an experiment.

The students were sitting with their desks in groups for four students. After completing various parts of the experiment they would write the numbers they were finding up on the front board. The teacher praised one group when they saw

that their numbers looked very different than those of the other groups because they decided that they would redo the experiment.

A student came into class late and it seemed that they had not been there for a few days. The teacher instructed her to get someone from her crew to help her with her notes, rather than spend the class period copying someone else's when she could be assisting with the experiment.

Another group was not being very productive or working together to complete the assignment. The teacher approached the group and they had a conversation about being a part of a community. He told them that they had a responsibility to the other group members. One person's decision to not do work affects another person's ability to do the work. After he left, the group seemed to work together much more actively.

Electives

Electives serve the purpose of extracurricular activities at the school, in order to allow for academic credit. They change each trimester, based on student interest, and meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 45 minutes after school hours. Examples of past electives include:

2nd trimester, 2009-2010
Yoga (.33 PE credit)
Fighting for Fitness: Get In-Shape through Martial-Arts Style Work-outs (.33 PE credit)
Games: The Math & Science Behind the Games You Love (.33 elective credit)
Community Theater (.33 performing art credit)
Publishing/Yearbook (.33 art credit)
Model United Nations (.33 social studies credit)
Keyboarding (.33 elective credit)
Chess (.33 elective credit)
Community Garden: Leaders' Sustainable Farm Project (.33 health credit)
US History Regents Review (Regents prep)

1st trimester, 2009-2010
Film Studies (.33 art credit)
MC's on the Microphone: Leading Community Meeting (public speaking and productions) (.33 theater credit)
Cross Country (.33 PE credit)

Fall 2007 (first month of the school)
From History to Hollywood!
Photography
Fine Art
Artists' Editions
PSAL teams: Girls Volleyball, Coed Bowling, Boys Football, Boys Soccer

Interview with Leadership G

S: Okay, basic introduction to what I'm doing here: I'm doing my senior thesis on the idea of implementing the theme of leadership in high schools. I worked at a leadership theme high school in New York City last year what really got me the idea is that the idea behind having a theme in a school is so great and that it's another way to engage students, to increase scores and to get them interested in school, and to teach them something else at the same time, along with their academic subjects, but that so many schools fall subject to not being able to quite get there and have a theme and actually do something with it because even just the basic, core-subjects aren't there. So I really just want to learn more about your school – your founding, experiences you have had, things you have seen, the vision behind your school.

C: I think one of the great things we have going for us is we are super arts-heavy, which is a good thing. I mean, other schools might have as many art teachers as we do, but they have twice the population of students, but I teach drama and I see the kids every day, which is a big deal. I think that's part of our leadership vision is having a really strong arts curriculum.

T: Yeah, and having the investment of teaching to the whole student, which is part of what our advisory curriculum does everyday also, but the principal, definitely, from the beginning, not only was a lover of arts, and so was I, and we wanted to imbed that into the everyday life here. Which I don't think all schools A) take the risk in doing, B) claim they don't have the budget to do, and C) aren't as invested as we are. Which is something that I think is outrageous to believe that the arts can't do for you. I think it definitely teaches more to the multiple intelligences of our students.

C: In the 6th grade they all get drama, 7th grade is all visual art, 8th grade is all music, 9th, which is as far up as we go right now, students choose an elective for the year, between the three of us, and we teach those every day.

What she was saying, we do have an advisory curriculum where we do, this year in 6th grade because of the first year, and I teach 6th grade, mostly, right now in advisory we're talking about self-esteem and self-image, and so they did an activity where they drew a silhouette of their heads and wrote words that describe them on the inside and how people look at them from the outside and they figured out what their multiple intelligences were. So they know right off the bat, "oh, I'm really strong with music, how can I use music to help me learn my math better?" So you mention about how people are down about Regents scores and I think the reason we're successful here teaching the skill of leadership is that math might not be so great for you, but you know you've got this other

intelligence that will help you with something that's lesser for you, plus, that you can be proud of and be a leader in. We teach to all of the intelligences – we offer opportunities for all of them.

T: I also think that the principal, as an amazing leader, builds leadership in by empowering everyone, that they have a voice. If I were to name the best thing she's done, I mean they're innumerable, but is that from the custodial staff to the teaching staff to the food services, delivery people, to FedEx, is that you are important. To the parents, to the students. You know, everyone is important, everyone has a role, everyone is to roll their sleeves up – everybody does that, and because of that, it doesn't feel like a hierarchy. Even being in this office, this is the principal's office. The door is open, she's not here, we're here; I'm using her computer, etcetera. It's a very open space, progressive atmosphere, that empowers people to do what they do best, and to have that expertise, and to share it with the group.

C: Yeah, our principal is the sort of leader that is not going to tell you… She's going to ask you what you would like in terms of help. She never would come into your classroom and tell you how to do something or how to teach something. And we've both taught at other places and that's not it. They'll tell you what you should do. But our principal makes you feel super empowered and the students know that. And we also, across the board on the staff, are super open to students having a very clear, open voice in our classrooms. And we're lucky in that our students are pretty extraordinarily well-behaved. They're very good students, before they came to us, and that is very helpful in that being able to work.

T: They definitely know what we're teaching them, but I think they know that they have a voice, too. Even, just now, prior to your arrival, one of the girls came in with another girl and one of them was saying, "well just tell her, just tell her what the problem is" and so she did and something happened and the principal said "well, what do you want me to do?" and it was interesting to hear the principal to say to the student, "what do you want me to do?" And the student kept saying "I, well, I, well…" and then finally she vocalized it and she said "I want to go to peer mediation. I want to resolve this problem. I want to deal with this" and the principal then said "Okay, well then that's what we're going to do. I'll make a note of it and we'll talk to you later." It was interesting to see the shift in, I would call it the archaic sense of power, where like, that's not here. And because it's not here you often don't even know she's the principal. You often don't know who is custodial staff, versus who is a teacher, because it's made, you know, it's everybody is important here. Everybody knows what's going on. And I think that's a huge leadership piece. And I think we praise our principal so much for that because she has never been one seeking accolades for herself, it's more "I want this to work for everyone." And so she falls back in her leadership role of, she's a listener, and then a guider, and then we'll brainstorm together what's going to happen and I think, traditionally, other leaders weren't taught to do that, so they don't know, and you kind of have to disarm yourself in order to do that.

And it's a really difficult thing to do, even having been a teacher. I've never taught in this school because I actually work for the Network that oversees the schools, but I used to be full-time, just for this school. So I'm a little bit more embedded in this school, but from the school that I came from, before this job, I had to be a control-freak in my classroom because I had no outside help. I was a brand new teacher, I didn't have any support, I was told to stay in my room and shut the door. Now, I've learned a lot from it, I took a lot away from it, but I had to unlearn a lot of things when I came here about the way that I should do things and the way things should work.

S: …and had to be done, in order to have control in your classroom.

T: Exactly, and I still catch myself wanting to be like "this is what we need to do" and then realize, "no, it doesn't have to be done that way."

C: Definitely. The students learn a lot about listening, and a lot about giving people their chance to shine. Every single class they have some sort of group project, like ELA [English Language Arts] they work in book clubs, where they each have a role and an expertise to share within that book club. The 7th grade ELA teacher piloted that program here and now everybody else is doing it, as well. And it's great because the kids are learning this idea of leadership and learning that skill. The principal is an exemplary model of leadership, we take that model from her, and then give it to the students. They are learning how to step forward and step back. It's a leadership skill you don't think about, everybody assumes that it is about taking control, and that it is about having a loud voice, but sometimes it's about keeping your mouth shut and letting somebody else talk, and we push that a lot here. I also teach 9th grade, and a lot of them have been here for three years. I teach drama and those students are the most self-sufficient, lovely students, who will self-monitor. They're like, "oh, the teacher needs to say something, shh." Nobody takes offense, and that doesn't mean that they don't sometimes get out of hand, and that they don't have their moments, they're still teenagers, and they do all of that stuff still, but they're very on and they're focused when you're doing your job as a teacher, keeping them engaged and interested, they'll do just about anything for you and empower themselves to go beyond it. I came from an amazing 9th grade class where I gave them insanely challenging work, but I was like "ooh, I don't want to set them up for failure", but I've just been pushing it like it's no big deal, and they completely rose above and beyond the bar that I set. Only the same way that the principal would set that standard for me and just assume that I will do it: I do, of course, because I want to do it for her, and the kids want to do it for us, and themselves, and all of that.

T: And it's a leadership style of just reflecting back on the open door thing. I had to make an appointment with my old principal and even then I would wait for like an hour outside her office, and then it felt like a heart-racing, emotional journey, whereas here, she's much busier now that there are four grades and you know, there's construction going on in the building, but you come in and you can talk to

her every day if you need to. I think that thing, that maybe people wouldn't quote in leadership books, is an underlying, open-line of communication, that is really important to leadership, in the sense of you can come in, you can ask me, you can tell me whatever you want, and we're going to resolve it. Even working with her, just personally, I've often struggled with things and she'll see me and ask what I'm struggling with. And I'll be like "I don't know how to organize this cultural event." And she's like, okay, what do you need to do? And then we'll just do it. And it's a very simple way to make a person feel good or for Caitlin to go to her and say "you know, our theater's equipment stinks. Can we get some.. whatever." And the principal will be like "okay, I'll look up some grants; or we can get this, but we can't do this."

C: Yeah, she's very clear about that. I think that what's awesome is that we spend a lot of professional development, which we're currently working on with this advisory curriculum, and making it clearer for us to teach. I would say that the our partner organizations are very proud of this advisory, but as teachers we're not always positive of how to motivate the students in just 20 minutes. It has gone glorified study hall, it has also gone "I'm crying my eyes out" therapy and you want to find a nice in-between with that, but it is integral to the idea of leadership in that open door policy sense. My girls, I have 16 kids, they're mine, I take care of them, and they come to me about just about anything. And it is open door, my lunch room door is always open, after school they can always find me. Very often I'll tell them I can't speak to them right now and they could see me at this time, but they know they can approach me about anything at any time.

T: That helps them understand the communication piece and empowering them. They definitely do surprise me in the sense of how quickly they learn, and they learn from watching us, and I think a lot of the staff here, as it grows, I mean, I think in any organization, in any school, when things get bigger, they become more difficult, but I will say in all of our schools, there's a really close-knit teacher community, too. Where teachers work together and they really work together, and it's not all of them, all of the time, but it's a lot of them, all the time. Where like, you have grade team meetings, you have subject area things, and you're working together. The principal does put a lot of the leadership onto the teachers, whereas in other places you don't have any power, you're told that you don't have power, and you're told what to do. This is more like "no, what are you going to do, you need to make a plan." Which is really scary, too, but it's also empowering because it's the same thing that we do with our students when, let's say that they complain about not having something. Well then do it. Create a recycling program. Start a Save the Manatee club. And these are things that all happened. Go volunteer at the Rehabilitation Center, you don't need me to walk you. Go over there. You want a job? Get your papers, I'll sign them. So that's sort of…

S: That it's more taking leadership of yourself and having control over your own success.

S: It's absolutely that. We're an early college and career awareness sort of everything. We're "you're going to college", not "if you're going to college…"

C: Yeah, there's no question. And my sixth graders can articulate that, my eleven year olds are like "I can't wait to go to college." They're super excited about it and, of course, they all want to be lawyers or doctors right now (laughs), I'm trying to teach them about some other stuff, too. I took my drama club to City College to work with some graduate students recently. In my old school, if someone was like, you have to take kids from 4-8pm, after your work day, to 138th and Broadway, I would have been like "You can take it and shove it." But this was my entire idea. The principal didn't even know I was doing it until I was on the way out the door and I was like "taking the kids to school" and she's like "Have fun!" And the students didn't blink twice about it. All of them showed, all of them decided to take their afternoon, too, to go hang out with some dorky grad students at City College. Which they loved! And they got cookies. Everything was good.

T: Do you have any other specific questions for us? We've just been yammering on…

S: No, that was great! I mean, it's definitely interesting to hear what you have to say and now we can kind of break into more specific questions. About the students who come here, you said that you have just a great group of girls and they're well-behaved, but are they coming from the area or are they coming from all over New York?

C: They come from this borough, but we have students who come from all over the borough… I ride the train with a lot of them. We also get some students from the No Child Left Behind schools that get closed, who didn't apply to the school, and we don't take, I'm sure you read, but it's not academic-based or anything like that, there's a lottery. But you have to apply to come here, like to get in the lottery. But we get like 10-11 students on the top of that because their school closed.

T: or 25, like the 9th grade. I mean, they'll trickle out, but we're an application school, based on interest of being at this school, being willing to wear a uniform, and wanting to go to college. We do not choose based on their grades. We want girls who are lower to mid-level to bring them up to be higher level students.

C: The surrounding schools aren't horror stories, I think that most of our feeder elementary schools are nice places, but they're again, typical New York City classrooms with 35 kids in a class and "so and so bullied so and so for the last six years," you've still got that. And then the kids that are coming here from the No Child Left Behind schools, you can definitely tell, because they come here and they're like…

T: "What is this place?"

C: "Who should I be picking on, should I be picking on somebody? How much street cred do I need? Do I have to protect myself?" My 6th graders, it's an easier buy-in, but the 9th grade students that came in this year, finally, like just this week I had a girl finally buy into what my class is about. And she's still really hard to motivate, and she's not a behavior problem, she's an excellent heart, and she's finally relaxed enough to not worry about it. And there's something about being here that, especially as a drama teacher, my 9th graders will crawl around on the floor and pretend to be animals. They sit on the ground in my classroom all the time, they don't think about it.

S: You don't have to guard yourself.

C: No, you really don't. And I'm on the floor, too. There's not a question of, they don't feel like I'm putting them down or that I'm treating them like children. I'm not, I actually speak to them like they're 35-year olds. They're super empowered and those new students coming in are really surprised. Some of them will tell you how much they hate it. Our current 8th grade is really struggling, they were kind of the middle child, there was one grade here and then they came in and another and then they just got a reputation of being the troublemakers, and they're nothing compared to things we've seen, but they're the ones who could go and be all "I hate this school" and they don't, they love it, they're just going to complain about it.

T: The demographic is really interesting. It runs the gamet, meaning it's very different, internationally diverse-wise. Our Latino population is predominantly South American, it's not Caribbean. It's predominantly Brazilian, Chilean, Venezuelan, etcetera. And then a huge Mexican population. Our "other," and what would be considered "white" by the DOE [Department of Education], is representative of more than 25 northern-European countries. Like one student from each country, one Lithuanian, one from Scandinavia, a core 10-15 group of Tibetan students. It's different. I will say it runs the gamet, socioeconomically, also. Some of our parents have gone to college, maybe one of them, some of them haven't finished high school.

C: Some of them got here yesterday.

T: Some of them drive, have cars. Some of them have nothing. You can't label our students as easily as some other New York City schools can, because ours is kind of like a fan. I think that definitely adds to the culture. It's an empowerment of culture, it's also a struggle with culture. Moreso with religious backgrounds, at times.

C: What's awesome is I don't necessarily see students grouping themselves. I mean, every once in a while, but it's more of who was in their elementary school, at least for the younger ones, but there's always a mix.

T: We even have some students who, and I can play the white card, as a white woman, and they look like your typical white, from America girl. But they're not, they're first-generation from Croatia. And you're like "Oh, I didn't realize."

C: We have a food day here – that's my favorite day of the year.

T: Last year we had over 62 countries represented by 240 girls. So that's a lot of countries.

C: Do you know what our highest cultural…

T: I would say Mexican is up there, as a place, but Latino is the highest, it's like 47%. But then they [the DOE) don't even group it like that. What you think falls under one is not what you would expect. Some of the European students don't know what to put. And then they're like "I don't know what I am." And I'm just like "You are what you are."

S: Do you have any numbers on the demographics?

T: I can get that to you – if you want me to give you my email.

S: And the teacher turnover rate..

C: No. We've all held onto these jobs, nobody's left. Well, one… She left to pursue a job teaching Spanish, which was something we did not offer here.

T: The turnover rate for teachers is slim to none. And often the reasons for leaving are husband's jobs and moving, to having babies, to retirement, to moving to another state. They're not based in a desire to be in another school. That's an interesting thing to think about. Or a career changer.

C: Yeah, you're going to have to drag me screaming from this job.

S: Are the teachers who come here more on the younger end of the spectrum, just out of college, or are they graduates in education, career changers…

C: I'd say the majority of them are pretty young…

T: But experienced.

C: Yeah, not out of college.

T: The youngest that the principal hired came out of undergrad, but he was an education major. And you were, too…

C: But I had been teaching somewhere else

T: You two were the youngest, I think. We primarily take more experienced, or newer to the program, but on-board with the school.

C: And there's a committee for hiring, I sat on it two years ago, and it's incredible, you can just sort of tell who's going to be a good fit here. So all of the other stuff that, like to get through to a demo lesson, you have to have this idea of being open, a collaboration, all of these things, there are a bunch of buzz words that sort of float around between the staff, without being watched. We can just tell. And we all happen to have really excellent outside relationships with one another, too. We all get along extraordinarily well, I would say. I have a blast teaching at this school.

T: There's still a mix though, there's a mix of ages. And experiences from other places, from people teaching in other countries, to people teaching in a private school before, or a Catholic school, teaching in a public school. It kind of runs the gamet, but we do primarily look for some experience teaching because we know that the capacity to do well, there are so many hats you have to wear.

C: A lot of times it's a degree of separation. Very often they'll have some experience in the school before they're hired.

T: We all kind of collaborate on where people are coming from. Word of mouth, but word of mouth on good teachers.

C: Yeah, but who knows better than, I mean, we all love this place so much that nobody is going to recommend somebody that wouldn't continue to make it a wonderful place to be.

S: Not just to help out someone, but to help out someone who would actually have a positive contribution.

T: Right, I would never refer people that I didn't think… And it still made me nervous. I was like, if you want to go there A) You better get ready B) Do me proud.

C: I was a recommend from a teacher here. I wouldn't have even known the job existed until somebody told me.

S: Since so many of the students here come from all these different cultures and backgrounds, and some of them may have just arrived last week, or first ones in their family to be looking at going to college, do you know if there have been

problems with cultural differences or language barriers that you've had to work through.

T: There's always going to be that. I mean, I will say that compared to other schools, our students speak English pretty well. Some of the Latin speakers struggle, in ELA especially, and then it other classes because of it. You're asking kind of two separate questions, so there is that with the language struggle, not tons, but some.

C: And we have services. As we grow bigger, we get more money to do that. We're getting more, like a guidance counselor, and we have more in-house now. The second part of your question was "is that barrier" and I would say absolutely not. I don't ever hear, if insults are flung in the hallway, it's never based in culture or race.

T: And even the times that it does happen, which it still happens, they don't even know, really, what they're doing. And we talk about it a lot. Four years ago I started a multi-cultural night, which is when we bring food from other cultures and celebrate their differences. It's come up, I mean different parents have actually said, "I'm Algerian, I don't want to be next to this table" And I just look and them and say "Well, then you can't come to the event, because this is what we're doing." And we're pretty raw with the parents and the students about not tolerating that sort of behavior. But yeah, it's going to happen, and I'm sure it happens when we don't hear it, too.

C: It does trickle down more from the parents, than it does from the girls.

T: I think the kids, they just like each other because they like each other, as they should. I think that when things come up, it can create some discomfort, but we talk about it and it's open to be discussed.

S: It's not a taboo subject anymore.

T: Absolutely.

S: How are the parents who you've had contact with since you've been here, how do they look at the whole college thing? When you come here you know it's an expectation that you're going to college, it's not an option, as you said earlier, so are they accepting of that, are they willing to be working, I mean is that an expectation they now carry in their family?

C: Yeah. I mean, we haven't gotten a senior class yet, and that's when I think we're really going to see that answer.

T: We just hosted a 9th grade College Discovery Day, where we brought it alumni from our partner school, but we hosted the day because we wanted our students to

start in the 9th grade. We took them to Baruch and we had five alumni speak on a panel and we had workshops on college and had them set goals and we mailed them a magnet home… We partially did all of this because we wanted this filtered into the home and we wanted them to say "I'm doing this and this is what I need to do." The parents are very supportive, our parent coordinator is going to take a group of parents on a college trip this year to let them see a college campus outside of the City. We take our students to go see colleges. I do think they're very invested in the fact that their children are going to go to college. I do think that some, very few, but some of the families, because of cultural stereotypes, and their own fear of letting their children go, I don't think that they've wrapped their brain around the fact that their children are going to get into college. And I think they will, and I think they'll be fine with it, and we do work on that with them.

C: And I also think, and this is my guess, that by the time those students get to be 12th graders, they're going to do exactly what they need to do to get themselves to college. The financial commitment of the family doesn't have to be, for a lot of these girls, really burdensome. They're going to get really huge scholarships. They are, just based on the fact they're so culturally diverse.

T: I can't wait for that day.

C: And I can see "Mommy and Daddy don't want me to go here, but I got a free-ride. Watch me." I do feel that that sort of empowerment is going to start happening, which is great.

T: We also say "little do the parents know, we're bringing their little kids in and making them leaders." Which is the whole point of our school, but some of them are sort of clouded over by the school and not seeing it as just a haven of safety, but also a haven of leadership.

C: Yeah, they run their own conferences. Parent-teacher conferences, the girls run, we don't. There are ten conferences happening at once, between two classrooms in the five content areas, and teachers float.

T: It's called student-led conferences.

C: So the students conduct their conference. I'll talk to the parents if they have a very specific question about drama, I'll sit and chat with them for a couple of minutes. And we help them prepare for it in advisory, but they speak about their own learning, what they're going to do for the next semester, what their grades are. Our assessment is very open here. We're very into our students being able to articulate what they're doing and what they need to do.

T: And that was another thing where the parents were… I'll never forget that first conference. We were scared, they were scared, the girls were scared, about like, how is this going to work? I was downstairs doing a little fundraiser with some

students for a program and as the parents were leaving we had them fill out a survey and some of them started crying and hugging the principal and saying "This was the best thing. My kid never talks to me, I learned more about her today. And now I know how to help her." Or you know, seeing relationships start to grow within a room, because it's hard to talk to your parents. It's hard to talk to your parents at any age, but it's hard to talk to your parents when you're in middle school and you're trying to tell them your goals and where you need help and where you need to improve. And the parent constantly looking at the teacher and saying "Well, you need to tell me…" and the teacher looking back to the student "You tell them." So that's a huge leadership piece also.

C: I can't tell you how many times I've said, "What did she say to you?" when a parent asks how his or her child is doing. And the parent will say "She said this, this, and this." And I was like "well, that sounds like how she's doing then, doesn't it?" There's a lot of times at student-led conferences where a parent hasn't quite trusted their kids enough and by the time they get to 9th grade…

T: They know now, and they like to come. And the girls are okay with it, too. I mean, it's a lot of prep work.

C: Yeah, it's a lot more organic, the older they get. My sixth graders, we have them write down everything they're going to say and then they read off of their script. But by the time they're older, they can have a conversation with their parent, more than just being like "This is what I'm doing in class." It's about a week and a half, two weeks, of prep time for that. And they pull two pieces of work.

S: Kind of like a portfolio, a display of the semester.

C: Right. We do a lot of goal setting in advisory and how you plan to get to that goal, and obstacles we have to overcome.

T: I need one of those goal setting sheets.

C: Me too! I need some advisory time, actually.

T: I need to go soon, do you have any more specifics?

S: I do, but it can't really be answered, since you guys haven't taken any Regents yet. So I guess that's it! Thank you so much, this has been a huge help.

Extracurricular Activities at Leadership G:
Archery
Beginning Guitar
CHAMPS Basketball
Chess
Conversational French
Drama Club – Musical
Flag Football
Hip Hop
Math Counts
NCWH – Samba
Newsletter
Peer Mediation
PowerPlay Sports
Save the Manatee Club
Soccer
Step Up Drama
Stock Market Game
Yoga

Interview with Leadership O

S: If you want to just start with a background of the school, the vision behind it – I know it was the first all-girls school to open in the nation in quite some time – maybe where the idea for it started?

C: The school opened in 1996, but the idea for it came a couple of years before that, let's say 1993/1994. This woman who was a correspondent for television news, was a reporter on national television. She would often do weeklong theme stories on education, that was one of the things that she specialized in. At one point she was doing a story on urban education and issues and problems in public schools. I believe she was in Milwaukee interviewing kids and going to schools and seeing what the trends were, whatever. She was noticing herself that it was pretty tragic what was going on in the schools. Dropout rates in general were tragic, girls were pregnant and had children, and also students were going to school, but were not engaged. So they were there, but sort of sitting in the back row and not fully participating in their own education. Just doing enough to get by and get out. She knew from her own experience, from living here in New York, that there are kids who have other alternatives. You know, there are students who are going to private schools and Catholic schools and Yeshivas who had the means to pay for tuition to go to those places that were having really different experiences. So she thought why not start a public school for students that did not have the opportunity to go to those other places. So she started the school in 1996 and the school works, in my opinion, but it's sort of like a recipe with a lot of ingredients, and the students we bring here is a piece of it, but being a small school is another important piece. The leadership component is an important piece, having dynamic teachers is an important piece. All of those things put together are what make this place function and work really well.

S: If we could talk a little bit about the selection for students to attend, because I know that this is a screened school.

C: We used to be a 7-12, now we're a 6-12 school, so in general students apply while they're 5th graders, around November of 5th grade time. We get their applications and we require applicants to come for an interview in order for their application to be complete. In our application process we get many more applications that we have room for, a lot more. In our process, we found what we're most successful with is working with students at average, or even a little bit below average, but have the potential to be solid students in the right environment. We really do hand-pick students, but we don't cream and take the best students, we actually go for the middle. In New York City you have these standardized tests that you take at certain benchmarks, I think it's 4th grade and 8th

grade. You get 1, 2, 3, 4's on those tests, 4 would be above grade level. You get a math score and an English score, English Language Arts (ELA) score. We get applicants that are double 4's and we reject those students. We also typically reject double 1 students because those students are technically getting left back. So most of our students have a combination of 2's and 3's – occasionally we get a double 3, sometimes we'll get a 2 and a 4, but it general our students are performing below the grade level, double 2's is the typical student that we get at this school.

S: So you're looking for the girls who might not quite be performing as well as they could be.

C: Right, so the typical student has double 2s, maybe a 2/3 combination, but then when we get their application we get attendance reports and that is more important to us, that a student has good attendance. The clues we're looking for in our selection process through the interview and through letters is a student that wants to be here. So a student that says "I want to go to this school." A kid who has good attendance, a kid that wants to go to college. So we ask that in the interview process. And that's sort of what we're shooting for.

S: What sort of experience have you had with parents as far as language barriers or cultural barriers, people that these are the first kids in the family who are looking at even graduating from high school, much less, even considering college.

C: From last year's class a third of the kids were the first in their family to graduate from high school. About 90% were the first to go to college. Typically, our school is about two-thirds Hispanic, and about half of those students, give or take, Spanish is the dominant language spoken at home. But most of those parents are bi-lingual. A smaller percentage, senior class this year is 55 kids, I would say 7 parents speak no English, for the most part. I mean, they can understand some basic things, but to do a workshop on the college process, you could not do it in English for them. But most of the parents who do speak Spanish at home are fine with doing a workshop in English.

S: Do you find it difficult to reach out to them? I think back to when I was in 5th grade and I was nowhere near thinking about "I want to go to college someday," or you know, anything like that.

C: We don't really start meeting with parents about college stuff until, I mean it happens informally from the get-go in 6th grade—

S: That that's the expectation.

C: That's the expectation. So I go to every PTA meeting and do a little presentation 2, maybe 3 minutes, about what the kids are doing. For example, we just had a PTA meeting a couple of weeks ago and a couple of our kids got

accepted early decision in college. So we have 30 parents at the PTA meeting, they don't know what early decision means. So I showed a video of a girl opening up her email and she got accepted early decision and then I explained early decision. So it's really educating the parents, in not a lecture-y kind of a way, but just saying, "Good news!" through the newsletters and different things. But the real meetings with parents, it starts to happen at the end of 10th grade and 11th grade for sure.

S: Is that a group, such as a workshop coming in, or is that meeting with individual students and their parents?

C: Eleventh grade it's one on one meetings, before it's workshop kind of things. We have really good attendance on those things. I think we've created a culture in the school that the whole college process is exciting and a certain energy around that. When we have those workshops we get near perfect attendance. Other times we'll have meetings or workshops and you'll get maybe a dozen parents who come out for those, which is fine, but it's kind of exciting when you have 90% of the parents come to a meeting that you do.

S: Definitely. Can you speak at all to how leadership is taught in the school, if it's a part of classes or if it's an idea, or something over the door that changes behavior…

C: Right, I think sometimes someone from the outside might assume leadership means you're the president or you're the vice president of that, and that's not what happens here. So leadership is sort of infused throughout the curriculum. We do not have a leadership class. We do have advisory, which is, I don't know if you know what advisory is… Back in my day we had homeroom and every day you went to homeroom to take attendance. So here we do advisory, which is about a 20-minute class every day. And some days it is just about taking attendance and filling out a form, or doing whatever administrative things need to be done. Sometimes it's a reading period, but more often it's sort of like a group counseling kind of a class that they have their advisor that stays with them the whole year and has about 15 students in his or her advisory. They are the main liaison between parents and the school. They are the one that's doing sex education, they're doing stuff about self-esteem, stuff about leadership that doesn't have the title leadership on it, but those kinds of things. The other place that leadership is quite strong at this school, I think, is it's just in every single classroom. So when we go for a little tour and sit in classes, you'll see that there are no desks in the school. Everything is done at tables, so tables are meant to sit four to six kids at each table. The teacher in general, depending on the class, does very little lecturing/talking. So we'll present a topic and give some type of a project or group work for the kids to do, and then they work cooperatively as a group. So there's no front of the room or back of the room, it's just sort of the room is sort of centralized and every student's voice is heard because if they're doing these group-type projects, they're all participating and all of them are

sharing their opinions and all of them are sharing their findings and that kind of stuff, debates, and stuff are happening within the table and then within the greater group. So there's a lot of talking, a lot of action going on in class. There's noise, but it's productive noise.

S: Right, right. When you first have teachers come to the school, do you guys go through your expectations of what you're looking for in them and how you expect their classes to run?

C: There is an orientation for new teachers. Typically here, this year we only hired one new teacher, so a staff of, I think 27 teachers, one new teacher, that's very low turnover. We have an orientation here at this school during the summer, unpaid, you know they come in, I think it's for four days, and they do workshop-y kinds of things about what is good teaching and how do kids learn and how you do cooperative learning and how do you infuse leadership into your classroom and that kind of stuff.

S: When I was looking at one of the reports on the school, it said that in the 2007-08 school year, that 28% of teachers had a master's degree, plus thirty hours, or a doctorate. So what kind of effect do you think that has on the girls?

C: I don't think that's accurate. I think it's way more than half… That stuff on the internet, the report cards and the stuff that the Board of Ed. tracks, is pretty inaccurate stuff sometimes. I wouldn't rely totally on those statistics, but that seems low to me. But what was the question, I'm sorry.

S: Just, what kind of effect you thought that had on the girls, for their learning, on the expectation of college, seeing someone in the front of the room having this degree.

C: This is more pedagogy, but I have found in general at all schools, but it's true here, too, that teachers in the humanities, teachers in all subject areas other than math and science, tend to go to college thinking "I'm going to be a teacher." Not always, but I'd say that's more common. So they're doing student teaching while they're undergraduates. They're learning pedagogy and how does a good teacher teach. More often than not, teachers who go into math and science are not going in with the goal of becoming a teacher. They sort of discover that after the fact and they become teachers because they're desperate for math and science teachers. They get some temporary certification and their first day of teaching as a paid employee is their first day of teaching ever. They've never done any practice teaching. So I think there's less creativity, at a lot of schools, going on in math and science, because the teachers only know how to lecture and give information and doing that creative lesson plan…

S: Because they have the knowledge and not the education in being educators.

C: Right, so typically I think math and science teachers struggle with that for a while until they get their feet wet and they figure out what is good teaching. It happens here, too, but I think that because the culture of this place is, there's almost pressure, I wouldn't say competition between the teachers, but a pressure of like, if you're a boring teacher, why would you be at this school, kind of a thing. So I think there's a transition period, like a maybe two months when the teachers first come here, that takes a while for them to adjust to that new type of teaching.

S: About college prep at the school, do you guys offer AP's, or is there a way I could get a list of electives or classes.

C: Yeah, I'll get you a list of it. We offer a couple of AP classes. It's one of the disadvantages of being at a small school is, you know, budget's tighter. For an AP class to run effectively you should have about 15 kids in it, but we're budgeted to have about 25 kids in a class so it costs more to run an AP class and we had to cut two teaching positions this year with the budget cuts, so to run an AP class is even more difficult. So we found some creative ways to do AP, but at larger schools where they're able to do, let's say they have an AP bio class, they're able to schedule that so it meets eight periods a week or they have some other ways to do it because when you're bigger you have more variables and ways that you can coordinate a schedule. Here we're only able to do five periods a week so it's tough. But we've been able to organize it so we have five different AP classes here, two in history, one in English, and two in Spanish.

S: The graduation requirements, I know that community service is required…

C: Technically we're not allowed to require community service, although we say that in print, it's expected. So if a student only has 100 hours of community service we can't deny them graduation, but it's okay if the kids believe that. It's never been an issue so the kids have always had plenty of community service. Once in a while you'll have kids that are a little bit resistant to it, but I think it's good for them to do it so, within general the kids do it anyhow.

S: Is it through school activities or is it expected that they do things outside of school?

C: A little bit of both. The younger grades we do not expect them to do anything outside of school, so 9th and 10th grade because some of it's for safety reasons and the kids just aren't mature enough to handle that kind of stuff. And people just aren't willing to provide opportunities for younger kids sometimes to do volunteer work. But 11th and 12th graders do out of school activities, mixed with in-school. Some of those we set up for kids, some of them they do on their own through their church or something like that.

S: Are they encouraged to have internships at any point or do you guys help them find internships?

C: It's minimal, so internship stuff we do is during the summer, once again because we're a small school the kids are locked into doing their seven periods here, or else they won't graduate in time. Our school day ends at 3:15, so in order to do an internship it has to be someone that would be willing to have an intern come at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. So we do have internships in the summer and we do some job shadowing things like these one-shot kind of deals. Some mentoring sort of things, it's minimal, most of it's done for the summer.

S: While the school year is in session what kind of opportunity do students have to get out and see different career options or are there a lot of field trips that go on or is it, again, difficult because you need to spend time in the classroom?

C: Right, it is difficult, but we are able to do do a lot of that stuff. So a lot of it's the one-day kind of things, like a couple of weeks ago I took about 20 kids to Seventeen Magazine and we spent the day at Seventeen and were editors, sat around the board room. They thought we were making decisions for them, the kids thought we were making decisions about the cover and I think they were just sort of being nice to us and making us feel like we were executives sitting in the nice room and as the day went on, so we spent maybe four hours there, every half-hour a different executive would come in and describe her job and what she does, and then ask the kids their advice on "should I use this picture or this picture?", that kind of stuff. It was a nice day for the kids. So we do do things, but we go out in small groups and we have people coming here quite often, as well. So we have a career day that's like a special day that, I'd say there's about 80 that come in, we call it Cool Women, Hot Jobs, and it's a day of career day. And then we do a lot of these one day sort of things with students who are interested in engineering, there's an Engineering Club and they do day where they do that kind of stuff. Students interested in different careers will do different kind of things. There are a lot of those kinds of opportunities.

S: What other kinds of clubs and extra-curricular activities do you guys offer?

C: My opinion of it is that we could probably improve in that area a little bit. So there are a lot of things going on that are sort of academic, club, kind of things, which are great, but in my opinion I would like to see more stuff that are hooks to get kids. You know, you have those kids that are marginal students and there might be something that could hook them in to say "I like school. I want to go to school." I don't think we do enough of that, focused on that kid. I don't know what it might be, some athletic program, or something like that that really wins a kid over. I think we need to do better at that. But there are a lot of things here, Engineering Club, The Young Feminist Club, Gay-Straight Alliance, and a Community Service Club, a lot of these different things going on that kids could get involved with.

S: You brought up kind of an interesting point; one of the things that I really found in my research of theme schools is that the point of it is to engage students and make them be able to learn the information in a different way, by using this theme to bring them in and make them be interested in school. That's really the problem with a lot of schools, that they fall into is that they're founded on this theme and they're supposed to be engaged and implementing it and have it intertwined in the curriculum, but then the administrators look and it and say, "we have other things to focus on right now."

C: It's sort of this Catch-22, how do you break that cycle? My opinion as a counselor is that you need to do a mix of the two things, but that you need to spend money to make money, kind of a thing, so if you do those different organizations, different things to get the kids interested, then you have leverage to get them to do their algebra homework, or whatever it is. So I think it's really important. And then if budget cuts come along then there's something cut, it's those kinds of programs, which is unfortunate.

S: Definitely. Is there any more recent information as far as Regents scores go? The stuff online isn't very up to date…

C: I don't know, but I'll find out while you're here.

S: Okay. Thank you so much for your time. I think that's pretty much all I have for right now…

Conversation with an administrator at Leadership O:
Having attended a school similar in many respects, she finds this atmosphere very relatable. There is an expectation here of working toward college and everyone knows that it exists.

Two years ago, there was a class of 56 students and each of them was failing at least one subject. They were in 10th grade then (current seniors). So she had 6 or 7 seniors speak to these students, sharing their experiences. They had fooled around in high school and shared their stories of being accepted for not accepted where they wanted to go. By sharing their mistakes, the hope was that the 10th graders would learn and make choices about their expectations in life and how they would work to get there. The expectation from the school is college, but the administrators and faculty constantly work to break the assumption that because students attend here, they will automatically be accepted to a great school. The reality is that the school will help them through the process of applying and do their part to ensure they are prepared, but like any other school, the students must do their part. The experience seemed to serve its purpose in many respects; several students changed their behavior and began to focus themselves on what they wanted.

When I asked as to why a 5th grader would want to come to this school, she responded that many see other schools as having distractions. Through interviews with eight potential candidates at a time, the interviewer assesses the students' desire to go to college, opinion of uniforms, and drive to work hard. Silently, they're wondering if it is the students' desire to attend this school, or their parents'.

When I asked as to why the school screens, she responded that students who receive double 4s on their exams need challenges that the school is not designed to offer. Students who receive 2s and 3s need more help, and double 4 students would be bored in classes with them.

Conversation with a curriculum writer and former English teacher at Leadership O:
Faculty and staff focus a lot on self-promoting and the fact that this is an experimental ground for the students. They created lessons based on the book Workplace Lessons Smart People Wish They Had Been Taught Sooner, which are incorporated into the school.

She is currently working on another pilot, which is based on helping the students get to know themselves as individuals.

She has also created life skills curricula for grades 6-12, which include organization, leadership, personal needs, relationships, and academics. These

lesson plans have all been created and teachers can pull from them when it is appropriate to do so.

She remarked that the school has built a "culture of success," but they also have to break a lot of cultural habits. Many students who are underprivileged have never heard "no" and are shocked at the consequences of being 5 minutes late to school. I shared that when I arrived at the school I was waiting downstairs for the elevator and when we arrived upstairs, the students were all told that they were late and needed to sign in. After claims of how unfair this was, they all formed a line and did as they were told. She told me that the reality is that if they had all arrived a few minutes earlier to allot for waiting for the elevator, they would have been on-time, but they chose to cut it closer than that. It is a continual issue (considering I visited in January and even if this were their first year at the school, they would know better by now).

We talked about the need for a school to be a practice arena, so perhaps being able to "practice" and grow as an individual provides appropriate practice for the students. We also spoke about her opinions on single-sex education, which she felt is an answer, but it isn't necessarily the answer for every student.

Extra-curricular activities at Leadership O:
Art Club
Engineering Club
Honor Chorus
Journalism
Model United Nations
Orchestra
Running Club
Social Justice
Step Up Drama
Student Council
Young Feminists Club
Young Science Achievers

Terms in New York City High Schools

Educational Option (Ed. Opt.): Educational Option programs are designed to allow students of different achievement levels entrance to a high school/program. The school selects one-half of its incoming students, the other one-half is selected from the eligible applicant pool.

Limited Unscreened: Limited Unscreened programs give priority to students who, along with their parents, participate in an orientation session or open house.

Peer Index: Peer schools are those New York City public schools with a student population most like this school's population. For High Schools, peer schools are determined based on three factors: 1) the average English Language Arts and Math Proficiency levels of the school's students before they entered High School, 2) the percentage of special education students, and 3) the percentage of students who enter high school 2 or more years overage. A lower peer index indicates a higher need population. (from the NYC DOE Progress Report)

Progress Report Grade: Schools are assigned letter grades based on their overall Progress Report score. Schools that get As and Bs are eligible for rewards. Schools that get Ds and Fs or 3 Cs in a row, face consequences, including change in school leadership or school closure.

Screened: Screened program schools use a selection method that is based on the academic record, standardized test scores and/or attendance history.

Teacher Turnover: Teacher Turnover Rate for a specified school year is the number of teachers in that school year who were not teaching in the following school year divided by the number of teachers in the specified school year, expressed as a percentage. (from the NYC DOE Accountability and Overview Report)

Transfer School: Small, academically challenging, full-time high schools designed to re-engage students who are behind in high school or have dropped out. The essential elements of Transfer Schools include: a personalized learning environment, rigorous academic standards, student-centered pedagogy, support to meet instructional and developmental goals, and a focus on connections to college.

Schools Used in the Study

- Academy for Environmental Leadership

- All City Leadership Secondary School

- Brooklyn High School for Leadership and Community Service

- Bronx Leadership Academy

- Bronx Leadership Academy II

- Bushwick Leaders High School for Academic Excellence

- Civic Leadership Academy

- Expeditionary Learning School for Community Leaders

- Fordham Leadership Academy for Business and Technology

- High School for Leadership and Public Service

- Leadership Institute

- School for Democracy and Leadership

- The Young Women's Leadership School, Astoria

- The Young Women's Leadership School, East Harlem

- The Young Women's Leadership School, Queens

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