Cultivating Educational Resilience in Students Experiencing Multiple Grade Retention

Debra Lamb

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Cultivating Educational Resilience in Students Experiencing Multiple Grade Retention

Abstract
This study examined the cultivation of educational resilience among upper elementary and middle school students experiencing multiple grade retention. Multiple grade retention means that a student has been retained in grade or “left back” more than once. These students are referred to within this study as “Multiple Holdovers” (MHO). The primary purpose of this study was to (a) examine the presence of resilience attributes as self-reported by MHO students in grades four through eight; and to (b) illuminate the perceptions of school leaders and teachers in schools attended by these MHO students with regard to each school’s readiness, efforts, accomplishments, and challenges to student resilience building. The research context for this study is a small sample of elementary and middle schools within the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE). In this two-phased, mixed-methods (QUAN-QUAL) study, data was collected from responses to two questionnaire instruments completed by 13 MHO students and 17 educators (school leaders and teachers) in seven schools across three New York City boroughs. In addition, data was collected from educators in face-to-face interviews. These data were triangulated to corroborate the respondents’ perspectives on school-based student resilience-building. Findings support the need and importance of positive school relationships with MHO students to help them thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

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Cultivating Educational Resilience in Students Experiencing Multiple Grade Retention

By

Debra R. Lamb

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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St. John Fisher College

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Dedication

With tremendous gratitude, I would like to acknowledge the incredible support and encouragement so many family, friends, colleagues, professors, and classmates; too many to name but all of whom I unequivocally respect and value. Above all, I would like to thank my husband and my children for their love, patience, and unyielding belief in me and my capacity to effectively multitask. I am grateful to my parents for instilling among my sisters and me a tremendous sense of pride in educational accomplishment and public service. This dissertation would not have been possible without the invaluable guidance and support of my chair and professor, Dr. Ronald Valenti; my committee member, Dr. Winsome Gregory; my executive mentor, Dr. Evelyn Castro; and my instructors at St. John Fisher College at The College of New Rochelle, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education’s Executive Leadership doctoral program. I am also very appreciative to the principals, teachers, and students who participated in this study. Finally, I thank my fellow Cohort 3 members, for their inspiration, motivation, collegial support, and friendship. May your lights shine for the entire world to see how exceptionally brilliant you each truly are.
Biographical Sketch

Debra R. Lamb is an educational administrator with the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) currently conducting principal evaluations consistent with New York State’s Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) legislation (Education Law 3012-c). Educationally, Mrs. Lamb earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1991 from Empire State College of the State University of New York, an Executive Master of Public Administration degree from Baruch College of the City University of New York in 1999, and New York State certification as a School District Leader through The College of New Rochelle. Mrs. Lamb began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College at The College of New Rochelle in the spring of 2011 and successfully defended her dissertation in August 2013. Her research entitled “Cultivating Educational Resilience in Students Experiencing Multiple Grade Retention” was conducted under the direction of Dr. Ronald Valenti and Dr. Winsome Gregory.

Mrs. Lamb has also served on an NYCDOE school support network team as Network Leader, Deputy Network Leader, and Achievement Coach; Director of the NYCDOE’s citywide Academic Intervention Initiative; and Deputy Executive Director of the Division of Funded and Community Resources. She began her service in public education as a school library teacher, and has served in two HIV/AIDS organizations, The Ford Foundation, and the Foundation Fighting Blindness in Maryland.
Abstract

This study examined the cultivation of educational resilience among upper elementary and middle school students experiencing multiple grade retention. Multiple grade retention means that a student has been retained in grade or “left back” more than once. These students are referred to within this study as “Multiple Holdovers” (MHO).

The primary purpose of this study was to (a) examine the presence of resilience attributes as self-reported by MHO students in grades four through eight; and to (b) illuminate the perceptions of school leaders and teachers in schools attended by these MHO students with regard to each school’s readiness, efforts, accomplishments, and challenges to student resilience building. The research context for this study is a small sample of elementary and middle schools within the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE).

In this two-phased, mixed-methods (QUAN-QUAL) study, data was collected from responses to two questionnaire instruments completed by 13 MHO students and 17 educators (school leaders and teachers) in seven schools across three New York City boroughs. In addition, data was collected from educators in face-to-face interviews. These data were triangulated to corroborate the respondents’ perspectives on school-based student resilience-building. Findings support the need and importance of positive school relationships with MHO students to help them thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

This message—a quote from a 1967 speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—appears on a wall of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial in Washington, D.C. A person who is able to overcome adversity—to weather a storm and thrive in moments of challenge and controversy—could be considered to have resilience. Resilience is a strengths-based concept, meaning its focus is on the supports and opportunities which promote life success, rather than trying only to eliminate the factors that promote failure, a deficit-based concept. Within the context of elementary and middle schools, educational resilience is the ability of pre-adolescent and adolescent students to effectively cope with persistent academic failure by (a) dealing with associated negative effects to one’s self esteem; (b) rebounding academically, socially, and emotionally; and (c) turning adversity into achievement.

Jailene. On the morning of the first day of school in a Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York middle school in September 2012, a 13-year-old girl sat in the main office silently crying. A short time before, “Jailene” had arrived at school excited and hopeful about the new school year; she was entering the seventh grade after having spent the past two school years (2010-11 and 2011-12) in the sixth grade (one grade retention).
Upon arrival, however, Jailene learned that she would spend yet another year in the sixth grade. At 13 years old, Jailene was already two years behind her modal grade and peers her own age. Friends with whom she entered middle school were now eighth graders and would be graduating at the end of this school year and transitioning into high schools with a focus on college and career readiness.

The official letter that Jailene’s school sent home to her mom in June 2012 directed Jailene to attend summer school due to her low performance on the New York State Test of Mathematics Proficiency (the “State Math exam”) administered in April 2012. For five weeks in July and August 2012, Jailene spent four days of her summer vacation in summer school attempting to improve her performance on the State Math exam. This required Jailene to travel daily to and from her summer school class held in a different school building than her own, four days a week for the five-week summer session. Jailene passed the State Math exam re-administered in August 2012.

Unfortunately, the promotion decision system is not human error-proof. Close examination of the official school letter by a school administrator on the first day of school revealed a problem: The letter stated only mathematics as the core subject and assessment to take during summer school; it did not include the fact that Jailene was also required to attend summer school classes and take the State ELA exam to qualify for promotion to the next grade. Although Jailene’s performance level on the April 2012 State Math exam was a Level 2 (approaching proficiency standards), her performance on the April 2012 State ELA exam was a Level 1 (below proficiency). As this oversight was the school’s error, the community school district superintendent agreed the next day to approve Jailene’s promotion to the seventh grade. Although Jailene had a rocky start to
the new school year, the advocacy of an adult who took the time to listen and investigate the matter in the midst of a flurry of school year opening activity prevented her from being retained in the sixth grade for a third year.

Not all students have an adult who can advocate so quickly and successfully for them. It turns out that there was another student in the same school as Jailene with a similar situation that was brought to the attention of the superintendent. Other community school superintendents reported similar scenarios in schools across New York City during that first week of school.

In a well-publicized story in an August 2012 article, *The Huffington Post* reported:

The city's Department of Education had overestimated the number of failing students, but only caught their mistake after the graduation ceremonies had already taken place. The 7,034 students were notified last week—after they had taken just over a week of summer school and missed their graduations—that it was all a mistake. They were among 30,000 city students who were told they would be held back unless they went to summer school and passed another exam in August.

Although the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) planned to hold special graduation ceremonies for these students, the trying social and emotional experiences these students endured are truly unforgettable events.

Unfortunately, Jailene did not meet the criteria for promotion to the eighth grade in June 2013 when preliminary State ELA and Math exam results were revealed by the New York City Department of Education for the purpose of promotion decisions. Jailene
had passed the State Math exam but did not pass the State ELA exam. Grade retention likely looms once again for Jailene unless she attends six weeks of summer school, retakes the ELA exam at the end of the summer session, and achieves a passing score. Although grade retention is intended to be an intervention for students who need more time to meet performance standards before moving on to more complex academic content, there is no doubt that there have been unintended negative consequences.

**Resilience.** This study focuses on resilience as one of the most important characteristics in students who have experienced multiple grade retention. People are not born resilient; it is a characteristic that is developed and cultivated over time. The word “cultivate” is used in this study to describe the specific knowledge, depth of effort, and commitment of time and resources needed to effect a positive change in one’s ability to be resilient. “More than any institution except the family, schools can provide the environment and conditions that foster resiliency in today’s youth and tomorrow’s adults” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 2). In very much the same way that gardeners cultivate soil by tilling and watering to promote growth of plants, schools can promote the development of resilient characteristics.

**Stress.** To experience failure signifies something has happened that did not go according to plan. When a person experiences failure, it is a negative life event that is felt deeply, whether consciously or unconsciously. It is a loaded word that affects the way we see the world and our place in it. School failure is a significant event in a student’s life. To experience stress can be something that can either motivate or cripple a student. Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple (2008) examined children’s ratings of stressful life events, and found that “…grade retention was rated as the most stressful life event by
sixth grade students” whereas in their prior study, “…it was ranked the third highest following losing a parent and going blind” (Anderson, Jimerson & Whipple., 2005, p. 1). Few people would disagree that being retained in grade more than once is a critical event in a young person’s social, emotional, and academic development.

**Adversity.** “A significant percentage of the nation’s schoolchildren struggle with chronic adversity, and the impact of this adversity if felt in schools each day” (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005, p. 6). When you are 18-years-old in the eighth grade or 15-years-old in the fifth grade, you are experiencing adversity. Why are you in this predicament in the first place? One reason is that you’ve experienced grade retention. What personal characteristics will matter most as you try to negotiate your way through adversity in elementary and middle school, through high school completion, and on to a productive and personally satisfying adulthood? How do you maintain a positive, buoyant, and optimistic attitude to school, to the future, and to life while facing major personal obstacles?

**Statement of the Problem**

A challenging obstacle to the academic, social, and emotional development of upper elementary and middle school students, and a test of resilience, is the experience of **grade retention**.

**Grade retention.** Xia and Nataraj Kirby (2009) define grade retention as “…the practice of keeping low-achieving students at the same grade level for an additional year to provide them with extra time to catch up, as opposed to social promotion which is the practice of promoting students regardless of whether they have mastered the grade content” (p. ix). When a student is retained in grade, a virtual bar has been set that the student has not been able to transcend—the ability to demonstrate adequate yearly
progress (proficiency) in meeting performance standards at their modal grade. As a result, well-intentioned decision makers determine whether the student’s performance is lacking to the extent that requires retention—the ultimate intervention.

The practice of grade retention is usually implemented by schools and their districts to provide more time to acquire and to demonstrate milestones of learning once called performance standards in core subjects, and are now nationally called Common Core State Standards and within New York State (NYS) as Common Core Learning Standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. Grade retention decisions require that a student remain in the same grade for another year with the anticipation that the student’s performance on the following year’s State exams will progress enough to be promoted the following year.

**Multiple grade retention.** Most students who have experienced retention once will not repeat a grade again. Unfortunately, there is no official cap on the number of grade retentions any individual child can experience or any accountability mechanism to judge the efficacy of the decision making, implementation, and evaluation of specific academic interventions. As a result, there is a relatively small population of students who have experienced grade retention two, three, or even four times in the same grade or multiple grades (multiple grade retention). Multiple grade retention is often a turning point in the engagement, motivation, and attitudes of upper elementary and middle school students towards self, middle and high school completion, college opportunities, career choices, and their future lives. Students who have experienced multiple grade retention are frequently called multiple holdover (MHO) students. MHO students are significantly overage for their modal grade and have younger classmates who may be at a different
place developmentally. Multiple grade retention can be an isolating, embarrassing, and undignified experience.

**Federal law.** The practice of grade retention is ultimately an unintended yet ironic consequence of federal educational policy. “In his 1997, 1998 and 1999 State of the Union addresses, President Bill Clinton urged for an end to social promotion and an increase in standardized testing in order to show that students were meeting standards” (Picklo & Christenson, 2005, p. 259). In January 1998, Clinton stated:

If we are going to go strong into the 21st century, we must continue to expand opportunity for all of our people--and when it comes to our children’s education, that means continuing to expect and demand the very best from our schools, our teachers, and, above all, from our students. That is why I have fought for excellence, competition, and accountability in our nation’s public schools, with more parental involvement, greater choice, better teaching, and an end to social promotion. We cannot afford to let our children down when they need us the most (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

In December 2001, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), more commonly known as the “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001” or NCLB.

**NCLB.** The passage of NCLB was the impetus for an intensive focus on test scores as a measure of achievement for students and performance for schools. Under NCLB, student performance data—the number of students who meet or exceed Proficiency Level 3 primarily ELA and Mathematics—has been used by many States to judge and categorize students and schools on a continuum ranging from low performing
to high achieving, with incentives, consequences, and rewards. New York State schools that have significant percentages of students in grades three through eight who have not met proficiency standards in these content areas over a period of years have been identified as “Focus” or “Priority” schools. These schools receive district and/or State-level interventions to address content areas of deficiency.

The impact of NCLB and its demanding test accountability has resulted in increasing numbers of students experiencing grade retention; in the redirection of low-performing students into special education; and in ever increasing numbers of expulsions, dropouts, and students unable to graduate from high school. “In 2004, U.S. Census data revealed that 9.6% of U.S. youth ages 16-19 had been retained in grade one or more times” (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2010, p. 86).

**Civil Rights Data Collection.** Every two years, the U.S. Department of Education’s Civil Rights Office conducts a nationwide data collection called the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). This data collection process is mandated by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and under the Department of Education Organization Act (20 U.S.C. §3413).

In a March 2012 article for *Education Week*, researchers Adams, Robelen, and Shah described the retention disparities reflected in the CRDC data for school year 2009-10 as follows:

The contrast is especially strong for African-Americans. In the most extreme case, more than half of all 4th graders retained at the end of the 2009-10 academic year—56%—were black, according to the data, which account for about 85% of
the nation's public school population. In 3rd grade, 49% of those held back were black. Those findings come even though African-American students represented less than one-fifth of the entire universe of students in the K-12 data set collected from districts. In all, nearly one million students, or 2.3% of those enrolled, were retained across K-12, the data show. Black students were nearly three times as likely as white students to be retained, when combining all grade levels. Hispanic students were twice as likely to be held back…The most recent data-collection undertaking, for the 2009-10 school year, is the most ambitious to date, including 6,835 school districts, more than 72,000 schools, and more than 42 million public school students (p. 1).

**State regulations.** The New York State Education Department (NYSED) does not have a grade retention requirement for students in grades 3 through 8. However, it does have a regulation that addresses the provision of Academic Intervention Services (AIS) (Part 100.2(ee) of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education.

**AIS.** The NYSED defines academic intervention services as “…additional instruction which supplements the instruction provided in the general curriculum and assists students in meeting State learning standards…and/or student support services which may include guidance, counseling, attendance, and study skills which are needed to support improved academic performance.” The following is an excerpt of this regulation addressing requirements for providing academic intervention services in grade three through grade eight:

Schools shall provide academic intervention services when students score below the State designated performance level on one or more of the State elementary
assessments in English language arts, mathematics or science, provided that for the 2010-2011 school year only, the following shall apply: Those students scoring at or below a scale score of 650 shall receive academic intervention instructional services; and those students scoring above a scale score of 650 but below level 3/proficient shall not be required to receive academic intervention instructional and/or student support services unless the school district, in its discretion, deems it necessary. Each school district shall develop and maintain on file a uniform process by which the district determines whether to offer AIS during the 2010-2011 school year to students who scored above a scale score of 650 but below level 3/proficient on a grade 3-8 English language arts or mathematics State assessment in 2009-2010, and shall no later than the commencement of the first day of instruction either post to its website or distribute to parents in writing a description of such process (Commissioner’s Regulation 100.2(ee).

Response to intervention. It is worth noting that the NYSED Commissioner subsequently requested modifications and presented recommendations to the Board of Regents for regulatory flexibility in order (a) to provide flexibility to districts in the provision of AIS in light of the decreasing number of students performing at a proficient level on the 2012-2013 Common Core-aligned assessments, and (b) to move towards Response to Intervention (RtI) model, a three-tiered framework for the delivery of academic intervention services within schools, with each tier increasing in intensity as well as frequency and duration of services. Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) refer to RtI as “…a seamless system of continuous, meaningful, and research-based interventions
for struggling learners, anchored in high quality, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction and assessments.”

**District policy.** In 2003–2004, the NYDOE—the school district overseeing the largest public school system in the country—instituted an aggressive test-based promotion policy, *Chancellor’s Regulation A-501.*

**Promotion policy.** Promotion policy is one of the broadest educational reforms initiated during Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s three-term governance of New York City. Largely as a consequence of this promotion policy, a growing number of students in New York City public schools have experienced grade retention. In a 2011 publication entitled *Raising the Bar for Students & Schools: Our Commitment to Action,* the NYDOE describes its overarching goal as “college & career readiness for all students (p. 4)” Its promotion policy is intended to support this goal by giving students the additional time and support needed to master content at a proficient level. An excerpt of *Chancellor’s Regulation A-501* describes the criteria for promotion as follows:

The decision to promote or retain a student may not be based on consideration of a sole criterion, except that a student must attain a score of at least Proficiency Level 2 on the English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics standardized tests in order to be promoted from Grades 3 through 7, and must attain a score of at least Proficiency Level 2 on the ELA and Mathematics standardized tests and achieve a passing grade in core courses in Grade 8 in order to be promoted from Grade 8 to Grade 9 (unless otherwise deemed ready for promotion by recommendation of the principal and approval of the community superintendent) Students who are
not promoted from Grade 8 to high school…will be provided with additional time and support needed to complete 8th grade graduation requirements. It will be the responsibility of each school to provide those students retained in Grade 8 with a structured setting in which intensive intervention will lead to meeting the promotion requirements (NYCDOE, 2012).

In an article for *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) about New York City’s promotion policy, schools reporter Lisa Fleisher wrote, “Last year, 9,122 third- through eighth-graders were held back. Of those, 1,200 were held back multiple times or became overage” (2012).

**Overage students.** Until recently, there was little flexibility in this promotion policy for students who have experienced retention more than once. However, in July/August 2012, the NYCDOE revisited and slightly relaxed its promotion policy to facilitate more principal discretion in the promotion of overage students, as follows:

For students who have been previously retained in their current or prior two grade levels, or who are two or more years overage by December 31st of their eighth grade year, principals may evaluate student performance using multiple measures of assessment and student work (e.g. standardized assessment scores, classroom assessments, completed student assignments, and teacher observations). Principals may recommend for promotion students who demonstrate gains in the foregoing measures of assessment. This provision is effective as of August 1, 2012 (New York City Department of Education, 2012).
School-level implementation. It is the intent of the retention decision maker—usually a teacher team, student support providers, or principal—that retained students receive school-based academic interventions that are (a) research-based and proven effective; (b) implemented with fidelity; (c) differentiated based on a student’s needs; and (d) varied in terms of frequency, duration, and intensity. A school implementing RtI would focus on (a) Tier One—which is intervention in the classroom by the teacher; (b) Tier Two—more intensive intervention on a push-in or pull out basis; and (c) Tier Three—a possible referral to special education. Although the majority of upper elementary and middle school students will meet the requirements in their grade for promotion following a year of intensive intervention, for a variety of reasons sometimes these interventions fail and students do not demonstrate academic progress in one or more content areas.

Debate. Grade retention is a topic of contentious debate. Proponents of grade retention who often assert that holding students back affords “the gift of another year” would be “…hard pressed to justify multiple grade retention as a gift” (Anderson, Whipple, & Jimerson, 2002). Opponents of grade retention who assert that students are socially and emotionally harmed by this practice may view multiple grade retention as damaging. Adolescence is a developmentally challenging time for many students to navigate socially and emotionally. Add to this the focus on instructional rigor within the Common Core Learning Standards, and the need to increase test stamina, and school becomes overwhelming for some students who have experienced grade retention in the past. Proponents of social promotion—the adverse of grade retention—support
promotion to the next grade, though usually with more responsive and effective intervention decisions.

In a 2012 entry on her blog, New York University research professor and educational policy analyst Diane Ravitch wrote:

When I spoke earlier this year to the National Association of School Psychologists, I listened to introductory remarks by Philip Lazarus, the president of the organization. In talking about the role of school psychologists and reviewing the many problems that students have today, he mentioned that there were three things that students feared most. Number one was going blind. Number two was the death of a parent. And number three was being held back in school. That really shook me up, because I started thinking about the deep humiliation children must feel if all their friends are promoted and they are not. Some years ago, when I was a reliable member of the conservative camp, I favored policies that “ended social promotion.” I thought it was wrong to promote kids to a grade where they were unable to keep up. I dispassionately observed debates between supporters and opponents; I knew that retention was associated with higher dropout rates, but back in those days, I was on the tough-accountability side. Make it harder, I thought, as conservatives do, and children will work harder and get better results. But like so much else that I used to support—like high-stakes testing and choice—I was wrong. I wish that all policymakers could hear from school psychologists about the damage that retention does to children’s lives. I recently came across the research that Lazarus was citing. It is a paper called “Grade Retention: Achievement and Mental Health Outcomes.” About 2.4 million
children are retained every year, more boys than girls, more minorities than whites. Retained students are likely to exhibit aggressive behavior and to have a history of absenteeism and frequent moves. They are more likely to have large families, low parental education and less family involvement. Research suggests that retention leads to minimal—if any—improvement of academic outcomes and an increase in dropping out for the retained students. The writers recognize that the increase in high-stakes testing was intended to pressure students to improve their test scores, but its main impact is to raise their stress levels. And whereas the original research on this topic in the 1980s found that children most feared going blind, losing a parent, or being flunked, a replication of the study in 2001 found that sixth grade students said that fear of being flunked was even greater than the other two terrible fears. What are we doing to our children? I am speaking now as a parent and grandparent, not as a detached observer who looks at the issues from 30,000 feet and “sees like a state.” Students who are retained have lower self-esteem (which must surely be lowered even more by having been branded as a failure and humiliated in front of their peers). Dropping out, as the paper recounts, is associated with a wide range of negative behaviors and outcomes that are bad for children and bad for our society. Ultimately, holding kids back does not get them the social and emotional support they need. Instead, it aggravates the very conditions that led to their original failure. We live in a time of social scarcity, of meanness, of meritocracy without compassion and without social concern. ‘Ending social promotion,’ it turns out, is just another slogan that politicians like to bandy about. It makes them feel strong; it makes them look tough; it wins
plaudits from the hard-hearted tabloids; it allows the politicians to call themselves ‘reformers.’ But it hurts children. Ask the school psychologists. They see the children every day who are wounded and broken by these tough social policies. We must all begin to see them” (Ravitch, 2012).

In an interview with WSJ reporter Lisa Fleisher, NYCDOE Chief Academic Officer Shael Polakow-Suransky stated, “If you have a kid who’s fifteen with a bunch of 11-year-olds, it doesn’t make sense at that point for them to continue to retake the same grade over and over again…This is a kid who’s clearly struggling no matter what grade they’re in” (Fleisher, 2012). This statement from a high-level NYCDOE official is, in effect, an acknowledgement that promotion policy that worked for some struggling students has not worked for ALL struggling students, and that a different approach is needed.

**Dynamics of grade retention.** The dynamics of grade retention are complex and the specific dynamics cited here are neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive. Advocates for Children is a non-profit organization that works on behalf of students who are at greatest risk for school-based discrimination due to poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English language learner (ELL) status, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. In its report entitled *Stuck in the Middle: The Problem of Overage Middle School Students in New York City*, researchers with Advocates for Children (2008) identified the following common factors that may result in a student failing to meet promotional requirements and become overage for their grade: (a) interrupted schooling due to such events as frequent family relocation, domestic violence, and foster care placement; (b) the lack of
appropriate academic supports provided “competently and consistently” for students who need them; (c) students who may need to change schools due to safety or disciplinary concerns, or family circumstances but cannot find an alternative placement prior to discharge from their current school (2008).

Other dynamics or factors that influence grade retention may include: (a) poor early childhood preparation for school or unsupported transitions from elementary to middle school; (b) slow progress in English language acquisition or interrupted formal education; (c) a lack of access to good instruction and personalized approaches to teaching and learning; (d) a lack of timely collective and individual responsiveness to student needs; (e) negative attitudes or beliefs among peers that diminish the achievement, school engagement, and motivation of some students of color; and (e) a lack of effective teachers, mentors, counselors, and other intervention providers.

Emotional dynamics may include low levels of parent participation in student academic activities or low parent expectations for the student’s success, and infinite range of other cognitive, social, behavioral or mental health issues. Political dynamics include strict accountability measures, governmental or organizational policies, philosophical beliefs, or downright arbitrary and capricious promotion decision making without understanding the academic or personal history and implications for the individual student. Cultural dynamics may include poor student-teacher communication due to language barriers, as well as personal biases or low expectations of teachers.

In her book entitled Wounded by School: Recapturing the Joy in Learning and Standing Up to Old School Culture, author Kirsten Olson shares stories of people who have “school wounds”—“the notion that schooling can wound us…the hidden and long-
lasting wounds that result from the structured violence inherent in the ways we organize and evaluate learning.” (2009, p. xv):

- “Everyday” losses of pleasure in learning
- Belief that we are not smart, not competent in learning
- Belief that our abilities are fixed, and cannot be improved with effort, coaching, intervention, or self-understanding
- Belief that we are “just average” in ways that feel diminishing
- Painful burning memories of shaming experiences in school that produce generalized anxiety and shut us down
- Chronic, habitual anger towards teachers, and those in authority, due to past experiences of injustice, of not being “seen” in school
- Belief that we are intellectually or cognitively “less than” due to experiences in school
- Low appetite for risk taking intellectually; wanting to be right or “just get the assignment done”
- Overattachment to “right” answers, correctness
- Tendency to classify others, and ourselves, into dualistic, diminishing “smart/dumb,” “artistic/not artistic” categories
- Unprocessed, powerful feelings about education and learning that we become aware of as adults, in our interactions with our own children or students in school (Olson, 2009, p. 19).

Olson also describes the effects of school wounds as:

- Students believe they aren’t “smart”
Students believe they don’t have what it takes to succeed in school (and by implication, life)

Students believe their ideas lack value or validity

Students believe all their efforts, no matter how hard they try, are below standards

Students believe they are “flawed people”

Students feel ashamed of themselves and their efforts; they develop “learned helplessness”

Students show less pleasure, less courage in learning

Students have lowered ambition, less self-discipline, and diminished persistence in the face of obstacles (Olsen, 2009, p. 26).

Challenges. In large urban school districts like New York City, schools are experiencing significant challenges in serving students who are overage for their modal grade level. The effects of economics, language struggles, disabilities, bureaucracies, and family pressures together with the challenge of achieving high standards for all students can certainly be difficult for some schools.

The following educational issues are challenges for school systems serving MHO students:

Access. Continued access to a free public education, which is provided to students until age 21. With some MHO students graduating from middle school in their mid- to late-teenage years, it is conceivable that they will “age out” of high school before they graduate. Data collection related to four-year high school graduation cohorts begin when a student enters ninth grade. This cohort data is used to calculate the school’s and
district’s graduation rate. Therefore, a disincentive exists to promoting struggling eighth grade students. In New York City, approximately 39% of students who enter ninth grade each September fail to graduate with their peers four years later (United Way of New York City, 2012). “In 2004, U.S. Census data revealed that 9.6% of U.S. youth ages 16-19 had been retained in grade one or more times” (Bali, Anagnostopoulos, & Roberts, 2005).

Cost. Retention is an expensive intervention (National Association of School Psychologists, 2011). Each March, student registers are projected by districts for each grade for the next school year. The projected registers for each school are the basis for a school’s funding for the subsequent school year. For every student retained, schools spend the equivalent of the cost of one more year of school—which, depending on the numbers of students retained, can be significant in this era of school budget austerity.

Data usage. A recurring theme in various reports highlighting promising practices is the use of data, not only to track students who are at-risk of being retaining or dropping out, but also to evaluate the effectiveness of the practices being implemented (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007; Heppen & Therriault, 2008). Although there are some NYC public schools embracing innovative practices involving data collection, widespread availability within every school of real-time information that is delivered, analyzed, and acted upon immediately after collection without delay is a stumbling block within most schools. It is not uncommon for educators to review student data that is a month or more old.

Programming. Although a student demonstrated proficiency in one of the two core content areas, he/she failed to demonstrate proficiency in the other content area. Due
to the complexities of school-level programming and scheduling, however, a student may retake the entire year of the content area he/she struggled with as well as the content area in which he/she demonstrated proficiency. In addition, the small schools movement in New York City has limited the alternative options at the school level for MHO students to receive another year of instruction in the classroom of a teacher with whom they were not successful or with different instructional practices.

**Student Demographics.** Who are the students being retained? There are folks who enjoy conspiracy theories and proclaim an outright conspiracy to derail the progress of communities of color. There may be some basis for this perspective. Table 1.1 highlights 2007 data from the National Center for Education Statistics, which reflects racial disparities in retention rates.

**Race/Ethnicity.** In the early grades, retention rates are similar among whites, African Americans, and Hispanics, but by high school, the rate is about 15% higher for African Americans and Hispanics than for whites (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000).

Adams, Robelen, and Shah (2012) highlighted grade retention as a practice that creates racial and ethnic disparities. According to these researchers, for school year 2009-10, the following data was collected by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights:
Table 1.1

*Percentage of Public School Students in Kindergarten Through Grade 12 Who Had Ever Repeated a Grade, By Sex and Race/Ethnicity: 2007*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>!</td>
<td>!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>!</td>
<td>‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Rounds to zero.

! Interpret data with caution.

‡ Reporting standards not met.

1 Total includes other race/ethnicity categories not separately shown.

*Note.* All data are based on parent reports. Reporting standards for Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders were not met; therefore, data for this group are not shown on the table. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2007)

From grades 3-10, black students represented the largest single racial or ethnic group held back. In 4th grade, they represented more than half of all students retained, and the rates were still high in some other grades. In 5th grade, 44% were black, and in 6th grade, 48%. In 8th grade, black students were 42% of those retained…Hispanic retention rates also appeared to be disproportionately high relative to the student population in some, but not all, grade levels. In 1st grade, 39% of the students retained were Hispanic, and at 2nd grade, 43%. In grade 4, however, the proportion appeared more even: 23% of those retained were
Hispanic. Hispanics represented about 24% of all K-12 students in the data set” (Adams, Robelen, & Shah, 2012, p. 1, 18).

**Gender.** Some groups of children are more likely to be retained than others. Thompson and Cunningham (2000) found that “nationally…the retention rate for boys is about 10% higher than for girls.”

**Poverty.** Retained students often “live in poverty or in a single parent household; have parents with low educational attainment; have parents that are less involved in their education; have changed schools frequently; have behavior problems and display aggression or immaturity; have reading problems, including English language learners” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003). “The percentage of K-8 students who had experienced retention was greater among students from poor families than among students from near-poor of non-poor families” (National Household Education Surveys Program, 2007).

In an article entitled “How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement” for the May 2013 issue of *Educational Leadership*, author Jensen states:

Although small amounts of stress are healthy, acute and chronic stress—known as distress—is toxic. Children living in poverty experience greater chronic stress than do their more affluent counterparts…Distressed children typically exhibit one of two behaviors: angry “in your face” assertiveness or disconnected “leave me alone” passivity. To the uninformed, the student may appear to be either out of control, showing an attitude or lazy. But those behaviors are actually symptoms of stress disorders—and distress influences many behaviors that influence engagement (p. 29).
Theoretical Rationale

The following theoretical and conceptual frameworks have relevance for school-based resilience-building in MHO students:

Grand theory. Resilience, which is related to behaviorism, focuses on the ability of people to transform disaster into a growth experience and move forward. Resilience theory has its roots in the study of children who proved resilient despite adverse childhood environments. Definitions of resilience have two basic elements (a) successful adaptation (i.e., outcome or process) in the presence of (b) adversities and risk (i.e. context) (Zhang, DeBlois, Deniger & Kamanzi, 2008).

The premise of resiliency is that people possess selective strengths, which are often referred to as protective factors that help them survive adversity (Richardson, 2002). Educational resilience is the ability of students to cope with the adversity of school failure and rebound academically, socially, and emotionally. Much of our resilience comes from the relationships that allow us to lean on each other for support when we need it. “Fostering resilience in children through working on their strengths or the strengths of the environment has become an alternative to the traditional manner of educational intervention that focused efforts on problems or risk factors” (Zhang, DeBlois, et. al., 2008). “Only recently have practitioners/ researchers engaged in the explicit, prospective facilitation of resilience in educational settings” (Brown, Jean-Marie, & Beck, 2010).

The following older theories regarding the crisis of repeated grade retention of students and the role of schools in building resilience are relevant for this study.

Self-efficacy. In his theory of self-efficacy, psychologist Albert Bandura said that self-efficacy “…can play a major role in how one approaches goals, tasks, and challenges
(1993); and the stronger a person’s level of self-efficacy is, the higher expectations are set and an increased focus is placed on accomplishing goals.” Close and Solberg (2007) found that, as they predicted, that self-efficacy beliefs were positively predictive of academic achievement and negatively predictive of distress. (p. 39)

**Salutogenesis.** In his *salutogenesis* model, medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky was concerned with the relationship between health, stress, and coping. The word salutogenesis is derived from the Latin word “salus,” which means health and well-being, and the word “genesis,” which means formation. In their 2013 article, researchers Mittelmark and Bull describe Antonovsky’s central ideas as follows:

The experience of health, Antonovsky propounded, is movement along a continuum of pain and suffering (ease/dis-ease), which he termed “breakdown.” The ease/dis-ease continuum has four dimensions along which we experience varying degrees of breakdown. First, what is the person’s experience of pain (rated on a four-point scale from not to all to severe? Third, what is the person’s degree of functional limitation that is definable medically as having prognostic implications (rated on a six-point scale from not acute or chronic to serious, acute and life threatening)? Fourth, does prognosis imply that medical treatment is needed (rated on a four-point scale ranging from no particular health-related action to a requirement for active therapeutic intervention)?..Four points are worth noting about Antonovsky’s concept of health. First, rather than being a true continuum, the ease/dis-ease construct as discussed by Antonovsky is a categorization, similar to the sick/well categorization of pathogenesis, except for having several meaningful categories instead of just two. He considered in detail
various profiles, he referred to them as “types,” and he surmised that over time, people move from one breakdown type to another, either for better or for worse. He wrote about types as though they were diagnostic categories, and suggested that different types require different follow-up strategies…To be at the ease end of the continuum (to be maximally healthy) is to have no pain and suffering…he [Antonovsky] indicates his understanding that health, as in the ease/dis-ease continuum, is an aspect of a larger construct called well-being (pp. 30-33).

Wellness. The term “wellness” can be used to describe the goal of any academic, social, emotional, or physical intervention. On its website, the National Wellness Institute (NWI) defines wellness as “an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence” (2013). Wellness is defined as a “multidimensional state of being describing the existence of positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life and a sense of well-being” (President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 2001).

Positive youth development. Positive youth development (PYD) is the process through which students acquire the cognitive, social, and emotional skills and abilities required to navigate life. Within PYD, the concept of thriving incorporates indicators of positive, healthy development. Benson and Scales (2009) describe thriving as “an under-utilized construct that can add value to theory, research, and application in child development.” Scales, Leffert, and Vraa (2003) offer a construct for thriving that includes: a positive orientation to schoolwork, helping others, valuing diversity, feeling healthy, exhibiting leadership, delaying gratification, overcoming adversity, and active coping.
Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to: (a) examine the presence of resiliency attributes as self-reported by overage elementary and middle school students who have experienced multiple grade retention in New York City’s public schools; and (b) illuminate the specific perceptions of school leaders and teachers with regard to the efforts, accomplishments, and challenges to cultivating resilience within their school buildings. The secondary purpose was to bring attention to the academic, social, and emotional plight of MHO students. Though there may be many other factors that influence the educational achievement of MHO students, this study focuses solely on the presence of resilience factors that will help students to overcome grade retention and other life challenges.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between students who have experienced multiple grade retention and the attributes of resilience?

2. Is there a relationship between school-based efforts to cultivate resilience and the prevalence of resilience attributes among their MHO students?

Potential Significance of the Study

The cultivation of resilience attributes within students who have experienced multiple grade retention and the efforts of schools to foster these attributes is the topic of this study. This study is important because students experiencing multiple grade retention have not been adequately studied and, specifically, how their schools cultivate resilience in these students has not been studied. It is hoped that this study contributes to current scholarship by (1) deepening organizational knowledge about MHO students, and (2)
advancing ideas about school culture to support the academic achievement, school engagement, and resilience of this struggling student population.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

**Academic intervention services:** Additional instruction for targeted students that supplements the instruction provided in the general curriculum to all students. Academic intervention services are intended to support improved academic performance, to help prepare students to master CCLS-aligned content, and to meet the State’s proficiency levels. These services may also include guidance, counseling, attendance, and study skills.

**Attributes:** Personal qualities or characteristics inherent within or ascribed to someone or something, in this case, a student and/or a school.

**Behaviorism:** A theory based on the belief that behaviors can be measured, trained, and changed.

**Bright spots:** Examples of practices to be replicated.

**Chancellor’s Regulations:** These written policies govern the manner in which the New York City Department of Education addresses such issues as but not limited to promotion, discipline, attendance, and security.

**Children First Network:** An administrative organization within the New York City Department of Education, providing non-geographically bound instructional and operational support to schools.

**Collaborative Team Teachers:** A general education and special education co-teachers delivering instruction in a least restrictive environment for students receiving general education and special education services.
**Common Core Learning Standards**: A teaching and learning framework that provides a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, and encompasses New York State’s adoption of the national Common Core State Standards as well as the optional 15% State-specific standards additions.

**Core subjects**: Foundational academic subjects, including English language arts, mathematics, and science.

**Cultivate**: To foster the growth of something, in this case, resilience.

**Dynamics**: A pattern or process of change, growth, or activity.

**Educational resilience**: The ability of students to cope with the adversity of school failure and rebound academically, socially, and emotionally.

**Emotional Reactivity**: A measurable construct or core characteristic of resiliency related to being susceptible to being emotionally vulnerable. Includes *sensitivity*—“the threshold for reaction and the intensity of the reaction” (RSCA Manual, p. 14);

*recovery*—“the ability to bounce back from emotional arousal or disturbance of emotional equilibrium” (RSCA Manual, p. 14); and *impairment*—“the degree to which the youth is able to maintain an emotional equilibrium when aroused” (RSCA Manual, p. 14).

**Evidence-based practice**: Denotes the quality, robustness, or validity of scientific evidence of an intervention’s effectiveness.

**Executive functioning**: Cognitive processes that enable students to self-regulate their behavior, e.g., planning, time management, multitasking, problem solving, working memory, and attention.
**Grade retention:** The practice of holding a student back from being promoted to the next grade, usually as an intervention to address low academic performance or lack of social-emotional readiness.

**Grit:** “Perseverance to accomplish long-term or higher-order goals in the face of challenges and setbacks.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2013)

**Intervention:** A strategy designed to support academic, behavioral, social, or emotional improvement.

**Middle school:** Grades 6, 7, and 8.

**Multiple grade retention:** Retaining a student repeatedly across multiple grades or school years.

**Multiple Holdover (MHO):** A student who has experienced grade retention two or more times.

**Performance standards:** Milestones designed to encourage the highest achievement of every student, by defining the knowledge, concepts, and skills that students should acquire at each grade level.

**Promotional gates:** Performance standards that a student is expected to meet in order to be promoted.

**Promotion-in-doubt:** The process of early identification of students who may not meet the requirements for promotion by the end of the school year.

**Proficiency level:** The New York State-determined level of grade-level competence in a content area, (e.g., Level 1=Below Proficiency Standards; Level 2=Approaching Proficiency Standards; Level 3=Meeting Proficiency Standards, and Level 4=Exceeding Proficiency Standards)
Promotion portfolio: A collection of student work and assessment documents (e.g., writing samples, formative assessment data) that evidence a student’s performance relative to promotional benchmarks.

Protective factors: Conditions, characteristics, resources, supports, or coping strategies that, when present, mitigate or eliminate risk and increase the health, well-being, and positive outcomes.

Resilience: The ability of people to cope with stress, adversity, or crisis through the presence of the inner strength necessary to overcome and turn the event into a growth experience and move forward.

Resilience theory: A strength-based theory that proposes that individuals possess some or all of the attributes that helps them to cope with adversity depending on protective factors that exist in families, schools, and communities.

Response to Intervention: A three-tiered framework for the delivery of academic intervention services within schools, with each tier increasing in intensity as well as frequency and duration of services.

Right to appeal: Upon written notification of a decision to retain a student in the same grade, parents have the ability to appeal the promotional decision by writing to the principal. The principal will make a recommendation to the superintendent, who will make the final determination.

Scaled score: A student’s raw score on state tests is transformed into a scale score through an equating process that allows a test (same subject, same grade level, etc.) to represent the same level of difficulty from one year to the next. Scaled scores convert into proficiency levels.
**Sense of Mastery (MAS):** A measurable construct or core characteristic of resiliency that is related to efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and social learning. Includes characteristics of *optimism*—“consists of positive attitudes about the world/life in general and about one’s own life specifically, and would refer specifically or generally to the future” (RSCA Manual, p. 10); *self-efficacy*—“associated with developing problem-solving attitudes and strategies” (RSCA Manual, p. 10); and *adaptability*—“the ability to be personally receptive to criticism, and to learn from one’s mistakes” (RSCA Manual, p. 10).

**Sense of Relatedness (REL):** A measurable construct or core characteristic of resiliency that is related to relationships with others. Includes characteristics of *trust*—“the degree to which others are perceived as reliable and accepting, and the degree to which an individual can be authentic in these relationships” (RSCA Manual, p. 12); *support*—“the individual’s belief that there are others to whom he or she can turn when dealing with adversity” (RSCA Manual, p. 12); *comfort*—“the degree to which an individual can be in the presence of others without discomfort or anxiety” (RSCA Manual, p. 12); and *tolerance*—“the individual’s belief that he or she can safely express differences within a relationship (RSCA Manual, p. 12).

**School-based effort:** Consistent with the concept of “organizing for effort” and “effort-based schools,” which are terms used in the University of Pittsburgh’s Principles of Learning, the term “school-based effort” refers to “…sustained and directed effort” that “…can yield high achievement for all students” (Resnick, 1995).

**Social promotion:** The practice of promoting students with their same-age peers regardless of achievement.
**Strength-based model:** Focused primarily on the positive attributes of a student’s ability rather than a deficit model focused primarily on the student’s weaknesses.

**Thriving:** The continued healthy development and well-being of students.

**Upper elementary school:** Grades 4 and 5.

**Wellness:** A “multidimensional state of being describing the existence of positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life and a sense of well-being” (President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 2001)

**Chapter Summary**

The focus on grade retention and its connection to the construct of resilience was discussed in this chapter. The complexity of grade retention in academic, emotional, political, and cultural dynamics were discussed. Relevant legislation, policy, process, and issues for debate were described, along with the implementation challenges of access, cost, data, programming, and demographics. Theories of resilience and self-efficacy, and the concepts of positive youth development and thriving were explored. Finally, a rationale for the importance of this study and a definition of terms were provided.

A review of the literature that exists on the topic of grade retention and resilience follows in Chapter 2. A description of the research methodology used in this study is presented in Chapter 3, and the findings from the research conducted herein are described in detail in Chapter 4. Finally, implications of the findings and the study’s limitations are discussed in Chapter 5, as well as some recommendations for future practice.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” (Nelson Mandela). The primary focus of this literature review is to identify scholarship that will facilitate a better understanding of the plight of students experiencing multiple grade retention, and the ways in which their schools have helped to cultivate attributes of resilience within these students, so that they thrive academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally despite their circumstances.

The topic of multiple grade retention is important because this practice (a) has potentially negative consequences for a student’s successful school completion; (b) impedes healthy social and emotional development; and (c) places stress upon school infrastructure and resources. Resilience is an important topic because (a) it focuses on a strength-based model of grade retention rather than a deficit model; and (b) schools are well situated organizationally for building resilience in MHO students. There is strong research evidence linking building resiliency to academic success—especially for struggling students. In their longitudinal study, Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, and Benson (2006) found that higher levels of resiliency traits are strongly correlated with higher grade point averages (GPAs) among middle and high school students.
In their study on ELL educational resilience, Waxman, Rivera, and Powers (2012) found that:

Resilience is an area of research that has important implications for the improvement of English Language Learners (ELLs) because it focuses on ELLs who are successful in school despite the presence of adverse conditions such as living in economically- and socially-disadvantaged circumstances…ELLs have often been characterized as the most vulnerable students to academic failure in the U.S.”

Examined in this literature review are (1) academic and professional studies on grade retention practices, and (2) the nature of resilience-building schools and programs. In addition, non-research secondary sources (e.g., memos, presentations, policy statements, regulations, organizational web resources, and newspaper articles) were reviewed to understand promotion or retention issues specific to an urban public education setting.

**Topic Analysis**

**Grade retention.** A great deal of scholarly literature exists on the history, rationale, and pros and cons of grade retention in general. Many articles explore relationships between grade retention and a variety of different factors, including but not limited to early versus later retention (Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006), and dropping out of school (Sterns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007). Although an abundance of literature exists about grade retention, the scholarship concentrates largely on grade retention as (1) an early childhood event, or (2) as a singular event rather than a repetitious one in a student’s school career.
It is widely accepted that unsuccessful high school transition is associated with higher dropout rates, delayed graduation rates, and low achievement (Herlihy, 2007). Male and black or Hispanic students are more likely to be retained and is the single strongest predictor of leaving school before graduation (Alexander, Entwistle, & Dauber, 2003; Bali, Anagnostopoulos & Roberts, 2005; Corman, 2003). A 2007 study by the American Council on Education comparing the characteristics of General Education Diploma (GED) candidates who were and were not retained in grade found that among candidates retained:

- the percentages of males and minorities were disproportionately high;
- many were less likely to be employed and more likely to be in correctional facilities than the non-retained candidates;
- many dropped out of school because they did not like school and were absent too many times;
- many had academic or behavioral problems; or
- many felt too old for their grade.

Grade transitions are peak times for retention. Thompson and Cunningham (2000) found that students are most commonly retained at the end of the year after the transition into elementary school, into middle or junior high school, and into high school. When promotion to the next grade requires transition, e.g., from elementary to middle, or middle to high school, it is often difficult to have a seamless articulation of intervention methods across schools in different school organizational structures. Although some students are able to demonstrate enough academic progress to transition to high school,
others become detached and exhibit lower self-esteem and behavioral problems, or drop out of school entirely.

Unsuccessful high school transition is associated with higher dropout rates, delayed graduation rates, and low achievement (Herlihy, 2007). Critical transition points such as the move from middle school to high school are difficult for already struggling students (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Male black or Hispanic students are more likely to be retained…Retention is the single strongest predictor of leaving school before graduation (Alexander, Entwistle, & Dauber, 2003; Bali et al., 2005; Corman, 2003; Whipple, 2002). Frederick and Hauser (2008) focused on trends in the proportion of children below the modal grade for their age (BMG), a proxy for grade retention, and the effects of its demographic and socioeconomic correlates. They predicted that the more common the practice of retaining students in grade becomes, the more the effects of being retained will be magnified at the population level.

A great deal of scholarly literature exists on the history, rationale, and pros and cons of grade retention (Range, Dougan, & Pijanowski, 2011; Bowman, 2005; and Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005). Many studies take a position either for or against ending social promotion, which is the practice of promoting students to the next grade regardless of their academic achievement—the adverse of grade retention.

Most research has been focused on retention in the early childhood grades and its consequences. Akmal and Larsen (2004) found that not many researchers have examined retention at the middle school level. Longitudinal studies have linked grade retention to increased risk for dropping out of school (Allensworth, 2005), to the extent that early grade retention was “…one of the most powerful predictors of later school withdrawal”
Shane Jimerson’s scholarship and contributions to the study of grade retention has been recognized nationally. Jimerson’s 2001 meta-analysis of grade retention research of the prior decade found that compared to similar students that are promoted, retained students are worse off; simply having a student repeat a grade is unlikely to address the multiple factors influencing poor achievement or adjustments that led to the student being retained. Jimerson, Kerr, and Pletcher (2005) found that retention may improve a student’s academic performance during the year the student is retained, but the gain usually declines two to three years after retention. Their research compared the short- and long-term effects between students who had been retained, similarly achieving but promoted students, and a random sample of students.

**New York City’s past promotion initiatives.** Chancellor’s Regulation A-501 was not the first promotion initiative instituted in New York City in the recent past.

**Promotion Gates Program.** In school year 1981-1982, New York City implemented a major grade retention initiative called the *Promotion Gates Program*, which was designed to bolster instruction and learning in order to enable New York City public school students in grades four and seven to meet city-wide performance standards required for promotion. According Professor Ernest House, who served as the auditor for the 1982 evaluation of the Promotion Gates Program, the conclusions were as follows:

Students who were retained did not achieve better than similar low-achieving students who were simply socially promoted before the policy was put in place. Research further showed that retained students in New York later dropped out at substantially higher rates. Negative results for retained students occurred even though these students had attended summer school and received an extra year of
schooling in smaller classes with specially trained teachers during their retention year (1998).

**The Eight-Plus Program.** In her 2005 dissertation entitled *Programs for Unsuccessful Students in Successful Schools*, Dr. Dorita Gibson—currently a Deputy Chancellor with the New York City Department of Education—focused her study on “…understanding the dimensions of programs most likely to enhance the success of struggling students.” Gibson’s research described the *Eight-Plus Program*, a remedial program implemented by the NYCDOE in the 1990s and early 2000s to address the needs of retained 8th grade students. Gibson referenced Aronson’s 2001 theoretical framework, which views resilience as a social rather than an individual phenomenon, and moves struggling students from adversity to success through (1) faces of adversity, (2) effects of adversity, (3) enabling conditions, (4) coping strategies, (5) achievement, and (6) looking back” (Gibson, 2005).

Through interviews with teachers and parents in five middle schools in New York City, as well as document analysis, Gibson found that the *Eight-Plus Programs*:

“…prioritized increasing attendance and attention, focus on academic priorities, and provide counseling and study skills. Teachers and support staff assigned to these programs are often recognized for their understanding of adolescents and their abilities to create caring classroom climates…However, the academic purposes of the programs are more difficult to implement. Teachers struggle with the negative effects of homogeneous classes and are challenged by the need to create opportunities for meeting standards-driven curricular objectives” (2005).
**RAND Corporation.** The RAND Corporation conducted an independent longitudinal evaluation of the NYCDOE’s promotion policy implementation from 2006 to 2009. RAND’s researchers concluded that there were (a) no negative socio-emotional effects on the retained fifth graders; and (b) positive achievement outcomes in English language arts, though less positive in mathematics (Xia & Nataraj Kirby, 2009). Although the report focused on three cohorts of fifth graders and one comparison group, it did not specifically address the issue of multiple holdovers students—students who had experienced repeated grade retention since the commencement of New York City’s promotion policy in 2004.

In 2009, the RAND Corporation published a literature review as part of a larger study prepared for the New York City Department of Education, which highlighted the following findings of 91 selected studies (87 empirical, three meta-analyses, and one systematic review of past research):

- Relative to students who are promoted, retained students are likely to be male, minority, younger than their peers, of low socioeconomic status, and living in poor households and single-parent families. They are also more likely to have poorer academic performance prior to retention; significantly lower social skills and poorer emotional adjustment; more problem behaviors, such as inattention and absenteeism; more school transfers; poorer health; and disabilities.

- In general, retention does not appear to benefit students academically. In most of the studies, we found negative relationships between retention and subsequent academic achievement. On the other hand, a few studies have
found academic improvement in the immediate years after retention. Even so, these gains are short-lived and tend to fade over time. Findings from the few studies using rigorous methods to adjust for selection bias have been mixed as well—with some showing short-term gains and others reporting gains that disappeared over time.

- Retained students have a significantly increased risk of eventually dropping out of school.
- Compared with their peers, retained students also appear less likely to pursue postsecondary education and more likely to have poorer employment outcomes in terms of earnings (although only a few studies have looked at this outcome).
- Findings on social, emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes among the retained students compared with their promoted peers appear mixed, with some studies reporting positive outcomes and others finding insignificant or even negative results.

Interestingly, in their final research report describing the process and outcomes of an independent longitudinal evaluation of the NYCDOE’s promotion policy implementation from 2006 to 2009, RAND did not correlate its longitudinal evaluation findings with the cons highlighted in their literature review.

**Social and emotional learning.**

cope well with high levels of ongoing disruptive change;

- sustain good health and energy when under constant pressure;
- bounce back easily from setbacks;
- overcome adversities;
- change to a new way of working and living when an way is no longer possible; and
- do all this without acting in dysfunctional or harmful ways” (p. 5)

Dr. Sam Goldstein (2008) of the University of Utah’s Neurology, Learning and Behavior Center described the evolution of the study of resilience:

The study of resilience traces its roots back a mere fifty years. Early on only a small number of researchers examined this phenomenon, and the field of study was not extensive. Research interest focused on what factors insulate and protect as well as how these factors exert their influence. Only high risk populations were examined and researchers focused on youth who demonstrated the ability to overcome the emotional, developmental, medical, economic or environmental challenges they faced growing up. However, the study of resilience has expanded significantly over the past twenty years with a great sense of urgency. All youth face pressure and stress in our fast-paced environment. Even youth fortunate not to face significant adversity or trauma, or to be burdened by intense stress or anxiety experience the pressures around them and the expectations placed upon them. This phenomenon has driven the study of resilience beyond just an academic examination to the doorstep of an applied science.
The qualities of resilient youth include (a) the ability to self-regulate, (b) a sense of hope, (c) self-worth, (d) the ability to establish realistic goals and expectations, (e) problem-solving skills, and (f) the presence of effective interpersonal skills and coping strategies (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). Goldstein (2008) found that resilient youth appear capable of developing clear and realistic goals, solving problems, relating comfortably with others and treating themselves and others with respect. Samel, Sondergeld, Fischer and Patterson (2011) found that students sometimes survive and thrive dependent on or despite the conditions in which they find themselves. Fostering resilience in children by working on their strengths or the strengths of the environment has become an alternative to the traditional manner of educational intervention that focused efforts on problems or risk factors (Zhang, DeBlois, Deniger & Kamanzi, 2008).

Suldo, Friedrich, White, Farmer, and Michalowski (2009) found that adolescent well-being is associated with a variety of school-based experiences, especially students’ perceptions of teacher support. In this study, a strong correlation was found between emotional support from teachers and students’ life satisfaction. A longitudinal study by Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier and Benson (2006) found that higher levels of resiliency traits are strongly correlated with higher grade point averages (GPAs) among middle and high school students.

More recent research on resilience of school-aged children offers the premise of resilience whereas people possess selective strengths, which are often referred to as *protective factors* that help them survive adversity (Richardson, 2002). “Fostering resilience in children through working on their strengths or on the strengths of the environment has become an alternative to the traditional manner of education
intervention that focused efforts on problems or risk factors” (Zhang, DeBlois, Deniger & Kamazi, 2008). Masten (2001) made the following observation about resilience:

Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.

Brooks and Goldstein (2001) asserted that the qualities that are found in resilient youth include (a) the ability to self-regulate, (b) a sense of hope, (c) self-worth, (d) the ability to establish realistic goals and expectations, (e) problem-solving skills, and (f) the presence of effective interpersonal skills and coping strategies. Wood, Murdock, and Cronin (2002) found that middle school students who were taught how to self-monitor improved their academic performance, as measured by their grades and related academic behaviors. Self-regulation or self-monitoring and problem-solving are consistent with the types of skills schools can help struggling students to develop or enhance, that may lead to improved academic performance. They are also skills with which students who experience problems with executive functioning struggle.

In their book entitled Resiliency in Schools: Making it Happen for Students and Educators, Henderson and Milstein (2003, p. 9) provide a list of protective factors (see Table 2.1). Schools, more than any other institution— with the exception of families, can provide the environment and conditions that foster resilience in today’s youth and tomorrow’s adults. Schools offer advantages for resilience-building in that multiple levels of influence (educators, counselors, parents, peers, partnerships) on academics, behavior, and social and emotional learning can be targeted, from the individual level of interventions student achievement to school-wide efforts to improve student outcomes.
Resilience-building facilitated by schools is important because it shifts the focus away from blaming the student for being retained in grade because of something internal to the student, to the school’s role in helping the student overcome this life challenge. “Without an awareness of exactly what contributes to resiliency, it is more difficult to promote programmatic and structural changes that build resiliency in students” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

In their book, *Resiliency in Schools: Making it Happen for Students and Educators*, Henderson and Milstein (2003) offer six concrete “steps to cultivating resiliency in schools—the first three steps are intended to mitigate risk, and the second three steps are intended to build resilience.” The six steps are:

1. **Increase bonding:** These are the strong positive connections between individuals.

2. **Set clear and consistent boundaries:** Implementing school policies and procedures that clarify expectations of student behavior.

3. **Teach life skills:** Life skills include cooperation, healthy conflict resolution, resistance and assertiveness skills, communication skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and healthy stress management.

4. **Provide caring and support:** This is identified as the most critical of the elements that promote resiliency.

5. **Set and communicate high expectations:** Expectations need to be high and realistic in order to be effective motivators.
6. **Provide opportunities for meaningful participation:** Providing opportunities for problem solving, decision making, planning, goal setting, and helping others.

Henderson and Milstein (2003) suggest that schools can use these six factors to “…create a common language, assess the status quo, and identify other things that need to be done” prior to coming to agreement about what is presently happening that promotes or detracts from resiliency.”

**Executive functioning.** On its website, The Council for Exceptional Children states that executive functioning “…generally refers to the cognitive processes that enable individuals to engage in goal-directed or problem-solving behaviors.” Dawson and Guare (2004) define executive skills as “…those that help us regulate our actions, thinking, and emotions; they are the foundation of many high-level cognitive functions, including planning, decision making, metacognition, strategies, self-regulated learning, and selective attention.” Although executive functioning is discussed most often within special education rather than general education environments, students who do not have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) can benefit from acquiring these skills.


Human beings have a built-in capacity to meet challenges and accomplish goals through the use of high-level cognitive functions called *executive skills*…These skills include the following:
(a) **Planning.** The ability to create a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. It also involves being able to make decisions about what’s important to focus on and what’s not important;

(b) **Organization.** The ability to design and maintain systems for keeping track of information or materials;

(c) **Time management.** The capacity to estimate how much time one has, how to allocate it, and how to stay within time limits and deadlines. It also involves a sense that time is important;

(d) **Working memory.** The ability to hold information in mind while performing complex tasks. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future;

(e) **Metacognition.** The ability to stand back and take a bird’s eye view of oneself in a situation. It is an ability to observe how you problem solve. It also includes self-monitoring and self-evaluative skills (e.g., asking yourself, “How am I doing?” or “How did I do?”);

(f) **Response inhibition.** The capacity to think before you act. The ability to resist the urge to say or do something allows us the time to evaluate a situation or task in spite of distractions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior;

(g) **Sustained attention.** The capacity to attend to a situation or task in spite of distractibility, fatigue, or boredom;

(h) **Task initiation.** The ability to begin a task without undue procrastination, in a timely fashion;
(i)  *Flexibility.* The ability to revise plans in the face of obstacles, setbacks, new information, or mistakes. It involves adaptability to changing conditions; and

(j)  *Goal directed persistence.* The capacity or drive to follow through to the completion of a goal and not be put off by other demands or competing interests (pp. 1-2).

Table 2.1

**Internal and Environmental Protective Factors: Individual Characteristics That Facilitate Resiliency**

1.  Gives of self in service to others and/or a cause
2.  Uses life skills, including good decision making, assertiveness, impulse control, and problem solving
3.  Sociability; ability to be a friend; ability to form positive relationships
4.  Sense of humor
5.  Internal locus of control
6.  Autonomy; independence
7.  Positive view of personal future
8.  Flexibility
9.  Capacity for and connection to learning
10.  Self-motivation
11.  Is “good at something”; personal competence
12.  Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence

**Emotional intelligence.** Emotional intelligence in education is “…a learned ability to identify, understand, experience, and express human emotions in healthy and productive ways” (Nelson, Low, & Nelson, 2005).

We define emotional intelligence as a confluence of developed abilities to: (1) know and value self; (2) build and maintain a variety of strong, productive, and healthy relationships; (3) get along and work well with others in achieving positive results; and (4) effectively deal with the pressures and demands of daily life and work…When emotional intelligence skills are a focus of learning, teachers and students are building human development behaviors that are intricately related to the positive outcomes of achievement, goals achievement, and personal well-being (Nelson, Low, & Nelson, 2005).

**Big-picture thinking.** In his book, *How Children Succeed*, author Paul Tough (2012) talks about “…the way that teachers and administrators at KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) talked to their students about day-to-day emotional crises or behavioral lapses.” Tough recounts the following conversation:

You may recall that KIPP’s dean…considered his approach to be a kind of cognitive behavioral therapy. When his students were flailing, lost in moments of stress and emotional turmoil, he would encourage them to do the kind of big-picture thinking—the metacognition, as many psychologists call it—that takes place in the prefrontal cortex: slowing down, examining their impulses, and considering more productive solutions to their problems than say, yelling at a teacher or shoving another kid on the playground…In postgame chess analyses [at another Brooklyn school]…students were being challenged to look deeply at their
own mistakes, examine why they had made them, and think hard about what they might have done differently…it seemed remarkably effective in producing change in middle school students (p. 121).

**Habits of Mind.** Costa and Kallick (2008) describe *Habits of Mind* as “…a composite of many skills, attitudes, cues, past experiences, and proclivities.”

It means that we value one pattern of intellectual behaviors over another; therefore, it implies making choices about which patterns we should use at a certain time. It includes sensitivity to the contextual cues that signal that a particular circumstance is a time when applying a certain pattern would be useful and appropriate. It requires a level of skillfulness to use, carry out, and sustain the behaviors effectively. It suggests that after each experience in which these behaviors are used, the effects of their use are reflected upon, evaluated, modified, and carried forth to future applications (Costa & Kallick, 2008).

There are 16 Habits of Mind, including: (1) persisting, (2) managing impulsivity, (3) listening with understanding and empathy, (4) thinking flexibly, (5) thinking about thinking (metacognition), (6) striving for accuracy, (7) questioning and posing problems, (8) applying past knowledge to new situations, (9) thinking and communicating with clarity and precision, (10) gathering data through all senses, (11) creating, imagining, innovating, (12) responding with wonderment and awe, (13) taking responsible risks, (14) finding humor, (15) thinking independently, and (16) remaining open to continuous learning (2008).

**Growth mindset.** In her book entitled *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, author Dweck included the following passage about legendary Chicago educator Dr.
Marva Collins, and the achievements of the school she founded in 1975, Westside Preparatory:

Marva Collins took inner-city Chicago kids who had failed in the public schools and treated them like geniuses. Many of them had been labeled “learning disabled,” “retarded,” or “emotionally disturbed.” Virtually all of them were apathetic. No light in the eyes, no hope in the face. Collin’s second-grade public school class started out with the lowest level reader there was. By June, they reached the middle of the fifth grade reader, studying Aristotle, Aesop, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Poe, Frost, and Dickinson along the way (2006, pp. 64-65).

Dweck (2006) talked about mindsets, as “powerful beliefs” (p. 16). She differentiates between choosing to have a growth mindset—to be a learner, rather than choosing to have a fixed mindset—to be a non-learner (Dweck, 2006, p. 16.). Like Dr. Collins, educators have a huge influence on a student’s mindset.

**Grit.** In his new book entitled *Fostering Grit*, author Hoerr defines grit as “...a combination of tenacity and perseverance, a willingness to take risks even if it means sometimes failing and starting again” (2013). In February 2013, the Office of Technology of the U.S. Department of Education disseminated a draft report entitled, “Promoting Grit, Tenacity, and Perseverance: Critical Factors for Success in the 21st Century.” The goal of this draft report was, “To distill the critical themes, questions, conclusions, and recommendations around theory, measurement, and the design of learning environments, with an eye towards identifying potential new roles for technology” (p. 93). In its report, the U.S. Department of Education highlighted the following interventions that are not
only relevant for promoting grit, tenacity, and perseverance, but also for cultivating resilience:

- **School readiness programs that address executive functions.** School readiness programs that address executive functions; These are programs at the preschool and early elementary school levels that help young children develop the effortful control and executive functions that are necessary for the transition into formal schooling…A key conclusion was that the best approaches to improving executive functions address young children’s emotional, social, and physical development together in a supportive environment.

- **Interventions that address mindsets, learning strategies, and resilience.** These interventions comprise the growing of research demonstrating that relatively brief interventions (e.g., two to 10 hours) can significantly impact students’ mindsets and learning strategies for students at the middle grade levels and higher…Interventions that address academic mindsets include instruction that teaches students that intelligence grows with effort, shifting students’ explanation for academic and social challenges from stable internal causes to temporary external causes, affirmation of personal values, exercises that relate course materials to students’ lives, and “super interventions” that incorporate multiple approaches. These interventions also address learning strategies include those that foster investment in clarifying goals and anticipating obstacles and planning solutions in advance, development of general study skills to deal with cognitive demands, building a robust set of structures for
success, and development of content-specific metacognitive skills. Each of these interventions has been shown to impact mindsets, learning strategies, and/or academic performance.

*Alternative school models and school-level reform approaches.*

- **Character education school models.** Key features include explicit articulation of learning goals for targeted competencies, clear and regular assessment and feedback of student progress on these competencies, intensive professional development to help teachers understanding and work with these competencies, and discourse about these competencies infused throughout the school culture and all disciplinary curricula; and

- **Project-based learning and design thinking.** Students develop competencies through engagement in long-term, challenging, and/or real-world problems that require planning, monitoring, feedback, and iteration. Projects provide opportunities to learn important learning strategies and self-regulation skills necessary for perseverance over the long term to achieve the goals of a given project. Mindsets are address inherently in processes of feedback and iteration, and projects are often aligned with students’ interests and passions. (2013, pp. 81-82).

**Gaps in the current literature.** Although a vast amount of scholarship about grade retention exists, there is a dearth of literature on multiple grade retention. The focus of the existing literature on this topic concentrates on grade retention as a singular event rather than a repetitious one in a student’s school career. There is a wide range of scholarship addressing the literacy needs of struggling students in general, but limited
research on students who drop out as a result of multiple grade retention at the upper elementary or middle school level. Finally, there are few longitudinal studies that follow resilient multiple holdover students as they progress through high school and beyond.

Chapter Summary

This chapter identifies some of the vast literature that exists on the topic of grade retention and resilience, and provides an overview of past promotional initiatives within New York City, including the Promotion Gates Program, the RAND Corporation evaluation of the promotion policy implementation from 2006 to 2009, and the Eight-Plus Program. Literature focused on social and emotional learning, i.e., resilience, executive functioning, emotional intelligence, big picture thinking, Habits of Mind, growth mindsets, and grit, is also discussed. Finally, gaps in the current literature are identified as potential topics for future research.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Largely as a consequence of a district-wide promotion policy, a growing number of students in public schools have experienced grade retention. Although the majority of these students will meet the requirements in their grade for promotion following a year of intervention, there is a growing population of students who have experienced retention more than once in their school tenure (being either retained multiple times in the same grade or having been retained at an earlier grade one or more times prior to experiencing retention once again at the middle school level). Although some students are able to demonstrate enough academic progress to articulate successfully to high school, others become detached and exhibit lower self-esteem and behavioral problems, or drop out of school entirely. In essence, “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.”

The purpose of this study was to examine: (a) the presence of self-reported resiliency attributes by overage elementary and middle school students who have experienced multiple grade retention in New York City’s public schools, as well as (b) the perceptions among school leaders and teachers about efforts at the school building level to cultivate resilience within their students.
Research Questions

This study addressed the following two research questions:

(1) Is there a relationship between students who have experienced multiple grade retention and the attributes of resilience?

(2) Is there a relationship between school-based efforts to cultivate resilience and the prevalence of resilience attributes among their MHO students?

The investigator used a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (QUAN-QUAL), which involved collecting and analyzing quantitative and then qualitative data in two phases.

Research Context

This study was conducted with participating schools and students of the New York City Department of Education, an urban, high poverty, racially and ethnically diverse school district with a promotion policy in place since school year 2003-2004. The focus of this study was Multiple Holdover students and their school administrators and teachers in upper elementary and middle schools in three New York City boroughs. Through triangulation of data from various sources, the investigator sought to establish a relationship between schools that positively cultivate resilience in their multiple holdover students and the prevalence of resilience attributes in these students, though no conclusions were be drawn about cause and effect. The investigator used a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (QUAN-QUAL), which involved collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data in two phases.
Research Participants

Initially, a historical database query extracted from the NYCDOE’s Automate the Schools (ATS) database identified 90 MHO students across 14 schools that met the investigator’s criteria for school participation: The school (a) served students who have experienced grade retention more than once; and (b) were members in a network of public schools supported by the same Children First Network (CFN)—a school support organization within the NYCDOE during the school year 2012-2013. At the time of this study, the investigator was a member of the network team supporting these schools instructionally, operationally, and administratively and thus the participating schools, students, principals, and teachers were all identified by the investigator as convenience samples.

From this initial school sample on the ATS report, the investigator omitted any student with one of two retentions in grade occurring during kindergarten or grade one. The rationale for this omission is that early grade retentions may be attributable to developmental factors rather than academic, specifically low performance on a State assessment in a testing grade and is therefore subject to the DOE’s promotion policy. Also omitted from the student sample were any students without at least one retention in a State testing grade—grades three through eight. Lastly, the investigator omitted any student who had not been a student in the participating school for at least one year.

In Phase I (quantitative), the investigator accessed and analyzed data available on the NYCDOE’s Achievement Reporting & Innovation System (ARIS) website to identify students who fit the MHO criteria. For the purposes of student background information, ATS reports were generated for participating student containing the following statistical
information: Students’ name, a unique numerical identifier known in the NYCDOE as the OSIS number, grade, age, race/ethnicity, English proficiency status, special education status, grades retained and state assessment results for each year of elementary and middle school. Students in the convenience sample have attended the participating schools for at least one year.

Letters inviting participation in this study were sent by the investigator to 14 principals. Principals who expressed interest were given parent letters of invitation and student consent letters. Ultimately, seven schools were identified by the receipt of signed consent forms from parents. The class and teacher name of the student’s teacher was also included on ARIS, which enabled the investigator to identify and recruit potential teacher participants. Letters of invitation and teacher consent forms were sent to the teachers of students with parent consent.

The resulting sample population included seven schools, 13 MHO students, seven school administrators, and 14 educators. Two of the participating schools are middle schools serving students in grades 6, 7, and 8; and four of the schools are elementary serving students in grades 4 and 5. Every school is Title I eligible, meaning that each school serves a high percentage of students from low-income families.

Participating school sample (n=7).

School A. A Brooklyn-based middle school with 209 students from grade 6 through grade 8. According to register statistics on the NYCDOE’s website, the school population comprises 10.05% Hispanic, 89.00% Black, 0.48% White and 0.48% Asian. The student body includes 32.34% English language learners and 13.88% special
education students. Girls account for 45.45% of the student population and Boys account for 54.55%.

**School B.** A Bronx-based elementary school with 508 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. According to register statistics on the NYCDOE’s website, the school population comprises 53.15% Hispanic, 44.09% Black, 0.39% White, 1.77% Asian, 0.39% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 0.20% American Indian, and 0.32% Multi-Racial. The student body includes 10.43% English language learners and 19.68% special education students. Girls account for 52.36% of the student population and Boys account for 47.64%.

**School C.** A Bronx-based elementary school with 726 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. According to register statistics on the NYCDOE’s website, the school population comprises 81.13% Hispanic, 17.91% Black, 0.28% White, 0.28% Asian, and 0.28% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. The student body includes 32.09% English language learners and 18.46% special education students. Girls account for 45.59% of the student population and Boys account for 54.41%.

**School D.** A Bronx-based elementary school with 658 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. According to its 2012-2013 Quality Review, the school population comprises 36% Black, 61% Hispanic, 2% White, and 1% other students. The student body includes 9% English language learners and 14% special education students. Boys account for 54% of the students enrolled and girls account for 46%.

**School E.** A Bronx-based middle school with 281 students from grade 6 through grade 8. According to register statistics on the NYCDOE’s website, the school population comprises 64.77% Hispanic, 33.81% Black, 1.07% White, and 0.36% American Indian.
The student body includes 17.79% English language learners and 20.64% special education students. Girls account for 51.25% of the student population and Boys account for 48.75%.

**School F.** A Bronx-based elementary school with 728 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. According to register statistics on the NYCDOE’s website, the school population comprises 75.55% Hispanic, 22.94% Black, 2.45% White, 0.55% Asian, 0.27% American Indian, and 0.14% Multi-Racial. The student body includes 12.23% English language learners and 19.78% special education students. Girls account for 46.98% of the student population and Boys account for 53.02%.

**School G.** A Manhattan-based elementary school with 937 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 5. According to register statistics on the NYCDOE’s website, the school population comprises 78.98% Hispanic, 16.54% Black, 2.45% White, 1.39% Asian, 0.21% American Indian, and 0.32% Multi-Racial. The student body includes 32.34% English language learners and 13.88% special education students. Girls account for 50.69% of the student population and Boys account for 49.31%.

**MHO student sample (n=13).**

**Student #1.** A 13-year-old African-American female sixth grader at Middle School A during school year 2012-2013. Student #1 will be 14-years-old in November 2013. She does not have an Individual Educational Plan (IEP). She was required to repeat the second grade during school year 2007-2008 as well as the fourth grade during school year 2010-2011. Her attendance rate as of June 27, 2013 was 95% (9 days absent and 48 days late)—a slight decline from her prior year’s attendance rate of 98%. Her latenesses have more than doubled from 23 latenesses during the prior year. As of June 2013,
Student #1’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that she has passed the State Math exam but did not pass the State ELA exam, and therefore has not met the criteria for promotion to the seventh grade for school year 2013-2014.

**Student #2.** A 14-year-old African-American male sixth grader at Middle School A during school year 2012-2013. Student #2 will be 15-years-old in October 2013. He does not have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). In addition to repeating first grade in 2005-2006, he was required to repeat the sixth grade during school years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. His attendance rate as of June 27, 2013 was 89% (19 days absent and 62 days late)—a slight increase from his prior year’s attendance rate of 85%, however his latenesses have increased significantly from 19 latenesses during the prior year. As of June 2013, Student #2’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that he passed both the State ELA and State Math exams, and therefore has met the criteria for promotion to the seventh grade for school year 2013-2014.

**Student #3.** A 16-year-old Hispanic female eighth grader at Middle School A during school year 2012-2013. Student #3 was required to repeat the fourth grade during school year 2007-2008 as well as the eighth grade during school year 2012-2013. She is an ELL and therefore receives English as a Second Language (ESL) services. She does not have an IEP. Her attendance rate as of June 27, 2013 was 63% (65 days absent, 79 days late). This is a decline in her attendance rate from the prior year, which was 72% (50 days absent, 43 days late). As of June 2013, Student #3’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that she passed both exams and therefore met the criteria for promotion to the ninth grade for school year 2013-2014.
**Student #4.** A 12-year-old African-American male fourth grader at Elementary School B during school year 2012-2013. He is not an ELL but does have an IEP and therefore received special education services. He was required to repeat the second grade during school year 2009-2010 as well as the third grade during school year 2011-2012. His attendance rate as of April 22, 2013 was 90% (13 days absent, 0 days late) and is consistent with his attendance rate during the prior year. As of June 2013, Student #4’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that he passed the State Math exam but did not pass the State ELA exam, and therefore has not met the criteria for promotion to the fifth grade for school year 2013-2014.

**Student #5.** A 12-year-old Hispanic female fourth grader at Elementary School B during school year 2012-2013. She is not an ELL nor does she have an IEP. Student #5 was retained in the second grade during school year 2009-2010 as well as the third grade during school year 2011-2012. Her attendance rate as of April 22, 2013 was 98% (2 days absent, 0 days late), a slight increase from her 96% attendance rate during the prior year. As of June 2013, Student #5’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exams reflect that she has passed both exams, and therefore met the criteria for promotion to the fifth grade for school year 2013-2014.

**Student #6.** A 13-year-old African-American female fifth grader at Elementary School B during school year 2012-2013. Student #6 is not an ELL and does not have an IEP. Student #6 was retained in the fifth grade twice—during school year 2011-2012 and once again during school year 2012-2013. Her attendance rate as of April 22, 2013 was 95% (6 days absent, 17 days late), a slight increase from her 92% attendance rate during the prior year. As of June 2013, Student #6’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math
exam results reflect that she has passed the State ELA exam but did not pass the State Math exam, and therefore has not met the criteria for promotion to the sixth grade for school year 2013-2014. If retained, Student #6 will have experienced retention in the fifth grade a total of three times during elementary school.

**Student #7.** A 14-year-old Hispanic female fifth grader at Elementary School B during school year 2012-2013. Student #7 will be 15-years-old in November 2013. She is a long-term ELL and has an IEP therefore she received both ESL and special education services. In addition to having been retained in the first grade during school year 2005-2006, Student #7 was retained in the fourth grade during school year 2009-2010, and retained in the fifth grade twice—during school years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. Her attendance rate as of April 22, 2013 was 90% (13 days absent, 47 days late), which is an improvement from her attendance rate of 80% for the prior year. As of June 2013, Student #7’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that she has passed the ELA exam but did not pass the State Math exam, and therefore has not met the criteria for promotion to the sixth grade. If retained again, Student #7 will have experienced grade retention a total of five times during elementary school, and will be in the fifth grade for the fourth time in school year 2013-2014.

**Student #8.** A 12-year-old Hispanic male fourth grader at Elementary School C during school year 2012-2013. In addition to having been retained in the first grade during school year 2007-2008, Student #8 was retained in the second grade twice—during school years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. He is not an ELL but does have an IEP and therefore received special education services. His attendance rate as of May 13, 2013 was 81% (27 days absent, 15 days late), a decrease from the 87% attendance rate of the
prior year. As of June 2013, Student #8’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that he passed both exams and has met the criteria for promotion to the fifth grade for school year 2013-2014.

**Student #9.** A 13-year-old African-American female fifth grader at Elementary School D during school year 2012-2013. Student #9 is not an ELL and does not have an IEP. Student #9 was required to repeat the fourth grade during school year 2010-2011 as well as the fifth grade in school year 2012-2013. Her attendance rate as of April 22, 2013 was 91% (12 days absent, 28 days late), an increase from the 86% attendance rate of the prior year. As of June 2013, Student #9’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that she passed the State Math exam but did not pass the State ELA exam and therefore she has not met the criteria for promotion to the sixth grade for school year 2013-2014.

**Student #10.** A 15-year-old Hispanic male sixth grader in Middle School E during school year 2012-2013. Student #10 does not have an IEP but is an ELL and therefore received ESL services. His year-to-date attendance rate as of June 27, 2013 was 90% (18 days absent, 0 days late), which is a decline from his prior year attendance rate of 98%. As of June 2013, Student #10’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that he did not pass the ELA or the State Math exam, and therefore has not met the criteria for promotion to the seventh grade in school year 2013-2014.

**Student #11.** A 16-year-old African-American male eighth grader at Middle School E during school year 2012-2013. Student #11 was required to repeat the third grade during school year 2006-2007 as well as the sixth grade during school year 2010-2011. He is not an ELL and does not have an IEP. His attendance rate as of April 22,
2013 was 98% (2 days absent, 21 days late) and is consistent with his attendance rate of the prior year. As of June 2013, Student #11’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that he passed both exams and therefore he has met the criteria for promotion to the ninth grade for school year 2013-2014.

**Student #12.** A 12-year-old Hispanic male fourth grader attending School F during school year 2012-2013. Student #12 is not an ELL and does not have an IEP. His attendance rate as of April 30, 2013 was 97% (4 days absent, 22 days late) representing a slight increase in attendance rate from the prior year of 95%. As of June 2013, Student #12’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that he passed both exams and therefore he has met the criteria for promotion to the fifth grade for school year 2013-2014.

**Student #13.** A 12-year-old Hispanic female fourth grader attending School G during school year 2012-2013. She is an ELL and does have an IEP; therefore she received ESL and special education services. Her attendance rate as of April 22, 2013 was 99% (1 day absent, 1 days late), which is consistent with her attendance rate of 98% from the prior year. As of June 2013, Student #13’s preliminary 2012-2013 State ELA and Math exam results reflect that she passed both exams and therefore she has met the criteria for promotion to the sixth grade for school year 2013-2014.

Demographic factors of the MHO student and school samples in Figures 3.1 through 3.7 are cited by the investigator so as to infer the likeliness of representativeness across other New York City public schools:
Figure 3.1. MHO Student Sample—Special Needs (n=13)

Figure 3.2. Ethnicity Distribution of MHO Student Sample (n=13)
Figure 3.3. Distribution of MHO Student Sample (n=13) in Participating Schools (n=7)

Figure 3.4. Grade Distribution of MHO Student Sample (n=13)
Figure 3.5. Gender Distribution of MHO Student Sample (n=13)

Figure 3.6. State Accountability Statuses of Schools, 2012-2013 School Year (n=7)
A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (QUAN-QUAL) was used in this descriptive study by the investigator, which involved collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data in two phases. No participant names, school identification, or other identifying information are used in this study for purposes of anonymity.

**Phase I, the quantitative phase:** Phase I of this study was intended to measure resilience among MHO students through a self-report of personal strengths that help youth to overcome adversity as well as to understand the perspectives of school administrators and teachers in the buildings that serve these students. This quantitative phase encompassed the use of two different data collection instruments: (1) a pre-existing formal questionnaire instrument entitled the *Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents* (RSCA) developed by Dr. Sandra Prince-Embry (2006) and available through Pearson Education, which was administered to 14 multiple holdover students.
across seven schools—four elementary and two middle schools; and (2) a pre-existing informal questionnaire entitled *Assessing School Resiliency Building* (ASRB) developed by Nan Henderson, M.S.W., which was administered to seven school administrators and 11 teachers. In Phase I (quantitative), the investigator administered the RSCA questionnaire to the MHO students and the ASRB questionnaire to the educators, and then compared the student responses with the educator responses to examine any relationship between the MHO students’ self-reported resilience attributes and their school leaders’ and teachers’ self-reported resilience-building efforts.

**Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents.** During Phase I, a valid and reliable instrument entitled the *Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents* (RSCA) was administered during the spring 2013 to each participating MHO student. The RSCA is a self-report, pen and pencil administered, standardized instrument for children and adolescents aged 9 through 18 years that measures the personal attributes of the child that are critical for resilience. In a journal article for *Psychology in the Schools* (2011), RSCA author Sandra Prince-Embury described the instrument as follows:

The full measure includes 64 Likert-type items and yields two Index scores: Resource and Vulnerability. The Resource Index combines the two strength-based scales into one score. The Vulnerability Index expresses the discrepancy between the youth’s Emotional Reactivity Scale and Resource Index scores. Evidence of internal consistency was good to excellent for all three global scales across three age-bands. Internal consistency for both Index scores was excellent; In addition, previous research has supported the three-factor structure underlying the RSCA three-scale format in normative samples (Prince-Embury & Courville, 2008a).
Measurement invariance for the three-factor structure was found across gender within the normative sample of children and adolescents aged 9 to 18, and partial invariance was found across three age-bands (Prince-Embury & Courville, 2008b). This research suggests that the three-scale structure applies similarly across genders. Partial invariance across age-band did not affect the basic three-factor structure of the RSCA.

The RSCA scales are composed of three stand-alone global scales of 20-24 questions each and ten subscales:

- **Sense of Mastery Scale**: optimism, self-efficacy, adaptability
- **Sense of Relatedness Scale**: trust, support, comfort, tolerance
- **Emotional Reactivity Scale**: sensitivity, recovery, impairment

No specific training is required for administration of the RSCA. Depending upon the student’s reading ability, each record form takes only minutes to complete, with all three (the Combination Form) taking approximately 15 minutes. Items are scored with paper-and-pencil by choosing one of five responses from 0 (Never) to 4 (Almost Always). The RSCA scales are written at a third grade reading level (Prince-Embury, 2007).

Instructions to student participants on each scale are as follows:

> Here is a list of things that happen to people and that people think, feel or do. Read each sentence carefully, and circle the one answer (Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, or Almost Always) that tells about you best. There are no right or wrong answers. (RSCA Manual, pp. 3-5)
Sample items from the *Sense of Mastery Scale* (MAS) include:

- If at first I don’t succeed, I will keep on trying.
- I make good decisions.
- No matter what happens, things will be all right.

Sample items from the *Sense of Relatedness Scale* (REL) include:

- I can depend on people to treat me fairly.
- I can trust others.
- There are people who love and care about me.

Sample items from the *Emotional Reactivity Scale* (REA) include:

- People say that I am easy to upset.
- When I am upset, I do things that I later feel bad about.
- I get so upset I lose control. (Prince-Embry, 2005)

The total raw score for each of the global scales is obtained by summing all item scores for each scale. The manual that accompanies the RSCA instrument purchased from Pearson Education provides a methodology for calculating the raw score by adding number of responses selected in each of the three resiliency scales—MAS, REL, and REA, and then converting these raw scores to *t* scores (in accordance with the conversion table provided in the manual).

*Assessing School Resiliency Building*. The investigator administered an informal questionnaire entitled *Assessing School Resiliency Building* (ASRB) to participating school leaders and teachers to capture their perceptions of resiliency building factors existing within their schools. The ASRB was developed by Nan Henderson, M.S.W., President of Resiliency in Action, Inc., an organization whose mission is “To share the
growing body of social science research that documents how people of all ages bounce back from life challenges of all kinds” (www.resiliency.com). Henderson is co-author of the book, *Resiliency in Schools: Making It Happen for Students and Educators* in which the ASRB is listed in Chapter 8 as a “Tool to Facilitate Change” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 106). The instrument appears in its entirety at the end of the chapter and is included here as Appendix A. The ASRB instrument is described below. Henderson and Milstein refer to “The Resiliency Wheel,” as “…a six-step strategy for fostering resiliency in schools (2003, p. 106). The six steps described by Henderson and Milstein (2003) are:

- **Steps 1 through 3: Mitigating Risk**
  1. *Increase bonding:* Children with strong positive bonds are far less involved in risk behaviors than children without these bonds.
  2. *Set clear and consistent boundaries:* Development and consistent implementation of school policies and procedures that clarify expectations of behavior.
  3. *Teach life skills:* Including cooperation, healthy conflict resolution, resistance, and assertiveness skills, communication skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and healthy stress management.

- **Steps 4 through 6: Building Resiliency**
  4. *Provide caring and support:* Providing unconditional positive regard and encouragement—the most critical of all the elements that promote resiliency.
5. *Set and communicate high expectations:* Expectations should be both high and realistic.

6. *Provide opportunities for meaningful participation:* Providing students, their families, and staff opportunities for problem solving, decision making, planning, goal setting, and helping others (pp. 11-14)

According to Henderson and Milstein: “Employed in combination, these six approaches have resulted in increased positive self-concepts, attachment to school, a belief in rules, and higher standardized test scores” (2003, p. 14).

In accordance with the instructions contained in the RSCA manual (p. 20), the investigator converted the numeric data collected during the administration of the RSCA into raw scores for each of the global scales, which entailed summing each category of response (4—Almost Always, 3—Often, 2—Sometimes, 1—Rarely, and 0—Never). A total raw score was obtained by summing all item scores for each scale. The raw scores were transformed to standardized $t$ scores based upon a $t$ score equivalent conversion table included in the RSCA manual (pp. 121-129). This categorical data is highlighted in Table 1 in Chapter 4 with descriptive data representing the RSCA scales. The administration of the ASRB took place during the months of April 2013 through June 2013, and was followed by teacher/administrator interviews conducted during the same period.

**Phase II, the qualitative phase.** The investigator used a phenomenological approach in Phase II of this study, which was intended to gather qualitative data in order to gain insight into perceptions and school-based efforts to foster resilience.
Interviews of school leaders and teachers. Teachers and their school leaders who agreed to participate were interviewed to obtain more information about their perspectives on and practices of resilience building in their schools. The investigator focused on the interview questions on only those responses that were 1, 3, or 4 as areas of success or challenge.

Data Analysis

As described above, the investigator collected quantitative and qualitative data for this study including self-reports from the RSCA (formal) and ASRB (informal) instruments as well recordings of semi-structured interviews. The investigator personally inputted data from the RSCA and ASRB into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, and transcribed the recorded face-to-face, semi-structured interviews of school leaders and teachers. The investigator synthesized and interpreted frequency data culled from the RSCA, the ASRB, as well as the face-to-face interviews in order to examine any relationship among school building resilience efforts and the resilience attributes self-reported by the MHO student participants. The investigator used methodological triangulation for the purpose of cross verification among the insights of the educators gleaned through interviews in Phase II with the quantitative data collected in Phase I.

Summary

To understand the cultivation of educational resilience at the school level, the investigator engaged in a QUAL-QUAN study spring 2013 in seven New York City public schools. In Phase I pre-existing formal and informal instruments were used to collect quantitative data from 13 MHO students, seven school leaders, and 10 teachers. In Phase II, a phenomenological approach was used to gather qualitative data through school leader and teacher interviews, which were conducted to gain insight into
perceptions and school-based practices that foster resilience. The investigator believes that the results of this study will be relevant for school administrators and teachers who can use this information to develop a strategic plan for cultivating educational resilience in their schools.
Chapter 4: Results

The primary purpose of this study was to: (a) examine the presence of resiliency attributes as self-reported by overage elementary and middle school students who have experienced multiple grade retention in New York City’s public schools; and (b) illuminate the specific perceptions of school leaders and teachers with regard to the efforts, accomplishments, and challenges to cultivating resilience within their school buildings. The secondary purpose was to bring attention to the academic, social, and emotional plight of MHO students. Although there may be many other factors that influence the educational achievement of MHO students and retention decisions, this study focuses on the presence of resilience factors that will help students to overcome this and other life challenges.

Research Questions

In this chapter, the investigator addressed the following research question and explained the findings of this study:

(1) Is there a relationship between students who have experienced multiple grade retention and the attributes of resilience?

(2) Is there a relationship between school-based efforts to cultivate resilience and the prevalence of resilience attributes among their MHO students?
Data Analysis and Findings

**Research question #1.** Is there a relationship between students who have experienced multiple grade retention and the attributes of resilience? To address this research question, the investigator selected a pre-existing questionnaire—the *Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents* (RSCA). The following guidelines from the RSCA manual were used to frame the investigator’s data analysis:

For all three scales, *t* scores between 46 and 55 are in the average range. *t* scores between 56 and 59 are in the above average range and scores of 60 or above are in the high range. *t* scores 41-45 are below average, and *t* scores of 40 and below are in the low range. For the Sense of Mastery (MAS) and Sense of Relatedness (REL) scales, scores in the average and above ranges may indicate that the youth experiences relative strength in these areas and below average scores may indicate that he or she does not. However...above average scores on the Emotional Reactivity scale may indicate potential for vulnerability. *t* scores in the average and below average range would suggest that the youth does not experience this vulnerability (Prince-Embury, 2007, p. 26).

Based upon the guidelines above, Table 4.1 reflects the results of the MHO student self-reports on the MAS, REL, and REA scales and is color-coded for emphasis based on the key provided. The following descriptions provide a context for which to understand individual MHO student self-reports, similarities, differences, and educational challenges:
Table 4.1

Results of RSCA Administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>MAS t Score</th>
<th>REL t Score</th>
<th>REA t Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score rankings based on resiliency scale t score ranges (RSCA, p. 26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>≤ 40</th>
<th>41-45</th>
<th>46-55</th>
<th>56-59</th>
<th>≥ 60</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Above average</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

School A.

- **Student #1** responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect an *average* Sense of Mastery; her responses on the REL scale instrument reflect an *average* Sense of Relatedness; and her responses on the REA scale instrument reflect an *average* level of Emotional Reactivity.

- **Student #2**’s responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a *low* Sense of Mastery; his responses on the REL scale instrument reflect an *average* Sense
of Relatedness; and her responses on the REA scale instrument reflect an *above-average* level of Emotional Reactivity.

- **Student #3’s** responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a *low* Sense of Mastery; her responses on the REL scale instrument reflect a *low* Sense of Relatedness; and her responses on the REA scale instrument reflect an *above-average* level of Emotional Reactivity.

**School B.**

- **Student #4’s** responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a *below average* Sense of Mastery; his responses on the REL scale instrument reflect an *low* Sense of Relatedness; and his responses on the REA scale instrument reflect a *below average* level of Emotional Reactivity.

- **Student #5’s** responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect an *average* Sense of Mastery; her responses on the REL scale instrument reflect an *average* Sense of Relatedness; and her responses on the REA scale instrument reflect a *high* level of Emotional Reactivity.

- **Student #6’s** responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a *below average* Sense of Mastery; her responses on the REL scale instrument reflect an *average* Sense of Relatedness; and her responses on the REA scale instrument reflect a *high* level of Emotional Reactivity.

- **Student #7’s** responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a *low* Sense of Mastery; her responses on the REL scale instrument reflect a *low* Sense of Relatedness; and her responses on the REA scale instrument reflect a *high* level of Emotional Reactivity.
School C.

- Student #8’s responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a low Sense of Mastery; his responses on the REL scale instrument reflect a low Sense of Relatedness; and his responses on the REA scale instrument reflect an average level of Emotional Reactivity.

School D.

- Student #9’s responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a below average Sense of Mastery; her responses on the REL scale instrument reflect a below average Sense of Relatedness; and her responses on the REA scale instrument reflect an average level of Emotional Reactivity.

School E.

- Student #10’s responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a low Sense of Mastery; his responses on the REL scale instrument reflect a below average Sense of Relatedness; and his responses on the REA scale instrument reflect a high level of Emotional Reactivity.

- Student #11’s responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a low Sense of Mastery; his responses on the REL scale instrument reflect a low Sense of Relatedness; and his responses on the REA scale instrument reflect a high level of Emotional Reactivity.

School F.

- Student #12’s responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a high Sense of Mastery; his responses on the REL scale instrument reflect an above average
Sense of Relatedness; and his responses on the REA scale instrument reflect a low level of Emotional Reactivity.

**School G.**

- **Student #13’s** responses on the MAS scale instrument reflect a low Sense of Mastery; her responses on the REL scale instrument reflect an average Sense of Relatedness; and her responses on the REA scale instrument reflect an average level of Emotional Reactivity.

**Findings from the RSCA administration.** Ten of the 13 MHO student responses reflect a low or below average Sense of Mastery. As defined in Chapter 1, a Sense of Mastery includes characteristics of **optimism**—“consists of positive attitudes about the world/life in general and about one’s own life specifically, and would refer specifically or generally to the future” (RSCA Manual, p. 10); **self-efficacy**—“associated with developing problem-solving attitudes and strategies” (RSCA Manual, p. 10); and **adaptability**—“the ability to be personally receptive to criticism, and to learn from one’s mistakes” (RSCA Manual, p. 10). Seven of the 13 MHO student responses reflect a low or below average Sense of Relatedness. As defined in Chapter 1, a Sense of Relatedness includes characteristics of **trust**—“the degree to which others are perceived as reliable and accepting, and the degree to which an individual can be authentic in these relationships” (RSCA Manual, p. 12); **support**—“the individual’s belief that there are others to whom he or she can turn when dealing with adversity” (RSCA Manual, p. 12); **comfort**—“the degree to which an individual can be in the presence of others without discomfort or anxiety” (RSCA Manual, p. 12); and **tolerance**—“the individual’s belief
that he or she can safely express differences within a relationship (RSCA Manual, p. 12).

Furrer & Skinner (2003) describe the “Sense of Relatedness” as follows:

Children’s sense of relatedness plays an important role in their academic motivation and performance…Children who reported a higher sense of relatedness also showed greater emotional and behavioral engagement in school…Moreover, children’s sense of relatedness made a unique contribution to their engagement over and above the effects of a strong self-system predictor of motivation, namely, student’s perceived control…Children high in relatedness did indeed start out the school year higher in engagement than children low in relatedness, but they also improved more over time. Children low in relatedness were not simply lower in enthusiasm and persistence in the fall; they also showed deteriorating motivation over time…Children who are high on relatedness are more likely to show enthusiastic participation in school activities and fewer negative emotions, leading to greater opportunities for actual learning and school success; the combination of constructive engagement and higher performance elicits more support from teachers, parents, and peers, which confirms or promotes children’s feelings of belonging and connectedness. In contrast, children who feel unimportant or rejected by key partners are more likely to become frustrated, bored, and alienated from learning activities, which in turn interferes with their academic progress; poor performance coupled with disaffection erodes social support, leading children to feel further estranged (p. 158).

Seven of the 13 MHO student responses reflect a high or above average level of Emotional Reactivity. “Adolescents who rate themselves as emotionally reactive face a
high risk for mood and anxiety disorders” (Pine, Cohen & Brook, 2001). As defined in Chapter 1, the term Emotional Reactivity includes “sensitivity—the threshold for reaction and the intensity of the reaction; recovery—the ability to bounce back from emotional arousal or disturbance of emotional equilibrium; and impairment—the degree to which the youth is able to maintain an emotional equilibrium when aroused” (RSCA Manual, p. 14). Two students in the highest age band (15-18-years-old) have a consistently low Sense of Mastery, low Sense of Relatedness, and above average and high Emotional Reactivity. At the school level, these responses underscore the need for intervention. There does not appear to be a significant difference in self-reports of resilience factors among boys versus girls.

**Research question #2.** Is there a relationship between school-based efforts to cultivate resilience and the prevalence of resilience attributes among their MHO students? To address this research question, the investigator selected a pre-existing questionnaire entitled the *Assessing School Resiliency Building* (ASRB). The following guidelines from the ASRB instrument were used to frame the investigator’s data analysis:

The ASRB includes 36 elements of school resiliency building, in six categories:

1. Pro-social Bonding,
2. Clear, Consistent Boundaries,
3. Teaching Life Skills,
4. Caring and Support,
5. High Expectations,
6. Opportunities for Meaningful Participation (see Appendix A, *Assessing School Resiliency Building*). Each category has six elements which are assessed using a scale of 1 to 4, with “1” indicating “we have this together,” “2” indicating “we’ve done a lot in this area, but could do more,” “3” indicating “we are getting started,” and “4” indicating “nothing has been done” (ASRB, 2003).
Table 4.2 reflects the results of the school administration and teacher self-reports on the six categories of school building resiliency: (1) Pro-social Bonding, (2) Clear, Consistent Boundaries, (3) Teaching Life Skills, (4) Caring and Support, (5) High Expectations, and (6) Opportunities for Meaningful Participation. Following the guidelines for analysis of the ASRB results, the investigator summed the first two scores in each of the six ASRB categories for students, the second two scores in each section for staff and the last two scores in each section for school. “The range of scores for the total of each of the six ASRB categories is as follows: Students, Staff, and the School, 12 to 48. Lower scores indicate positive resilience building; higher scores indicate a need for improvement” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 116). Based on these guidelines, the investigator identified three score rankings for educator self-report of school resiliency building: low = 12 to 23, average = 24 to 36, and high = 37 to 48.

Findings from the ASRB administration. Table 4.2 highlights the results of the educator self-reports of school building resilience efforts. Table 4.4 highlights the similarities and differences between the students’ self-report of resilience factors and the educators’ self-reports of school-building resilience. Responses to the RSCA were categorized in two levels: Scores that would denote positive student resilience attributes or school efforts as well as those that denote a need for improvement in school efforts and/or intervention with students:

- **Positive resilience building:** High, above average, or average on the RSCA’s MAS and REL Scales; low, below average, or average on the REA Scale; and low in the ASRB’s Students, Staff, & School categories.
• *Needs Improvement: Low or below average* on the RSCA’s MAS & REL Scales;
  and *high or above average* REA Scale; and *medium or high* in the ASRB,
  Students, Staff, & School categories.

  The investigator identified consensus in only two of the seven schools—School D and School G—based upon the results of the self-reports of educators on the ASRB. With the exception of School G, educators in every school identified areas for improvement of resilience building efforts within their schools (medium and high responses). The ASRB responses highlight some disparities in the perspectives of some school leaders and teachers with regard to school-level resilience building efforts.

  The following school-specific information is provided:

  *School A.* The ASRB responses of the school leader of School A (Educator #1) fall into the *low* range, which reflect positive resilience building. However the responses of School A’s two teachers (Educator #2 and #3) fell within the *medium* range, indicating a need for some improvement in school resilience building.

  *School B.* The ASRB responses of the school leader of School B (Educator #10) fell within the *medium* range and matched those of one teacher (Educator #5), indicating a need for some improvement in school resilience building. The responses of School B’s second teacher (Educator #7), fell within the *low* range for students and school, indicating positive resilience building and the *medium* range for staff, indicating a need for some improvement in school resilience building.
Table 4.2

Results of ASRB Administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>School Leader</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 to 23</td>
<td>24 to 36</td>
<td>37 to 48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School C. The ASRB responses of the school leader of School C (Educator #13) fell within the medium range. In contrast, the responses of one teacher (Educator #6), which fell within the low range for staff and school, and within the medium range for students indicating some need for improvement in this area. The responses of School C’s
second teacher (Educator #7), fell within the low range for students, staff, and school, indicating positive resilience building. Educators #6 and #7 are Collaborative Team Teachers—a general education and special education co-teachers delivering instruction in a least restrictive environment for students receiving general education and special education services.

School D. The ASRB responses of the school leader of School D (Educator #9) fell within the medium range and matched those of School D’s teacher (Educator #8), indicating a need for some improvement in school resilience building.

School E. The ASRB responses of the school leader of School E (Educator #11) fell within the medium range for students, staff, and school, indicating a need for some improvement in school resilience building. The responses of School E’s teacher (Educator #12) fell within the medium range for students and school and within the low range for staff, indicating positive resilience building.

School F. The ASRB responses of the school leader of School F (Educator #14) fell within the medium range for students and school, and within the high range (an outlier) for staff, indicating a priority need for resilience-building among staff. In sharp contrast, the responses of School F’s teacher (Educator #15) fell within the low range, indicating positive resilience building.

School G. The ASRB responses of the school leader of School G (Educator #16) fell within the low range and matched those of School G’s teacher (Educator #17), indicating positive resilience building.
Although there are areas of consensus within individual schools regarding areas that would denote positive school building resilience efforts, one area of general consensus across all participating schools is: “Students have a positive bond with at least one caring adult in the school.” Eleven educators responded: “1-We have this together” and six educators responded: “2-We’ve done a lot in this area, but could do more.” This was the one category across all schools where no educator responded: “3-We are getting started” or “4-Nothing has been done.”

**Interviews with educators.** Transcripts of the interviews conducted with school leaders and teachers in each of the participating schools are attached in their entirety as Appendix B. The conversations are rich and provide providing a window into consensus or lack thereof on resilience building efforts working well in schools and interesting insight into school culture, climate, and communication. From the interviews, two areas of consensus are highlighted:

*Strength—Positive bonds with students.* All seven schools reported that students have caring relationships with adults in their schools that support problem solving.

*Challenge—School mission and vision statements.* Six of the seven schools reported lack of knowledge, understanding, or involvement in the design or revisions to these important organizational statements.

**Summary of results**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine whether relationships exists between (a) the presence of resiliency attributes as self-reported by elementary and middle school students who have experienced multiple grade retention in New York City’s public schools; and (b) the school-based efforts, accomplishments, and challenges
to cultivating resilience within their school buildings. The secondary purpose was to bring much needed attention to the academic, social, and emotional plight of MHO students in New York City’s public schools as well as to the challenges experienced by schools to create a culture of learning and positive environmental conditions that are supportive of academic and life success for these students.

Table 4.3 highlights an effort to correlate a relationship between the MHO student responses on the RSCA with the Educator responses on the ASRB. Although no statistical significance was found at a $p$-value $\leq .05$, the results do reflect areas of practical or educational significance based on moderate effect size. For example, there appears to be a moderately strong relationship between the School Leader’s responses to ASRB elements related to staff and student responses to the RSCA indicators of emotional reactivity (.500) as well as the teacher responses to ASRB elements related to students, and the student responses to the RSCA indicators of emotional reactivity (.479). This data could imply a cause-effect relationship between students with high levels of emotional reactivity and the actions of their teachers.
# Table 4.3

## Relationship of MHO Student Perceptions to Educator Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educator (ASRB)</th>
<th>MHO Student (RSCA) (n=13)</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>REL</th>
<th>REA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SL Student</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (1-tailed)</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL Staff</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)</td>
<td>-.229</td>
<td>-.219</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (1-tailed)</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td>.500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL School</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)</td>
<td>.135</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (1-tailed)</td>
<td>.330</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1 Student</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>.422</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (1-tailed)</td>
<td>.323</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.479</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SL = School Leader
T1 = Teacher 1

Note: A correlation co-efficient is the measure of the strength of linear association of between two variables with correlation being between -1.0 and +1.0. If the correlation is positive, we have a positive relationship. If it is negative, the relationship is negative. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 alpha level.
Table 4.4

Comparison of RSCA and ASRB Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>RSCA</th>
<th>ASRB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>REL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>aver</td>
<td>aver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>aver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>aver</td>
<td>aver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>below aver</td>
<td>aver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>below aver</td>
<td>below aver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>below aver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>above aver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>aver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Needs Improvement | Positive Resilience Attributes or Supports |
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

“Fall seven times, stand up eight” (Japanese Proverb). As stated in Chapter 1, grade retention is a challenging obstacle to the academic, social, and emotional development of upper elementary and middle school students, and a test of resilience. Is being retained two, three, or even four times in the same grade or multiple grades an intervention that effectively supports the academic, social, and emotional development of MHO students? I believe that this study demonstrates a relationship between the negative effects of multiple grade retention and the cultivation of resilience by schools.

Indeed, most upper elementary and middle school MHO students will progress sufficiently for the purposes of promotion; however also discussed in Chapter 1 is the fact that multiple grade retention has often been a turning point in the engagement, motivation, and attitudes of upper elementary and middle school students towards self, middle and high school completion, college opportunities, career choices, and their future lives.

In their longitudinal study, Herzog & Balfanz (2006) showed that almost half of the students who are at high risk for dropping out of high school can be identified as early as the sixth grade. This is highlighted in this study by the following cases: Of the 53 students in the data pool who met the criteria for being retained in grade multiple times, two MHO students no longer attend school. One of these students is an 18-year-old
African-American female—a non-ELL without an IEP—was first retained in the fifth grade in school year 2006-2007 and then retained three consecutive times in the eighth grade in school years 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013, for a total of four years spent in the eighth grade. Her attendance was 3% in 2012-2013. The other student, a 18-year-old Hispanic male—an ELL without an IEP—was retained four consecutive times in the eighth grade in school years 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012, 2013, for a total of five years spent in the eighth grade. His attendance was 17% in 2012-2013. These statistics are startling to the say the least.

Of the five middle school MHO students participating in this study, two students will be nearly 21-years-old by the time they complete high school. Student #11 is currently a 16-year-old eighth grader who will be aged 17 in December. His attendance is high. His MAS is low, his REL is low, and his REA is high.

Student #3 is currently a 16-year-old eighth grader who has passed the State ELA and Math exam and will be promoted to the ninth grade. However, her attendance rate was 63% with 79 days late in 2012-2013 and she will be 17-years-old in April 2014. If all goes well for Student #3 and there are no more grade retentions, she will be aged 18 in the tenth grade, aged 19 in the eleventh grade and aged 20 in the twelfth grade. Her MAS is low, her REL is low, and her REA is above-average.

Implications of Findings

The RSCA and ASRB findings reflect a need for schools to prioritize (1) individual MHO student needs, (2) to examine the efficacy of interventions provided to these students, and (3) address school-level factors that can foster greater resilience-
building among students, staff, and the school. These findings address the investigators two research questions:

**Research question #1.** The results of the RSCA show that a majority of the MHO students have a low Sense of Mastery. Mastery is closely related to self-efficacy:

Self-efficacy is commonly defined as the belief in one’s capabilities to achieve a goal or an outcome. Students with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks and be intrinsically motivated. These students will put forth a high degree of effort in order to meet their commitments, and attribute failure to things which are in their control, rather than blaming external factors. Self-efficacious students also recover quickly from setbacks, and ultimately are likely to achieve their personal goals. Students with low self-efficacy, on the other hand, believe they cannot be successful and thus are less likely to make a concerted, extended effort and may consider challenging tasks as threats that are to be avoided. Thus, students with poor self-efficacy have low aspirations which may result in disappointing academic performances becoming part of a self-fulfilling feedback cycle (Margolis & McCabe, 2006).

**Research question #2.** The other observation is the general lack of consensus among school leaders and teacher with regard to their school’s efforts to cultivate resilience. According to Henderson and Milstein (2003):

Many educators report that they have sensed resiliency in their students…Without knowing the specifics, however—that is, the characteristics of children who are developing resiliency even in high-risk environments—it is less likely that educators will be effective in looking for resiliency, identifying it, and helping
students identify it in themselves. Without an awareness of exactly what contributes to resiliency, it is also more difficult to promote programmatic and structural changes that build resiliency in students (p. 19).

**Limitations**

A limitation of this study is an understanding of the impact of parents and family matters on the cultivation of resilience attributes in MHO students. As investigator, I recognize that schools cannot take full responsibility for the development of these positive attributes in their students; however through time-tested interventions proven effective in school reform, schools can positively contribute to a student’s academic, social, and emotional wellness. This study does not address the quality of implementation of academic interventions provided to MHO students; nor issues of teacher effectiveness. Also missing from this discussion is any rationale for the lack of Individual Education Plans that may provide a framework for providing student services based on the students’ learning difference or learning disability. A larger pool of students and schools may provide more insight into the cultivation of resilience within schools citywide; this study only focuses upon a relatively small number of New York City public schools. Although educators were asked to elaborate on some of their responses to the ASRB during the interviews, this study did not interview MHO student respondents to the RSCA, which would certainly have provided qualitative data to better understand the context of the student’s experiences.

Finally, the self-report nature of the ASRB instrument which, although easy to administer, may be more deeply contextualized with the addition of information yielded from each school’s quality review, learning environment surveys, teacher and principal
evaluations, and other assessments of quality and effectiveness. The same is true for the RSCA instrument which together with observations and student specific teacher feedback could provide more insight into the strengths and weaknesses of each participating MHO student.

**Recommendations**

There is no “one-stop grocery shopping” kind of solution to the complex problem of multiple grade retention. Student resilience is something that is cultivated within and outside of schools, and other societal issues need to be considered when developing plans for student resilience-building. Here are some thoughts:

**Recommendation #1.** Deepen school-level capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate evidence-based interventions. Although there are schools that are bright spots in their attention to intervention efficacy, the level of intervention management in the majority of has been largely disorganized and capricious in schools.

*Intervention planning and monitoring.* According to Kratochwill and Stoiber (2000):

It is vital to consider the context and specific needs of the individual children receiving the prevention or intervention services. Once the needs of an individual student and/or the entire student population are understood, it is important for educators to be familiar with specific intervention strategies that are evidence based.

Each student needs, in effect, a recipe (plan) for progress and success that is specific to where the student is and needs to be. An array of ingredients (interventions) needs to be added to this stew; each ingredient must be appetizing (appropriate) and well
done (implemented with fidelity). Such ingredients may include mentoring, buddying, tutoring, counseling, service to others; and ingredients must include positive environments, adequate resources, well trained providers, and high expectations. The recipe must include guidelines that describe and monitor how long and often the student will receive each ingredient (frequency and duration); when and how often the stew will be stirred (formative assessment; interim evaluation) and how strong or light the intensity of the intervention’s flavor (intensity; summative assessment).

**Recommendation #2.** School psychologists need to be actively involved in retention decision making for each potential MHO. In a white paper on grade retention and social promotion, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommended the following:

Holding schools accountable for student progress requires effective intervention strategies that provide educational opportunities and assistance to promote the social and cognitive development of students… For children experiencing academic, emotional, or behavioral difficulties, neither repeating the same instruction another year nor promoting the student to the next grade is an effective remedy. NASP encourages school psychologists to collaborate actively with other professionals by assuming leadership roles in their school districts to implement models of service delivery that ensure:

- Multi-tiered problem-solving models to provide early and intensive evidence-based instruction and intervention to meet the needs of all students across academic, behavioral, and social–emotional domains
- Equitable opportunities to learn for students from diverse backgrounds
- Universal screening for academic, behavioral, and social–emotional difficulties
- Frequent progress monitoring and evaluation of interventions

Furthermore, NASP urges schools to maximize students’ opportunities to learn both in and outside of school through effective teacher professional development and extended day/year programs. Finally, grade retention is a costly intervention with questionable benefits to students. If it is necessary to retain a student in grade, an intensive individualized intervention plan and frequent progress monitoring should be employed to ensure the maximum benefit for the student (NASP, 2011).

The challenge here is readiness and depth of knowledge. According to Shernoff, Kratochwill, and Stoiber (2003):

Many psychologists (trainers and practitioners) do not have the training to implement evidence-based interventions in their school practice.

Kratochwill and Shernoff (2004) add:

When we add teachers to the list of individuals who will need to implement interventions in schools, the complexity of the evidence-based practice adoption process increases further. Developing competencies in evidence-based practices—among ourselves and among our mediators for interventions (e.g., parents and teachers)—is one of our most serious challenges (p. 36).

**Recommendation #3.** Create a school-level *intervention informaticist* position to support effective intervention practice in every school. This position would (a) facilitate the level of attention to data needed to ensure effective communication about and
monitoring of resources, devices, and methods required to optimize the acquisition, delivery, retrieval and use of intervention data, devices, methods and providers for evaluative decision making; and (b) lead strategic planning efforts to improve their school’s delivery of interventions as well as ensuring appropriate access to and tracking of student data among stakeholders. Schools are challenged to focus effectively on new NYCDOE priorities without dedicated staff.

The NYCDOE has certainly made advances in its electronic student databases. For example, the relatively new SESIS (Special Education Student Information System) enables users to complete workflow processes from referral through IEP development. As indicated earlier, however, few of the MHO students involved in this study have IEPs. There are issues that have arisen related to the amount of time that is dedicated to inputting student information into the system and the commitment to timeliness and accuracy of data, yet once these issues are overcome the system will be useful for educators of students with disabilities. The SESIS project can serve as the initial phase of a broader data collection and retention effort that could address the information needs of staff planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating intervention services for and promotional decisions about MHO and other struggling students.

**Recommendation #4.** Intentionally build the social and emotional learning capacity of struggling students in such life skills as, but not limited to, executive functioning, emotional intelligence, big picture thinking, Habits of Mind and grit. It is important to note that this recommendation focuses not only on the capacity of struggling students to learn and adopt these skills but also for their teachers to hone and embrace these skills.
**Recommendation #5.** The term *Medical Model* is a term used that has been used in healthcare for some time and refers to “…a process whereby doctors advise on, coordinate or deliver health-improving interventions informed by the best available evidence” (Shah & Mountain, 2007).

While working in support of schools and students as a member of various school support structures within the NYCDOE, I’ve witnessed so many passionate educators implementing positive intervention strategies and activities designed to cultivate those protective factors described in Chapter 2. In my own conversations with school leaders and delivery of professional development for school-level staff, I’ve frequently used an analogy to describe how systems, structures, and support for struggling students can be coordinated through the use of data, planning, use of resources, and above all, a commitment to the academic, social, and emotional health, personal development, well-being, and success of struggling students. In consideration of the continuum described in Antonovsky’s salutogenesis model described in Chapter 2, I have applied the health-related Medical Model within an educational context.

**Background.** My version of the Medical Model of Intervention (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2) was the result of a visit to an emergency room with my elderly parents, who were each being treated on two different sides of the nurses’ station. As I stood at the nurses’ station monitoring an electronic display with real-time data on the care of my parents, I realized how valuable real-time access to information on student progress would be for educators. How daily attendance, interventions, executive skills and behavior could be captured and closely monitored to support on-the-spot and informed decision making and action. How frequently assessing and continually improving the way
that interventions are delivered at all levels within a school would make a transformative
difference in the quality of service and care.

*Application.* This version of the Medical Model of Intervention requires educators
to think as physicians. The goal of a physician is to promote and maintain good physical
and mental health and wellness within their patients. Similarly, the goal of a school and
its educators is to promote and maintain good academic, social, and emotional health and
wellness within their students. Physicians have caseloads that are comprised of patients
across a four-stage continuum of well-being: Wellness, Outpatient, Inpatient, and
Intensive Care. Patients classified as *Inpatient* and *Intensive Care* are admitted to and
served within a hospital and those classified as in *Wellness* or as *Outpatient* are served
outside of the hospital. Teachers can use this version of the Medical Model of
Intervention to categorize the different levels of and approaches to intervention for
students, with an increased intensity, frequency, and duration of services at each level
along the continuum. This model provides the necessary perspective to clearly understand
how effective data analysis, decision making, and evaluation as part of an RtI framework
can be crucial to student progress.

*Precedent.* This would not be the only example of a medical analogy being
applied to an educational process. Dr. Jerome Groopman, a staff writer at *The New
Yorker*, has written a book about how doctors make decisions regarding their patients. In
his book called *How Doctors Think* (2013), author Groopman describes his preferred
method of conducting rounds, as follows:

I like to conduct rounds in a traditional way. One member of the team first
presents the salient aspects of the case and then we move as a group to the
bedside, where we talk to the patient and examine him. The team then returns to
the conference room to discuss the problem. I follow the Socratic Method in the
discussion, encouraging the students and residents to challenge each other, and
challenge me, with their ideas (pp. 3-4).

Many educators engage regularly in *instructional rounds*, during which educators
diagnose a “problem of practice” and engage in classroom visits in much the same way
that doctors in teaching hospitals engage in the practice of rounds. Educators then
debrief about their observations through the lens of their problem of practice and discuss
theories of action.

*Figure 5.1. Medical Model of Intervention, Educators as Physicians.*
Groopman (2007) describes how physicians use *decision trees* to identify a strategy most likely to reach a goal:

To establish a more organized structure, medical students and residents are being taught to follow preset algorithms and practice guidelines in the form of decision trees…The trunk of the clinical decision is a patient’s major symptom or laboratory result, contained within a box. Arrows branch from the first box to other boxes. For example, a common symptom like “sore throat” would begin the algorithm, followed by a series of branches with “yes” or “no” questions about associated symptoms. Is there a fever or not? Are swollen lymph nodes associated with the sore throat? Have other family members suffered from this symptom? Ultimately, following the branches to the end should lead to the correct diagnosis and therapy (2007, p. 5).

*Figure 5.2. Medical Model of Intervention, Theory of Action.*
Figure 5.3. Medical Model of Intervention, Differentiated by Intensity.

The application of the Medical Model of Intervention within New York City public schools would require (a) defining each category of intervention based on the student population’s needs—this categorization is not necessarily based on New York State Performance Levels 4 (above proficiency), Level 3 (meets proficiency), Level 2 (approaching proficiency), and Level 1 (below proficiency) as a Level 4 student could conceivably be categorized in the ICU for intensive social and emotional interventions; (b) each school having a variety of interventions within their toolkits that increase with intensity from Wellness through ICU; (b) training of intervention providers to expand their professional repertoire of academic, social, and emotional intervention strategies;
and (c) a commitment to capturing real-time data to guide intervention decision making and action based upon decision trees, as well as the appropriate data collection tools and software. Chancellor’s Regulation A-501—the NYCDOE’s Promotion Policy would be amended to provide a framework for within which the activities of all providers of academic, social, emotional, and behavioral interventions can be coordinated. Policy amendments would be developed through a systematic process of consultation with MHO students, parents, educators and student support professionals.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I shared a couple of stories about students who dropped out after being retained as many as four times before high school. Also provided are some ideas from practice that are captured in print by experts in various fields, as well as some thoughts of my own. Decisions to retain students who have previously experienced retention should not be made based solely on the results of a summative assessment score. Social promotion is certainly not the answer if the outcome is that students arrive at high school graduation “all dressed up and nowhere to go.” There is no silver bullet so to speak and no express train to academic success. Rather, it is a stew of different interventions, expertise, approaches, strategies, commitments, and life skills. It’s about what the child in front of you needs at that moment, and the next, and the next. My hope is to identify and contribute to tangible solutions that make a meaningful difference in the life trajectories of MHO students and that strengthen the capacity of schools to continue this work effectively.

There are those students who do not do well in school, but do well in life. In contrast, there are those students who do well in school, but fail in life. As someone who
has overcome her own life challenges and considers herself to be resilient and resourceful, I understand firsthand how important it is to persevere. After four full years of high school, I left in 1976 with a General Education Diploma (GED) when told I would be retained for another year for lack of credits. Today, I have successfully defended my doctoral dissertation…against all odds.
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Appendix A

Assessing School Resiliency Building (ASRB)

Evaluate the following elements of school resiliency building using a scale of 1 to 4, with:

1. Indicating "We have this together"
2. Indicating "We've done a lot in this area, but could do more"
3. Indicating "We are getting started"
4. Indicating "Nothing has been done"

Pro-social Bonding

_____ Students have a positive bond with at least one caring adult in the school.
_____ Students are engaged in lots of interest-based before, after, and during school activities.
_____ Staff engage in meaningful interactions with one another. Staff has been involved in creating meaningful vision and mission statements.
_____ Families are positively bonded to the school.
_____ The physical environment of the school is warm, positive, and inviting.

_____ Total Score

Clear, Consistent Boundaries

_____ Students are clear about the behaviors expected of them and experience consistency in boundary enforcement.
_____ Students use an intervention process ("core" or "care" team) that helps them when they are having problems.
_____ Staff are clear about what is expected of them and experience consistency of expectations.

_____ Staff model the behavioral expectations developed for students and adults.

_____ The school fosters an ongoing discussion of norms, rules, goals, and expectations for staff and students.

_____ The school provides training necessary for members of the school community to set and live by behavioral expectations.

_____ **Total Score**

**Teaching Life Skills**

_____ Students use refusal skills, assertiveness, healthy conflict resolution, good decision making and problem solving, and healthy stress-management skills most of the time.

_____ Students are engaged in cooperative learning that focuses on both social skills and academic outcomes.

_____ Staff work cooperatively together and emphasize the importance of cooperation.

_____ Staff have the interpersonal skills necessary to engage in effective organizational functioning and the professional skills necessary for effective teaching.

_____ The school provides the skill development needed by all members of the school community.

_____ The school promotes a philosophy of lifelong learning.

_____ **Total Score**

**Caring and Support**

_____ Students feel cared for and supported in the school. Students experience many types of incentives, recognition, and rewards.
Staff feel cared for and appreciated in the school.  
Staff experience many types of incentives, recognition, and rewards.  
The school has a climate of kindness and encouragement. Resources needed by students and staff are secured and distributed fairly in the school.

Total Score

High Expectations

Students believe that they can succeed.  
Students experience little or no labeling (formally or informally) or tracking.  
Staff believe members can succeed.  
Staff are rewarded for risk-taking and excellence (e.g., merit pay).  
The school provides growth plans for staff and students with clear outcomes, regular reviews, and supportive feedback. An attitude of "can do" permeates the school.

Total Score

Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

Students are involved in programs that emphasize service to other students, the school, and the community.  
Students are involved in school decision-making, including governance and policy.  
Staff are involved in school decision-making, including governance and policy.  
Staff are engaged in both job-specific and organization-wide responsibilities  
Everyone in the school community (students, parents, staff) is viewed as a resource rather than as a problem, object, or client.  
The school climate emphasizes "doing what really matters" and risk taking.

Total Score
Overall Assessment Score (total of each of the six sections)

Student (total of the first two scores in each section)

Staff (total of the second two scores in each section)

School (total of the last two scores in each section)

Range of scores: overall, 36-144; each section, 6-24; students, staff, and the school, 12-48.

Lower scores indicate positive resilience building; higher scores indicate a need for improvement.

Appendix B

Transcripts of Educator Interviews

Interviewer: Debra R. Lamb, Doctoral Student, St. John Fisher College

Following the completion of the ASRB questionnaire by the interviewee, each respondent was interviewed. During these interviews, the interviewer read each ASRB Element that was scored as follows: “1-We have this together; “3-We are getting started,” or “4-Nothing has been done.” The interviewee was asked to talk about their responses. The interviewer does not address those ASRB Elements for which the interviewee responds as follows: “2-We’ve done a lot in this area, but could do more.”

Pro-Social Bonding (PB)

ASRB Element PB1: Students have a positive bond with at least one caring adult in the school.

Educator #1, Middle School A Principal. Well we’ve put various structures in place to ensure that they have access to individuals who can actually get to know them, not just on an academic level but on the social level. And that’s done through either the advisory program where you have…one teacher is allowed to maybe six or seven students and they meet at least three times a week. That’s one area that we’ve…we have actually various organizations in the school, such as The Gents Program, we have the Young Females Groups, we have the Sports and Arts Program; so throughout the day students are interacting with teachers on a consistent basis. And from even my previous Learning Environment Surveys, we scored very, very high, with students saying that at least one adult cares for them and knows them by name and who they are based upon these specific things that are in place.
**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** I definitely think that every child in this building has somebody they can go to, regardless of whether it’s their teacher or past teacher or the security guard; I’ve seen children sit and talk with the security guards, custodians even. I definitely think that there’s someone here for everybody.

**Educator #9, Elementary School D Assistant Principal.** I feel that at P.S. “D,” I’ve been here for the last 10 years, and I think it’s obvious from the moment you walk into the building that the children and the adults care about each other. And, the children often organize, with my support, birthday parties for their teachers; parents very often ask to come in and celebrate birthday parties in the building; and I think it’s because it’s that family atmosphere that we do have here. And, the children are very, very much connected to their teachers; they often write them cards and make little gifts for them. And, the teachers in turn also make sure that all holidays are celebrated, and they even go into their own financial pocket to make things happen for the children. So I would say without a doubt there’s a definite positive, warm, family style here at P.S. “D.”

**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** This is a local community school, intermediate level. Because right now we serve a little under 300 children, a big part of what we promote through advisory, and even through the academic periods and also through our extensions and extended day, are close connections, familial bonds. We want this school to feel like it is serving the needs of the local community, its children, and its parents. So we really pride ourselves in building relationships with kids. It’s very, very important that every child here have an individual that they can go to. So with that said, we notice when the odd child doesn’t have a relationship with anyone, and we work hard to shore that up.
**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** It becomes evident to me that we have created relationships between members of our staff and our students by the way that they interact with each other. By the fact that, yes they come to us when they’re troubled, but more importantly than that they come to us just to say “hello.” Just to say “good morning.” They are systems and protocols, or whatever word you want to use that speaks to these relationships that we have forged here. Just having students come...I pick a group of students every morning just to start my day off with; and we sit here at my table; we talk about what’s going on in our lives—both them and me, and then we go and we do our pledge. We start our day together, and that’s a system that’s been going on since the day I started here. And with each day I do a different class, so that by a certain time we start that cycle all over again. So essentially I have seen every child in this school and had that moment with them. That’s something that speaks to the relationships that I’m forging, but also tells the staff that this is the type of thing that’s just as important as the ABCs and the 123s. We set time in our day, besides from making sure that we’re doing all that is mandated, making sure that we’re teaching to the Common Core; those are very important things; but if there is no person connected to the Common Core, if there is no person connected to rigorous instruction, then instruction becomes impersonal. Instruction does not have the depth that it’s supposed to have. Therefore it’s not going to be retained by our students. So it’s all about us.

**Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher.** As far as the children as concerned, they know that they can come and talk to any staff member if they’re having a problem academically or socially, they can come to anybody. They do feel that they can come to us.
**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** Ok, so I did indicate that we have this together. In this building there are a lot of support systems for teachers and students, and we look out for each other, so to speak. The question asks if students have a positive bond with at least one caring adult in the school, and I say yes to that because every child in the building, if they have an issue or problem, know that there’s at least one person they can run to, go to, to talk it out and discuss it with them. And, with a population of over 900 children, I think that’s a remarkable thing. Children will come to the office and they’ll have a staff member, whether it’s a school aide or the principal, or assistant principal, guidance counselor; children know that they can bond with someone here in the school to say, “I have a problem” or “I have something good to tell you.” And you see it happening in the hallways, if you walk in and out or throughout the school building, you’ll see that children interact with the adults and say, “Here, I just need to tell you something good” or “I have an issue; somebody bumped into me and I want to resolve the problem.”

**Educator #17, Elementary School G Teacher.** The students have a positive bond in this school because, if you just stop a child in the hallway and you ask them, “Who can you go to when you need to talk or to ask a question,” they will name the teacher and they know the counselors. Right now in my room I have a counselor talking to them about college readiness and where they can go. Before, there were different counselors coming in talking to them about stress relief close to the test. So I do believe that the children are comfortable speaking to anyone in this building.

**ASRB Element PB2: Students are engaged in lots of interest-based, before, after, and during-school activities.**
**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think that through the fourth and fifth grade especially picking clubs and being able to express themselves more through what their interests are, I think that definitely has helped.

**Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.** I think the school as a whole has opportunities; I think that the student body hasn’t necessarily taken the responsibilities and run with it. I think that there’s drama afterschool; there’s many afterschool programs; there’s the Lego Robotics; there’s the extra tutoring before and after school. Some teachers have instituted clubs; but I think that either the school as a whole hasn’t given enough to enforce the kids to come or hasn’t given enough of the opportunity to allow them to come, but I think there are things out there.

**Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal.** Well we have a lot of different opportunities here for students to select their own learning, in regards to specialties on grades 4 and 5 where students have an opportunity to be exposed to the core courses in science, art, music, dance, and library skills. And then after a four-week period, students can pick a selection of core courses over three eight-week sessions. Students also have the opportunity to participate in additional out-of-school-learning time with our grant with an external organization, where they have an opportunity to learn dance, science, math, learn how to play an instrument...so students have an opportunity to express a desire of what they choose to learn and just have an opportunity to be well-rounded and exposed to a variety of specialties to help encourage them, to build their self-esteem and their interest in coming to school on a daily basis.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** Unfortunately I think we were a victim of all the mandates and we got caught up—far too caught up—in the business of
making sure that we were in compliance on this issue and that issue. And we neglected looking at our students as whole people; we looked at them as pages in a binder. Therefore did we offer them the type of opportunities that they need as children? No. There are times during the course of the day, and I have to reflect on the way I grew up. The reason why I’m here today is because my parents—yes, they strived and they did everything that they could to make sure that I and my brother would eventually be successful in whatever term we desired successful, but they also provided us those moments when we were kids. That’s huge because that business of play is also instructional. It teaches a wealth of skills that is not outlined in the Common Core, ELA standards, or the Math or any other of the content strands. The business of play actually has bearings upon how we as adults will interact with each other once we are in the workplace, once we are clear in our own personal lives. That’s just as important as anything that is done in the math block or the reading block. That’s now going to be embedded into our plans for next year. So therefore…I just want to talk about this because I’m a little proud of this...so when we look at, and we’re creating our schedules now, we have an overlapping system that’s going to be put in place with the lunch periods. So it allows the children more time to get out there in the yard and to play. We’ve ordered things for them so that the play is structured; so that they are learning certain life skills while having those moments of fun.

*Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.* So, one of the problems that we had was funding; the lack of funding didn’t really give me the opportunity to provide students the extracurricular activities or programs in order for them to participate in. After my mid-year adjustments and I was able to receive a certain allotment of money, I
was able to implement programs to start supporting these extracurricular activities for kids, in the morning sessions and afternoon as well. And they range from anything from instructional to recreational sports, and this happened because I inherited a budget that was already allocated, so now what I have, I make whatever possible leeway to get them the best possible choices in terms of programs.

ASRB Element PB3: Staff engages in meaningful interactions with one another.

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** I think because we provide various opportunities for staff to get together for professional development opportunities that they kind of create a community or camaraderie with each other; that they are constantly interacting with each other, whether it will be doing intervisitations to each other’s classrooms or just informally meeting up with each other to plan. Also, structures that put in place are things that are built into their schedules, such as content meetings, grade meetings; so they have various opportunities to kind of learn from each other and share. And that has kind of created that atmosphere of camaraderie.

**Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.** I think there’s a lot more staff cooperation that could occur. It seems like in a lot of our planning meetings, things like that, that it’s almost like pulling teeth to interact with some staff members. Maybe because they don’t like each other’s ideas; maybe because they don’t like the idea of someone else having a say in their classroom; or maybe just because they aren’t used to it. But I think that structures have been put in place; it’s just that some personalities and some habits have been formed that make that more difficult than it should be.
Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher. There’s a lot to be done to turn this school around. And although we do have some time allotted during the clubs period, where teachers can meet to discuss issues and to do lesson plans, I think that many teachers don’t use it effectively enough. I mean, we meet in the hallway and they think that’s actually meeting to discuss lesson plans. Or we meet in the bathroom and over the stall we’re talking. But what we need to do more fully is planning, and planning is going to take a lot more than the time that is allotted. There are many changes, things that are coming at us, and anything can just disrupt the schedule in terms of us meeting together to bond; to talk about the changes that are coming; what needs to be implemented. So, I don’t see enough of it being done.

Educator #11, Elementary School F Principal. So, many of the staff members are…I have a seasoned staff, and a lot of them are old school. When I say old school, I mean that they’re in their classrooms and they close their door and they do what they have to do. So one of the things that we’re working on now is how do we share what we know? the expertise from so many levels, so many years put together, how do we share those experiences? So we’ve established grade meetings, common planning meetings, so together we’re coming up with different ideas and trying to think outside the box in order to see how can be best reach our kids? What are the best possible solutions and venues in order to reach our children?

Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher. As far as pro-social bonding, I think that the kids and the staff feel bonded because we’re able to communicate with one another, especially the staff. On Thursdays, we get to sit and talk about what is going on
with the students; we get to talk about the data so that we can further the students’ learning ability.

**ASRB Element PB4: Staff has been involved in meaningful vision and mission statements.**

*Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.* Well, when I first came there was already a mission and vision established for the school. But I didn’t feel like it was…people could really internalize it themselves because it was already pre-established. So, at the beginning of our year during our professional development days, we kind of sat down and we looked at the mission and the vision. And we had discussions around, “Is this our mission; is this our vision. If so, what are we going to do to make it happen as a collective body? We all vetted it and said, “This is what we’re going to do.” So they had a lot of input into that kind of changing and tweaking some things.

*Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.* Since the mission of the school seems to be global citizens and technology, I think it’s not really followed through on enough. So I think we need to be having conversations in class; Maybe not every day but connecting our lessons to that. So if this is going to directly apply, what we want you to do as you leave this school. So I think we need more tangible because it sounds nice, the words, but if they don’t know what it means then how is it actually going to be effective?

*Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.* So we have a mission statement at our school that’s school wide to make leaders in science and technology, and it is a vision that, I think, right now just that…it’s just words. And it’s not really a reality in our school. We’re not really working towards that if we’re honest with ourselves. And I don’t think our students if we ask them would know that that’s our vision. And so I think a
meaningful vision is one that you can see, you can feel, you can show, you can model. And none of us are world leaders in science and technology. There aren’t any of us that are leaders in science and technology, and I think don’t think that anyone is pursuing that, so it’s a difficult vision to model for our students.

Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher. I think that everyone will say the mission is to ensure that students read better, do better academically. But the global picture, the real global picture as to how what’s happening in here and what we’re doing in here will affect all the students long-term, I think that’s a miss. And, the global planning that needs to have students become…I guess the phrase is “Common Core,” but it’s really just having students meet the needs to function as adults, whether they go to college as the Common Core say, or whether they just get a job. So, I don’t think that there is enough clarity in terms of the vision for this school and how we need to move the students to become global learners and just young adults that can work in any environment across the globe. I really don’t see it yet.

Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher. The mission statements are usually just given to the staff as opposed to collaboratively designing the mission statements as a group. And every year we come in there’s a one or two word variation; we’re not exactly sure where those variations came from.

Educator #11, Middle School E Principal. We are looking for collective voice from staff. But unfortunately, staff has disparate opinions about the vision around education for students with a variety of needs as those posed here at this school. So part of getting started is the attempt to get everybody on the same with a vision, and that has been a challenge for 8½ years and it continues to be a challenge.
**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** Far too often in many schools...this school is typical of it...is that there was a very top-bottom type of view. The vision was really one that was created by one person and was not carried through, was not seen, there was no buy-in. So, now having a staff which understands that my door is always open and have been instrumental this year in making sure that teachers have the opportunity just to come in and to say anything...well, anything within certain barriers, but to have those moments to just come in a speak, that set off an understanding that I invite them to come into my world; I invite them to be part of my world. So, having established that we now move to the next step of having us create a joint understanding of what the vision and the mission of the school is. If I don’t have them involved in that, then the idea of them actually living that vision and mission will not come to fruition. It has to be...it’s organic, and they have to be involved in that process. So therefore, this year was the trial and error kind of thing. Next year we’ll sit down and we’ll have these difficult conversations...and they are going to be difficult, but we can rise above those difficulties based on the fact that we are all trying to achieve one thing and that is a vision and mission that is meaningful to every stakeholder in this school.

**Educator #14, Middle School F Principal.** Coming into the building, the mission and vision statements were already created by the prior administrative staff. Moving forward, at the end of the year what we’re planning to do is bringing everybody together during our...we’re having our teachers’ celebration day...’cause we missed teacher appreciation week, I wanted to have something special. So we’re doing it on June 6th and we’re going to be planning together what is it that we want? What is the vision for this school? I have a vision as a principal, but how do you come on board to join me at that
vision so that we all take ownership over it to make it work in the school. So we’re going to be coming together to design a vision and mission statement for next year.

**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** I think why we do this so well is because for every year we look at the vision statement and the mission statement and we always have…and I know everyone says it—a cliché, “Children First.” And the children come first when we write it; it’s about their socialization. So if they have good socialization from pre-k all the way to grade 5, I think that we have everything is mostly done and set. We talk about peer interaction and peer grouping with students so that not only do you have an adult to go to, the children know that they have each other.

**ASRB Element PB5: Families are positively bonded to the school.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** I guess I feel really blessed and I hear a lot of stories where in the community the families are not actively involved. When I first got here, it was a little awkward because people were trying to figure out who I was. But when I kind of opened the doors and created various outlets for them to come in—whether it is breakfast with the principal or showing up at all the PTA meetings—they come out in droves. And then I implemented the whole scholar-led conferences, which require every parent to come into the building to get their child’s report card, so they really had no choice but to say, “This is my school; this is my child; I know who the principal is; I know who the teachers are because I’ve been in the building.” So with those kinds of things, you create that bond with them. And then they actually want to come back and help.

**Educator #7, Elementary School C Teacher.** I work with a special need population and from my past experience, parent participation is very low; they don’t
come to the IEP meetings, they don’t come to parent-teacher conferences; they feel very comfortable sending their kids on the buses, but you don’t see them. I remember a particular year I had to write a letter through my bus monitor to ask a parent to come in. Some of them don’t pick up their report cards; so it’s a work in process for we in the special need population.

**Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.** Sure, we actually have a very nice core of families. But if you think about the student body as a whole, there could be a lot more. Every year there seems to be more and more families getting involved in the school, and the parent association helping out as class mother type of thing. But there are still plenty of people not in it, and were collecting money for senior graduation and dues, and we’re getting a…we had the basis and now we need more push, and it’s hard to get in touch with a lot of the family members to support the system.

**Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.** I think that we have good involvement with parents being involved in the school, but there’s room for improvement; there’s a lot of room for improvement. I think I would like to see more parents in the building; I would like to see more parents involved in what we do with the students and coming to activities. For instance, each year in May and June we take a lot of trips and I’ve been trying to encourage some of the parents to join us on the trips. And it’s been good; it’s getting them involved, they’re getting to know the students and me and just the school environment. And so I think it’s a good idea to try to find more ways to include parents and get parents in the building and involved in our school community.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** Ok, you know it’s very funny. This year I tried to put in place a system where every child was going to be registered
into our clinic, thereby getting them the assistance they would need in terms of medical. And I was shocked to find out that the numbers of individuals, of students and parents, who opted for that opportunity was not as high as I had hoped, which made me reflect, which made me have conversations with other individuals, which speak about things that are currently on not just in this school but going around in our world that we live in. Parents today have many concerns that extend our building. There are reasons as to why that wasn’t successful. They’re concerned about issues pertaining to immigration. They’re concerned about things about leases and a wealth of things that you would think has no bearing upon a school, but has direct bearings on a school. So, it is not time to take a step back and now let’s calibrate what we need to do to make this setting, where they think of us as a resource. So therefore, for next year I’m looking at having more adult classes going on. And, we’re going to make this setting a place where it is really very transparent. My graduation I’m taking in the yard. Everyone and everyone in the neighborhood will see my children graduate this year. It’s about transparency; and if they see it, they’ll buy into it. They’ll come to us. This has to be a safe haven; no judgments, just come and we’ll try. That’s all I can do, we can try.

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** It was very crucial for me coming into this building to make myself visible every day in the mornings and outside, and reach out to the community and let them know listen, I am here, I speak your language—we have a very large Hispanic population that prior to me coming here did not feel comfortable approaching because they could not communicate their concerns. So now that I am able to communicate with a lot of the parents, they understand that I need them in the building; I need their support. And that’s how I’ve gained a lot of Learning
Leaders; they support me in the cafeteria, they support me in the classrooms; they support me with dismissal outside, so we’re working on building relationships with them. Getting them to understand that it’s okay to come into the building, it’s okay to help out and be part of your children’s education.

**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** I would certainly say that’s true here too; we welcome all the parents. Every morning, I ask if the staff are not part of the classroom to step out into the hallway during the school day to welcome the parents in the building every day. So you will see here in the building staff members welcoming them. “Good morning,” “How are you?” “Have a good day.” The same way you would walk into a department store and say “Hi.” We call ourselves “greeters” in the morning, so that if there are any issues at the onset of the day, “Here I need to talk to you” and “Let’s just resolve a problem” or just for positive social interaction.

**ASRB Element PB6: The physical environment of the school is warm, positive, and inviting.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** That goes to the culture. I think when anyone walks into the building, there have been common sentiments that there’s this peace in our building. There’s not chaos; everything’s very clean, streamlined. We have a lot of technology—it’s up-to-date, and there’s not chaos where people feel like...and they’re greeted well. I was always taught that if you treat people well, then it’s a reflection of who you are. So we try to make sure that people understand that this is not just our school; it’s anyone who comes here. So we try to make that a part of our culture.

**Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.** I do think we need to take a step back and use positive incentives and reinforcements for our students because, I’m guilty of this
too, always referring back to yelling or back to “you’re doing this wrong,” rather than this person’s doing this right. For example, I’ll call someone who is not behaving in class 20 times in one class but I won’t recognize the student in front of me who has been working the whole entire time. So, I think as a school we need to start making that a place where they want to come but they also feel appreciated and valued and that they can just accomplish these great things.

\textit{Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.} That was one that I struggled with. I think that I more than others try to create that safe environment for learning, and maybe it’s because I grew up in a different type of environment than the environment I’m teaching in. And here in a low-income neighborhood sometimes it seems that that warm, safe environment gets taken advantage of more than it’s appreciated. And so I think it’s a fine line that people…that teachers and school leaders are trying to walk, and we just haven’t figured out how to walk it yet. And so I’d like to see a little bit more of a shift in…I answered many of those types of questions the same way…the things about the “can do attitude, positive, safe climate” because of that—because I think that fine line…we’re trying to find it, still.

\textit{Educators #6 & #7, Elementary School C Teachers.} We have a lot of positive things going on. Due to some behavior issues, we have some teachers that engage in selling stuff and they get the money to buy stuff to give as a reward for positive behavior. Even in our classroom, we have a store and we come up with little gifts, not very expensive things; if you complete your homework, stay on task, good behavior…every week we reward them. We also go out when the weather is good and take 45 minutes to play games, something different from just sitting in the classroom all the time. And they
tend to look forward to it; you get that motivation when everything is going in a positive
direction when you say, “Okay guys, we’re going to have cupcakes this Friday if we have
100% homework, and stuff like that.” So we try in every way to encourage them.

**Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.** I think all the staff members in
general let the kids, you know, give good nights, good mornings, both physical and
emotional; Smiles are on their faces, the building is warm esthetically both physically and
emotionally for the kids.

**Educator #9, Elementary School D Assistant Principal.** That was very
intentional, the environmental piece. When we first arrived at the building 12 years ago,
there was poor lighting in the building. It was very dark, dim, very institutional looking.
So we got in touch with the district office and all of the lighting was redone in the
auditorium as well as in all of the hallways. All of the classrooms were repainted, and if
you walked into the main office—the administration felt the main office should be a
direct model for the teachers of what we expect in the classroom—so the main office is
decorated, it’s colorful, it’s not your typical institutional office. So, all of those things
were in there to create an atmosphere. Additionally, we had an artist that was contracted
to paint the basement because the early childhood is located in the basement of the
building and it was very dark and dim and now it’s very colorful and the doors are
painted, and we used Disneyworld as our model so that when the children arrive at the
doors, they know they’re in for an experience.

**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** Well, it’s warm and positive and
inviting because we feel that we supplement gaps in the home and the community. We
have worked hard to recognize those gaps and to acknowledge them, and to also think
about how gaps in children’s personal lives and the community-at-large influence their performance in school. And, we do a lot relative to providing a school-wide breakfast program; providing incentivized extended day programs; and just providing opportunities where kids can get to see aspects of the community and the culture that we live in, that they would not have otherwise had exposure to.

*Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher.* The physical environment of the school is very warm. The students see that we put their work up; they know that we trying to make them move from one level to the next; and we’re always engaging them in some type of activities that can promote their learning. So, the physicality of the building is warming and inviting, so that the kids know…and the classrooms too…we make the environment very inviting to feel warm and feel secure.

*Educator #17, Elementary School G Teacher.* Every single day when I come into this building, I’m greeted by someone with a big smile. Parents know this; the teachers know this; you’ll see a good morning, you’ll hear good afternoon. It’s just a feeling of safe and that everyone knows that where they can go to talk with someone. The teachers are willing to work and they get together often to talk about how we can improve anything that we’re having difficulty with. New teachers—the doors are always open to them. Our older staff—we go to them, we talk with them. I feel that everybody has a good sense of who they can talk to and where they can go.

**Clear, Consistent Boundaries (CCB)**

**ASRB Element CCB1:** Students are clear about the behaviors expected of them and experience consistency in boundary enforcement.
Educator #1, Middle School A Principal. I’m very, very clear—that’s one of the things…one of my non-negotiables is to have order. And so my students know exactly where I stand in that, that I don’t really play in terms of making sure that they have a very safe and orderly environment. So with that said, to ensure that, we put structures in place so that they’re very clear. The handbook outlines all the expectations, the consequences; they’re very clear about what the protocols are—if you do X, then this is what is going to happen in terms of why. To be even more specific, I have for eighth graders on my wall, there’s a system in place to help them regulate their behavior if they want to get the incentives. And students can opt out of getting the rewards—of trips and things, if they don’t follow those guidelines. So, on a day-to-day basis, I speak to my students in the morning, talking to them about what is expected of them. So there’s not a day that goes by when it is not being enforced.

Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher. I think there are a lot of differences between our staff members on philosophies, on experiences; and those things manifest themselves in the way that we treat our students. Some teachers give their students a lot more freedom to stand up and walk around the classroom to get what they need; whereas in my classroom I expect you to be in your seat unless you raise your hand and ask me. So I think classroom to classroom it’s very different. And even interactions in the hallways; teachers say some things are okay and some things aren’t. And so school wide we haven’t settled in once place and said this is okay and this is what’s not, and everybody needs to buy in.

Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher. I feel that it’s very consistent in what we’re telling them is expected of them; I don’t always feel that the follow through is
as consistent as it needs to be, or the same across the board for everybody. So I think that is somewhere where we’ve started but we need to continue to do some more work on.

*Educator #9, Elementary School B Assistant Principal.* We review every year with the teachers and we have a school handbook, which indicates that you should be very positive with what the rules are in the classroom. No more than five rules should be enforced, and that, for your routines and procedures, you can have hundreds, but the children have to know how everything that’s done in that classroom—right down to how do I hang up my coat, how do I sharpen a pencil, how do I get permission to use the bathroom; but your rules should be limited to five. Keep it manageable for the children but that the children should understand how the room functions. So we’re very clear on the children should know what they should do and what they should not do. And those things have to be reinforced and taught frequently as needed.

*Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.* I think because there are many class issues that come into play relative to students and their involvement in school, expectations among staff sometimes seem to differ from those of the children. So relative to that, we often find that some of the teacher expectations, although positive, differ from those of students because, although students want positive outcomes and want to achieve positive goals, they’re not as clear relative to how to achieve them. And, again, because there are class differences in the lens and the approach, they don’t always discern or see the teacher’s advice or clarity around the issue as the necessary solution or pathway for them to achieve their goals.

*Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.* I just feel that that’s one of the areas we need a lot of work in. It seems like what we’re allowed to do in terms of discipline is
so limited. Make phone calls constantly; that doesn’t always solve the problem. And suspensions are not necessarily the answer to the problem either because now the child is not in school. So it’s a delicate area and we’ve got to find creative ways, different ways to implement discipline and to let the children know what they’re expected of, and have consequences that have meaning when they don’t meet expectations for behavior; not just call your parent or you’re going to get suspended. That’s an area I don’t personally have an answer yet, I’ve been thinking about it and trying to find new ways to discipline children and let them know that if you do this, this is what’s going to happen. And they do and it deters from the behavior that we don’t want. It’s a work in progress; we’re still trying to find alternative ways to discipline the students and letting the students know what is expected of them.

*Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher.* Well, regarding behavior, they know basically how far they can go; if they get out of hand, they know that they’ll be given a warning and the second time around, we’ll talk with them…always trying to make it have a positive outcome. We never try to turn that behavior into a negative.

*Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.* We have a behavioral plan, and we use a behavioral program called Peace Builders, and every day they recite the Peace Builders pledge, “I’m a Peace Builder; I pledge: to praise people, to give up put-downs, to see wise people, to notice and speak up about hurts I have caused, to right wrongs, to help others. I will build peace at home, at school, and in my community each day.” In reference to the behaviors, they know that if they, for instance, do something wrong, by the end of the day, “How do I right this wrong? Who do I have to talk to in order to make sure that before I walk out of this building, that this wrong has been corrected?”
**Educator #17, Elementary School G Teacher.** When you walk into a classroom…each teacher is different, however each child knows what their goals are, what is expected of them, and what they should do. It is posted somewhere in the classroom; sometimes the children have it in their notebook; if you ask a student, “What are your goals? What are you expected to do?” each child would have a response in this building. We work a lot on making sure that the child knows what their goals are, and once they have reached that goal, to be able to build from there.

**ASRB Element CCB2: Students use an intervention process (“core” or “care” team) that helps them when they are having problems.**

**Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.** So, we do have our counselor, Mr. X, who is amazing; above and beyond always. And the problem is he is it’s usually just him and he’ll have interventions with students but I think that our students constantly deal with conflict by lashing back out. We have a lot of fighting, a lot of verbal fighting as well, and I think if we had more conversations in the classroom, maybe setting accountable talk, running through conflicts, what do you do when this happens, how do you react? I have had several fights in my classroom and it’s because I’m not having the conversation—when someone says this to you, you need to find a different way to deal with this. So, we need to work on that.

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** Right, so we’ve begun using “WWT” and “Walk away” and “Speak to an adult” but there still are many incidences where children are using physical solutions to some of their problems. So that’s another thing that is coming along the way, but it’s not consistent throughout the whole building.
**Educators #6 & #7 Elementary School C Teachers.** Right, many of the students…their home environments do not really allow them to express themselves in a positive way. So we try to instill in the children—and it’s an ongoing, constant redirection, trying to explain to them if they have a problem they can come to talk about it, they can come to us and we sit. Even sometimes in the middle of a lesson a child will have a problem and we actually stop the lesson and pay attention to them because we don’t let it wait for too long; it’s a teachable moment for the whole class. So we try to encourage them in that way as well because it’s very important for them to express themselves; but we want them to express themselves in a positive way, not to take to physical violence and fighting, to use our words. When the kids are having difficulties, we invite the parents, we invite the school counselors, and we discuss to see if they can be resolved amicably. And most of the time, we focus on those kids to praise them. If there’s a problem between them and all of them take the highway—walking away, we praise them and given them a reward.

**Educator #9, Elementary School B Assistant Principal.** We started with our intervention team but we did it more holistically, and then it depends on the needs basis, that we do have a group and that consists of our SAVE (Safe Schools Against Violence in Education) room, the guidance counselor, the resource room teacher, the administration, and the school nurse. So we have had several children and those children—we have one in the process right now—were usually placed in alternative settings. This setting was not effective for them and their needs. But we certainly have to get a little bit more I would say organized, because we find in the last three years, we’ve had more students coming into our building where this was not the appropriate setting for them.
**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** We have had great difficulty in empowering students relative to solving their own problems. What we find is that students’ empowerment around a sense of independence and clarity relative to them taking on their own problems and seeking solutions needs a very large amount of guidance. And although we provide a paramount of guidance in those venues, we’ve never been able to make the transition to independence that we would like to see among students.

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** As I mentioned earlier, students often just go to their immediate teacher or that one individual that they feel most comfortable with. And one of the things that we’re try to do is…we’ve started thinking about a student council where they can, amongst themselves, talk about issues that they may not be comfortable bringing up to somebody else on their own but somebody within their group can bring up. So we started that just now, just recently as a pilot to see if it will work for us.

**ASRB Element CCB3: Staff is clear about what is expected of them and experience consistency of expectations.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** I think as a leader that it’s important that people know exactly what you want, how you want it, they like to have that transparency. And at the very beginning of the year, I outline with my teachers what my expectations are for them and I hold them accountable by being consistent with my feedback with them, my interactions with them, and constantly reinforcing what needs to happen at the school level, I mean from them, to ensure that we have all the things in place. So, they kind of know that when I say something, this is how I need it to be. And
I’m going to help facilitate it by providing them with the resources they need to get it done. But by the end of the day, this is the expectation.

_Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher._ Yes, I think that our school leaders have high expectations for us and communicate well with us about what is expected. And as long as it’s communicated and it’s reasonable, I don’t think there’s any reason to be fuzzy on what’s expected. I think the high standards are because there’s a lot expected of our students, and so if we can’t meet those high standards, they’re not going to be able to. The fact that I can articulate that just shows that it’s been articulated to me. And so I think it’s very clear to everyone here.

_Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher._ I think that sometimes the administration, they’re not consistent. And from administrator to administrator, you will get different instructions as to what they want and what is expected. I think sometimes when people say something and they think it’s clear, but it’s really not clear in what we are practicing. For example, I’ll be specific: One practice was that teachers would divide up the lesson plan and that we would come together and everyone would be accountable for their particular lesson plan. The year before last we were cited in the Quality Review as that was an excellent policy. This year, no one said anything, but upon classroom visit, it was said that that is not a good plan; that it’s not…the Superintendent in his Quality Review did not like it. I think that, it that’s the case, it needs to be explicitly stated to the staff. And that’s just one example. But I don’t think that enough collaboration and communication goes on with the administration. As a result, even though one might say that we wrote a memo…we did this or we did that…teachers are not getting the message clearly. And the end result is that there are some inconsistent practices.
**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** Again, inheriting a seasoned staff that has been used to things being done a certain way for so many years, in lieu of everything that’s coming up—new teacher evaluation system, new expectations—introducing them to what is expected at this time at this level has been different for us, different for me. And we’re just starting the work, showing them: What are the rubrics? What is the quality review looking like? What are the expectations of our teachers that we expect as administrators, as a school? Where do we expect our kids to go by the end of the particular year and how are we going to get there? So working together and coming together and showing them that by the end of the year I expect you to have looked at your child from the beginning to end and have a full picture as to where the gap deficiencies were in this child? What did we do to try to help improve that child during that time? And what are our next steps even moving to the next grade? So that the next teacher already comes in knowing what they need to do or where can they continue from in order to push this child forward.

**ASRB Element CCB4: Staff models the behavioral expectations developed for students and for adults.**

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** Again, everyone was left on their own, and everyone did what they had to do within their classrooms. I wanted to make sure that we had a unified system that everyone was doing the same thing across the school so that in the event that you were not there to be with your particular class, somebody else can just step in and take over the regular routines. So we just started making sure that everyone amongst the grade, amongst the school is on the same page in
terms of routines, policies, this is how we walk, and this is what we should do on a daily basis. So we just started this as well.

**ASRB Element CCB5: The school fosters an ongoing discussion of norms, rules, goals, and expectations for staff and students.**

*Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.* So we absolutely do have those norms and rules set out, but at the same time I feel like it would be somewhat inconsistent; one teacher would do something different in their classroom and it’s problematic when you are trying to reinforce the rules because the student does have the evidence saying “I don’t have it do this there, so why do I have to this here?” And they’re upset. And then if you turn around and do it, they don’t think it’s fair; obviously it’s not. So, we need to make it more consistent throughout the year, not just the beginning, the middle, and the end.

*Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.* I was specifically thinking of things like the norms and rules in that area. I also have some difficulty keeping our students focused on the goals aspect because long term, in a culture of instant gratification, anything that’s long term is hard for us to grasp. Especially as kids; they want it and they want it now. And so to tell them that we want you to get an 80% on every objective for the year, they don’t think about that more than once, unless we are really drilling it into their heads. So I think that the way that our staff uses our time could be fleshed out a little bit more in terms of what each admin period is supposed to look like, things like that. But more specifically, just the norms and goals our students are held to really need to be more clear.
**Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.** I think wherever you go in the building, whichever class you go to, it’s always reinforced. There’s certain ways how to act, how not to act. Those that act well, I do believe that we needed a little more for those kids that do the right thing to show them the way you’re supposed to act is in fact rewarded. But, there’s always repercussions for those who do not act well, whether maybe not as harsh as sometimes it needs to be or sometimes it’s too harsh depending on the actual issue. But, in general I think that the kids know what norms are, how you should act and shouldn’t. And it’s reinforced on a consistent basis.

**Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher.** The rules are very clear because we have PBIS in the school. So the kids know that as far as being well behaved in the hallway or in the lunchroom, they know their rewarded. So the expectations are set; they know the five rules of the expectations. And if the staff members see them doing something positive, they’ll either verbally tell them or they’ll get a School Buck that they can spend at the store, which is an excellent way to promote behavior anywhere in the building.

**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** We have non-negotiables in this school about wearing your school uniform every day; if children wear their school uniforms every day, then we know that he or she is ready for school, ready for learning. When we see that children do not have a uniform, it gives us a heads up and we know that something about this is not 100% correct. So we’ll have social workers and guidance counselors call the family and we talk to them about why they are not following this rule. And we’ll sometimes find out that there’s something happening in the home, maybe they can’t afford it, and we just want to make sure that the child comes to school able to fit in
and socialized in the classroom correctly based on the rules that we have. It is a non-negotiable—wearing a uniform—but it’s a rule too; Socialization.
ASRB Element CCB6: The school provides training necessary for members of the school community to effectively set and live by behavioral expectations.

*Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.* I think, especially this year, we’ve had a lot of …and last year too…we’ve had a lot of parent workshops to bring them into the school building community, and even workshops for the children. We had someone come in about safety on Facebook, and I think that just bringing all those little workshops in, and workshops for the staff also, that we started but there definitely could be more done.

*Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.* Because to me the school community is all-encompassing; not just the staff are members of the school, it’s more the families. We live in a…this school is in an area where we’ve had three lockdowns in the past few weeks because of gunshots in the neighborhood and I think that the kids have to understand that when you get out into society, it is atypical for the most part where you’re going to have to stay indoors your entire life. So we want to make that more of an issue and say, yes you know you have norms in the school but there are also norms outside the school also. So just like you walk to the right side of an escalator, there’s certain ways to act around the environment.

*Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.* We are doing a lot of work to bring an understanding to the staff relative to student and community needs. We have established a core group that I think does have a sound understanding; it is a case management group that consists of a broad swathe of people; it includes administrators, counselors, teachers, and other active participants including community-based organizations. But, this core group does not represent the entire pedagogical group in the school. So our next step now
that we’ve achieved the core group is to consider how we will implement radiating our core knowledge of what we’ve achieved around consistent behaviors to the rest of the staff.

**Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.** I think that kind of goes along with the last piece. The staff has gone to different professional development; we talk about it at our meetings. But to extend it to the other parts of the school community—parents and other parts of the staff that the children deal with—I haven’t seen that. Maybe it’s in place, but it’s not something that I’ve seen. I think that might be a way to go; certainly bringing in the parents. I feel strongly about that; I’ve had a few parents accompany me on trips and they see what we deal with from a totally different lens. So they really understand and they want to help out. And they see that, wow, you know, teachers have a lot to do. They like to jump in and help with the discipline and the disciplining other people’s children. It works very well. And so I think that having something in place where we train other staff members as well as the parent community as well in terms of the community about what some of our outcomes might be and what our expectations are, and what they have to accomplish.

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** So, the beginning of the year was a learning experience…was an observation period. We had to see where the staff was, what was it that they were accustomed to doing, and what is it that we expect them to do? And we had to come up with a plan and say, “This is what they’ve been doing, we can’t through everything out. How do we work with what they’re already doing to move it forward to the next level, and gear them to the direction that we hope to be in. so that’s
why it’s all in the getting started phase, because being year one for me has been…again, inheriting what was here.
Teaching Life Skills (TLS)

ASRB Element TLS1: Students use refusal skills, assertiveness, healthy conflict resolutions, good decision making and problem solving, and healthy stress-management skills most of the time.

**Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.** So we do have our seven character traits, but I think that we don’t incorporate them in our lessons enough. And I think that it can be as simple as having more Socratic Seminars with students and having more open discussions. For example, how can social studies help you in real life? Because right now they see it as, “Well, what is the Constitution going to help me with?” Knowing this helps you vote, helping you have a voice, helping you advocate for yourself. Thank is more tangible for them. So I think that we need to work on teaching…even things like discipline and perseverance.

**Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.** I said that nothing has been done because I don’t think anything has been done school wide. I think our guidance counselor does a great job teaching these sorts of life skills and executive functioning skills. But I don’t think that any of us teachers would know how to coach a student through a very stressful situation unless we had some sort of training from somewhere else. For example, I have a Masters in Special Education, and so training on how to deal with those students and sort of diagnose their behaviors and things like that. I don’t think our staff really knows how to deal with a stressful situation besides just pushing it out to someone who does. And so nothing has really been done as a school.

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** Many of the students that experience academic difficulty also have emotional issues that they are contending with,
and they say that if the emotional issues are not dealt with appropriately, then the students cannot perform academically well. And, I think…that’s what I was getting into in the last question before this in terms of the need to collaborate with mental health facilities so that we can teach our students how to deal with some of the emotional issues. I think that as an adult, we have our own coping skills; we know some that are good, and we may have some that are not so good. And so to expect a teacher to become the psychologist, the social worker…all of these factors within a limited timeframe when you are expected to be on task is kind of unfair. And we’re just now beginning to see that these emotional issues that these students have to contend with must be priorities. Just as academic issues are priority; we have one social worker; we have the school…Dr. [X] and Ms. [X]. But they are clearly…and if you speak to them, they are clearly, and will tell you that they are clearly in over their heads. Because they cannot deal with it. And so we ask, “Could you do us a favor please in speaking to this child.” And then the social worker will say, “I have my mandated cases.” So everyone is feeling the pull of dealing with these emotional issues, and especially classroom teachers who are the first line of encounter most times that these kids have to meet and deal with.

**Educators #6 & #7, Elementary School C Teachers.** What we do sometimes is we share, we use times with the students as teachable moments, and share some of our experiences as well and how we handled. We go as far back as when we were kids and we do a lot of life skill teaching as well and actually share some of our personal experiences with our own children. This is the way this child acted versus another child. We try to make connections. And we also have a teacher in the building, Ms. X, who comes in to work with the kids on life skills; how to share, things that they can do not to
get them in trouble, teaches them how to take care of themselves, drugs—how bad it is for you. So we have the teacher that comes in and works with the children too.

**Educator #9, Elementary School D Assistant Principal.** When I read the teaching life skills, I don’t think we are as organized as we should be. And, I believe we’re more successful in that area in certain grades than in other grades. I believe in teaching children conflict resolution and good decision-making; it’s being done very well in grades 3, 4 and 5. But in the early childhood, I think we have to get a little more uniform, organized, and pro-active in the early childhood. So that’s my, why I scored that at a little bit higher than my other scores—that we’re not consistent throughout the building. So with the inconsistency is why I didn’t give that as high a score as it should be or could be.

**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** Because we have such a high percentage of at-risk students, and because we have them the least amount of time relative to elementary school or high school, we find ourselves consistently beginning the work but never being able to achieve finality around it. And I think it is a time factor. We are able to take a bite out of the proverbial apple, but we don’t see, again, the achievement that we’d like to see as a child exits in eighth grade.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** The best way to teach that…of course there are the lessons that we can actually give them…but it’s by example. Many of the things that I do now I learned from my parents, good and/or bad. So, if you use that as the basis to have our students really learn, then that means that we have the responsibility as adults…and I mean as adults, not teachers, but adults…to then become role models for them. To model certain types of behaviors that we expect them to use when they get to a
certain age, to adulthood. You know, the Common Core was devised so that all children will eventually be able to enter into college; it made the playing field fair. But we neglected to also address within those standards certain other behavioral standards that we as teachers and educators must model for our students every day. If they see that there’s dissention going on between administration and teachers, that carries on and will have a bearing upon how they interact with each other; not just grade by grade but class to class and all these other configurations. Children are very smart. Don’t sleep on them; they pick up on those subtle nuances in conversations that are carried on between one adult and another. And they model that in their own behaviors towards each other. So, if we recognize just that…and we are cognizant, and we have to be, every single day about how we speak with one another, then there’s going to be a spill-over effect. So we have to be careful about the words we choose, not just in our verbal conversations but in our written conversations as well. You know, who was it who said that, “The pen is mightier than the sword”? And no truer words were ever said. That is going to make an impact in terms of bringing about a culture that is based on respect and that is based on trust, as far as I see it.

Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal. Again, we use the Peace Builders program to discuss life skills. We want to make sure that every child is ready—socially, emotionally, and academically ready—before they leave this building, and just for life in general. What we do here is have conflict resolution meetings and teams; on fourth and fifth grade, we have community building every Thursday and Friday. And we choose topics in six-week units to discuss some of these things that the children may be going through. For instance, “How do you deal with stress during the time of test taking? What
are some strategies that a child may use during the test?” We talk about healthy breathing, healthy eating, just to prepare them because we have adults—the teachers themselves—who become nervous during testing time. So we’ll have a staff member who will help them through this time because it’s a life skill.

**Educator #17, Elementary School G Teacher.** We have many different programs that help children with health. Independently, teachers have programs, like this year I did one on eating breakfast—how important it is to eat breakfast. And we got pedometers and the children were challenged to keep track of how many times they walk, and what kind of exercise they’re doing and the importance of eating a good breakfast. That’s just in my classroom; every other teacher has their own technique as in every school. The fifth graders have community building, where they go and talk to them about nutrition, and in their final project they invited the fourth graders to see what kinds of projects they came up with, how sugar affects their health. And I believe that each teacher in their own classroom has and teaches about health which is so important. We’re trying to limit the sugary drinks; our principal goes into the lunchroom and makes sure we have a discussion about why it’s so important to eat healthy. Especially with my kids; they like potato chips.

**ASRB Element TLS2: Students are engaged in cooperative learning that focuses on both social skills and academic outcomes.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** Well that’s just a part that’s embedded in our teaching model; collaborative work. Students work in groups throughout the day, all day. You don’t see any classes where students are enrolled by themselves. So at every interval throughout the day they are working in a group to complete some specific type of
task, and that provides them an opportunity to kind of get to know people and share their thoughts and learn from each other, as well as a means of educating themselves; It’s embedded.

_Educator #9, Elementary School D Assistant Principal._ Yes, that’s exactly why; if you look in this particular area of teaching life skills, I don’t think we’re consistent throughout the building. So, it raises my consciousness that this is an area that we probably can do a whole lot better in if we focus some of our resources in this particular area.

_Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal._ I think that we provide an opportunity for students to explore, through the use of inquiry learning, where students can uncover a specific skill, or concept through exploration. And more specifically, we’re moving in that direction in the area of science, where students learn to use within groups critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, to unpack and solve an issue. Where I think that the school needs to get better as it concerns life skills, is that right now children are engaged in those kinds of anti-bullying thoughts of caring for one another centrally around a book of the month as opposed to being taught as an integral subject throughout the course of the school day. And I think as a school we need to get better in that area because kids need to specifically learn how to be a good friend.

_Educator #11, Middle School E Principal._ Part of the concern around cooperative engagement with students has a lot to do with the adults that are in front of them. Cooperative engagement and the differentiation and individualization that it calls for is still something that is somewhat amorphous to adults in the building. The real problem is adults and their perceptions around implementation and execution of
cooperative work. First and foremost, we all have to have a shared understanding of what that is and that is the space that we’re in as we’re trying to achieve a shared understanding. But as of right now not all of us share the same views or exercise the same lens relative to a cooperative implementation.

*Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.* So we have PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) in the building, and our SAVE room teacher actually has been trained in conflict resolution as well as our guidance counselor at the time when we had her. And they had been working with groups going into classrooms and having discussions with them because we wanted to make sure that we continued to decrease our numbers of incidents in the classrooms as we have; I have a printout…we’ve decreased tremendously in terms of incidents, classroom fights, cafeteria fights from last year to this year. And part of it is attributed to the fact that we have more adults going in and talking with the students about, “What is expected from you as a young adult? What is it that you’re going to be expected to do as an adult? What is the process that you must go through? And “What are some of the things that you need to have in terms of self-control and holding yourself back and being able to talk rather than fight?” So, we’ve started this work; again, it’s all new, it’s all something fresh that we’re starting and we hope to move forward with that.

*ASRB Element TLS2: Students are engaged in cooperative learning that focuses on both social skills and academic outcomes.*

*Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.* Again, making an alignment with the Common Core and with the Teacher Effectiveness, one of the things that it pushes is that kids become more engaged with what’s going on in the classroom. And, how do we
bring real-life situations into what they’re expected to learn and make that connection? So, in that conversation, in that cooperative learning, we’re infusing the social skills needed so that they make a correlation about what transpires certain things. So, if we’re talking about war or different things that are happening, how do make that connection between, “What types of social skills do they need to deal with this situation at the time? How do we have similar situations now? And what do you think that you need to do as a person in order to be able to cope with this. So we’re starting now infusing it within our cooperative learning groups as well as afterschool programs that we have. And teachers talk about it during their sessions as well.

**Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher.** In the classrooms myself…I do a lot of cooperative learning with kids; I make sure they have activities that foster the strategy or skill that I’m teaching. And I always try to make sure that I always do something hands-on with them; or I break them into little groups so that they can work together and come back to share out with the rest of the groups about what they did.

**ASRB Element TLS3: Staff works cooperatively together and emphasizes the importance of cooperation.**

**Educator #3, Middle School B Teacher.** Yes, I think it’s been communicated to us that cooperation is important. I just don’t think that our teacher team has done a good job of showing that it’s important; of saying, “Look, this is the time we spend together and this was the result.” And so those teachers who didn’t buy into it aren’t going to buy into it because as teachers we think it’s a waste, and it we think it’s a waste of time, we’re not even going to risk it. And so I think someone has to show us that it’s useful, and once its utility is shown, then we’ll do it.
**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** I do think that the staff…they will help each other. But the working cooperatively that I guess I’m envisioning goes beyond just asking someone “How do you do this,” and the person just quickly gives you a quick response. I think that working collaboratively entails so much more that would be needed to change the school and for teachers to feel comfortable with each other in handling some of these problems. And I may not be doing justice in explaining that because many of the staff have been here a long time and they do help each other and they are cordial to each other. But I still find that teachers are still in their own little niche, and they’re so busy trying to do what is expected of them that the assistance that they can give another teacher is very limited. And definitely sometimes there is a gap in the kind of collaboration that we need to do to change the school, to change our practice. And this is not to say anything negative about teachers, it’s just that we are all working in a confined period of time and more and more demands are placed on us. And we are the ones that society is looking for to say well, “We are accountable.”

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** So we’re working through our common planning meetings and our team meetings on, “How do we share experiences?” as I mentioned earlier, and how do we work with one another in terms of, if I’m having a disruptive student in my class, why can’t I reach out to you as my colleague and say, “Can you take this student for a couple of minutes?” So if we cooperate with one another, (1) we’ll have less disruption in the class; (2) we’ll be able to bounce ideas from one another, and be able to move our kids forward. It’s a matter of sharing the experiences and the different ideas because not everyone thinks the same way. We just started getting
them to be able to talk about what do they want to see happening and how are we going to get there.

*Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher.* On Thursdays, we have a common prep time where we sit and discuss or organize to make sure everyone is one the same page. We also make sure that any data that we got back…we look at it together so that we see the strengths and the weaknesses among the grade as well as in every classroom.

*Educator #17, Elementary School G Principal.* Yes, definitely. Especially even coming from our principal—how she rewards just by…when we get into a reunion and she states everybody’s positives, and how we work together, and even for the students, we always give them treats and rewards. Even just by saying, “You’re doing such a great job.” Even making sure that at the end of the day, we said, “I love the way that you have worked and how far you’ve gotten him.” Right not during lunch, our group of teachers got together and we decided, “How are we going to involve the parents and talk to the students and just end the year with saying, “How much you’ve grown; what artifacts are we going to show them…look at the way you were writing in September and look at the way are writing now.” We always try to build the students’ self-esteem and each child grows in a different way and they have to know that they have the power to change and to keep growing.

**ASRB Element TLS4: Staff has the interpersonal skills necessary to engage in effective organizational functioning and the professional skills necessary for effective teaching.**

*Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.* I think interpersonal skills are extremely important in building relationships with students. We have various teachers
who...kids are at the school with them just because they want to be...they don’t have to be there for tutorials. And that’s because those teachers have, established some type of relationship with them by saying or reaching out to them, maybe by saying “You need some assistance with this,” or “Come meet me afterschool,” or just being their coach afterschool. So those barriers allow students to feel comfortable enough to just kind of interact with them on a level that doesn’t always have to deal with academics.

_Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher._ When you look at the staff—I’m not saying every single staff member—in general when you look at the staff, I think that they engage each other and they engage the students in a professional manner; where we as professionals are exhibiting the proper ways to act with colleagues and future people that you’re going to be dealing with. It’s more of the quality of the people that are in the building.

_Educator #9, Elementary School D Assistant Principal._ We have been using the teacher effectiveness model and really going into each teacher individually. So I think prior to the last two years, we had been more grouping teachers according to grade cohorts or early childhood/upper grades, and now it’s more individualized than we had prior been. And I think individualizing it will give us greater results.

_Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal._ So one of the things here at this professional learning community…the staff expressed concern about morale. And when the staff have low self-concepts of themselves and low self-concepts of the progress and the service that they’re affording students, there needs to be a lot of work around getting the community together, developing the professional standards, adhering that everyone is engaged, understanding expectations and moving that piece forward. I think that we have
started the conversation; whether or not each individual here in this school is actively engaged or actively interested…we’re not quite there as a school.

*Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.* Teachers first need to understand their constituent base that they serve—namely the students and parents. And some of our teachers lack a basic understanding of the needs and concerns of the local community. Although they may be deeply entrenched in the Department of Education’s expectations for academic success, it’s not necessarily coupled with an understanding of the local communities’ immediate needs. So we continue to work at educating teachers on the immediate needs that often hinder or inhibit academic or professional growth among students and even among themselves. So part of what we need to do as we move forward is educate staff relative to the community served and the needs that need to be met beyond those of the organization.

*Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.* So, again with the new initiatives that are coming out, we felt a need to build on what the teachers had already. With our network and coaches coming in, we’re starting to support teachers in order to get them to understand what is…build up their repertoire of skills and strategies in order to be able to deal with the necessary changes that are coming; in order to help improve instruction in the building; in order to help build relationships with students; in order to help build relationships among each other. So we’re just starting this as well.

**ASRB Element TLS5: The school provides the skill development needed by all members of the school community.**

*Educator #4, Elementary School B Teacher.* I think with socialization there needs to be more of children being able to express themselves verbally and appropriately
for all different settings. Also their life skills that they’ve learned through the Makers Club—of actually sewing and building things and electronics and all sorts of great stuff; so I think that’s giving kids also a look towards the future of something they may like the community to do.

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** Well, I think that each teacher, each administrator has strengths and they have weaknesses. And when you look at a teacher’s weakness and strength, I don’t think that we’re pairing teachers up with their strengths and with someone that has maybe that area of a weakness together—to work together. I don’t think staff development is sufficient to change practice. I think that you have to actually…it’s if a teacher is having difficulty with technology, you have to put another teacher in the classroom that is good with technology and during the practice of actually teaching and planning they see how technology can be incorporated; and that’s just one example. Right, so I think that changing adult learners’ practice requires a hands-on approach; just like students have different learning styles, I think teachers have different learning styles. And sitting at a professional development sometimes is not sufficient; it might be for some but for most it’s not.

**Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.** I think it’s similar to what I mentioned before, the part about getting the entire school community onboard in terms of business norms and social norms. Even simple things such as hygiene, proper hygiene, you know having community-based functions in the school explaining that societal norms have to be learned, started in the school and work outwards. And, I think something happens once you leave fifth grade or sixth grade and get to middle school, so hopefully
we can try to take what we’ve taught in the elementary school and push it into…beyond, that’s into the middle schools.

**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** We have enlisted the help of several departments inside the Department of Education who deal with the statistical data that will allow us to better understand the community we serve; understand its needs; understand where there is a level of duress, and where there is a level of accessibility. And what we hope to do in time is, by understanding a variety of statistics relative to things like homelessness, impoverishment, sickness and incarceration; we hope to better understand how we can serve our constituents.

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** So, again, we started workshops as well so that we can invite our parents in to take part in the workshops with our teachers and other staff members, in order to be able to show them…give them the actual skill; teach them how to get there. It’s not fully developed yet, it’s just starting for all of us. I say all of us because part of my administrative team is on that as well. How do we work together to be able to come together as a school community in order to move the agenda forward? So we’re just starting with that as well.

**ASRB Element TLS6: The school promotes a philosophy of lifelong learning.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** This is a personal thing for me, but also just the idea of…we have this whole mentality of college and career readiness, and so that’s constantly being infused in our children, that you’re going to prepare yourself for college. And I kind of took it a step further that even as an adult, I’m constantly learning. I want to go back to school myself to get my own law degree. And so them seeing my models of that to understand that it just doesn’t end once you leave high school or college
and you can pick up nuggets of wisdom all over the place. And so you need to have that mindset that you can learn at any interval; anytime in your life. So, we say that all the time and hopefully some of these things are sinking in to students…’cause you can talk and that doesn’t necessarily…they may not get it right now but it’ll resonate at some other point in their life.

*Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.* Well, I think that we always appreciated the fact that learning…our motto is “Learning is Forever,” so we know the importance of learning for ourselves and for our students. But the culture in which this school will lend itself to people being open to say “I am deficit in certain areas and I want to correct this area, and I want to do it in such a way that it will not impact my student and it will not impact me, it’s not there as yet. So, what I’m referring to is the culture that would promote teachers feeling comfortable in which they can learn and build their craft. I think that the culture for the pedagogy…increasing and learning and building on that, I don’t think that the culture is where it needs to be right now.

*Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.* You know what, it’s not just this school, I think. But it’s the system at whole. When I sit and plan a unit, and I see that we’re supposed to be teaching about different types of rocks; and I see igneous and metamorphous rocks, and you as a teacher wonder, well how is this going to impact…I obviously don’t remember these different types of rocks from when I learned it, so you have to almost change your philosophy. And it’s not that you’re teaching them the rocks, but you’re teaching the skills of classification, and teaching them the skills of reading and understanding and comprehending. So you always have to go back and explain what you’re teaching is not—to yourself—it you have to figure out…that’s not the most
important part. It’s the WAY you’re teaching it and the WAY they’re learning it that means things.

  *Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal.* So, one of the things about learning and having an appreciation for learning, I think, stems from individuals’ understanding who they are as an individual and how they relate to others, and then the bigger picture. And, I think that there have been opportunities within the school where we try to engage students, and then engage students as groups of students, and then have an impact on the larger society. For example, our students have been very proactive in raising funds or raising items for the students with the drama with Sandy Hook. Our students are going to be engaged with raising funds for the veterans. Our students have had experience with having intergenerational activities, playing board games in the senior citizens in the senior center across the street. However, I think that the staff needs to be more hands-on with helping students identify what their gift, what their strength, what their talent is, and gear their instruction a little bit more to that. For example, if a student has an interest in art, maybe the teacher can engage students in artistic kinds of explorations, and capitalize on improving their interests in school.

  *Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.* We do rally around success; we do understand that our role is to act as a vehicle to success; the concern is simply what the definition of success is. But what we do is consistently do everything within our power to promote the lives and wellbeing of the student body. That is collective and that is uniform and that is consistent.

  *Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.* Yes, I think that…that’s what we’re here for; it’s everything that we do. We’re always focused on pushing the children,
creating rigorous lessons and implementing them, pushing projects along, pushing plans along…it’s just a natural…it’s like breathing. That’s what we do. It’s constantly planting that seed of life-long learning. It’s all about the next assignment, and the next project, and even now, it’s warm…it’s hot outside. And the kids are like “Awww, why can’t we play. And I’m like…I let them know that school isn’t over yet and we’re going all the way to June 26th so get that pencil out, get that paper out, we’re still conceding. And they understand. It’s part of that philosophy of promoting life-long learning and just learning all the time.

Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal. The first thing was to create the attitude that everyone can learn, no matter where you came from…if you’re an ELL student, you’re special ed…the expectation is that everyone will be a life-long learner. So in order to get the kids to believe that the entire staff had to believe that. And when I say the entire staff, it went from my school aides all the way to my teachers, everyone on board. It needed to be encouraging on all aspects because quite often the school aides have the most interaction with the kids and I needed to make sure that they had that understanding that they’re pushing the kids to believe. You can learn; you can do this; keep going; and the teachers will continue that as well. So we just started making sure that this was a risk-free environment; it’s okay to make mistakes and we learn from our mistakes. So in the process of learning we all become life-long learners.

Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal. We have college and career day; we talk with the students about how to make sure that when they finish school, twelfth grade, that they are ready socially, emotionally, and of course academically to operate in
the 21st century. And I think we do a very good job with that; it’s not always about academics; it’s about social and emotional development.

Caring and Support (CS)

ASRB Element CS1: Students feel cared for and supported in the school.

Educator #1, Middle School A Principal. Well, I guess I use their own data from the Learning Environment Survey last year. We scored very, very high; I think about 86% of our students said that…it was in the eighties…that they felt that they felt really cared for at our building, and that’s because of the fact that even though we’re tough, they understand that there’s still that love aspect. And the reason we are tough is because we want them to be successful. And knowing that they can go to that person if they do need help and receive that, openly…I think that has created an opportunity for us…or for them to feel like we actually care about them.

Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher. I just think…it’s similar to what I was saying before…I just think that sometimes students feel like they’re constantly being targeted and the target is just punishment rather than pulling someone in and saying “What’s wrong? How can I actually help?” and setting up an actual plan rather than “Okay, I’m going to help you afterschool” or “We’re going to talk about it in Mr. X’s office.” But following through and staying consistent with it. Consistency; that seems to be the biggest thing.

Educator #4, Elementary School B Teacher. I think that our principal is very into making sure that the children are given incentives to do well; to respect themselves, to respect their community, their school building. She sets up a lot of different things. She also does it for classrooms, entire rooms, incentives to be the first ones to bring in a certain piece of paperwork or something gets a prize. We’ve a very tightknit staff, and I
think that we also try to make that happen for the students. And, it may not be 100% but I really think that that is something that it’s really got a good handle on.

**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** We believe that students feel that this is a welcoming, nurturing, familial environment. It is so because we make an effort to go beyond the basic expectations of classroom teaching and learning. We are proponents of whole child development and as such we believe that children recognize the school as a positive entity in their lives. And examples bear out time and again when children under great duress continue to show up every day who otherwise would not have.

**Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.** Well, like I said before…I think our school is very close knit, we’re like a family. We’re also small in size so it’s easy for us to get to know each other and know different aspects about the students, about the staff. And so we intermingle, we relate, we help each other with our problems. Students feel comfortable speaking to adults about issues that they have. I know a lot of them come to me and if it’s something I can’t handle or that I think that someone might be better with it, I’ll direct them in that direction. Students are very comfortable coming to us, and I know one proof of that is that every day we have a host of visitors; former students who drop by the building to just say hi; to check up on us to see how we’re doing. And I know think that happens everywhere. I know that we’re doing kids come back to visit but a lot of students. And two to three years after they graduate they come back, and that lets me know that there’s something strong here. There’s a bond here; we have a nurturing sense here and our students feel comfortable with us. And so that’s proof for me that we’re doing very well in that area.
Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal. Again it goes back to me stating that it was about bringing the nurturing back into this environment. Prior to me getting here, everything was really testing, testing. Coming in, I brought back in events for kids to have fun; we have the Storybook Character Parade; we had Christmas celebrations, holiday celebrations. So, how do we make sure that the kids understand that, “Yes, we do expect you to learn but we also want to take part in other venues with you; we want you to know that we care; we’re giving you these incentives, we’re giving you these celebrations in the classrooms just to let you know we care, we appreciate, and we know that you’re working hard and we want you to continue to do that.

Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher. The caring and support goes hand-in-hand with…as our principal said from the beginning, each child should be treated differently because they’re different students. He always said to us that they should be treated warmly with something positive. Always acknowledge that; don’t just call their parents for a negative reason; call them for positive reasons as well. We always try to encourage them to go to the next level; we talk to them constantly about getting to that next level. Before the test, we always have a rally and they know we’re trying to promote them so they get the threes and the fours. And throughout the time, we always give incentives so that we want to get them to that next level.

Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal. We do a really great job making sure when children come to the building, when they leave at the end of the day and at the end of their six-year experience, that they walk away feeling that I have been rewarded for all of the good things that I have done.
**ASRB Element CS2: Students experience many types of incentives, recognitions, and rewards.**

*Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.* So we do have some incentives, like an honor roll trip and they do get little rewards for reaching certain achievements like the 25 book club. But I think in the classrooms, even little things like doing a shout out at the end of each class—which I’m also guilty of…I started at the beginning of the year and sometimes it’s just crazy and I don’t do it. But the kids love that. Even stickers…they love getting stickers for doing their Do Now, and I think those little things need to be implemented across the school so that they have a reason to come to class. And it doesn’t have to be candy or money; just a sticker.

*Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.* I think that a lot of the times we forget as a school community that we have to enforce and reinforce the kids that are doing the right thing. Because the “Caught Being Good” system that I always went through as a kid, where I was getting those incentives because I always did the right thing are not necessarily being given because sometimes too much effort has to be put on the kids that are not doing the right things. So I think that we all need to focus in on those aspects; on these beautiful days we need to reward the kids that are doing the great job.

*Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.* Again, I have to flip back to the date when I was their age. The learning that I had and continue to have, I always get some…there’s a prize to it; sometimes it’s tangible; sometimes it’s not. But there’s a prize to that. Our kids don’t see that prize. And I’m not just talking about things that we can just go out and purchase because, let’s be honest, the things that I purchased last year, do I cherish a lot of those things today? No, because I was living like we all do to some
degree for the fad, whatever it was that was en vogue at that moment. But that doesn’t speak to those treasures that really you can accumulate in life that truly shows that there was something great that you got from doing X, Y, and Z. So therefore, we’re trying to put in place here systems that have things to do with what you learn and get by helping others, per se. For instance, school’s ending very shortly. In the Bronx, the number of students that have asthma is quite high; huge. While they’re here in my building, I do have some control over how a child is being taken care of. But what happens when they leave us on June 27th? So, I called in New York Health (Montefiore Hospital) and they gave training on what happens during an asthma attack and what they can do to alleviate that situation for every single grade. And the purpose of that was to show kids what they need to do if they see someone who is in a crisis situation. When a kid helps another kid in that, that’s the biggest prize anybody can ever achieve. That comes from the learning, and that’s bigger than any type of electronic game you can get. Yes, we will put in place those incentives that, you know…you get a pencil for this, you get this for that. Those tangible items; yes, this is a materialistic world. But I got to also bring those things that are going to build their self-esteem, their caring for each other, and for themselves. There’s no price tag on those types of incentives.

**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** We have incentives on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, and we do highlight students at the end of the fifth grade to say, “Here are the things that you have done well,” so that they feel good about themselves. Our teachers do a wonderful job at that as well. We highlight students for attendance; we highlight students just for being able to make peace with one another on a
daily basis. We talk about children just being caught being kind; acts of kindness throughout the day.

*Educator #17, Elementary School G Principal.* Yes, definitely. Especially even coming from our principal—how she rewards just by…when we get into a reunion and she states everybody’s positives, and how we work together, and even for the students, we always give them treats and rewards. Even just by saying, “You’re doing such a great job.” Even making sure that at the end of the day, we said, “I love the way that you have worked and how far you’ve gotten him.” Right not during lunch, our group of teachers got together and we decided, “How are we going to involve the parents and talk to the students and just end the year with saying, “How much you’ve grown; what artifacts are we going to show them…look at the way you were writing in September and look at the way are writing now.” We always try to build the students’ self-esteem and each child grows in a different way and they have to know that they have the power to change and to keep growing.

**ASRB Element CS3: Students feel cared for and appreciated in the school.**

*Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.* So, we do it in big ways and in small ways. One thing that I do…it’s not even feeling appreciated but making them feel that they’re a part. Every morning I talk to my students for about ten minutes before I bring them upstairs, and then I’ll have one of their colleagues come up and do our school motto. And you’ll see them, “Ooooooh, I want to do it.” So that’s one way we celebrate students. I’ll call students out…for instance yesterday, who has made a significant improvement; and I’m just so proud of them, so they’ll be highlighted or shined in front
of the whole class or school, or student of the month, which we have every month. So those kinds of things are the little incentives that kind of create that format.

Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher. I guess I would kind of go with the same thing as supported and appreciated, but I think they need to feel more like they are contributing positively to the school and they’re not just students that we come in to teach every day and yell at every day. And, it’s kind of the same thing. I just think that they need to feel like they’re positively contributing to the school.

Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher. That’s related a little bit to…just the climate that I think could be more positive and safe. I think that students hear messages about their teachers from peers from parents, from whoever, that our teachers are here to make sure you’re behaving, and here to make sure you’re are not having fun, whatever it is. I don’t think that students understand the fact we’re here to make them successful, and so I don’t think they understand that our job means that we care for them. And so, I think we can prove that over and over again until they finally believe it. But I don’t think it’s been done enough.

Educator #4, Elementary School B Teacher. I think that our principal is very into making sure that the children are given incentives to do well; to respect themselves, to respect their community, their school building. She sets up a lot of different things. She also does it for classrooms, entire rooms, incentives to be the first ones to bring in a certain piece of paperwork or something gets a prize. We’ve a very tightknit staff, and I think that we also try to make that happen for the students. And, it may not be 100% but I really think that that is something that it’s really got a good handle on.
Educator #11, Middle School E Principal. Well I think it’s…we celebrate our place in the community. We celebrate that with students. We’re very clear with students and families that this is their community school, it doesn’t belong to the staff; it belongs to the community. And, therefore, we appreciate the opportunity that we’re given and the tasks that we’re charged with relative to educating children, supporting their children, and again acting like a viable entity in the locale.

Educator #12, Middle School E Principal. We try to…I know I try to celebrate my kids. I let them know I care about them; I let them know that I love them. And I’m constantly encouraging them and letting them know that they’re doing a good job, as well as letting them know when they’re not. And it’s just part of the elements of…like, you can’t teach that. It’s just something that is. We show that concern, that love and it’s really strong in our building, I believe. And I just feel that students know that they’re cared for, that they’re appreciated. It’s from our rapport, from our conversations, just trying to find to keep pushing them. I let children know, “If I’m not in your face, if I’m not talking to you or reprimanding you about something, then that means I don’t care. So, it’s not just the praise…it’s everything. Always trying to shape the behavior that we want, and helping them get ready for the world and to learn, and focus, all those things. Not just praise only, but that comes as well. When we let them know, ”Wow, you did a great job; that’s fantastic.” Yesterday, the seventh graders were kind of active and lively; and I took them to the World Trade Center. And I was a little concerned because you know we had a couple of trips where some of the kids were a little rambunctious. But I sat with them, I talked with them, I told them that I believe in them, I told them that I know when we go to the World Trade Center that you’re not going to embarrass me; you’re not going to
embarrass yourself. Any why we’re going there…the importance of this visit; and they were so well behaved and today I let them know I was so proud of them. So I know they know they’re appreciated.

**ASRB Element CS4: Staff experiences many types of incentives, recognitions, and rewards.**

_Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher._ Yes, we have Teacher of the Month, and our principal will see something in our classroom that he’ll bring to the staff meeting—which is great. But sometimes I feel that administration is not in the classroom enough to see all those great things going on. And, I think that sometimes it more that “You’re not doing this” rather than “You are doing this.” And that’s not great.

_Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher._ While I feel like the school will lend itself to, like…how should I put this? [pause] I don’t see where teachers feel like they—on a whole in society and in the school as a whole—that they are supported when they do well and that they can put themselves out there to take risk and to just develop themselves personally and professionally; I don’t see that. I think that the staff in this climate that we’re in now where accountability rests solely on the shoulders of teachers as opposed to administrators, teachers, parents, and students; I think that teachers are really very guarded to put themselves out there because I don’t see them being hailed as this person did this, this person took risk and the end result is this, or this person tried it and it didn’t work but what can we learn from it.

_Educators #6 & #7, Elementary School C Teachers._ Well, sometimes we think that we, as a staff, we really work hard with the children. And sometimes we feel that our efforts go sort of unnoticed. And it doesn’t mean that the support that we…we do get
support but not the recognition at times. Just a simple thank you will really suffice. You
don’t have to take us to dinner or send us on a vacation, but it means a lot to us just for
administration…the supervisors to stop and say “Thank you and we know that actually
you guys are working really hard with the students to make better citizens for the future.”

**Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.** I think it’s…it also is simply…I
found a professional development that I wanted to go to, and I was allowed to go to. But,
I think unless…and going to these professional developments, it re-ignites the fire. I think
it needs to be done as often. In the hall, if you see someone doing well, you say, “You
know what? You deserve to go get a little bit more as opposed to just sending people that
don’t need the help.” You want to…as a staff, I think you should really consciously ignite
the fire and you have to keep on igniting, igniting, igniting. And that’s the role of the
administration to make sure that that fire continues to burn.

**Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal.** So, I had an inner conflict with
that because…do we kind of publicly acknowledge teachers when they do a good job.
Like the other day, we had a group of teachers participate afterschool for Move to
Improve, there’s an acknowledgement about that. But it’s not on merit pay or there’s not
an attempt for the school as an individual to encourage or entice teachers to do more than
what is needed outside of…there’s nothing extra that we can give teacher aside from
what the set perimeters are inside the Board of Ed.

**Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.** Yes, like I saw a little check there for
merit pay. We don’t have that in our system as of yet. You know, I think we’re getting
started with that where there’s recognition for our work and what we do. We get it all the
time, informally, we’re told, “Yes, you’re doing a great job; you’re doing what you’re
supposed to be doing; everything is going well. And we also…I also get it…the feedback, from my students, not just from the administration, my superiors. I think that they’ll be more forthcoming opportunities where they can highlight certain people and say, “Oh, you’re doing this or you’re doing that.” I know in years past we’ve had Teacher of the Year, and things like that. Perhaps that will return.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** Just getting started. Every day there are moments…you know, they say there are teachable moments; but there are also celebratory moments that should be acknowledged. And, it’s from everyone, not just in terms of teachers…I’m talking about from the custodial staff to my secretaries to every single staff stakeholder in this building who do things that go beyond the expectation. And they should be acknowledged in some form in some way. And you know what, it doesn’t have to be big; just saying, “I saw it, I loved it, and I thank you.” You’d be surprised how that resonates more to them than if I were going to buy some flowers; if I was to go out and buy breakfast for the staff; because that means that I really honed in and I saw. So, we’re doing it with our children. Now, every teacher is going to have slips in their pockets; when they see a child doing something, they’ll acknowledge it by giving kids a slip. I’m going to do that to my teachers; I’m going to do that to every single person in this building. By doing that can you imagine how we’re going to feel at the end of a week? And I want the kids to do that to each other; give recognition to your peers when they do something wonderful. That’s our starting point.

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** So I’ve started an attendance…for every teacher that is here 100% of the time, they get a certificate and a raffle ticket. At the end of the year we do a raffle and the winner gets an iPad. We also
have…I do gift cards. So any teacher that has X amount of tickets qualifies to be part of another raffle and they’ll get a Dunkin Donuts gift card or a Starbucks gift card just as an incentive to give them little motivations to be here. And my attendance has been one of the best among the schools.

**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** What has happened over the years, and especially for myself, I tended to focus on rewarding children and giving children the recognition. But then I noticed over the years if you reward the adults, the adults will tend to reward the children just as much. So when we have faculty conferences, I’ll give out little pens as incentives for the teachers that turned in something on time or teachers who did all 10 newsletters. Teachers who work together on teacher teams, let’s say for instance the G&T teachers will get together and they’ll do a newsletter, and I’ll reward them for that because it means that I don’t have to put the newsletter out for everyone. Just little, tiny things. And, it took a while before I realized we need to just say, “Thank you” sometimes to teachers, and it’s not about monetary rewards, but just little things on a daily basis to say “Thank you for that.” That goes a long way.

**ASRB Element CS5: The school has a climate of kindness and encouragement.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** Kindness…we’ll I’m the mean one; the principal’s always the bad guy [laugh]. I think kindness is instilled just by…in your approach to people. When people come to you, do they feel…is there a sense of fear or do you feel comfortable. And I think it goes back to the interpersonal relationships that you have with them. That kindness kind of comes through; where you see a willingness
to want to help me. Even if you’re not happy with what I’ve done, we can still sit down and you’re not going to want to beat me over the head with it. Specifically I can talk about Mr. X, who’s my guidance counselor. And his whole demeanor is kindness. Like, you see him…he doesn’t get swayed, he doesn’t get animated, he doesn’t get angry; he’s just always peaceful. And it’s that spirit that kind of attracts you to him. If no one else, this is one guy I can go to…this is one kind person. And it’s because of who he is.

*Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.* Same thing, kind of, as before. But again, just going back to the positives and seeing that someone is maybe not…even if it’s just a student not having a good day…pulling them out and talking about it. If a student has his head down, sometimes it’s better to say “Are you okay” rather than “Put your head up; what’s wrong with you?” So it’s the same thing.

*Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.* I believe that we could do more to incentivize some of our goals; more to teach the satisfaction of doing a great job. I think we could do more to encourage our students rather than put them down in classroom after classroom after classroom; those same students. And so, I think that in order for one of those students to decide they want to succeed, it has to be on them; they want to decide, ‘because otherwise I don’t see that motivator stepping in and saying, “You’re going to success, you’re going to do it, I know you’re going to do it.”’ I don’t see that happening consistently enough.

*Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.* Again, we take special, personal interest in our students. It is familial in nature; there are some students who lack consistent familial bonds outside the school and I am certain that they have found that
here in adults that they are deeply connected to, be they teachers or counselors. And that is a unique strength that keeps students engaged in this school community.

**ASRB Element CS6: Resources needed by students and staff are secured and distributed fairly in the school.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** I had some great models of leaders as a teacher. And, they always said “Once I give you everything that you need to be successful, and then I’m going to be able to hold you accountable for it. Because I can’t hold you accountable for it if I don’t provide the resources.” And that stuck with me. So, I say that that’s my mantra with my teachers; if you need any books, I’m going to get you the books. If you need time I’m going to make sure you have the time. Whatever it is that you need to help these students become successful, I’m going to make sure that you have it. They don’t have a want for anything. You could go around and call every teacher and say, “Has there ever been a time when you’ve needed or wanted something that you’ve been denied access to?” I guarantee you 100% that they will say no. Whether it is my student’s access to field trips, to people to come and talk, whatever it is that you say is going to help them I’m going to make it happen.

**Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.** I think we have a rare situation in this school with so many resources, and we can get almost anything we want to get. And that helps us to our job well and gives us no excuse not to do our jobs well. And so it relates back to the high standards I spoke about, that we expect our students to accomplish a lot because we expect our teachers to accomplish a lot. I think that it’s clearly distributed fairly and done well.
Educator #8, Elementary School D Assistant Principal. It’s a systematic approach, from what I’ve seen as an outsider. But I think that they’ve…you know…all the members of each grade are looked at as a whole, then give something to one member of a grade, they’re going to give it to every member of a grade; they’re not going to differentiate. That’s when it comes to core, I think. Sometimes I do feel to other things, such as special programs…then it needs to be a little bit more divided evenly. Like I know there are certain…we have within our school, all boys’ classes and all girls’ classes…and sometimes I feel that that’s favored in terms of the extracurricular programs as opposed to…just because you were put into a co-ed class doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t get the extra visitors, speakers, things like that.

Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal. Yes, I think that we’ve done very well here as a school because when I arrived to this school, the teachers didn’t have appropriate materials just for children to read. And that was one of the things that we focused on, resources. Making sure that resources were available; making sure that not only teachers but students and parents had access to resources. And resources not just being tangible items but availing the school, opening the school up to extend the school hours, not solely for academic intervention but for enrichment, which includes both parent and child. And that we’ve done with our partnership with New York Cares; in fact New York Cares will be here tonight for a day of fun. And prior to that partnership with New York Cares, the first summer that I was here in the building, we had developed a partnership with the public library in which we had literacy activities every Wednesday and parents were able to come and engage in literacy activities with their young child. Actually the parents asked me the other day, “Are you going to have that day at the
library?” Yes (laughs). And also…I just saw one of my students come to the door…some of our students have…we have an online learning that we’ve been promoting this year in math and reading. And some of our students have access to internet but not computers; computers break. So we’ve been loaning out computers to students so that they can have those resources. That’s one area that we’re moving in the right direction.

**Educator #16, Elementary G Principal.** Everyone receives resources in a fair and equitable way. Every child should have the same resources in one classroom, whether it’s a G&T (gifted and talented) class versus a dual language or a bilingual class. Every single child should have the same resources and every staff member should. So we try to make sure that every class has SmartBoards, tech equipment, and to distribute it in a fair way.

**High Expectations (HE)**

**ASRB Element HE1: Students believe that they can succeed.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** Well, I think that high expectations start from the teachers. And that’s done through what you expect for them to do. If you teach them in a way that’s belittling or is not up to where they can reach, then of course that show’s you have very low expectations. But if you are expecting them to do things that they’ve never done before, and you’re challenging them and saying that “You can do this and that I’m going to help you get there,” that shows the high expectations. And I see that happening in the majority of my classrooms. I will say, not all, but the majority of them, that they are stretching the children based on what they are asking them to complete and do. And then when kids feel that sense of high expectations because now they want to…but not say please, but they want to make their teacher proud because this person thinks enough of me that I can do this. And I think that feels for themselves their own sense of high expectations and I need to do this as well.
Educator #8, Elementary School B Teacher. I think it also...a lot comes from the environment that they’re in. So, just because it’s in the school...yes, you can do it, you can do it, you can do it, but also comes from the neighborhood. So we have to have them look beyond the four walls and see, “You know what...we can succeed no matter where we are in life...you can do whatever and it’s not always going to be...no every single child is going to be the doctor, the lawyer...but you know what...we know in life plumbers and construction people—the owners of the plumbing companies and the owners of the construction companies—they make a ton of money as well. So that’s good, let’s get them to believe that they can do...whatever niche they have, they can succeed in their niche.

Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal. Yes, and I take a lot of pride in that because now you can walk into any of my first grade classes and say to the children, “In a couple of weeks, we’re preparing for grade two; who can tell me what your reading level is and what does it have to be in grade two. And they can now articulate that. And for me that’s like gains...my second grade students can do that also. Next year we’ll work with kindergarten. But for kids to articulate...to know that the expectations are and, “You know Ms. X, I’m an “I” but I have two more levels to go,” and that’s huge.

Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher. My students know, when they first come in I talk with them...I have a song that I took...it’s a little rap song, and on Fridays and Mondays I put it on for them right in the mornings so they now that this is what we’re going to do. And they sing it; it’s basically telling them that they can succeed, and they can do what they have to do. In the mornings I always say, “I can do it,” and they repeat “I can do it.” At the end of the day, we always say, “I did it,” and then I always ask
them, “What did you do today to make yourself proud? I always tell them, the teachers that are hardest on you…if I’m on you 24/7, it’s because I really care. I told them, “So don’t get upset with me if I’m on your case all the time; I just want to make sure you get to the place where you need to be.” I tell the fifth graders that they’re going to junior high school and it’s a whole different world for them. Not only do I have to get them there academically, I have to get them there socially so that they know they have to be mature enough to handle what’s coming ahead of them.

Educator #16, Elementary School G Teacher. As soon as our students come into the building in pre-k, it is embedded in them and embedded in the teachers that there are just no excuses. We have to have high expectations for every child here, every child in the community. And we have to say from the onset, in pre-k, there are just no excuses. The children can do it, can succeed, and there’s nothing that stops us. I just know that in this community…it’s something that I tell the staff every single day, we have to have high expectations in this community. For instances, it’s graduation time and it’s one of my philosophies not to let our fifth graders wear cap and gown. An often times I get into a debate, “Oh, they should wear a cap and gown,” and I’ll have a parent or a staff member say, “But it may be the only time that they get to wear a cap and a gown,” and I say, “Not here, not in this school, not in this community.” I will make sure that you wear a pretty white dress and a nice little suit and we will aspire to make sure that they wear cap and gown in high school or in college. So if you walk away and say this may be the only time, that’s a low expectation. A high expectation is that you will definitely do it, but you’ll do it in high school. It’s kind of our vision and our mission, and that captures everything that we’re about. It won’t be the only time in a cap and gown.
**Educator #17, Elementary School B Teacher.** We’ve talked so much this year about how we’re trying to get them college ready. In my classroom, we’re working on an essay and they are so happy that…how the first kind of writing that they were doing, how they didn’t include resources. And I continue to remind them that, “Now you’re using resources; you’re supporting…you’re going out and doing research and you’re putting it all together,” and this is the same thing that they’re going to be doing in college; they’re already doing everything that they need to do right now. Just continue and move forward with this. We had college day, where different groups of teenagers came and they shared their colleges. And our kids were so excited they did research on the colleges they want to go to. And we researched careers and talk about the reasons why they want to become whatever they want to become, and whether the college that they want to go to has the major they need. Some of them want to be scientists so they know that they have to be good in math and science. So we researched what college has a focus on these areas and where you would want to go. Do you want stay close to home? Do you want to go away? What kind of independence did you want to have?

**ASRB Element HE2: Students experience little or no labeling (formally or informally) or tracking.**

**Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.** In our school, we actually do track our students based on their literacy scores in three classes: Highest readers, middle readers, and lowest readers. And as much as we don’t…we stay away from telling them which class they’re in, but it’s not a stretch for them to figure it out. They’re smarter than we give them credit for. And so they know which class they’re in and year after year, I see those lower level readers sort of begin to give up. And so they’re not motivated by that
classification; they’re really discouraged by it. And so I think that’s an issue I’ve brought up in meetings and we’ve talked a little about, but I don’t think we’re ready to scratch it yet.

**Educator #4, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think that the expectation is high but I don’t know if the expectation for each child is reachable. And I think that even though we expect it to be high, I don’t think we’re giving the kids their goals that are realistic for them to get through. Or even their short-term goals; I think we’re overwhelming some of them, especially ones who are the Special Eds or the ELLs. And I think the expectations for them are a little too much to be understood either by them too and reached.

**Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.** I think that that’s also a function of the school system, in general, where it’s all tracking; it’s all data; it’s all data-driven. And no one…unfortunately we don’t let kids just be kids anymore. We have to label them and to say, “Well, they’re high; they’re low; they’re tier 1; they’re tier 2” You’re not allowed to look at names when you score tests, but when you don’t look at names, you take away the personality of the kid. You just look at what they did on a test score. So, I think that…I don’t know if that’s indicative of this particular school building that we’re in, but I think that that’s a question as a whole where we as a society have to take a look at.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** It’s very funny. What the DOE did was they made sure that they put into place systems that speak about giving children, our special needs students, and the least restrictive environment. Wonderful. But that’s just the beginning. And this is a societal problem; we label people and we track them and we keep everybody in their little compartment. Not giving other kids the opportunity, or
giving us the opportunity of experiencing something from a different lens. So, with that in mind, it’s a long process and you take baby steps in it; I’m departmentalizing next year. I need my kids to go from this place to hear the sound from another voice, to this one to hear the sound from another voice; to know that learning is not just coming from one single lens, but there’s a lot of lens. And that’s what we’re starting; that’s our kickoff point to making sure that my kids experience a wealth of different sounds, thus reducing the business of them being categorized. They’re now going to be learning with other children. You know we talk about flexible groupings and programming; we can’t stop there. You’ll be surprised how children have a way of explaining something to another child that we as adults do not even think of. So why not capitalize on that? Come on now.

**ASRB Element HE4: Staff is rewarded for risk taking and excellence (e.g., merit pay).**

*Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.* Each month for my staff specifically I do Teacher of the Month. And it’s just to celebrate a particular staff member who has done something or who has just been a great part of our school community. And it allows them to be kind of highlighted and it makes them feel like “Okay, what I’m doing is valid.” I also allow staff members to take on leadership roles where they can get to share something they’ve done amazing with their peers. And that’s also a booster; this principal thinks enough of me that he wants me to facilitate this session about a performance task because he thought that what I did was great. So, those are some of the incentives that I provide to them—whether it is a shout out, whether it is a gift card, whether it is your picture on my wall, to let them know that we appreciate them. And also I treat my staff well; breakfast, coffee…it’s the small things that you just do to make people feel like
“Okay.” Teaching is a hard job and they don’t get their just rewards. So I try to provide them that.

**Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.** I think the staff, with a little bit of a new administration still, is almost fearful to take risks. Maybe it’s the leadership style…us not ever experiencing the leadership style, whatever it is I think that we sort of want to play it safe, make sure that we do what we need to do, and hopefully that’ll mean that the kids learn. And so I think there’s a little bit of paranoia even among staff members about, “Are we doing the right thing; are we doing the wrong thing; is this going to be okay or is it not okay?” So even though everything has been communicated very well, there are still…fear makes you think in weird ways. So I think there’s some fear that’s sort of clouding us and making us say, “I’m going to do it the easy way,” or not the easy way but “I’m going to do it the normal way that I know is going to be okay.” And any risk is just putting my neck out there unnecessarily.

**Educator #4, Elementary School B Teacher.** Well, that’s what I had taken that question as the merit pay; I don’t really think that the teachers…it’s kind of been like, you know, “Your name’s going to be in the paper, or you need to do this, you need to do that. I don’t think it’s very positive, and I think a little more positivity might go a long way, a little longer, a little further with the teachers than constantly be like, you know, this isn’t working. Just like the kids it’s got to be brought over with the staff.

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think that merit pay is really tricky because often times you get students that have experienced…are having challenges and you are expected to get those students and turn them around within a short period of the academic year. And if you’re going to base merit pay on that, I don’t think it’s fair. But
there is something else that needs to be done. So whether it’s merit pay in a different
fashion; not the way we’re accustomed to merit pay. Because the students sometimes that
you inherit, they come with a lot of deficits and gaps and you cannot fairly
expected…sometimes it works and you can do all you can to raise them to the next level.
But to squarely expect that teachers…the numbers, if a student gets a two or a three or
one, or whatever. That within that short time…the practice is now that teachers getting
merit pay for that it’s unfair. But they should be rewarded for what they do and the unit
of measurement needs to change.

*Educators #6 & #7, Elementary School C Teachers.* Yes, just as Ms. X said,
everything is based on “do this, do this, and do this.” Like I work with special needs; if
I’m taking risks, making sure that these kids have to learn to become life-long learners, I
may not be able to do this. Right there I’ll get in trouble with my supervisor. So, the due
dates and what you want your kids to really know don’t give you the flexibility to take
risks in whatever you’re doing.

*Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.* I think that’s a citywide thing;
there’s nothing…no agreement on merit pay and things like that. I’m not necessarily a
proponent of it anyway, completely; there are aspects of it that…a lot of discussion needs
to be involved with. But, again, that’s contractual issues, so in terms of rewarding risk
taking, it goes back to that other statement. I guess that it would be nice that if you see
something really great that there would be some sort of incentive involved…given.

*Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.* There are members of our staff
who think of taking risks as being something that you’re not supposed to do, that we want
you to stay in this safe zone; that means that everything is going to be cookie cutter, one-
size-fits-all. No. If I wasn’t a risk taker, I wouldn’t be sitting here right now having this conversation with you. Yes there are risks, but that have to be educationally sound. They are risks that you know where, kind of, sort of, it’s going to fall. It’s like estimation in mathematics. When you estimate, you know sort of what your total is going to be. I need our children to estimate elements in their lives, and our teachers to estimate elements in their lives. Not to go way out on a ledge, because that’s just too way over the extreme. But to push it a little; see what happens. It should be like an action research project. In that respect, you try something, you reflect, you evaluate it, if it was successful make it part of your daily practice. If it wasn’t, you find out where it went wrong but try it again. And you keep trying and you keep reflecting until you get what you’re aiming for.

**Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.** Yes, because that’s not available to us; the administrators are not able to do that right now; it’s not part of our contract, or you know that teachers can be given merit pay or whatever for their performance in the classroom…merit pay. So that’s what I meant by “It doesn’t exist.” We don’t have that right now.

**ASRB Element HE5: The school provides growth plans for staff and students with clear outcomes, regular reviews, and supportive feedback.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** Well for students specifically, they have conferences with their teachers. It happens at least four times a year. For some people it’s more regularly depending on children and where they are. That’s the time when children get an idea of where I am; this is what needs to happen; this is what I’m going to do; this is what my teacher’s going to do, and this is when we’re going to check back with each other to see where we are on this whole trajectory. The same thing
happens with teachers. I do observations; I provide them with feedback; I provide them
with resources once they get the feedback if they need some assistance in specific areas,
and then I’ll come back—or my assistant principal will come back—and “This is what
we talked about before; this is where you are still; or you’ve moved and this is where
we’re trying to get you to that. So, it’s a continuous cycle that happens throughout the
year.

**Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.** I guess just me personally…I’m a new,
first year teacher as you can tell from my level of craziness. But I feel that I don’t have
enough feedback on what I’m doing in the classroom, only because I’m not getting
observed as much. And even though being observed is very scary…right now it seems
more like a threat than support. So, I would want next year when we start off where, “I’m
in your classroom because I want to help you.”

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think that when administrators go
into classrooms they are looking for what’s not in place; they are looking for the feeling
that some teachers’ have—to catch. And so in this political climate I think that they are
covering themselves with regard to creating a paper trail, and not necessarily to aid or
help the teachers. And teachers realize that; they realize that the paper trail is not in a
supportive light but it’s a paper trail to say, well, okay, well we did tell this person to do
this x, y, and z, but I don’t see that the climate as we have it now is such that
administrators are going in and even co-teachers are going in—because we don’t have
that, we don’t have coaches. So, we have to rely squarely on administrators. And I don’t
see them entering to… most cases…put themselves out there so that you know that, listen
we are in this together and let’s move these kids. And we all say that’s the agenda but if
that is the agenda, the culture has to change. So that teachers and students know that they are here to be helped; they’re here to be moved. Now teachers…I don’t know if teachers have personal agendas that they discuss with administrators and say, “This is my goal; I need to get this done, will you help me with this. And this is my goal for the year.” I think that’s a good practice; I think that sometimes the idea is there but I think that with everything that comes down, that it is one of the first things that go. Because everybody is now focusing; this is the flow of the day, this is what I need to get through. I think that there’s some change that needs to happen on all levels. I haven’t discussed the parent level, but that’s a big part of the equation. But there are certainly things that need to be done, and one of the first things that need to be done is to the climate. I think that we are good in terms of a talent and being there for our students in terms of letting them know there is one…a least a caring adult that’s willing to help them through. But, I don’t think that the same is done for adult learners. And I think that to say, “Oh, well, you receive a paycheck; that is your job” is not sufficient. Because this is a job that is so time intensive, labor intensive, mentally intensive, and emotionally intensive. Now we have the greatest responsibility which is to mold a future generation of learners; lifetime learners; of people who will change this world. And if the teacher is the biggest factor in their lives then you must invest in your teachers.

**Educators #6 & #7, Elementary School C Teachers.** I believe that we’re getting started because everything is a process and it’s trial and error. So we try one thing, and that doesn’t work, so we move on to the next thing. So I think we’re not actually there yet; everything is a process.
**Educator #8, Elementary School D Teacher.** I think it’s…although the taboo issue would be having individual plans for all students, the theory because of that its extra work. In theory, I think it’s a good idea. Going back to the taking away the labeling of the kids…each kid has his own individual personality. To really sit and construct with the family, with the teachers, with all the providers, a plan for each particular kid. I mean that’s great; now that I have children…a child in the school system…only in kindergarten, I see it’s constant work for the kids; and just…they’re not going to all be the same. And, my wife was just…is a doctor and her entire life…she’s very bright…was study, study, study. Now, she’s getting nervous about my son. I see that every kid is different; every kid needs that individual plan. And, again, that would be more of a contractual issue on an individual teacher basis.

**Educator #12, Middle School E Principal.** Yes, that’s like all of our training, and getting acclimated in implementing the Common Core Standards, all the steps and the aspects, and the Teacher Effective, and all these new approaches we’re just now…we’ve been training since last year and all this year we’ve been immersed in it. And we’re becoming more and more competent and more and more masterful in these areas.

**ASRB Element HE6: An attitude of “can do” permeates the school.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** Well, I live it; and so I exude that. So when people tell me that we can’t do something, that’s not even a thought. So, I think that kind of permeates from the head down. And so that philosophy is instilled in my teachers, and they also say, “Well, this is what we’re going to do,” and it trickles down to the students when they say they can’t do something. You know, “This is what you’re going
to do.” So I think it’s all about the modeling of it, and then people seeing your own walk and how you kind of just go about your own life and this can be done.

**Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.** Yes, I don’t think that there’s much of an attitude around here of motivating yourself or intrinsic motivation. And that’s something I haven’t quite figured out—how to get students to understand. We can incentivize a whole bunch of things, but that’s only going to last until the incentive is over and do they go back to being motivated at, or what is it. So I think that our school has tried to teach students to motivate themselves, by showing those students, “Student of the Month”; those students who are motivated just because they’re doing it, but more can be done.

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think…that same thing that I was saying in terms of this is not a climate where people feel like they can take risks; I think that it’s not enough to do what you think is safe and there is something else that needs to be done. And so everyone will do what is expected of them as long as they know what is expected of them. But we need to go above and beyond that. It’s not just the expectation; it’s what you do even when no one else is looking. And that…the culture has to change so that teachers feel like “I’m going to put my all into this,” and there will be support, there will be recognition because we’re all human. It doesn’t always have to be monetarily, but it’s the same things that kids want; they want to know that they can take risks in trying to solve problems. And even if they don’t get it right, they’re moving in the right direction. And I think that that’s the same kind of climate teachers need as well. And I think once we get the climate down, I think we’re going to take off. And it’s not to say that all of this is not being done, but it’s not permeating in the school sufficiently.
That it sinks in; that people can speak freely and I’m taking a chance in speaking freely because I really want a change.

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** With the new expectations that are coming out now citywide, and before this Common Core business, students are being held to a higher standard. And quite often, teachers used to say, “Well, they’re having a hard time doing what we’ve already done; what makes you think that they’re going to be able to get to the next level and do their best at this stage without the extra support and resources.” And I told them, “You put it out there. Once you put it out there and you give them the opportunity to take a jab at it and take a chance, and tell them that they can do it, that you believe that they can do it, they will rise to the occasion, and it’s what’s been happening. Teachers have been putting out more rigorous tasks and expressing these high expectations in the students, and the kids are rising to the occasion, slowly but surely.

And it’s a process but we’ve just started that work.

**Opportunities for Meaningful Participation (OMP)**

**ASRB Element OMP1: Students are involved in programs that emphasize service to other students, school, and community.**

**Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher.** Something I think we need to work on a lot is…and it would be for, not even just for students inside the school but also in the outside community, finding a way that students can feel that they’re positively influencing the community and maybe changing things for the next generation. So even if it’s just a community service aspect, or communicating with other groups outside of just this neighborhood. For example, I’m doing a pen pal with students in Morocco with some of my students; they’re doing it through pictures…some of them really like to draw. And
they feel kind of empowered, but also just like, “Wow, that exists? What is it like?” And it opens a conversation to talk about other places.

*Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.* Very little has been done in that area; I don’t think our students have any notion of the fact that they could be a positive presence in their community. I think many of them have given into the fact that during their teenage years, they’re going to be terrorists to their community; and that’s sad. I don’t think that they’ve been exposed to enough opportunities to clean up the streets, to plant gardens, to whatever it is. I think that a lot of them truly don’t know about those things. And so we haven’t done nearly enough to make that happen.

*Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.* I think we have many programs in here that, for example, the Kids4Kids is a program that we recently did where we have mathematicians in the upper fourth and fifth grade tutoring second, third, and fourth grade students and helping them. It’s the students taking ownership of it. This program was initiated by a few fifth graders that wanted that to happen. They just didn’t want to go into a program where it’s just adults. And to the credit of our principal, she asked if I would supervise that, and I just facilitate it; the kids did the work, actually. Whatever the tutors did not understand, then I would tutor them. But they took the initiative. And so programs like that, I think are important to show students that they do have a voice and that what they do matters.

*Educators #6 & #7, Elementary School C Teachers.* I’ve been in this building for quite some time and I haven’t really noticed where…I don’t think it’s a big thing for students to go out into the communities, that’s not one of the things that we’re really pushed like that.
**Educator #9, Elementary School D Assistant Principal.** We have pockets of that; where children are involved in helping others; we have certain children who volunteer to tutor younger children; we have our fourth grade goes to the senior center several times a year especially at the holidays to work with our seniors and celebrate with them. But, as giving back to the community, we can certainly do more work in that area; that’s an area I don’t think we’ve maximized.

**Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal.** Yes, again we like to encourage a sense of self and greater community because each individual has an impact on society and even the youngest child can bring and offer. As a matter of fact, for Christmas, which is really controversial here this year, instead of collecting gifts for our children, we collected gifts and sent them to the students in Sandy Hook, which is a real hard concept for people to understand…that you don’t always have to be on the receiving end. That you can actually give. And our children were able to cope with that concept that they were giving, more so than the adults. But I think after we were received at the school and they were so appreciative of our offerings, the adults got it.

**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** We would like to partner with more community-based organizations that give our students opportunities to better serve the community. Unfortunately they are few, but we attempt to take advantage of partnerships with the local community center, local churches, the local community garden, and in a small way we see that community service is beneficial in instilling a sense of community consciousness in children. We would like to see it grow in a meaningful fashion and hope that the community, as time goes on, will be enriched with more opportunities for children.
**Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.** We have afterschool programs and we do have a civic club that does community-type projects. And so that’s getting started…it’s kind of new, just started this year. And then we also have some afterschool programs that are outside programs coming in, and they’re good but I think we could have more activities and clubs and programs for the kids to be involved in and maybe a different or more variety of things that would tap into some of the other interests.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** When I first started the school year and had to attend things…those functions that every school has like school-based leadership team (SLT), because I came from middle school…and it was a middle school that had its flaws but there were some things that we did quite well…I was startled by the fact that it was a group of adults—teachers and parents, UFT representative, administration, and so on…but there were no student voices. So, I said ultimately that, “Who are we doing this for?” and who better to speak about the effectiveness of the work that we are doing than our children. We look at their work when we evaluate we are successful or not; should we not also hear their voices? So then they became part of our SLT; and that has reshaped the way that that organization works completely. It is student-centered, and it lets them know…I have kids now that are asking “When is my turn?” Okay? That lets them know that they’re key, they’re stakeholders in this thing called a school. And it also lets them know if we are successful as a school, it is because of them. Not just the teaching that’s going on but them as students, as participants. They’re stakeholders now; they’re going to rise to the occasion. So therefore, they go to their classrooms, they go to their grades, and they have these meaningful conversations, and they bring their concerns to this body. It made a world of difference…a world of
difference if terms of letting them know that their voices are being heard and that they are stakeholders. They’re the ones that are now becoming the policymakers. And at the end of the day…I hate to say it but in many cases, some adults on the SLT listen more to each other than they do us. Let’s take ego out of this whole thing; let’s put it on them. If you want this school to be successful, they’re going to have to be instrumental in making this happen.

**Educator #16, Elementary School G Teacher.** We have third, fourth, and fifth grade community meetings once a week, and it’s about giving back to the community. We do six-week units. The third graders have to give back to the first graders; the fourth graders to the second graders; the fifth graders to pre-k; we do lots of book buddies, reading to them. We have a green committee which consists of parents, teachers, and students, and we go around the community and beautify the community. We plant flowers, and we try to keep it clean and safe. We have students who go out to another school from time to time and do some buddy reading and buddy learning. And we also have a pre-k teacher who has, over the years, adopted another school in Nicaragua. So every year, the pre-kindergarteners collect money and at the end of the year the teacher visits this little community in Nicaragua and they give back to them. And we just have a lot of cases like that throughout the school year; it’s almost so normal that I forget to think about it. We, of course, do the Penny Harvest, where we collect money and the student council will come up with three places or organizations to give it to. Students, parents, and staff members had a “pink day” here; everyone wears pink and they talk about breast cancer awareness, and we talk about this to the little ones, the
kindergarteners about, and “Make sure Mommy does her yearly checkup.” We have the Sloan Kettering Foundation come in and we give back to them.”

**Educator #17, Elementary School G Teacher.** Throughout the year, there are many different programs that the children are involved in. They have not just academics where we stay after school to build on their test taking skills, but they also have sports—basketball, running, and soccer. And the teachers spend a lot of time also building their self-esteem through these extracurricular activities. We just finished a wonderful presentation on dance, and how the glee club works so hard, and the chorus works so hard, and they just did a phenomenal job. So, in this school we have many different ways for the children to shine.
ASRB Element OMP2: Students are involved in school decision making, including governance and policy.

*Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher.* We briefly flirted with a student government; that really never came to fruition. And I think the purpose of that was to fulfill exactly that—that helps students be more invested in the way we do things. And for one reason or another it just never really came about. And so, I think something’s been done, the first step has been taken, and we understand that it could be a key lever for us to pull, but we haven’t quite pulled it yet.

*Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.* Well, the school as I know it…most classes do not have a class president or a vice president. But the 5th graders—the upper graders—they do have town hall meetings where they meet to discuss issues that concern them. So I think that that is a foot in the right direction.

*Educators #6 & #7, Elementary School C Teachers.* I really don’t know why that is but decision making for students…I really haven’t seen. Staff have been involved in certain decisions but the students…I haven’t really seen that.

*Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.* We have a student government; the student government does not meet as regularly as we would like; they are strongest at the eighth grade terminal level; and will make some decisions around graduation and things of that nature. They are not as deeply involved in decision making or…for lack of a better term, school politics; but we seek opportunities and venues to study models and structures that can afford students a bigger voice in the decision-making processes of this school.
**Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher.** I know in years past, we’ve had a student council. This year we haven’t had one but in years past we had the student council and sometimes they were involved with…they may come up with an idea of certain things they want to have added to the school’s policies or how we may do things. And so, I think that we need to get back to that because we don’t have a venue for that right now. And I think that’s kind of powerful because it gives students buy-in, it gives students a feeling of ownership; so I think that’s something that would be beneficial for us to include again. Either through student council or some other type of committee that could be formulated where the students can have voice and input into decisions and setting policies.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** So that speaks to having them be part of that organization. And we’ve set systems where they now have that chance and they can speak to their classmates, they can speak to…we have monthly assemblies where these members of this constituency talk to their grade, and they tell them, “Okay, these are the things that are on the table. Tell us what you want.” And they’ve gotten into the process and you know what’s so funny…and this happened quite by accident, I didn’t see it happen but it has…you’re teaching math through this; you’re teaching about government through this; so there’s your social studies curriculum. It’s amazing how you’re killing to birds with one stone, because they’re writing surveys. A person checks off this, a person checks off that, and then they have to tabulate it, and they’re putting it into a mathematical equation. We constantly talk about how we have to make math real world and real world applications…that happened quite by accident. I didn’t even know it, but it worked to our advantage.
**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** Yes, we’re just getting started. Our children are smart enough and bright enough to be in a meeting and talk about whether or not this reading program would be best for us, and it’s something that I know I have to do next year. We have student government, but they talk about how we’re going to collect money and who we’re going to give it to. But when you talk about real, shared decision making, do we have students involved in it? So it’s an elementary school; in high school it’s mandated for them to sit on a school leadership team, but we have to be a little more creative and say we should invite our students to the SLT once every other month. They need to be part of that process. So getting started; the thought is there and the process will take effect this September.

**ASRB Element OMP3: Staff are involved in school decision making, including governance and policy.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** I took the weight off...of being the full lead...off my shoulders to a degree. I’ve created a cabinet. Every Thursday we meet for about an hour and a half to two hours, and we deal with anything from data analysis to decisions about structures we’re going to be putting in place; to hiring; and my team is comprised of myself, the assistant principal, a math teacher, a science teacher, my data specialist, the parent coordinator, the guidance counselor, and the SGA [student government association] president. So all of us come together and we talk about things that are going to impact the school. And yes, at the end of the day I make the final decision, but I have not made a decision that was against the general majority of the cabinet.
**Educator #4, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think administration has a lot of good vision for this school, and wants us to go good places. But I don’t think it’s always a collaborative discussion among the staff. And, I think that if there was some more collaboration, that it might be accepted more. But when you have…you know, people want…I don’t know, they have their vision; but if they let us in a little bit more I think it would be more workable.

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** Yes, well we do have the SLT committee; I can’t speak of it as such because I’m not a part of it right now. But there’s the SLT committee; there are other initiatives where there’s track and field with Ms. X; or the programs that I have done with test sophistication or in terms of the Kids4Kids program. So there are programs in the school where teachers can take some initiative to begin. But I think there’s room for more involvement and also decision making of the staff instead of after the fact, this is a crisis let’s deal with it. We need to be a little more proactive.

**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** Although we would like to see greater involvement in policy and decision making, staff is clear that the impetus behind teaching and learning takes an inordinate amount of time, energy, and effort, which leaves very little room for decision making processes. So we seek to create venues where we can embed these decision making processes in routines around pedagogy and curriculum, and we continue to work at that.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** It’s very funny because we’re right at that time of the school year where I need them to become more involved in terms of what’s happening for next year. So, it starts off with that meeting called the
consultation. It’s very interesting because in schools, theoretically speaking, there’s always this division between that which is known as administration and that which is known as teachers. So, you break down the barriers, you say, “Okay, I have to now start thinking about reorganization of the school, and looking at tablets and things of that nature. First of all, I don’t want to be the sole decision maker in any of this because if it all falls apart, I am not going to be the one holding that one. I need for all of us…so therefore, that SLT became a decision-making group that has bearings upon what my school looks like. We are now looking at matters pertaining to budget; we’re looking at the whole infrastructure and all the levels that have bearings upon what this school looks like and sounds like and tastes like, and the decision making. So therefore we are now at the point…which is completely different to what used to be in place here…where everyone feels like they are now decision makers. And it has…I’m now able to sleep a little better at night because I don’t have to…yes, I still take it home…but not to the extent that I was dragging this huge dinosaur for months and months and months. We always…I have to make the analogy of, when I was a teacher; I only became a good teacher when I gave up control. I use the same analogy here. That was the problem with the school to begin with; there was too much [noise]. Give it up and have faith, and give that leap of faith to those people out there. If you do that, you’ll be surprised at how they come…how they will meet the challenge. You’ll be surprised.

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** Well one of the things was trying to establish…the school went under a change, a change of administration. A new person coming on board was really hard for them to establish. So it’s basically really get to…me as a leader, looking at the systems that were already in place and trying not to change too
much. And not moving forward as we approach the end of the year, we will begin to start building on what has to happen and how do we—every member of the community—contribute to the decision making of this school. And, it’s going to start with our school leadership team making those decisions so we can push policy forward.

**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** We have lots of groups and subgroups, teacher teams. And aside our SLT, we have groups of teachers who will come together with the assistant principal, principal, and others, and just talk about, “How do we rewrite the mission and vision statements? How do we choose curriculum for next year? How do we get all stakeholders involved in something as simple as conducting Green Day? It’s just not something that I do; I make sure that we have school aides sit on the team to be part of the decision making for the books that we order. We have a school aide that picks children up from the bus and she knows every child by name. She can tell you some of the reading levels they’re on, so if we’re talking about buying nonfiction books, there are a whole lot of children that get on the bus every day and all they talk about are whales, so I think we should buy more books about whales because that’s all they talk about. Decision making is a process where we make sure that every single stakeholder in this constituency is involved with this school, from having a parade around Pink Day to doing something more comprehensive as deciding on a curriculum for next year. It’s just common place here.

**ASRB Element OMP4: Staff is engaged in both job-specific and organization-wide responsibilities.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** It speaks to again empowering people to make valuable contributions to the school. We have content area and grade level team
meetings, and we have leaders of those teams who facilitate the conversations, the
dialogue. And I think it’s extremely important for them because it gives them a voice, to
be able to share, but also to build their own leadership skills as well. So it’s embedded
within their job; a lot of responsibilities… you’re not going only going to be a teacher,
but to a degree you’re going to be a leader when you’re in the building. And those
specific structures allow those kinds of things to happen.

Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher. Yes, just like I just said in regards
to teachers are involved, I think that the staff—it’s generally the same people so that’s
why I said just getting started because I think that this theory of 20% of the people doing
80% of the work needs to stop because we all have a stake in it. And sometimes just
making teachers…letting them know that we have faith in them because sometimes you
learn not necessarily from the success but from the failures and we’ve had our share of
failures. So I think there’s a big lesson that we can gain in moving our students forward
from the past failures could turn into the future gains. If we have the time, if we sit down,
if our voices are heard in terms of what works and doesn’t work.

Educator #11, Middle School E Principal. Although staff is conscious and
observant of their particular licensure and the expectations around that, we have yet to
implicate a sense of larger responsibility with respect to the school community-at-large.
We feel that, many of us, still function in isolation relative to pedagogical and curricular
impetus that we’re here for. So what we would like to do is seek venues where staff can
seek greater involvement, have a larger voice, and we will continue to examine models
that will promote that.
**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** Yes, we’re just getting started. Establishing teacher leaders and grade leaders kind of helped with the work that has to be done because teachers are no longer feeling compelled to just, ”Oh I’m just focusing on teaching my class,” Now with these positions, teachers are saying, “Ok, so what do we have to do as a grade? How can we come together to push the agenda forward?”

**ASRB Element OMP5: Everyone in the school community (students, parents, staff) is viewed as resources rather than problems, objects, or clients.**

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** I’ll have to take my superintendent’s statement when she said: “We are a customer service business. At the end of the day, we serve at the will of our constituency—which is our parents and students. So we don’t view them as clients, per se, but we want to make sure that we’re providing them with the best services that we can. And we utilize resources to make sure we do that. So we connect with parents to provide us with other resources to help, then by all means we do just that. Whether it be them planning events for us, doing outreach, calling other parents to get them to come to the meetings, providing us with resources whether it be paper, or “In my job, we have all these equipment, these things that we don’t use…can I drop it off at the school?” [Parent]; “By all means!” [Principal] “I just want to come sit and watch my child” [Parent], but that’s not going to help the teacher much [laugh]. So there’s various things that parents can do to let them know that we accept any of this assistance they’re going to provide, and actually welcome it.

**Educator #4, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think everybody in the building is a resource. I think that most staff members use that. We go to out of classroom teachers, we go to specialists, and we go to the cluster teachers, even the administrators. I think
that the majority of the staff does support each other and help each other all the way around.

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think the most undervalued resources are the parents, actually. I see very few parents that are playing a part except for when it’s a crisis and everybody rallies. But I think that parents need to become more involved working with teachers. There needs to be greater collaboration between teachers and teachers, teachers and parents, and partnerships between teachers and students. And I see this as a community effort and not just a school effort. And I wouldn’t even mind the time, the money certainly, of teachers building partnerships with parents and students and the community on certain small projects at first so we can see some success and then kind of just getting bigger. One of the things I would love is to have students understand the need for college and getting them at this stage involved with taking them…we only have one program where we took them to Manhattan College. But that was to watch a basketball game. But these students need to know the bigger picture that what they do today will impact their future. We need the teachers taking them…and the parents, not just relying on the teachers. But the parents and the teachers in forming this partnership to expanding them, opening them up, taking them places; taking them to the various colleges; letting them see what are the requirements there. Even a day on a college campus; there are so many things that need to be turned around.

**Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal.** I think that everyone is valued; everyone has something to offer. We have had parents who come to the school to volunteer, they go on field trips with children; teachers volunteer to help create our learning environment so it’s more effective; our upper grade students volunteer in classes
during lunch time to offer students help with reading. Actually, we had a whole math program in January in preparation for the State test and a group of students who were very proficient in math tutored other students who had little challenges; that’s really important. In both reading and math we had a group who did this after school. So it’s important that each member is valued and what they can offer.

**Educator #11, Middle School E Principal.** Again, perceptions around what viable resources are as opposed to problems or clients, is the biggest inhibitor that keeps us from viewing all aspects of the community as resources. But, as we work together and we see problems or see students or staff or parents in a more positive light, in a more involved light, we seek to change perceptions around those aforementioned titles.

**Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal.** It’s an old-school mentality, where…and it’s sort of based on a caste system if you will, where you put everyone in their various place and you never thought of them as being contributors to a bigger pull. That they had those skills that you yourself did not have or do not have that could add more texture that could add more complexity, which could make a more complete picture, and to invite…to give opportunity where those voices can be heard. So, we’re just at the beginning of that piece. First I had to get to know the people. Then I had to put aside all my preconceived notions about them. And, in that you also learn some things about yourself; things that are good about yourself and something’s that are not so great, but you still have to learn them, alright? Then once you have gotten to that point when you are at least more receptive, then I have monthly meetings with my staff. I haven’t had to speak at any of my monthly meetings for the past three months. Why? Because I give that to those voices out there. They know exactly what needs to be discussed. I have just
now decided to use those talents within the building. But this is just the beginning. You know, unfortunately, when you take on a school, you are told by a number of individuals, “Well, you can use this person in this capacity, this person is great in this capacity…and like a fool you listen. As opposed to coming in with a complete clean slate and making those decisions based upon the performance of the players. So I listened, and whatever was told was completely inaccurate. And it was based upon a myriad of other stuff that is just so complicated and so convoluted it’s not even worth mentioning. So, okay, I said enough with listening, from others. Now I need to listen from my own, and then the decisions become easier…not easier, but they became clearer to me.

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** Right, so another thing…one of the other aspects of that we needed to look at was, “What do the students come with? Aside from barriers, students come with a lot of ideas within themselves, and how to we allow them to participate in our conversations in building what we need to move forward? So, one of the things we started was a student council and starting to see, “What ideas do they have about what needs to happen in the building? What needs to happen in terms of instruction, and in terms of what they would like to see so that they can take part in and want to come to school on a daily basis?” And we’ve just started that.

**ASRB Element OMP6: The school climate emphasizes “doing what really matters” and risk taking.**

**Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.** So I wanted to create a “worry-free zone” where students have the opportunity to participate and to want to take chances and just to respond. You know, a lot of times many of the students who respond are the ones who knew the answers and teachers quite often called on those students because
they know they knew the answers. It was now about creating multiple entry points for everyone. So giving them the opportunity to build on one another, in order to take the opportunity to participate. It could have created better self-esteem in some kids; I had a student who, in the fifth grade, she didn’t speak. She didn’t speak the entire year. And as we developed this program, she has come out of her shell and she participates. Even if she gets the answers wrong, the kids in her class encourage her. And that’s what I want to see throughout the entire building, and throughout all of my classes.

*The following questions are from the book, “Resiliency in Schools: Making It Happen for Students and Educators (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 87)*

*How will you know when you have succeeded (in increasing bonds, setting and consistently enforcing expectations, teaching life skills, providing all students with caring and support, providing all students with high expectations, or providing all students with opportunities for meaningful participation)? What will success look like, feel like, and sound like?*

**Educator #1, Middle School A Principal.** I think it would look—I guess in the ideal world for me—it would be a school where everyone is self-driven, to a degree. And everybody’s working collaboratively, but at the end of the day it’s the internal motivation that drives students to do well; professionals to go above and beyond; and the leader to have the vision and the audacity to have very bold goals for the school. So the school would be run in that everybody would be extremely accountable in their part, but also if they’re all working off of this drive. It seems kind of abstract but I think it can be seen. The idea that…you can tell if someone is very driven, and if that drive is consistently
throughout, you can see the kids working hard. No one has to prompt or prod them; they’re just going to do it naturally. And that teacher…you don’t have to look at the lesson plans and say, “Oh you need to add all this,” because they thought about everything; they went above and beyond. And there’s that leader leading by example and providing supports and resources. So that’s what I think it will look like in my head.

_Educator #2, Middle School A Teacher._ I think it would start definitely in the beginning of the year teaching with very consistent expectations and even if it takes three days of practicing how to line up and walk up the stairs. But also how to speak with one another, and that would be in every single classroom and having those conversations from the beginning and framing them in terms of “We’re doing this not to make you walk, sit, and talk a certain way, but to make sure that you are respecting one another, respecting yourselves, and giving yourselves the best possible education. Because it’s for them; it’s not for us, it’s for them. And I would like to see more just positive…making sure everyone takes time of their day to say one thing positive about someone in their class, or working on the way students talk to one another. The way we resolve conflicts, and that seems difficult, but I think we need to have those real conversations and actual…we need to sit down with it and say, “Hey, if this happens, then let’s roll play this scenario. How are you going to react to that so that they know exactly what they need to do and we do as well?”

_Educator #3, Middle School A Teacher._ Wow. I think resiliency is so hard to teach because you need to encounter difficult situations in order for you to be resilience. And nobody likes adversity; nobody. And so I think it looks like a group of calm, assertive leaders; teachers, principals who model day after day, and have to make a
conscious effort day after day to show, “I really have to get this done; it’s not going to be easy, but I need to do it because you guys matter to me.” And it’s constantly showing students that, showing teachers; just to model that resiliency otherwise everyone’s just going on with their lives and nobody knows some people are struggling with. And so I think it takes a lot of honesty and transparency between staff members, between staff and students, to show that “I’m working really hard for you guys, and you’re really working very hard for me.”

**Educator #4, Elementary School B Teacher.** I think it will be everybody working together all the time. Lot more positivity, all the time; I think more on a daily basis. For the most part I think everybody’s happy to be here, but I think if there were more positive-ness, I guess, I don’t know if that’s the word, but among everybody and everybody worked a little bit closer together that it could really work. It would be measured by student progress, absolutely. Less incidences all the way around…the building’s pretty clean, but all the way around…I just think that if everybody worked together and they were working towards the same goals and individual goals for students that are reachable…everyone’s going to make progress. And, with progress, you’re going to make further gains.

**Educator #5, Elementary School B Teacher.** Well, it will feel like teachers meeting with parents even before kids are a part of this school. It would sound like teachers helping parents and parents helping teachers; where we see parents walking around the school and we see parents playing a big part in their kids’ education—reading to them, having the as a sort of really…a resource, where they know they can come in and get the training they need on a consistent basis. It will be teachers collaborating
inside of the classroom where we have co-teachers. We’ll have teachers with various strengths working together; we’ll have teachers working across classroom with other teachers in other schools, whether by conferencing via technology. And I’m not the strongest with technology; I am learning. But I know it’s a necessity. And across different countries; and I know this is being done in other schools. We’ll have kids that are clear on what they want to be and we are honest with ourselves in terms of if a child says college is not there for them, that we have programs that will help them to kind of think about what the alternative might be. We’ll have collaborations with…there are mental health facilities in the building, where they come in at a certain time to speak to the students and speak to parents. We’ll have conversations—open. And, it’s not just one teacher trying to educate 25, 30, 37 students. It is a team of teachers that come together around the table with…and I’m not talking just about the at-risk students, but everybody; every student that there is a table of teachers around the table and we discuss where that student is at and what we can each do collectively and individually to move that student. And teachers are not feeling so overwhelmed that, “Oh, I am working by myself; I have to get this. And even if I stay until nine o’clock, there’s still not enough. We’ll have administrators that are in the classroom also teaching students and teachers; and working with teachers to move their students. We’ll have various programs that are going on in various fields. I see a buzzing school where parents are definitely involved, different organizations, and a team of teachers and parents that sit around the table to discuss the future of each of our students and what might be the optimal goal for the students, what they’re struggling with. I even see health professionals being a part of that. It’s just like if someone has cancer, not one doctor can do it but a team of doctors. Well we will become
that team of doctors to say this is what we need to do for that individual child. Not just the child at-risk; but for each child. And I see teachers in an environment where they feel safe, and I see students in an environment where they definitely feel safe to come here and to know that, “Listen, I’m not alone. I don’t care what’s happening.” Our students seem to have this environmental stress, and I know that’s what it is because they can’t retain. You know when you get old, you forget things? Well, even our students are forgetting even multiplication facts and they can’t retain it. And I think it’s caused from environmental stress. And you know when you get old and you have old brains. So, they have these old people brains. And so in order to alleviate some of that environmental stress, we have to think about how we are going to combat it as a team, and not just as one person. And, if this person needs assistance with their diet, this person needs assistance with handling emotional issues, this person needs a buddy teacher that will walk them through where they need it. I can knock on Ms. X’s door anytime and I have that relationship; or if it’s not Ms. X, then I know that this is the other teacher—the other adult that’s in here for us. So, it’s going to take a lot of work, but I think it’s doable. If we do it collaboratively, if we stop with the blame game, if we honestly look at the problem and are free to express ourselves like I’m doing with you. It’s a lot; it’s so much that I cannot even begin to tell you all that is in my head and in my heart right now.

**Educator #8, Elementary School D Assistant Principal.** I think my hard data will be student achievement with scores. I also think it will be student attendance—students tend to want to go where they’re happy. So I think an increase in attendance and maintenance of high attendance, maintaining a high attendance level, and also teacher attendance and teacher turnover. All of those things are indicators of are you doing a
good job, as well as just the culture. When people come into the building—I think it’s hard sometimes when you’re in the forest to see the trees—but when we do have visitors to the building it’s a frequent comment that it’s a very happy place to be; it’s a very positive environment. So our visitors always acknowledge that. I think success looks, feels, and sounds like—it’s happy; it’s a good energy; it’s a positive energy. I think it’s an energy that motivates; it’s children that want to do it, can do it, and are anxious—not anxious in a negative way—they’re motivated to want to participate, and that’s for adults as well.

_Educator #10, Elementary School B Principal._ I think that children would be proud of their work and make strives and efforts to do better.

_Educator #11, Middle School E Principal._ We will know when we achieve that when each child is examined as an individual and individual needs and concerns that encompass academics, social and emotional growth, and familial support; when those are achieved with a level of efficacy and mastery, we will feel that we have been successful in those venues. Until then, we continue to strive as we seek clarity and success.

_Educator #12, Middle School E Teacher._ Well, it would involve jumping in there…pulling up your sleeves and doing whatever it takes. That’s who we are; we’re highly resilient. Our school—we’ve been through a lot; we’ve been through redesign; our name has changed. I’ve been here through a lot of it as one of the teaching staff, and just that commitment to wanting to provide all that we can for our students and make this a community school so that they can get whatever they need right here. We want to promote this, and to put the work in and do the work. I can say that we have that and will continue to have that, because that’s what this community needs. A school that provides
all the needs that our students need; to be able to learn and be prepared for college later on, and just productive members of society. How do you measure it? How do you measure dedication? Because it’s a form of dedication; it’s people that are willing to do the work, willing to come together. And it takes leadership that says it’s, then I have to make sure that I have a handful of people that have this vision and when I don’t whatever needs to be done to weed that out to keep that consensus; a core of people who have that same vision, who want to put that effort to make that happen. So just keeping that alive, keeping like-minds...people that have the same goals and the same hopes...the key is to have like-minds together on the same team.

Educator #13, Elementary School C Principal. One that meets the needs of each child every single day. I don’t know what that need will be, but we can meet that demand. One that meets the demand of every parent coming into our building. I don’t know what they’re going to walk in asking for, but we’ll be able to meet that need. One where I know that my administrative team can go into any classroom and put down that tablet that they go into there for the purposes of evaluation, and to get in there and roll up their sleeves, and get busy with the instruction. Then I know that I’ve got a resilient school. One where I do not have to worry about a QR (quality review) because our practices are so on point, every single day, that it’s just another day at the beach. Then I know that I got a resilient school. One where I can go to a meeting and not worry about, “Oh God, who’s going to call and tell me this, that, and the other.” Because everyone here is so finely tuned to the needs of the school that they can carry on, and make sound and wise decisions without my being here. For me not to feel guilty if I get the flu, then I’ve created a resilient school. That’s what it looks like. It will be measured by the level of
success; Charlotte Danielson will prove that. Our scores will go up. And not just scores, but the target populations—those children who are not succeeding for a length of time that now show growth. Then, I’ve created a resilient school.

*Educator #14, Elementary School F Principal.* That’s a great question. I want to create a school where I helped contribute to many life-long learners. Where students come every day to learn and participate in what’s going to mold their future. Meaning how is it that teachers are allowing the students to take part in their learning process? How is it that the students are building these conversations in order to gain knowledge and pull from one another and help each other grow? So it would sound like a school where you go into any classroom and there’s accountable talk amongst the students. Where you go into any grade-level meeting, and you see teachers looking at the data and seeing what is it that they need to do in order to reach their students. It will look as a school where the parents are involved in every classroom, in our cafeterias, in order to help join the support of things that have to get done. How will I measure it? Well, we’ll see where we are now…take images and collect the data right now, and continue to do that, do small benchmarks every couple of months to see where do we stand? Where were we at; what is the baseline that we did, in terms of students and in terms of teachers. So, I can see my baseline was that my teachers did not plan together; now my teachers are meeting collaboratively and they’re planning together. So we’ll chart this on some type of Excel or something; just show growth and the work will speak for itself. They’ll be able to see what our teachers’ plans look like at the beginning and what do they look like now? You’ll see a more uniform sense in terms of teacher planning. You will look at a workshop when it started at the beginning and you will look at a workshop now in terms
of parent participation, and you’ll see a much greater increase. You’ll look at our assemblies where we’ve invited parents and we used to have 10 people coming to having an auditorium of almost 150, 200 parents full. So you will see the kids having conversations among themselves, and you will hear the language that they’re using, and they’re saying “I’m building on what my principal said.” That’s the type of stuff that you see where it wasn’t there at the beginning and now.

**Educator #15, Elementary School F Teacher.** It would feel really good because you got them to where they need to be. I remember last year everyone did well, except for one young lady. They must have been really attentive to what I was doing in the classroom. I was really proud that the majority of them, well except for one, graduated and went on. And so I felt good about that; I did something that made a difference.

**Educator #16, Elementary School G Principal.** I think it looks like…the tone of the building is calm. It’s calm but you see lots of people talking and engaged in conversation. You should see people having little conversations in the hallway; teachers informally stopping and talking. You should see the assistant principals or the principal out and about in the classrooms, talking; or in the hallways talking to students. You see adults talking to students, but in a calm way and tone. I think that’s kind of the feeling. You see order, you see organization, and you see children who are happy first and foremost. It looks like a place where…it’s almost like an oasis so to speak, where you can have problems and issues but it’s a place where you can say, “I want to be there, run in there every day.” And a parent or child should say, “I want to be there.” Early in the morning, you should see children kissing Mom bye, and rushing off to class. At the end of the day, you should see a kid excited saying, “Here’s what happened today.” As far as
resilience, you should be able to see teacher teams coming together and having good strong debates in a respectful way. You should see adults really pressing one another saying, “Tell me what you’re really thinking; prove it.” My measure is how happy are the students? My measure is, at the end of the year did we accomplish what we set out to do. The measure is...yes, we want to see good test scores, and we want to see movement from one level to the next, and you get that in a lot of places, but at the end of the day, do you see children happy? Here’s the measure: I had one of my students come here yesterday; I had her in kindergarten and first grade. And she said, “Remember you had us back-to-back, two years?” And I said, “Yes, I looped with your class.” And the measure is having her sit in here in this office yesterday talking with staff members about her wanting to be a social worker or a psychologist. And having four or five staff members bring her in and talk to her about her next steps, and she said, “I was a happy kid, I was happy at school; I ran into the door, I was happy being here. I wasn’t the brightest; I didn’t have the best test scores; but I had somebody pushing me, urging me, and kept me in a safe place, and made sure that I can sit here today and say that I am a third year college student. I’m going to graduate next year, and I can come back to my teacher, who is now a principal, and say, “What do I do next?” Safe, happy, but coming back for the encouragement.

**Educator #17, Elementary School G Teacher.** As soon as you walk in, you get a sense of...that you’re home. That everyone in here knows what is expected of them, not just the teachers and the children. And everyone is working towards the same goal. Everyone knows that we’re here for the students—to see them succeed; to see them graduate college. That would be measured, not just by test scores, but also by talking to
the children; seeing their work, seeing their artifacts, seeing how they walked in, seeing how they stand up; seeing how a fifth grade teacher knows a first grader or a fourth grader—someone who’s not in their class. Just seeing the interaction between the children and the staff, and the staff together as well.

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