



Characteristics of Positive Outlier Schools:

Illuminating the Strengths of American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Latino/a, and Students Experiencing Poverty

A PRACTITIONER'S VIEW

Moving beyond a singular focus on academic performance, the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE), with the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation, released a seminal study—Characteristics of Positive Outlier Schools: Illuminating the Strengths of American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty. Notably, the study analyzes seven measures of performance across 2,100 plus schools in Washington State with the goal of identifying true outliers in terms of systemic performance and improvement:

- Attendance
- Progress for English learners
- English-language arts performance
- Mathematics performance
- Readiness for high school
- High school course rigor (obtaining college credits)
- Graduation rates

The findings suggest that schools must prioritize the development of an “equity culture,” which is defined by Fullan and Malloy (2019) as “one that centers the voices and experiences of those most underserved in all decisions.” Schools in the study – all in different places on their equity journey—made significant continuous improvement in student academic and nonacademic outcomes by replacing historical narratives with structures and supports to illuminate the strengths of AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty.

Outlier schools in this study exhibit three common conditions, in addition to characteristics unique to the elementary and secondary levels.

Common Conditions

| Catalyst for Change | Study Report-Page 28 |
|--|----------------------|
| The greater school community commits to change | |
| Challenge of status quo and historical assumptions embedded in school system | |
| Focus on building strong foundational systems of support | |
| Integration of family and community as learning partners | |



| Readiness and Willingness to Benefit | Study Report Page 29 |
|---|----------------------|
| Consideration of racial equity or lack of racial equity in system | |
| Intentional focus on building a strong foundation of trust among all stakeholders | |
| Development of strong culture based on the premise <i>"all our students are all our students"</i> | |

| Sustainability | Study Report Page 30 |
|--|----------------------|
| Daily established practices (i.e., mindset, structures and actions) that eliminate inequities | |
| Schools partner with local and regional programs to support teacher efficacy and accomplish desired school goals | |
| Define what program/practice success looks like before the fact | |
| School staff hold each other accountable | |

Characteristics of All Outlier Schools

| Equitable and Stable Access to High-Quality Teachers and Principals | Study Report Page 30 |
|---|----------------------|
| Teachers average 15 years teaching experience | |
| High utilization of paraprofessionals to connect with community and families (school provides training to support instructional practices). | |
| All students have access to high-quality administrators | |

| Clear Student Learning Objectives | Study Report Page 31 |
|--|----------------------|
| Diverse strategies in place to inform students | |
| Students encouraged to elaborate on personal goals and outcomes | |
| Use of learning goals and outcomes through rubrics and formative assessments | |
| Structured, collaborative data reviews with staff regarding each student's individual progress | |

| Culture of Lifelong Learning Among School Staff | Study Report Page 31 |
|---|----------------------|
| Professional development includes pedagogy and time sensitive, locally relevant topics | |
| Professional development includes formal training and job-embedded teacher-led training | |

| Frequent School Collaboration | Study Report Page 32 |
|--|----------------------|
| Regular collaboration, includes all staff | |
| Teams collaborate formally across content areas and grade levels | |
| Teachers and staff initiate informal collaboration | |



Data Driven Decisions

Study Report Page 32

Multiple data sources inform decisions

Unified systems created to collect data

Administrators use data to create braided funding models

Sourcing Funds

Study Report Page 33

Proactive (innovative) approach to source funds to implement initiatives, including federal, state, local levy monies and private foundation funding

Characteristics of Elementary Schools

Learning Supports for Kindergarten Readiness

Study Report-Page 34

Implement innovative programs to jump-start kindergarten readiness for classroom instruction, to include for example:

- 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) after school programs
- Summer School for incoming kindergarteners led by qualified teachers (includes transportation and meals)

Family First Attitude

Study Report-Page 35

Culture of family first and school as family

Trust and commitment between school and family

Decisions based on what's best for the family and student

School actively promotes the concept of parents leading family council meetings

Creating a Non-Passive Student-Centered Classroom

Study Report-Page 35

Promote and develop student-centered classrooms

Commit to challenge the status quo, encourage innovation

Prioritize the need to build teachers' capacity to promote student ideas

Going Beyond an "At Grade Level" Mentality

Study Report-Page 36

Identify and remove barriers to learning, the sooner the better

Instruction is fluid and informed by data

All students can meet standard is a common theme

Students work at their cognitive level not their grade level



Inclusion

Study Report-Page 37

Professional development helps staff identify implicit and explicit biases facilitating a more open understanding of student potential

Administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents attend professional development to gain substantial SPED knowledge and skills that promote accessibility to content and improving students' learning

Social Emotional Support for Elementary Teachers

Study Report-Page 38

Supports are in place for both teachers and students

Social Emotional Learning is emphasized, and embedded, throughout the school day

Adults model mindfulness and wellness

Administrators encourage self-care by staff members

Teachers view school counselors as trusted friends and resources for support

Social Emotional Support for Elementary Students

Study Report-Page 38

Social Emotional Learning promotes safe, joyful and engaging classrooms

Students receive explicit lessons on Social Emotional Learning

Counseling and health staff that share same ethnicity as students

Characteristics of Secondary Schools

Leading with Equity

Study Report-Page 39

Administrators seek out inequitable policies and practices to effect change

Administrators support students taking leadership roles to educate teachers and peers about race

Staff gives priority to reducing gaps in cultural knowledge of the communities they serve

Framework to Support Equitable Outcomes

Study Report-Page 40

Implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)

Focus on 9th graders to ensure they aren't allowed to fail

Earning a Diploma and Career/College Readiness

Study Report-Page 40

Strong focus on high school and beyond

College mindset helps students earn college credit during high school

Post-secondary pathways, including trades and non-traditional tertiary endeavors, improve awareness that opportunities do exist for all



Social Emotional Learning Supports

Study Report-Page 41

Trusting relationships between students and staff, family-like culture

School community provides social emotional support to all especially during difficult times

Clear and High Expectations

Study Report-Page 41

Clear, consistent expectations exist

The reasons behind student disengagement are understood by staff

Recommendations

The outlier schools engage in best practices that include: (1) equitable access to high-quality teachers and principals for all students; (2) clear and visible learning objectives for all students; (3) a culture of lifelong learning among school staff; (4) continuous collaboration between staff at all levels; and (5) data-driven decisions within schools. The successful outlier teacher's tool-box follows:

Checklist for Instructional Strategies with Students at the Heart

- ✓ Provide ways for gifted non-English speaking students to work at their highest cognitive level.
- ✓ Identify students' current content knowledge within their own epistemology and worldview.
- ✓ Expand expectations of student responses to include their social context and community.
- ✓ Self-reflect on language used that could be considered deficit-based and change it to asset-based.
- ✓ Create flexible assignments so students can incorporate their passions.
- ✓ Be a listener and learner of students' races, ethnicities, and cultures and incorporate into content.
- ✓ Grow student leaders and demonstrate the value of their feedback by taking action.
- ✓ Develop a deeper understanding of sovereign Tribal Nations who are advocating for American Indian/Alaska Native students and how that fits into the goal of equity.

Illuminating the strengths of diverse students requires systemic change to dismantle unproductive systems put in place when the U.S. public school system began. Replacing unproductive systems with systems that promote a student-centered, equity-based culture requires that school leaders, teachers and staff be aware that communities and families have essential knowledge needed to inform school improvements. This effort also requires capacity building of district and school leaders and educators including building parent-school relationships and educator capacity for collaborating with families and communities.