

SAFETY WITH DIGNITY



Alternatives to the Over-Policing of Schools



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The report editors were Jennifer Carnig, Susan Fisher, Donna Lieberman and Michael Cummings.

Michael J. Balzano designed the report.

Research assistance was provided by Juliana Moran, Tulani Foy, Sarah Solomon, Diego Iniguez-Lopez and Chauncey Smith.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

S*afety with Dignity: Alternatives to the Over-Policing of Schools* examines six New York City public schools that are successfully maintaining safety while simultaneously promoting a nurturing school environment. This report explores the methods employed by these schools, including the tangible and intangible qualities that have contributed to their success. It concludes with practical recommendations to help the New York City Department of Education (DOE)—and urban school districts across the country—replicate their successful approaches to discipline and security.

These six schools share a number of significant characteristics. Like schools that employ some of the most draconian discipline policies, these schools all serve at-risk student populations. None currently has metal detectors, although some did at one time. Yet each provides a safe and successful learning environment, as evidenced by significantly higher than average attendance, student stability and graduation rates, as well as a dramatically lower than average incidence of crime and school suspensions.

While every school requires a school safety policy unique to its specific characteristics and educational philosophy, the core principles of safe and nurturing learning environment are universal:

- dignity and respect for all members of the school community;
- authority and responsibility for discipline residing with educators rather than police personnel;
- strong and compassionate leadership;
- clear lines of authority and open lines of communication between administrators, teachers, police personnel and students; and
- unambiguous, fair rules and disciplinary procedures.

To maintain safety in a nurturing learning environment, school districts must reexamine their use of zero tolerance policies; ensure educator control over school discipline; and foster com-

munication and understanding of school disciplinary policies among all stakeholders in the community, including students, educators, parents and School Safety Agents (SSAs).

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate that there are viable, real-world alternatives to metal detectors, zero tolerance policies, and police street tactics that simultaneously promote educational success and student safety.

This report makes the following recommendations to the DOE:

1) Discourage the installation of metal detectors.

High schools in New York City are currently under tremendous pressure to install or retain metal detectors. Many teachers and principals, however, doubt the efficacy of scanners in reducing violence in schools; they also believe metal detectors create a penal environment that interferes with teaching and learning. Metal detectors and the related routine of body scans and bag searches increase student/police interactions, expand police involvement in enforcement of school rules, and create flashpoints for confrontation. Schools can create safe learning environments without metal detectors.

Should a school choose to install metal detectors, it should do so only for a finite period after a careful review of alternatives, and only with the approval of the local parent council.

2) Restore discipline responsibilities to educators.

The vast majority of incidents in which SSAs become involved are disciplinary matters that should be handled by educators under the supervision of the school principal. To the extent SSAs are present in schools, New York City must adopt a clear governance structure—ideally in the form of a memorandum of understanding—that outlines the roles and responsibilities of Police Department and DOE personnel, and recognizes the principal as the primary authority. The current system fails to define the respective responsibilities of educators and SSAs in school discipline matters and results in grave confusion for police personnel, educators, parents and children alike.

3) Assign fewer School Safety Agents to patrol schools.

The responsibilities of SSAs should be limited to serious violations of the penal law.

The number of police personnel patrolling New York City's schools should, therefore, be reduced significantly. This should generate financial savings that can be applied to expand guidance, social work, and other support services to respond to disciplinary issues in ways that strengthen the educational environment and avoid excessive reliance on law enforcement tactics and the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

4) Mandate alternatives to harsh discipline.

Schools throughout the United States have begun to implement positive alternatives to harsh discipline policies, and have succeeded in reducing suspensions and dropouts. The DOE should mandate trainings for all school staff in restorative justice practices—a conflict resolution method that focuses on providing opportunities for all sides of a dispute to define the harms caused by an act and devise remedies—and implement such programs in all city schools.

5) Ensure students' voices in school rules.

Allowing students an authentic voice in a participatory school democracy leads to greater student ownership over school rules, a greater sense of belonging to the school community, and a greater willingness to comply with the code of conduct. The DOE should develop protocols for schools to ensure that students are given a meaningful voice in school rules.

6) Institute transparency and accountability in school safety practices.

Oversight of police practices in the schools is essential to both the safety and well-being of students, and to the maintenance of the public's trust and confidence in the Police Department and the DOE. The DOE and NYPD must release to the public raw data that will allow New Yorkers to determine the effectiveness of school safety practices. Moreover, SSAs, who have the authority to stop, search and arrest students, should be subject to the same oversight as police officers. The city should expand the jurisdiction of the Civilian Complaint Review Board to accept complaints of abuse by SSAs. Moreover, the DOE should allocate 1 percent of its current school safety budget to fund the expansion of the jurisdiction of the Civilian Complaint Review Board.

7) Provide support services for students' nonacademic needs.

Medical, mental health and social services connect students to the larger school community and address students' non-academic challenges before they become a basis for behavioral problems in the classroom.

The DOE should seek ways to foster connections between individual schools and medical and social services providers to offer students medical and mental health care and resources to access public assistance, housing, child care, counseling and other social services.

INTRODUCTION I.

For tens of thousands of New York City public school students, school days begin in line waiting to walk through metal detectors. Sometimes they must stand outside in the rain until it is their turn to remove their belt buckles and shoes, open their backpacks and quite possibly submit to a pat down, body scan or search. Once inside, if they are caught in the hallway after the bell rings because they were talking to a teacher, using the bathroom or just dawdling on the way to class, they can end up with a suspension, in handcuffs or even arrested.

But a few New York City schools have recognized that another way exists. We call them “Successful Schools,” and among them are the six profiled in this report: Progress High School for Professional Careers (Brooklyn), Urban Assembly for Careers in Sports (Bronx), Humanities Preparatory Academy (Manhattan), Urban Academy and Vanguard High School (both located in the Julia Richman Education Complex in Manhattan), and Lehman High School (Bronx).

These schools have rejected the twin pillars of school discipline in New York City: zero tolerance and police tactics. Instead, they approach school discipline as an educational matter, where principles of adolescent development guide policy and police methods and tactics do not dominate but are viewed only as a last resort.

IMPACT OF HARSH DISCIPLINE POLICIES

Recently, a number of reports have criticized school discipline policies in New York City.¹ They have documented the impact of zero tolerance policies on school educational environments, the excesses of policing operations in the schools, and the penalties students have paid as a result of those operations.

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECT

Following the high profile school shootings at Columbine and elsewhere in the 1990s, school administrators faced immense pressure to step up security measures and “get tough”

on problem students. In response, districts nationwide began to adopt “zero tolerance” discipline policies. Wedged between ever-shrinking budgets and a climate of fear, counseling, mental health treatment, conflict resolution and intervention strategies gave way to this harsh new discipline philosophy. Between 79 and 94 percent of American public schools now have zero tolerance policies.²

As a disciplinary approach, zero tolerance stands for the proposition that certain behaviors trigger severe, mandatory responses, almost always beginning with removal of the child from the classroom. Zero tolerance schools impose suspensions, expulsions and arrests for infractions across the spectrum—from tardiness, cursing or writing on the desk to drug use and weapons possession.

Though zero tolerance resonates politically, several studies have shown it is ineffective as a corrective measure, and has a demoralizing effect on the student body.³ Students who are suspended tend to be suspended repeatedly, until they either drop out or are pushed out of school by overwhelmed and under-resourced educators. In fact, the best demographic indicator of a student who will face suspension or expulsion is not the behavior of the student, but whether the student has been suspended before.⁴ Moreover, zero tolerance tends to be implemented in a discriminatory manner: it is enforced more often against male students, students of color, students with disabilities and those from low-income households.⁵

Finally, zero tolerance is a major contributor to the School to Prison Pipeline, a devastating phenomenon whereby students are kicked out of school and find their way onto the streets and ultimately into the juvenile justice system. Children who are removed from the learning environment *for even a few days* are more likely to drop out, use drugs, face emotional challenges, become involved with the juvenile justice system and develop criminal records as adults.⁶

While the New York City Department of Education (DOE) does not promulgate an official zero tolerance discipline model for all schools, a zero tolerance climate has nonetheless proliferated. Zero tolerance in practice, if not in name, takes root in

the lowest performing schools that serve some of the city’s most disadvantaged students, where teachers are under pressure to raise test scores, where the police are charged with enforcing school rules, and where permanent metal detectors and a significant police presence create a physical and symbolic barrier to a nurturing learning environment.

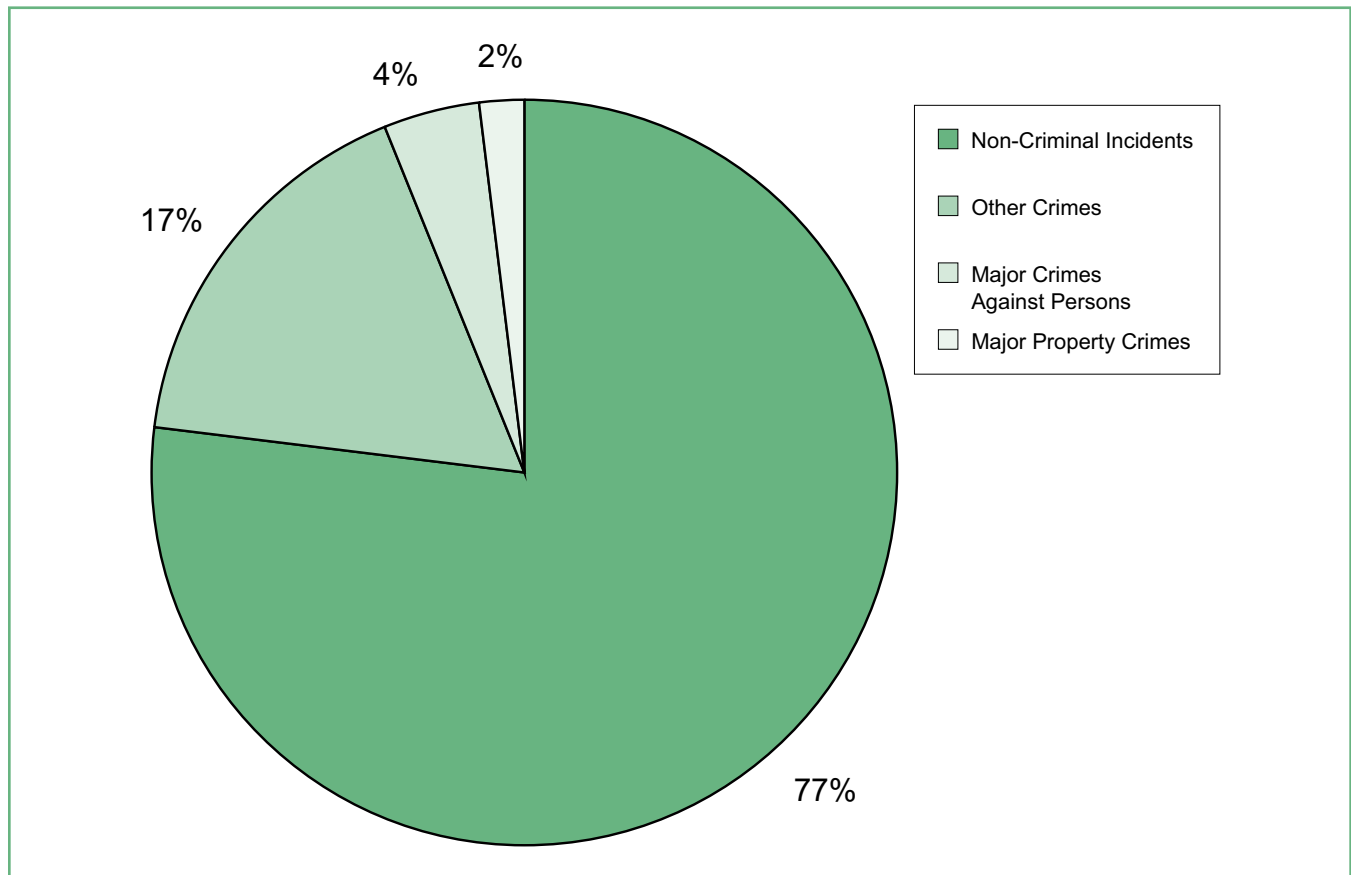
In New York City, unsurprisingly, *de facto* zero tolerance is manifest primarily in high schools with permanent metal detectors⁷—the number of which has grown dramatically in the past several years under the Bloomberg administration—schools which are attended by the city’s most vulnerable children. Compared to citywide averages, the students at these schools are disproportionately working class, black and Latino, and according to the Police Department’s own statistics, they are more often confronted by police personnel in school for “non-criminal” incidents than their peers citywide.⁸ Their schools tend to be large and overcrowded and have unusually high suspension and drop-out rates⁹ (See **Figure 1**, below).

OVER-POLICING OF SCHOOLS AND ITS EFFECTS

A large police presence in schools can damage the credibility and effectiveness of pedagogical employees, alienate students, and interfere with normal adolescent development.¹⁰ The NYPD, with more than 5,200 police personnel patrolling New York City schools, has played a central role in the unacknowledged growth of zero tolerance, and its use of street tactics to enforce even minor noncriminal violations has fed countless students into the School to Prison Pipeline. As already-marginalized students begin to perceive their schools as extensions of the prison system, their chances for success diminish.

Since 1998, when Mayor Rudolph Giuliani transferred school security responsibilities to the NYPD—amidst promises that its uniformed School Safety Agents (SSAs) would not arrest students¹¹—the handling of minor disciplinary issues in the city’s most disadvantaged schools has resulted in heated confrontations between children and police personnel, sometimes followed by

Figure 1. Police Involvement in Metal Detector Schools by Type of Incident



Source: NYC Department of Education, Annual School Report, 2004-2005.

arrests, court summonses and even jail time.¹² Students, some as young as five, have been handcuffed, taken to jail, and ordered to appear in court for infractions such as tardiness, talking back, truancy, refusing to show identification and refusing to turn over cell phones.¹³

Moreover, since the transfer of school safety from the Board of Education to the NYPD, the number of police personnel in the schools has increased by 62 percent, from 3,200 to 5,200.¹⁴ The dramatic increase in the number of police personnel occurred despite a decrease in the student population by approximately 70,000 during that same period. In effect, Mayor Michael Bloomberg brought into the schools former Mayor Giuliani’s “broken windows” policing policy—cracking down heavily on minor offenses and punishing offenders to the fullest extent of the law, with a disproportionate impact on low-income black and Latino neighborhoods (See *Figure 2*, below).

The relationship between the NYPD and the DOE in matters

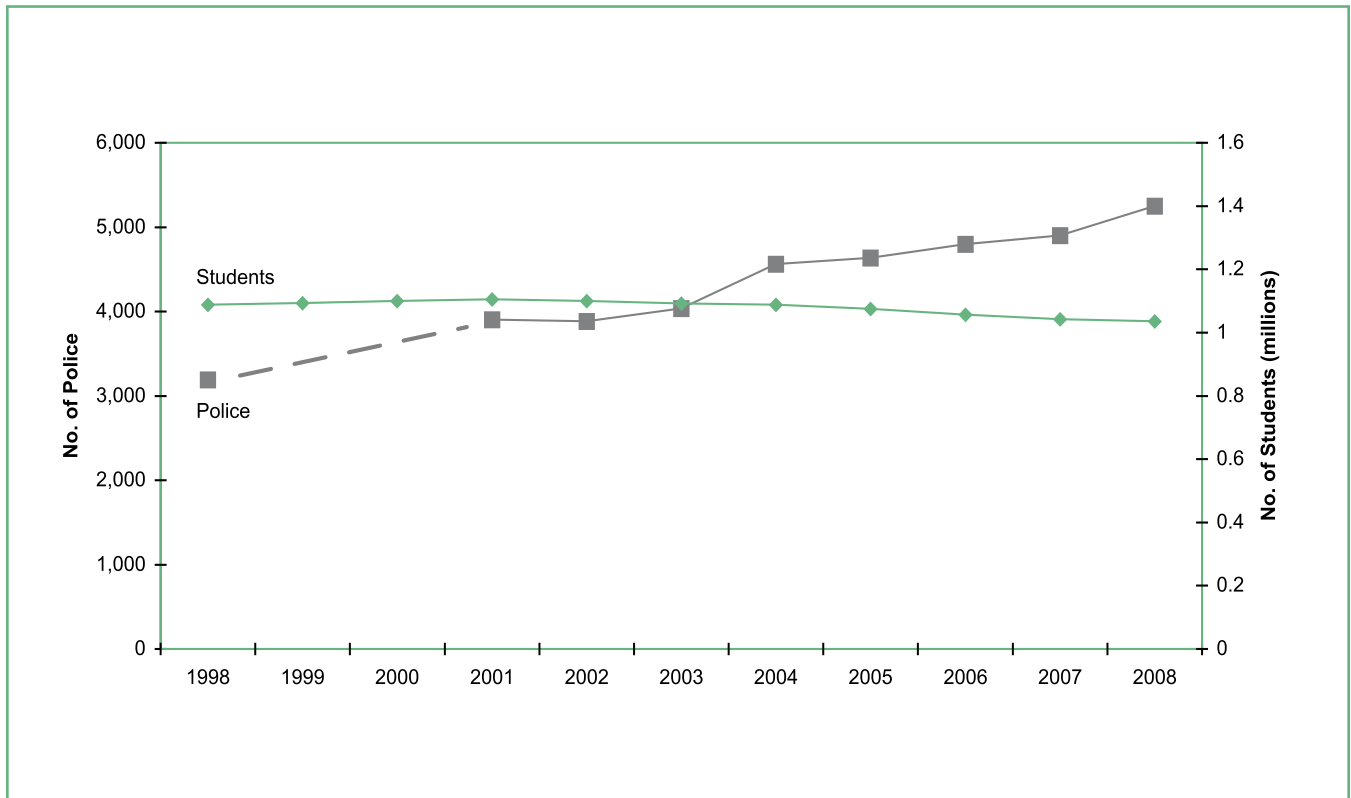
of school safety was initially defined in a 1998 memorandum of understanding, a legal agreement that expired in 2002 and has not been renewed.¹⁵ With no clear written policy dictating the relationship of SSAs to the larger school community, agent interactions with students now vary widely.

In many schools—generally schools without permanent metal detectors—students and faculty report positive working relationships with SSAs. In schools with permanent metal detectors, there tends to be a more intense police presence. In these schools, even the most prosaic daily interactions can explode into misunderstandings, power struggles and violence.

SAFE AND BETTER SCHOOLS

This report focuses on six Successful Schools—schools that have developed effective strategies for addressing school safety while promoting an effective learning environment.

Figure 2. Number of Police Personnel vs. Number of Students (2001–2008)



Note: Police personnel data were not available for 1999 and 2000.

Source: Annual Mayor’s Management Reports; correspondence with NYPD; City Council hearings; news articles

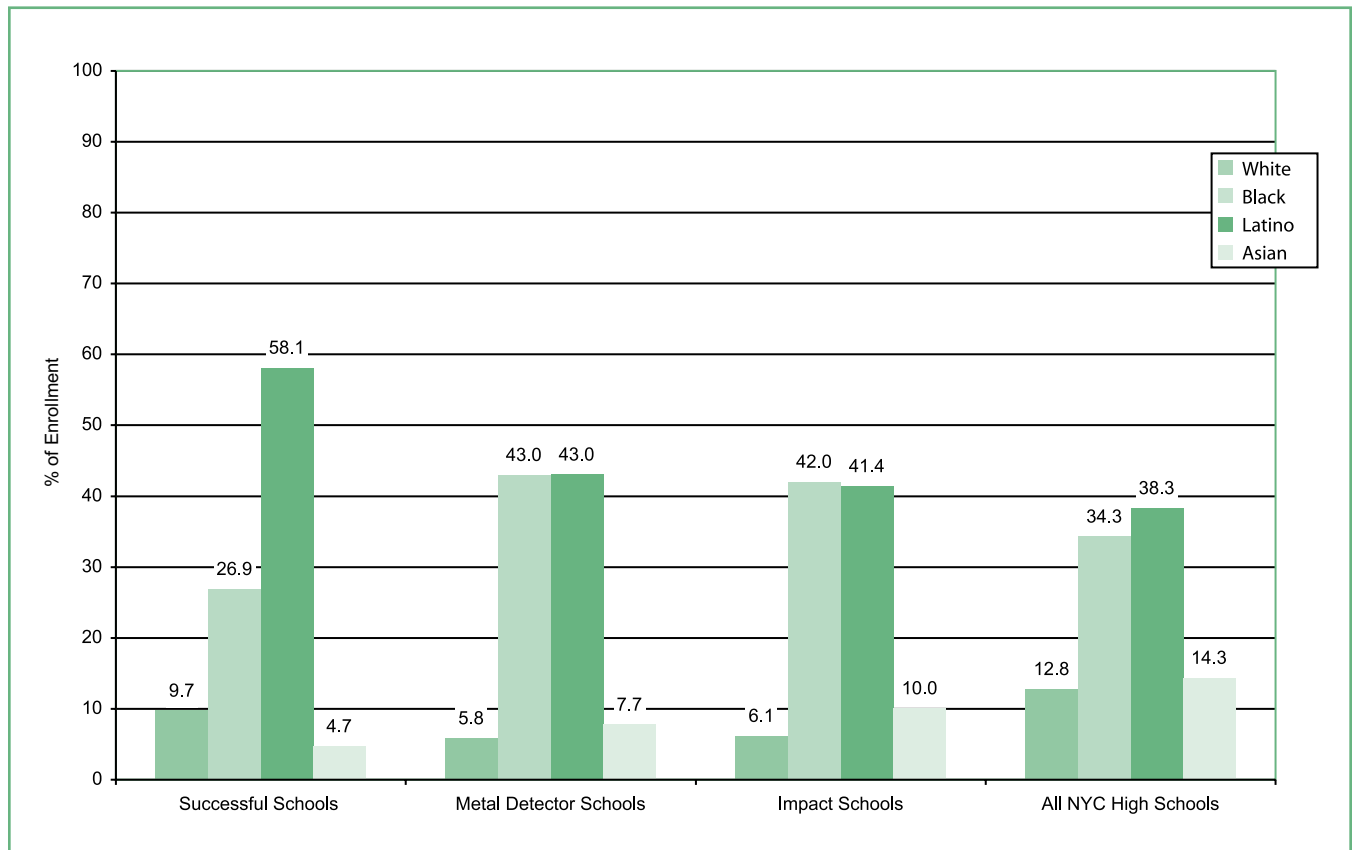
These Successful Schools serve at-risk student populations, similar to schools with some of the most punitive discipline policies. It is important to note that the student population of the Successful Schools is predominantly Latino—making up 58 percent of the total enrollment. Citywide, Latino students make up 38 percent of total high school enrollment; these students are currently graduating at the *lowest* rate and dropping out at the *highest* rate of all ethnic groups. In the class of 2007, 43 percent of New York City Latino students graduated in four years. The comparable rate in the Successful Schools—58 percent graduating in four years—speaks to the success of these schools in meeting the needs of some of New York City’s most vulnerable high school students. (See **Figure 3**, below).

Each Successful School employs alternative strategies to intervene with troubled students, and they generally enjoy long-term, positive relationships with SSAs. Their policies and practices invariably emphasize students’ dignity, desire to learn, and capac-

ity for responsible decision making. Students are approached as complete individuals who have needs, fears and ambitions, and clear rules govern the relationship between police personnel, educators and students. These schools provide safe and successful learning environments, as demonstrated through improved attendance, student retention and graduation rates, as well as dramatically lower numbers of criminal and noncriminal incidents, and school suspensions.

Several Successful Schools are transfer schools that serve students who fared poorly in other schools. Students often enroll after a year or two out of school and arrive with fewer credits and a troubled history with authority figures. Nonetheless, their four-year graduation rates are still higher than the rates for metal detector schools. Even more significant, though, are the Successful Schools’ seven-year-graduation rates—which include students who graduated in five or six years—and the remarkable successes they have had graduating students who, chances are,

Figure 3. Student Demographics, 2006 – 2007



Source: New York State Education Department, "School Report Card" 2006-07.

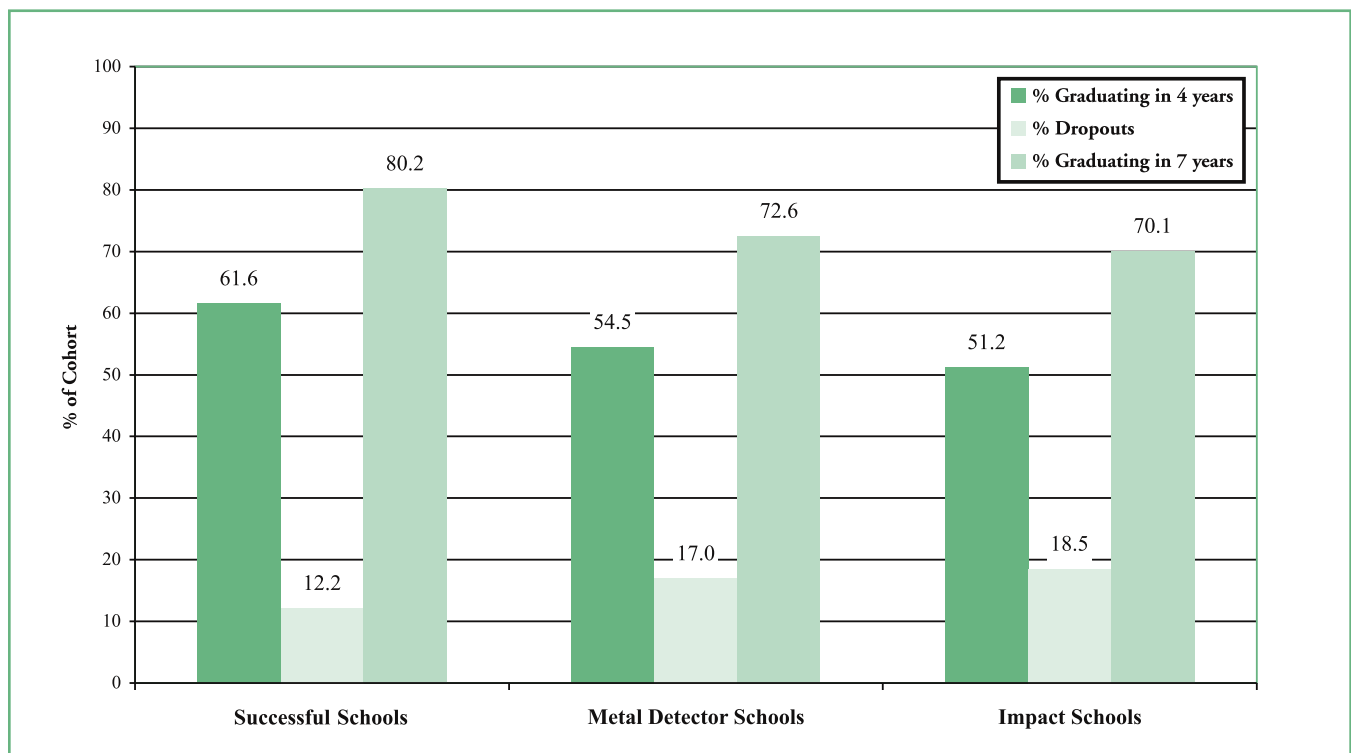
would have dropped out or been pushed out of other schools (See **Figure 4**, below).

The Successful Schools provide flexible, adaptable models for school security. They prove that non-police strategies can maintain the safety of a school without damaging its mission or compromising its integrity.

The following sections of *Safety with Dignity: Alternatives to the Over-Policing of Schools* explain the methods of data collection, analysis and aggregation used in the study (section II); describe and analyze the common findings and characteristics of the Successful Schools (section III); and profile each of the schools, including both quantitative and in-depth qualitative information gathered through interviews (section IV). Section V presents recommendations for recreating the Successful Schools’ environment in other schools. The appendices include a profile of Bushwick Community High School (which serves

over-age and under-credited transfer students who have not had success in traditional high schools) and a sample of the interview instruments used to gather qualitative data for the study.

Figure 4. Graduation and Dropouts



Note: “% graduating in 4 years” and “% dropout” are calculated from the number in the total cohort of the graduating class of 2007 after four years. “% graduating in 7 years” is calculated from the number in the total cohort of the graduating class of 2007 after 7 years.

Source: NYC DOE Research and Policy Support Group, “Graduation Rates, Class of 2007 (2003 Cohort),” 2008; and “The Class of 2004 Final Longitudinal Report: A Three-Year Follow-up Study,” 2008.

II. DATA & METHODS

S*afety with Dignity: Alternatives to the Over-Policing of Schools* is based on a one-year study employing multiple methods for the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

The school-based case studies in this report were designed to draw the maximum amount of pertinent information from a small, purposive sample of schools and stakeholders in those schools. We selected seven schools to profile, including six of the nine schools included in an article that appeared in the Spring 2008 issue of *Voices in Urban Education*, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform’s quarterly journal.¹⁶ The schools were chosen because they have no permanent metal detectors, have reputations for their positive learning environments, and serve populations similar to that of the average New York City school with permanent metal detectors. In selecting the Successful Schools, we also identified several measures of “success” beyond school safety: higher graduation, attendance and student stability rates, and low rates of suspensions, dropouts, absenteeism, as well as criminal and noncriminal incidents relative to schools serving comparable populations

Because some of the desired sample characteristics were rare, and because this study is intended to illustrate specific approaches to school safety and not general characteristics of New York City schools, we are justified in the use of a nonrandom selection process and the bias introduced in the resulting sample.

We also examined the 89 New York City high schools with permanent metal detectors and the 12 schools that were identified in 2006 by the DOE and NYPD as “Impact”¹⁷ schools—schools with high reported levels of crime that were targeted for a program of increased policing.

We conducted an analysis of the qualitative data for each school. Additionally, we conducted in-depth interviews with 48 subjects serving in one of the following roles in each of the Successful Schools:

- School administrator (e.g., principal, assistant principal, director)
- School Safety Agent
- Parent
- Student

- Teacher
- Other school staff (e.g., guidance counselor, social worker)

Those interviewed were asked 40 to 54 questions about their experiences with school rules and safety policies, professional development, security measures and interactions with SSAs, violence prevention programs, parental involvement and other aspects of the school environment, as appropriate. The questionnaire items were drawn from existing instruments, well used in research on urban schools.¹⁸ (A sample of the data-collection instruments—the interview questionnaire for administrators—is reproduced in Appendix B). All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and coded for qualitative themes about the school environment, discipline and adolescent development.

Information about SSAs was obtained from the annual *Mayor’s Management Reports*, correspondence with the NYPD, City Council hearing transcripts, news articles, and personnel data produced by the New York State Department of Education (NYSED).

The most recently available quantitative data for each Successful School were obtained from several sources. Demographic, human resource, school environment and academic performance data came from the 2006-2007 School Report Card database produced by the NYSED (this database contains information from the 2005-2006 school year for some measures and from 2006-2007 for others). Additional academic outcomes, including graduation and dropout data for the 2006-2007 school year, were obtained from separate files distributed by the DOE. Fiscal data were obtained from 2005-2006 *School Based Expenditure Report* by DOE. These quantitative measures were collected into a school level database, indexed by school identifier. Each of the Successful Schools was identified and school-level statistics, where available, were reported for each school. (Some school-level statistics were not available for criminal and non-criminal incidents and a few fiscal variables; in those cases, data representing the school’s building (“campus”) were presented).

We tabulated the data described above, school by school. To compare our Successful Schools to schools with metal detectors and Impact schools on school environment, resources and educational outcomes, we also calculated weighted averages. Depending on the metric, aggregations of student demographic

and performance data were weighted by the number of pupils in the school, the number of students in the state-defined cohort or the number of students in the pertinent grades. To determine whether apparent differences in averages were statistically significant, we conducted independent sample t-tests.

We made a conscious decision not to include the data from Bushwick Community High School in our aggregate calculations. Bushwick is a school that serves overage and under-credited transfer students who have not had success in traditional

high schools. Therefore, the data on graduation rates, attendance and other common measures of student success are drastically different from that at the other schools—not due to any failure on the part of the school, but due simply to the unique character of its student population. Because of the drastic variance in student populations, comparing Bushwick side-by-side with more traditional schools does a disservice to its accomplishments, and masks the successes of the rest. Therefore, the Bushwick data is included in the appendix independently of the aggregate data.

COMMON FINDINGS IN THE III. SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

The Successful Schools present diverse and effective solutions to problems that nearly all high schools face at some point. Their mission statements, their specific tactics and goals, and the size and composition of their student bodies vary widely (although Latino students constitute a majority of the student enrollment in all but one of the schools).

Nevertheless, there were consistent themes in all the Successful Schools. The seven themes described below were not manifested in the same way at every school, but they shaped the environment in all six of our case studies. In some ways, these common themes set the Successful Schools apart from other schools in the city; but, by highlighting them, we hope to show that they can be replicated in other schools.

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

Each of New York City's 1,400 schools contains its own microcosm of values, practices and culture, and few factors play as pivotal a role in creating an atmosphere as a school's leadership. All of the Successful Schools are led by principals, educators and staff with a strong vision and commitment to creating a nurturing environment for all students; one that emphasizes positive rather than punitive measures to address disciplinary problems.

The leadership in the Successful Schools—often teams made up of administrators and teachers—views itself as responsible for the wellbeing of the entire school community. They believe that the goal of safety cannot be achieved solely by relying on punitive responses to misconduct but must address the causes of confrontations. They put in place mechanisms and organizational structures to reduce flashpoints of confrontation.

The leaders of the Successful Schools exhibit genuine concern for the emotional and physical, as well as the intellectual, wellbeing of their students. They attempt to understand, and even anticipate, the daily pressures faced by members of the school community. They pay close attention to the concerns expressed by students and staff, and make sure that they are available to provide guidance on how to handle pressures and struggles. These leaders do not hide behind closed doors in the principal's office, but rather embrace the school community and spend significant time with students and staff in the classrooms, hallways, cafeterias and school entrance.

The emphasis on building strong leadership within schools squares well with Mayor Bloomberg's emphasis on promoting strong leadership skills in the city's principals. In December 2002, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Joel Klein launched an initiative to support principals to take on greater leadership roles in their schools. "As school leaders, principals are the key to overall school performance and to the kind of fundamental change that many of our schools require," said Chancellor

Klein at the unveiling of this new initiative.¹⁹ “It is critical that we begin work immediately on building a team of 1,200 great principals—people who are true instructional leaders that can inspire and empower teachers, students and parents in their school community.”²⁰

Unfortunately, the emphasis by the DOE on principal leadership has not made its way to the area of school safety. Principals have expressed great concern about the obstacles they face from the central DOE in their attempts to ensure school safety. They fear retaliation should they seek to implement safety practices that are rooted in educational approaches rather than retribution.

The mixed messages that principals receive—on the one hand, they’re told to be strong leaders; on the other hand, they feel helpless to create alternative school safety practices—has been expressed to the city’s policymakers, but little change has resulted. Ernest Logan, president of the Council of Supervisors and

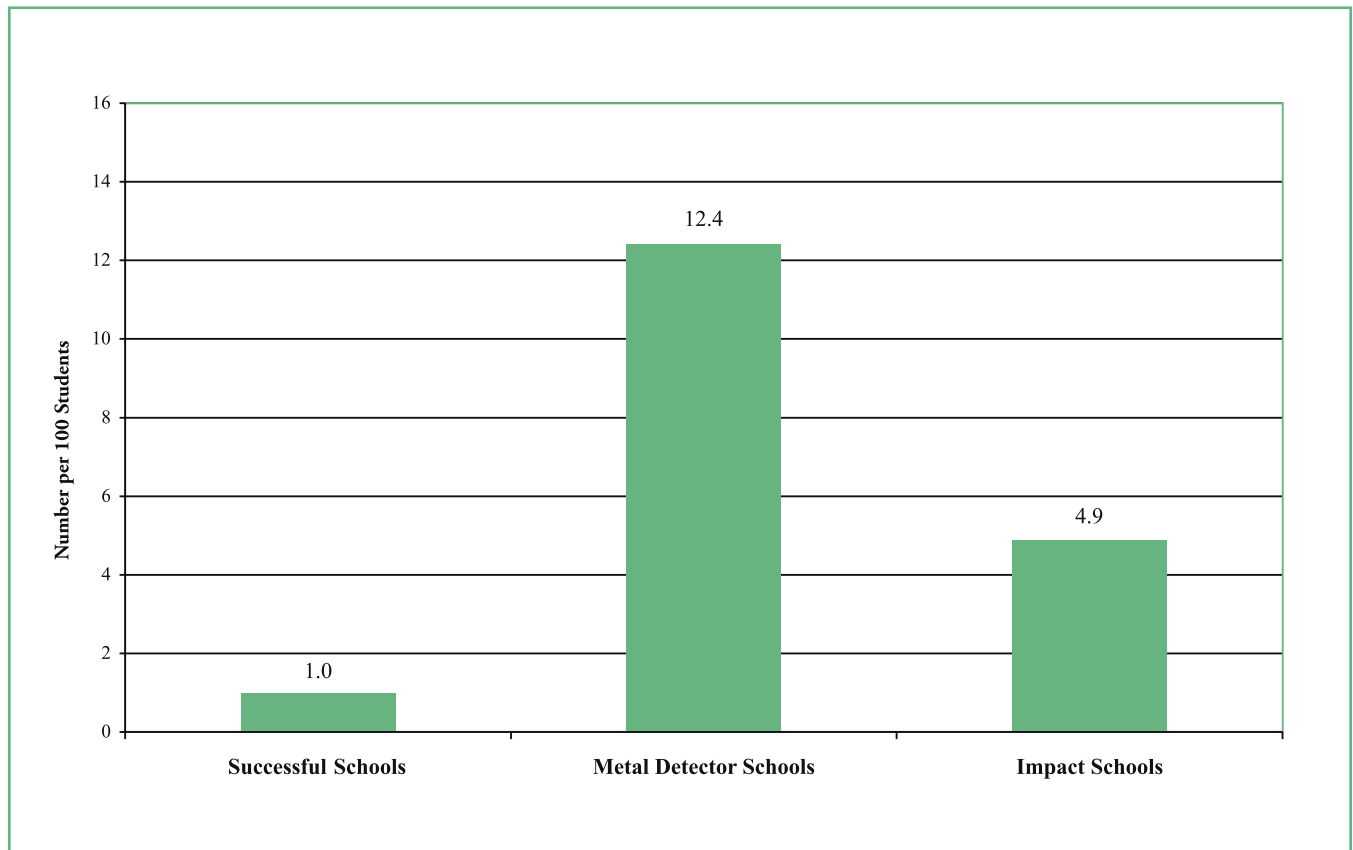
Administrators, the union that represents principals in New York City, testified about the feelings of his membership before the City Council in 2007:

My members who are the principals and the assistant principals in the schools feel that they cannot direct [School Safety Agents] who are providing the safety and security in their buildings because there is a conflict with what the Police Department tells the School Safety Agent they can and cannot do.

Now, the chancellor has said principals are empowered. Well, it’s interesting, we’re now empowered over everything but we can’t say anything to the School Safety Agent about what we want them to do.

We believe that principals and assistant principals are in charge of their buildings and must have more direct control and su-

Figure 5. Noncriminal Police Incidents, 2005–2006



Source: NYC Department of Education, Annual School Report, 2005-2006.

pervision of safety agents. We believe that strongly. It makes no sense to me that those who are held accountable for school safety should have little control over their key personnel and the implementation of safety measures. ... 21

The Successful Schools are led by principals and staff who understand the importance of creating a safe school environment, the complexity of adolescent behavior and the long-term impact of excessive retributive discipline. By focusing on safety and support, the Successful Schools have become beacons of hope for students who would otherwise be left behind.

COMMUNICATION AND CLEAR LINES OF AUTHORITY BETWEEN SSAS AND EDUCATORS

The Successful Schools fill in the gaps left by the DOE's failure to establish clear rules of governance over school safety matters. These schools have similar responses to the basic questions: Who is responsible for maintaining order in the classroom? Who is in charge of ensuring that students do not roam the hallways during class time? When does a school infraction warrant the involvement of law enforcement officials?

In the Successful Schools, educators have the final say on school disciplinary matters, even when infractions rise to the level of a minor illegal offense, such as disorderly conduct. Teachers are encouraged to try to defuse hostile exchanges between SSAs and students and promote respectful and open communication. In fact, the Successful Schools have made an art of finding ways to minimize flashpoints that in other schools all too often lead to arrests of students.

Some of these schools once used metal detectors to counter high rates of violence, but they all now reject their use. The educational leadership of the Successful Schools agree that metal detectors harm the educational environment; provide a false sense of security; and provoke distrust, tension and animosity between students and staff. They also conclude that metal detectors can increase dropout rates and decrease graduation rates by negatively affecting student morale and the school environment (See **Figure 5**, left).

The Successful Schools maintain a free flow of information between all those involved in school safety, including school administrators, the NYPD, teachers and students. Regular communication occurs between school officials and the police so that potential problems are defused quickly without compromising the schools' educational missions. Staff, SSAs and students are encouraged to share ideas for improving safety, allowing the entire school community, not just SSAs, to feel responsible for ensuring safety. If the school administration believes that as SSA is acting overly

aggressive or disrespecting students, administrators immediately contact the supervising authority within the NYPD, so that both the DOE and police officials can swiftly handle the situation. Principals do not hesitate to seek the removal of SSAs who clash with the school community.

Some of the Successful Schools employ their own security staff, who are trained by the school, not the NYPD, and answer only to school administration. School security aides monitor the hallways, and since they are not NYPD personnel, matters such as cutting class are not handled as criminal matters. Limiting contact between police personnel and students prevents minor disciplinary matters from escalating into criminal offenses.

SSAs are better integrated into the Successful School communities. They form a meaningful relationship with the school, learning the names of students and educators. They stay at the schools longer than agents at other schools and feel respected by staff and students alike.

Beyond greeting students at the school entrance, SSAs at the Successful Schools function as a last resort to deal with serious and immediate problems. Only educators patrol the hallways and enforce school discipline rules. This way few students ever come in contact with law enforcement officials and the criminal justice system.

The calm and order at the Successful Schools stands in stark contrast to the confusion and lack of communication existing between educators and police personnel at other schools. During testimony before the City Council, Ernest Logan, president of the principals' union, stated:

I was surprised today to hear that the principal can even decide if they wanted scanning [metal detectors] or not. My members will love to hear that one. ...I have never heard that until today. ...

Many of you have said that you have heard confusion here today at the City Council when people were asking questions about the DOE and the Police Department. Well, if you have confusion here at the City Council, imagine the confusion in 1,400 schools of how this is supposed to work. ...

Well, the Police Department has never approached us about doing things jointly about educating our members on the role of school safety, and their members on the role of principals and assistant principals in schools. We would like to have that done, because there are some universal issues that we need to talk about.

Every incident is unique, but I am truly troubled by the fact that we are criminalizing our children, because I heard

today also that the School Safety Agent decides whether it is a crime or not. Now, maybe I'm a little confused by that. I know there is a principal of a school, two second-graders playing in the school yard. The game gets heated, Johnny hits Michael, Michael winds up with a bloody nose, the School Safety Agent observed that. Is that a crime? Are we now going to arrest the child who hit the other kid with the bloody nose? I don't think so.²²

The leadership of the labor union that represents SSAs, UAW Local 237, has expressed similar concerns. According to Deputy Director Steve Gordon:

[T]here are areas where I feel that administrators can address discipline before it becomes a crime, and they look for School Safety Agents to intercede on disciplinary issues with law enforcement action. ...

So for example, Johnny is in class with his hat on, listening to his walkman. There's no reason why the School Safety Agent should have to address that issue, at all! But, I can tell you, every day they are called in to address that issue. And when they don't address that issue, there comes the problems. The calls ...

"Why do I have an agent here? The agent is not going to help the teacher."

"So what's the problem?"

"Johnny was in class being disruptive."

"Okay, disruption ... Okay, what was he doing? ... Was there a crime?"

If it wasn't a crime there really isn't any reason for a School Safety Agent to address that child!

I have a child in public school. I don't want a public safety officer addressing that issue! I want the principal, the dean, whoever to come in and discipline my child. Because he's in a school. And there's no crime there. If he's being disruptive to his class, that's something for the principals and the deans to deal with.²³

Greg Floyd, the president of Local 237, agreed:

[The city needs to] clearly define for [DOE] staff, administrators at schools and teachers the guidelines under which they have to operate. And when they call school safety, for whatever the reason, they have to step back. Otherwise, do not call the School Safety Agents because the child will not take gum out of his mouth, the child will not take off his hat

or her hat, the child will not sit down in the classroom. Those situations should be dealt with by the principals, the deans and the teachers. If you call the School Safety Agents, you run the risk of having problems escalate in those cases.²⁴

Unfortunately, schools receive little guidance from the DOE on how to ensure that law enforcement officials do not become school disciplinarians.²⁵ The Successful Schools have succeeded despite the DOE's failure to provide a coherent school safety plan.

POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES TO EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE

The Successful Schools use alternative approaches to address disciplinary problems. Most of them have either formally or informally embraced conflict-resolution programs, also known as fairness committees, which are based on restorative methods of handling discipline issues.

The restorative justice model is a dispute-resolution tool that focuses on providing opportunities for all sides of a dispute, victims and offenders alike, to become involved in defining the harm and devising remedies. The philosophy emphasizes an analysis of the harm done by particular actions and involves the impacted communities in repairing the harm.

Conflict-resolution, or fairness, committees are charged with adjudicating violations of school rules or school norms. The committees consider infractions such as cursing, disrespect or bullying, and even more serious matters such as fighting, vandalism or cheating. Students sit on the committees, allowing for the adjudication to be conducted by a group of peers. The committees are usually led by teachers or school social workers.

For example, Humanities Preparatory Academy in Manhattan has a fairness committee. When a student broke a window at the school, he was sent before the committee:

During that session, the members of the committee found out that the day before he broke the window, his family received notice that they were being kicked out of their shelter and had no place to go. While this did not fully excuse his actions, we were able to discuss more fully and fairly what the consequences should be, as well as discuss more constructive ways to deal with anger. We jointly decided that he needed to give back to the school community in some way. Knowing that it would be ridiculous to ask a student who was homeless to pay for the window, we all agreed he would help answer the phone after school for a month. In the meantime, his advisor and the school social worker were able to reach out to his family and offer support. If the fairness committee had been a systematic, rigid mechanism, we would not have been able to brainstorm these solutions.²⁶

The restorative justice model allowed the school to gain a fuller understanding of the circumstances that led to the student's disruptive behavior and an opportunity to devise appropriate remedies for the conduct.

Conflict-resolution committees provide an alternative to punitive disciplinary actions and allow students and educators to be flexible and creative in handling infractions. Bringing a conflict before a committee of one's peers allows for a more nurturing process in determining appropriate dispositions. It also legitimizes the process in the eyes of the student being judged and brings the school community into the decisionmaking and rehabilitative process.

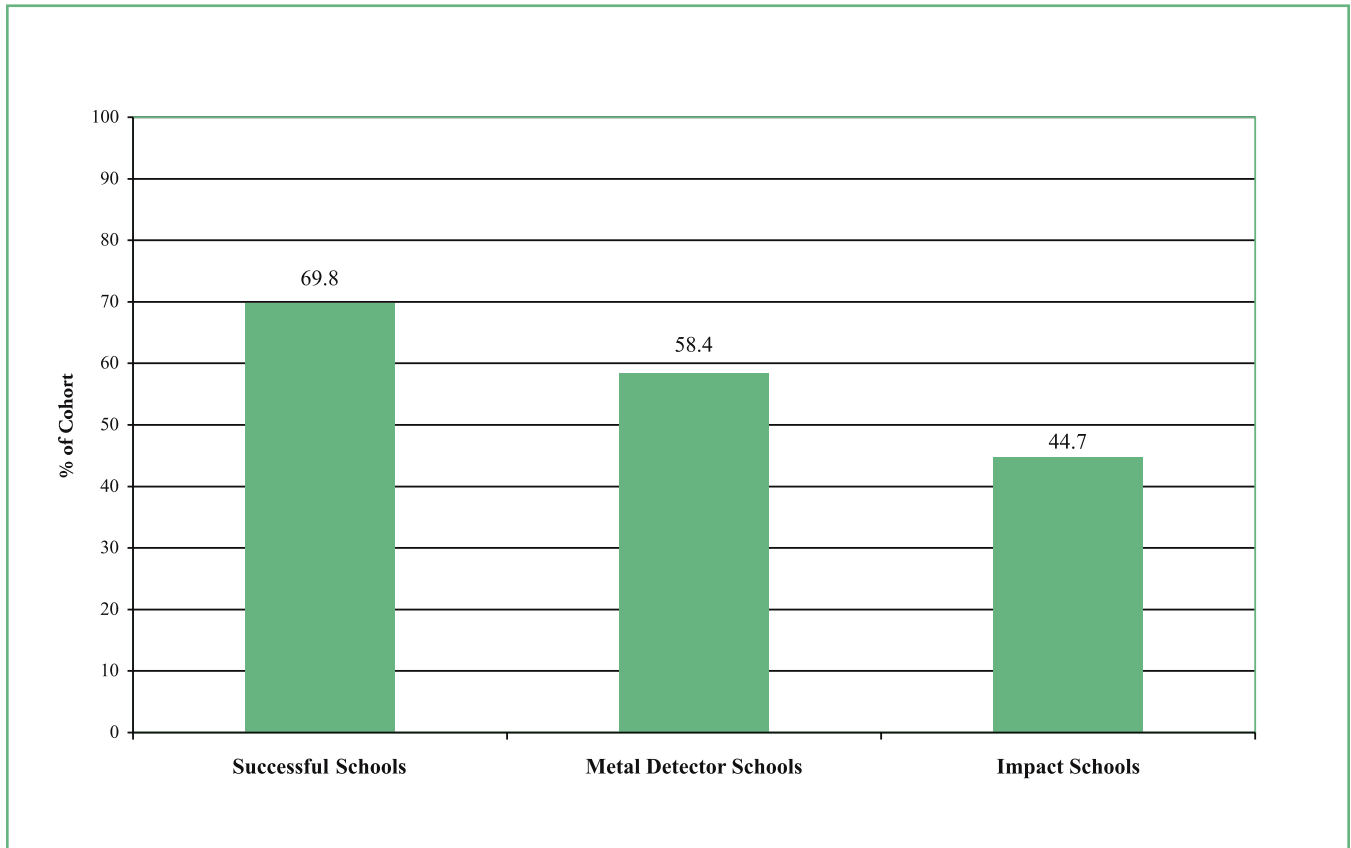
Student participation in the resolution of infractions of school rules allows students to feel some measure of ownership over the disciplinary process. The "punishments" for infractions are not predetermined, but rather come about through deliberation in-

volving dialogue and understanding of the causes of the infraction. Moreover, it permits a broader discussion, beyond the one incident, to understand the impact that the school community at large may have had on the student's behavior, thus increasing the range of solutions for the proscribed behavior.

In April 2007, New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum released a report criticizing the DOE for not using conflict-resolution and other emotional support programs in city schools. She concluded: "Studies demonstrate that conflict resolution programs successfully teach children to act cooperatively and express themselves non-violently, which, in turn, leads to safer schools and a classroom environment more conducive to teaching and learning."²⁷ She recommended greater funding for conflict-resolution programs.

In October 2007, Elayna Konstan, CEO of the Office of School and Youth Development at the DOE, testified before the City

Figure 6. Percent of Students Planning to Attend a Four- or Two-Year College, 2006-2007



Source: New York State Education Department, School Report Card, 2006-2007

Council that conflict-resolution programs “help students to take more ownership and have a different approach to solving conflicts in a different way.”²⁸ According to Konstan, 800 teachers have been trained on conflict resolution programs.²⁹ This is less than 1 percent of the approximately 83,000 teachers in the New York City school system.³⁰

A STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL RULES

Successful Schools also involve students in the rule-making process. Students in many of these schools are involved in an annual process of revising the individual school’s code of conduct or rules, which supplement the code of conduct stipulated by the DOE. The flexibility of school rules is even further decentralized in certain schools where individual classes can sometimes create their own rules for classroom decorum. For example, some classrooms allow students to listen to music as long as it doesn’t interfere with their work or the work of other students.

Engaging students in the rule-making process encourages ownership over school rules. Throughout the year, many of these schools let students revisit and discuss school policies and practices. Rules that have become outdated or counterproductive may be amended during regular meetings built into the organizational structure of the school. Some of the schools even send students on retreats to allow for a more in-depth conversation on school rules and related issues. Students consistently reported that this process makes them feel a greater responsibility to obey school rules (See **Figure 6**, page 19).

The schools that do not directly engage students in the rule-making process supplement their codes of conduct with overarching themes that help students understand what is expected of them. These themes, such as “no personal attacks,” are consistently incorporated into classrooms and the school community.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS’ NONACADEMIC NEEDS

Several of the Successful Schools have either created in-house services to support students’ nonacademic needs or have formed partnerships with community based organizations to provide such services.

School officials cite several reasons for providing such non-traditional services, including to assist the student as a “whole,” rather than focusing solely on the student’s academic needs; to allow students to feel that they are part of a larger community that cares about their general well-being; to understand a student’s struggles before they become the basis for behavioral problems in the classroom; and to allow students to focus better on their studies and, thus, bring less anger into school with them.

The schools that provide such services connect students with mentoring programs, counseling, internships and community-service opportunities. Some offer assistance to parents on how to become more engaged in their child’s educational process. Urban Academy in Manhattan provides trainings for teachers on how to identify medical and mental challenges faced by students.

The schools that provide these services hope to intervene in a student’s life early enough to prevent significant challenges from accumulating into insurmountable ones that will prevent the student from succeeding academically.

Geoffrey Canada, president and CEO of the Harlem Children’s Zone, Inc., has adopted a similar model for the Harlem Children’s Zone’s Promise Academy. In 2006, the Promise Academy opened a health clinic in its middle school, providing free medical, mental health and dental services. The goal of the Harlem Children’s Zone reflects the importance of providing nonacademic support services to students:

[The Harlem Children’s Zone] focus[es] on the needs of children at every developmental age, including specific programs addressing pre-natal care, infants, toddlers, elementary school, middle school, adolescence and college. Academic excellence is a principal goal of the [Harlem Children’s Zone], but high-quality schools are only one of the means we use to achieve it. Others include nurturing stable families, supporting youth development, improving health through fitness and nutrition, and cultivating engaged and involved adults and community stakeholders.³¹

EMPOWERED PEDAGOGICAL STAFF AND CLOSE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Teachers at the Successful Schools are strongly encouraged to form close relationships with one another and with their students, giving their schools a greater sense of community. The schools emphasize information-sharing among staff and the importance of professional development for educators to better serve students. Teachers and staff are encouraged to be creative and speak up about their needs and ambitions. Some of the schools hold retreats where teachers can share their concerns and review progress and achievements.

Progress High School for Professional Careers in Brooklyn invites students to teacher retreats, allowing students to share their own concerns and giving them a sense of belonging to a greater schoolwide community. Other schools hold regular town hall meetings where students are encouraged to share their thoughts. Multiday orientations at the beginning of the school year allow students to engage with teachers and staff.

The school curriculum also plays a role in fostering closer stu-

dent-teacher relationships and increased student commitment to the school. Several of the Successful Schools use culturally relevant curricula that attempt to integrate students' cultural backgrounds into the school's academic work. Some of the schools offer classes that deal specifically with urban issues, race and class.

Teachers in these schools feel that they have a complete sense of their students' needs and a basic understanding of the student's home life. This allows them to intervene in situations that may otherwise lead to classroom disruptions.

SCHOOL CULTURE OF TRUST AND RESPECT

One of the most intangible, yet important, qualities of a Successful School is its culture and environment. A school's culture is a self-fulfilling prophecy that forms the basis for all school

interactions and relationships. The Successful Schools have a culture that is built on trust and respect for all members of the school community, including "bad students" that have been shunned by other schools.

These schools recognize that there is no cookie-cutter solution for dealing with misbehaving students, and they emphasize an individualized approach to addressing students' needs. They consider students' opinions when deciding on or implementing policies, including those related to discipline. They also emphasize a culture of respect, not only between students and staff, but among students as well. They attempt to build a positive atmosphere of empathy and respect among all members of the school community. There are rules against bullying and bias-based harassment, and personal attacks are not tolerated. Teachers are conscious of classroom dynamics and do not talk to students in ways that may inadvertently demean them.

IV. PROFILES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

Table 1a. Demographics: Successful Schools vs. Metal Detector and Impact Schools

	SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS	METAL DETECTOR SCHOOLS	IMPACT SCHOOLS
% White	9.7	5.8	6.1
% Black	26.9	43.0	42.0
% Latino	58.1	43.0	41.4
% Asian	4.7	7.7	10.0
% Male	53.6	51.8	52.9
% Female	46.4	48.2	47.1
% Free or Reduced Lunch	73.6	71.0	70.4
% Limited English Proficient	7.2	14.0	18.8
% FT Special Education	6.5	7.0	8.9

Table 1b. Indicators of Success: Successful Schools vs. Metal Detector and Impact Schools

	SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS	METAL DETECTOR SCHOOLS	IMPACT SCHOOLS
% 4-Year Graduation	61.6	54.5	51.2
% Dropped Out	12.2	17.0	18.5
% 7-Year Graduation	80.2	72.6	70.1/ 75.2
Average Daily Attendance	82.0	79.6	74.0
% Student Stability	82.1	77.1	74.8
% Planning 4-Year College	42.6	39.0	29.1
% Planning 2-Year College	27.1	19.4	15.6
# Violent Incidents Per 100	0.12	0.40	0.11
# Property Crime Incidents Per 100	0.11	0.27	0.04
# Other Crime Incidents Per 100	0.53	2.92	0.85
# Non-Criminal Police Incidents Per 100	1.00	12.40	4.89
# Suspensions Per 100	4.01	7.06	6.25

PROGRESS HIGH SCHOOL FOR PROFESSIONAL CAREERS (BROOKLYN)



Table 2a. Demographics: Progress High School

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% White	1.5
% Black	34.4
% Latino	62.4
% Asian	1.2
% Male	44.2
% Female	55.8
% Free or Reduced Lunch	67.6
% Limited English Proficient	11.9
% FT Special Education	6.7

Table 2b. Indicators of Success: Progress High School

INDICATORS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% 4-Year Graduation	65.5
% Dropped Out	5.8
% 7-Year Graduation	84.2
Average Daily Attendance	80.0
% Student Stability	80.0
% Planning 4-Year College	48.0
% Planning 2-Year College	24.0
# Violent Incidents Per 100	0.1
# Property Crime Incidents Per 100	0.2
# Other Crime Incidents Per 100	0.8
# Non-Criminal Police Incidents Per 100	1.0
# Suspensions Per 100	4.2

At Progress High School in Brooklyn, a holistic approach to student discipline begins with relationships. For a school with more than 1,000 students, Progress is a surprisingly close-knit community, allowing teachers, administrators, and students to work together to address potential safety and discipline problems *before* they occur. From student-teacher retreats and a staff that is personally dedicated to meeting students' needs to monthly "best practices" security meetings and a school-employed security staff, the school's leaders understand that strong personal relationships are an important foundation for student success.

"Our school is a safe place because our students feel safe," Assistant Principal for Organization Victor Rodriguez said. "We'll have a fight break out like any other school, but for the most part the students and staff feel safe. Because we establish a good relationship with the students, the students then establish a good relationship with the administrators and the educators."³²

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

Principal William C. Jusino sets the stage for the school's nurturing environment by cultivating relationships with each student and teacher. He is known for his open-door policy and willingness to make time for each of his students and teachers.³³ His focus on developing relationships and respecting all members of the community trickles down to the school's administration, teachers, SSAs and students.

"I like to interact with the students," Rodriguez said. "I'm the first one they see in the morning, me and the security agent, and we greet them every morning, a friendly welcome. ... One of the best times of the day is when I'm downstairs in the cafeteria with the students because I get to interact with them, I get to see what's going on, I get to listen to them talk and I get to know what's going on in the neighborhood, in the hallways, in the classrooms."³⁴

POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES TO EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Progress does not use a zero tolerance approach to disciplinary problems. "In the last couple of years there has been a real interest in looking at the [discipline] policies and making sure that they're fair and making sure that the students, especially kids that have emotional problems—that they're getting the right support," special education teacher Emily Zaeske said. "[It's] about finding better ways to deal with kids who present a continual discipline problem and resolving it in a more positive way."³⁵

Conflict resolution (also known as peer mediation) is used to handle discipline problems such as verbal sparring, tension

between students, property disputes, hurt feelings and general misunderstandings. It relies on a dispute-resolution tool that focuses on providing opportunities for all sides of a dispute, victims and offenders alike, to become involved in defining the harm caused by an act and in devising remedies. When students are referred to conflict resolution, a group of peers known as "judges," led by a teacher who was not a witness to the conflict, help them work through the incident to a place of agreement. Mediation principles allow the students involved to tell their sides of the story while establishing common ground.³⁶

The student judges are trained in a conflict-resolution class, and mediations are supervised by their conflict-resolution teacher.³⁷ Students receive credits for enrolling in the class, making them more likely to commit time and energy to the conflict-resolution program than if they were volunteers. Training students in conflict-resolution principles allows them to contribute a unique skill to their school, communities and homes.

Progress uses conflict resolution both to prevent fights and to restore order after a fight.³⁸ In both instances, the program helps students explore the motivations behind their anger and develop strategies when faced with similar situations in the future.

A STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL RULES

At Progress, students are involved in the development and revision of the code of conduct.³⁹ An annual revision process allows the school to change or eliminate rules that are not working, improve on and learn from those that are, and add new items as needed. This system does away with outdated or irrelevant policies and actively engages students in improving their school environment. The school community works on the revisions each summer with the goal of ensuring fairness for all parties.

The first step in revising the code of conduct is community involvement. Suggestions are gathered from student government and leadership programs and from teacher and student retreats.⁴⁰ In addition, administrators and teachers gather information through informal interactions with students and parents.⁴¹

The second step is ensuring that the revisions are fair, uniform, understandable, sensible and flexible. Flexibility allows teachers and administrators to take a holistic view of discipline and work with students to correct behavior problems. Assistant Principal for Guidance Jorge Arias said, "Like everything in life, you have to look at the individual. ... It's not a black-and-white type thing; sometimes there's a little shade of gray, and we have to look at the individual and see, make sure we're being fair in all senses of the word."⁴²

Principal Jusino ensures that students involved with the school's leadership program play an important role in determining school rules and discipline processes that are outside the direct

purview of the DOE, such as general classroom decorum and lunchtime behavior.⁴³

Teacher Zaeske explained that students and teachers often work together to determine what demeanor is acceptable in a particular class, depending on the makeup and style of the class. For instance, students might decide that a conversational environment, inappropriate for a math class, is acceptable in a class with a creative component, such as art.

In addition to the annual revision of the code of conduct, there are monthly policy and practices discussions. At these meetings the entire Progress community, including students and parents, is invited to “review, discuss, revise and initiate school policy and procedures.”⁴⁴ Topics discussed include upcoming holiday celebrations, Regent’s exam tutoring, schoolwide curricula development and day-to-day campus operations.⁴⁵

COMMUNICATION AND CLEAR LINES OF AUTHORITY BETWEEN SSAS AND EDUCATORS

Part of the school’s success can be attributed to the establishment of clear lines of authority between administrators and SSAs. Principal Jusino allows administrators and teachers to intervene in interactions between students and SSAs, especially if the situation seems dangerous or disrespectful to the student or the agent. Teachers and administrators are encouraged to use their discretion in diffusing hostile interactions between SSAs and students and encourage respectful and open communication. “The goal is always to diffuse the situation,” Jusino said.⁴⁶

In addition, the administration reviews interactions between SSAs and students, particularly hostile interactions and those that involve teachers.⁴⁷ This review allows the administration to spot patterns of unrest, such as particular areas on campus where there is more conflict or specific personnel who behave aggressively.

If an SSA is perceived as overly aggressive, disrespectful to students or disruptive to the community, Principal Jusino or the assistant principal for security will ask the NYPD SSA supervisor to address the matter. This allows the principal to maintain a nurturing, respectful environment, while avoiding a power struggle between the administration and the agent. In addition, Assistant Principal Rodriguez said he has the authority to recommend the removal of an SSA who is not interacting well with the community.⁴⁸

Progress also hires its own security staff, known as security aides, to give administrators an extra level of oversight on safety issues and to ensure that school rules are enforced by school employees and not SSAs. The aides are trained to work with the SSAs but answer only to the administration (the assistant principal of security directly oversees them).

The aides use radios, like SSAs and administrators, and spend most of their time in the hallways interacting with students. Their primary responsibility is to ensure students travel between classes in a safe and orderly manner. Because the aides are school employees and not NYPD personnel, cutting class is treated as a discipline issue at Progress, not a potential criminal violation.

Once a month, the administration holds a meeting with SSAs, school-employed security aides, United Federation of Teachers representatives, members of PROGRESS, Inc., (see next section) and other community-based organizations, and NYPD personnel to make sure all aspects of school safety are running smoothly.⁴⁹ The main thrust of the meeting is to agree on a set of best practices—a constantly evolving collection of policies that contributes to the school’s safe and peaceful atmosphere. Any of the participants can express concerns or share suggestions for safety and discipline at the school.⁵⁰

In addition, the administration reviews safety and discipline data on a weekly basis with a safety committee composed of key school safety personnel, teachers, and administrators. The committee examines the overall picture of safety at the school, as well as any particular incidents that need to be addressed.⁵¹

Jusino said the most effective SSAs have a long relationship with the school.⁵² When SSAs know students by name and spend enough time at the school to learn the students’ schedules and personalities, there are fewer negative interactions and misunderstandings. As one student said, “The [SSAs] we have now know what time you finish, they know what type of students you are. They don’t give you too much problems. When you bring in new [agents], they harass you more, ... they don’t know you.”⁵³

Teachers and administrators at Progress assume roles that some schools reserve for school safety personnel. For instance, between class periods, Assistant Principal Rodriguez says, “every teacher” comes out into the hallway, along with support staff, school aids and guidance counselors to help ensure that students move between classes peacefully and arrive on time.⁵⁴ The presence of other school employees and pedagogical personnel may reduce tension between SSAs and students.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS’ NONACADEMIC NEEDS

Progress also draws on the expertise and resources of PROGRESS, Inc., the community-based organization that founded the school and is responsible for helping to secure much-needed resources and support. PROGRESS, Inc., provides a focused mission and goal for the school, as well as its basic educational philosophy: the belief that youth are the community’s most important resource.⁵⁵

To that end, employees of PROGRESS, Inc., are involved in everything from curriculum development to empowering students through leadership programs to connecting them with mentors, community service opportunities (community service is a key component of the Progress High School curriculum), and internships with local businesses and government agencies.⁵⁶

PROGRESS, Inc., also provides tangible support to the high school in the form of laptop computers and software, SAT and academic tutoring, and a range of counseling services. The student support services that PROGRESS, Inc., offers include family and group therapy, peer tutoring, weekend home visits by paraprofessionals, and a monthly parent discussion group.⁵⁷

EMPOWERED PEDAGOGICAL STAFF AND CLOSE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

The teachers we interviewed said information sharing, co-teaching arrangements and a schoolwide emphasis on meaningful professional development better gives them confidence in the classroom and helps them address their students' needs.⁵⁸

Principal Jusino's leadership has helped the school develop and retain a strong, confident and creative teaching staff. The teachers described Principal Jusino as a good listener who is interested in their experiences, ideas and input. They said he goes out of his way to meet their needs.⁵⁹

The teachers had three retreats in 2008, including one where student leaders were invited to brainstorm about safety and the school's learning environment.⁶⁰ The teacher-only retreats focused on professional development.

The retreat with students was a unique experiment that strengthened the bond between students and teachers. Held at a lakeside resort over a weekend, it featured planning and goal-setting, and allowed students to express the student body's concerns in a trusting environment.⁶¹

Every teacher we interviewed noted that students who misbehave are often dealing with serious personal, social or family issues or general adolescent development challenges.⁶² They explained the importance of simply taking the time to listen, asking questions about students' school and home lives, and interacting with the community where most of the students live. One of the teachers said that living in the same neighborhood as her students allowed her to better understand their daily lives and challenges. Progress teachers freely share information across grade levels and departments, allowing them to form a more complete picture of who their students are outside the classroom.

Knowing their students equips teachers to intervene before situations get out of hand, avoiding disruptive incidents, student violence and defiance, and the need for aggressive discipline. It

permits teachers to refer their troubled students to the conflict-resolution program instead of issuing a suspension.

"I think that most of the people here know their kids well so that you can tell when something's going to happen," said Zaeske. "All of the stuff that happens is usually based on small things, so you can usually get that solved with just a little bit of mediation."

URBAN ASSEMBLY SCHOOL FOR CAREERS IN SPORTS (BRONX)



Table 3a. Demographics: Urban Assembly for Careers in Sports

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% White	1.2
% Black	31.7
% Latino	66.1
% Asian	0.6
% Male	69.9
% Female	30.1
% Free or Reduced Lunch	80.4
% Limited English Proficient	1.6
% FT Special Education	0.3

Table 3b. Indicators of Success: Urban Assembly for Careers in Sports

INDICATORS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% 4-Year Graduation	86.8
% Dropped Out	3.9
% 7-Year Graduation	N/A
Average Daily Attendance	87.0
% Student Stability	87.0
% Planning 4-Year College	16.0
% Planning 2-Year College	4.0
# Violent Incidents Per 100	0.0
# Property Crime Incidents Per 100	0.1
# Other Crime Incidents Per 100	0.5
# Non-Criminal Police Incidents Per 100	2.2
# Suspensions Per 100	3.9

The Urban Assembly School for Careers in Sports is located in the South Bronx, a neighborhood with a high crime rate. Alixon Delgado, a student at the high school, calls it the “safest place” he’s ever been. “When I say I go to [the] South Bronx Campus, [people] tell me, ‘Oh, it’s probably bad, it’s project central around there.’ But actually, it’s very good,” Delgado said. “In the school, I’ve never been robbed, threatened, jumped, anything like that. I don’t think there are any gangs, and if there are, I don’t know about them.”⁶³

Careers in Sports, a high school of about 325 students, was established in 2002 with two other small high schools in a building that once housed the dysfunctional and unsafe South Bronx High School. By all academic measurements its students are thriving, and its rate of criminal incidents is close to zero. It accomplishes this without metal detectors, zero tolerance policies or other punitive disciplinary measures.

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

Felice Lepore, the school’s principal since 2003, has based school security on trust, communication and a disciplinary policy widely perceived as fair and legitimate. His school has no metal detectors, and discipline is handled almost entirely by educators—teachers, principals and school aides. The few SSAs assigned to the building mainly function as greeters at the entrance.

Although the student body is almost identical demographically to the city’s Impact schools and other metal detector schools, Careers in Sports is no hybrid schoolhouse and juvenile hall. Instead, this school trains its students in self-discipline and mutual respect, creating a calm and orderly environment. Explained Lepore:

One thing I’m proud of is that the campus doesn’t have metal detectors. We’re one of the few high schools in the Bronx that can actually make that claim.

I think metal detectors bring a false sense of security. ... If somebody wants to get something inside a building, they’re going to do it. You’re not going to be able to have complete protection. And then, what kind of a message are you sending kids to have to go through that process to get inside of the school? Speaking to colleagues from other schools, you create tension right from the beginning. There’s animosity between adults and the students, SSA agents and the students. When you’re having inclement weather, imagine kids having to wait outside for an hour at a time to get inside of the school building. It demoralizes the school, which ultimately leads to higher and higher dropout rates and lower and lower graduation rates.⁶⁴

Principal Lepore’s opinion is supported by statistics: Careers in Sports had a four-year graduation rate of 82.7 percent in 2007, while schools with permanent metal detectors graduated only 54.5 percent of students in 2006.

A STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL RULES

Students have a meaningful voice at Careers in Sports. Principal Lepore frequently meets with members of the student government, and there is regular, formalized communication between students and staff. Each grade has a town hall meeting once a week with a team of teachers, aides and administrators.⁶⁵

Recently, the students’ successfully advocated for a liberalization of the school’s dress code.

“We had certain policies in place when it came to dress codes in the past that were very antagonistic, and the kids felt as if their voices weren’t heard,” said Lepore, a U.S. Navy veteran. “Many of them would cut the detention [which followed a dress code violation], so it led to suspensions and we realized this wasn’t going to work. So we were willing to make changes at that time and we’ll continue to make changes that create an environment that works for everybody.”⁶⁶

This willingness to compromise and respond to student demands legitimizes the educators’ authority. It gives students a sense of ownership over the school rules, providing them an incentive to obey them. “I feel like students within the school have a right and a say in the safety and the attitude and the conduct in which everything happens at the school,” student Krystal Rodriguez said.⁶⁷

POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES TO EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Students appreciate that Careers in Sports is one of the few Bronx high schools without metal detectors.

“Students are more relaxed here,” said Rodriguez. “They don’t have to rush into school and know they have to get searched every single day. It’s more of a comfort zone. You’re in school. It’s a place you can rely on. You know you’re safe, and you feel safe when you walk into the building and have people trust you.”⁶⁸

Careers in Sports founds its disciplinary policy on detention, an effective, time-honored tool to maintain order and punish classroom misbehavior and other minor transgressions. Another disciplinary tool is the homework center. Parent Debra Burns explains: “If you don’t do your homework at home, you are mandated to go to the homework center. You have to get that homework done. To me, that’s discipline. I love it.”⁶⁹

Whenever more serious trouble is brewing between students,

or between a student and a staff member, the school's educators preemptively defuse the situation before punches are thrown by getting the student to talk through his or her conflict, usually with a school aide, and usually before any punches are thrown or a suspension handed down.

Student Krystal Rodriguez said this preventive approach entails a team effort. "The aides, the principal, the safety agents, they're all helpful when they see a situation of a student who doesn't like another student," she said. "They sit them down one-on-one. They talk to them. They try to solve it. When they know there's going to be a confrontation, they're always on the look-out."⁷⁰

School aides can anticipate potential trouble because the students trust them and communicate with them. Administrator Johanny Garcia said, "The students have that constant interaction with the aides in the cafeteria, in the gym, in the hallways."⁷¹

Faculty and students praise the nine aides that work at the South Bronx Campus. "Parents love them. Students love them," teacher Sharon Aiuvalsit said. "They're not looked at as teachers. They're looked at as more as ... well, there's that kind of playful respect between them."⁷²

"We really depend on them to mediate between problems as well, when a kid is really riled up either because of another kid or because of a teacher," she said. "They're often the first people to talk to them, and they're really good at that."⁷³

COMMUNICATION AND CLEAR LINES OF AUTHORITY BETWEEN SSAS AND EDUCATORS

The communication network in place at Careers in Sports is the main component of its security policy. Constant streams of communication keep everyone in the school—students, principals, school aides, teachers, SSAs—on the same page.

"You have to be cognizant of the fact that anybody at any given time—students, staff, visitors—could bring anything inside this school," said Principal Lepore. "You become dependent on folks being able to communicate so that you're able to provide a safe environment."

The security team meets monthly. Students regularly meet with educators and have come to feel they have a meaningful voice in how the school operates. The educators—teachers, school aides, principals and administrators—meet on a weekly basis. Administrator Johanny Garcia sees these meetings as a forum for sharing ideas and working out solutions together. "We want to show the staff that we're open to ideas and suggestions, and we want them to be proactive and bring any type of idea to the table," he said. "If we, as a group, feel that it's something that's going to be beneficial to the school, and to the kids in particu-

lar, we're going to take that idea and run with it."⁷⁴

Educators are chiefly responsible for discipline at Careers in Sports, not NYPD personnel, who function as a last resort. Beyond that, the educators rarely require their assistance. "I don't have any SSAs patrolling my hallways," Lepore said. "I trust my school aides for that. I know my aides can do the job. And that's not putting the SSAs down."⁷⁵

If there is a classroom disruption, teachers call on the school aides for assistance. They might even have a student notify the aides, which makes the students feel involved in maintaining safety and discipline. SSAs are seldom called upon. "My school aides are, in my eyes, no different from the SSA agents or the cops," Lepore said. "As a matter of fact, they're the first line of defense, and I would say 90 percent of all incidents stop at that point. They're able to handle them. If not, we have a dean that works for the campus. If it has to go higher than the dean, then you may need to involve the SSA agents, and there are incidents that ultimately the police may have to get involved in; but in the six years I've been here, you can count those on one hand."⁷⁶

Whereas educators at other schools have struggled to assert control over the police personnel in their buildings, Lepore believes he has "100 percent authority" over his SSAs. Lepore prefers his approach to the punitive model in use at other schools:

For the most part, the adults check their ego at the door. You don't have people who are on a power trip here; and, again, when you communicate, and that's ongoing, as an entire team, then if incidents occur and you don't see eye to eye, you have some good will to fall back on. Some people may say that you're not so lucky because you don't have those aggressive agents, you need those aggressive SSAs. No, I don't think I want those types of aggressive agents. I know what some of my colleagues go through. I've read some of the articles in terms of principal arrest. I wouldn't know what to do if I were in an environment where others became the authority."⁷⁷

HUMANITIES PREPARATORY ACADEMY (MANHATTAN)



Table 4a. Demographics: Humanities Prep

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% White	10.5
% Black	36.8
% Latino	46.8
% Asian	5.8
% Male	49.1
% Female	50.9
% Free or Reduced Lunch	N/A
% Limited English Proficient	2.3
% FT Special Education	2.4

Table 4b. Indicators of Success: Humanities Prep

INDICATORS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% 4-Year Graduation	64.8
% Dropped Out	5.6
% 7-Year Graduation	92.6
Average Daily Attendance	81.0
% Student Stability	81.0
% Planning 4-Year College	63.0
% Planning 2-Year College	31.0
# Violent Incidents Per 100	0.2
# Property Crime Incidents Per 100	0.2
# Other Crime Incidents Per 100	0.7
# Non-Criminal Police Incidents Per 100	1.4
# Suspensions Per 100	10.1

Educators at Humanities Prep credit its success to a familiar principle: democracy in action. At Prep, student input is encouraged, cultivated and respected through town hall meetings, colloquium-style classes and a fairness committee. “I’m not saying it’s perfect and everyone’s holding hands and singing,” said teacher Maria Hantzopoulos, “but it’s an effort to move towards a more humane learning institution.”⁷⁸

Seven core values guide decision making at the school: respect for humanity, respect for diversity, respect for the intellect, respect for the truth, commitment to peace, commitment to justice, and commitment to democracy.⁷⁹ These values help instill a nurturing, fair and peaceful learning environment at Prep.

Prep is a transfer school, welcoming students who have had behavioral, emotional or learning problems at other schools. The population it serves is representative of some of the city’s highest-need populations. Yet its graduation, student retention and college enrollment rates are higher than other schools serving similar populations.

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

Prep’s commitment to democracy is demonstrated in its organizational structure. There are no administrators other than the principal. Decisions are based on the consensus of the teachers—who meet every Wednesday for a two-and-a-half-hour staff meeting—giving them a greater investment in their educational mission, more control over their day-to-day interactions with students and colleagues, and a greater impact on the health of their school environment. “Nothing is ever just handed down to us,” said teacher Kate Bush. “[I]t is about hearing everyone’s voices.”⁸⁰

Teachers at the school often fill leadership roles in place of the administrator. For instance, at the time of our interview, Bush was leading the professional development program at the school.⁸¹ Arriving at a consensus also requires the teachers to make judgment calls and forge compromises, which builds their individual leadership qualities and their ability to be flexible.

The unique governance structure at Prep is due in part to the school’s history. In the 1990s, a small group of teachers at Bayard Rustin High School began working on a half-day program for students that used the core values as a basis for building a more humane and sympathetic learning environment.⁸² As more students joined the half-day program, the teachers got the green light from Bayard Rustin’s principal to write a prospectus for a school that would become Humanities Prep. While the principal was and still is an important leadership figure at Prep, it is the core values that provide the school with its integrity and direction.

Educators at the school are expected to use the core values in all aspects of their work, including during class time, in interactions with students, and in their approach to school safety and discipline. The values are enforced through the fairness committee and also as a community norm: teachers told us their students actively keep each other mindful of the core values by expressing when they feel a peer is out of line.⁸³

By structuring the school around a strong but flexible governing document instead of an individual or a title, Prep’s founders ensured that its approach to educating and nurturing students would survive personnel changes, trends in education and the personality dynamics of any one leader.

A STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL RULES

Humanities Prep strives to not overwhelm students with insignificant or “nitpicky” rules, but to focus on building a positive learning community while strongly emphasizing a few major prohibitions, such as those against drugs, alcohol, weapons, fighting and leaving campus without permission.⁸⁴ The school does not have a rule prohibiting hats or other headwear, students are permitted to chew gum as long as they are neat and considerate about it, and students can even listen to music in some classes.⁸⁵

Prep students say they understand that serious infractions result in serious consequences; students can be suspended or expelled for fighting, which, in addition to being dangerous and disruptive, is a violation of Prep’s core values. Nevertheless, even in situations like fighting—which Hantzopoulos described as “non-negotiable”—Prep teachers are committed to examining all the aspects of an incident. They are hesitant to resort to drastic punishments that can have a serious and lasting effect on a student’s success, Hantzopoulos said. “We really try to understand what’s going on with the kids and so it’s very different than the other schools where [discipline is] just automatic. [At Prep,] it depends on the circumstances.”

POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES TO EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE

At Prep, minor offenses or disagreements between students and teachers are handled through a conflict-resolution process known as the fairness committee. If any member of the Humanities Prep community feels that another member is violating one of the core values, they can take that person to fairness committee to try to work out their differences. At fairness committee, two students and a teacher serve as investigators and jury. Students can take both students and teachers to the committee. For instance, if a student feels that a teacher’s classroom policies do not reflect the core values, he or she has recourse by taking that teacher to the fairness committee.

“It could be a kid showing up to class late consistently and I’ve had conversations with her and it’s not working so I may take her to fairness because I feel like she’s violating ‘respect for the intellect,’” Hantzopoulos said. “Or she could take me because she doesn’t understand my grading policy and maybe she’s tried to talk to me and I haven’t given her a full explanation.”⁸⁶

Fairness committee gives students a sense of ownership over school rules, a safety net when they feel that something negative has happened to them, an outlet for frustrations and emotional turmoil, and the power to renegotiate daily interactions that could lead to conflict if they go unnoticed. “It’s a way to have a deeper conversation before things escalate into something else,” Hantzopoulos said.⁸⁷

For more serious incidents—such as fights—Prep relies on a mediation process. Mediation involves the two participants and one teacher or social worker, who acts as the mediator, in a confidential environment.⁸⁸ The goal of mediation is to diffuse a disagreement or fight by finding common ground, while the goal of fairness committee is to “unearth” what happened, allowing everyone to tell his or her side of the story.⁸⁹ Hantzopoulos explained that the difference between the two is nuanced, and teachers use their discretion when deciding which is more appropriate for a situation. Having both systems allows teachers to recommend the most positive and impactful form of conflict resolution.

EMPOWERED PEDAGOGICAL STAFF AND CLOSE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Democracy and community are some of the most valued principles at Prep. To that end, the school makes a unique effort to unite its students, to eliminate cliques and competition between students, and to encourage students to take an active role in their own education.⁹⁰ For example, Prep holds periodic town hall meetings where students are encouraged to discuss their thoughts on different timely topics. Teacher Hantzopoulos emphasized that the town hall meetings are not assemblies, but “lively” and sometimes “chaotic” discussions where students are given freedom to express themselves on topics chosen by a different advisory group each week.⁹¹

Past town hall topics have included environmental racism, the war in Iraq, drug policy, and police in schools. Sometimes the meetings will be dedicated to theater or dance performances or art exhibitions.⁹² A recent town hall invited students to talk about how they felt when roving metal detectors were installed in their building.⁹³

There are also smaller versions of town hall meetings, called quads, made up of three or four advisory classes, which give students another opportunity to speak their minds. Students may attend quads and/or town hall meetings several times a

month, strengthening their sense of community, appreciation of democratic values, respect for intellectual debate and expression, and self esteem.⁹⁴

At the beginning of every school year, all Prep students participate in a several-day-long orientation known as the clique-buster. The orientation includes ice breakers and a town hall meeting. After the orientation, students break into smaller groups for an event called the intensive, which features workshops and projects based on a common theme. The intensive involves group work, guest speakers, panel discussions and field research. It fosters a team spirit within the school.⁹⁵

The emphasis on fairness and democratic values is carried over to all aspects of the school. For example, students call teachers by their first names, creating a greater sense of trust, familiarity and community. Students say that being able to address their teachers on a first-name basis makes them feel more mature, more respected and relaxed, and enhances their sense of place at the school.⁹⁶

JULIA RICHMAN EDUCATION COMPLEX: URBAN ACADEMY AND VANGUARD HIGH SCHOOL (MANHATTAN)



Table 5a. Demographics: Vanguard

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% White	8.4
% Black	33.0
% Latino	54.2
% Asian	1.6
% Male	53.0
% Female	47.0
% Free or Reduced Lunch	77.5
% Limited English Proficient	5.8
% FT Special Education	3.0

Table 5b. Indicators of Success: Vanguard

INDICATORS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% 4-Year Graduation	67.7
% Dropped Out	6.5
% 7-Year Graduation	76.5
Average Daily Attendance	81.0
% Student Stability	81.0
% Planning 4-Year College	78.0
% Planning 2-Year College	20.0
# Violent Incidents Per 100	0.0
# Property Crime Incidents Per 100	0.1
# Other Crime Incidents Per 100	0.3
# Non-Criminal Police Incidents Per 100	0.1
# Suspensions Per 100	0.3

Table 6a. Demographics: Urban Academy

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% White	34.4
% Black	37.4
% Latino	24.4
% Asian	3.8
% Male	40.7
% Female	59.3
% Free or Reduced Lunch	33.6
% Limited English Proficient	1.5
% FT Special Education	N/A

Table 6b. Indicators of Success: Urban Academy

INDICATORS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% 4-Year Graduation	37.0
% Dropped Out	0
% 7-Year Graduation	90.9
Average Daily Attendance	94.0
% Student Stability	94.0
% Planning 4-Year College	80.0
% Planning 2-Year College	5.0
# Violent Incidents Per 100	0.0
# Property Crime Incidents Per 100	0.1
# Other Crime Incidents Per 100	0.3
# Non-Criminal Police Incidents Per 100	0.1
# Suspensions Per 100	0.8

Julia Richman was the first female district superintendent of New York City schools. She spent 40 years advocating for the welfare of marginalized youth.⁹⁷ Today, the Julia Richman Education Complex continues the work of educating some of the city's most vulnerable students in a progressive and nurturing atmosphere.

Julia Richman High School had its share of challenges. The massive, five-story building was once a self-contained school of more than 2,000 students. During the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s, Julia Richman, like many high schools in New York City, suffered major budget cuts. Overcrowded and under-funded, the institution began to decline by the late 1980s. Violence rose and student morale plummeted. By 1993, the graduation rate was the lowest in Manhattan, and the school was facing closure. School board officials knew a dramatic restructuring needed to take place if the high school was to survive. The board sought help from the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), a network of advocates and educators dedicated to creating and sustaining unique, equitable and intellectually challenging schools.⁹⁸

In 1995, CES opened the doors of the Julia Richman Education Complex (JREC).⁹⁹ Re-imagined as six smaller schools, JREC became the first large school in New York City to adopt the small-school model. Serving the same population it always has, JREC is now an academically rigorous, multiage, collaborative learning community, a place where students and staff say they feel at home.

JREC currently comprises four high schools: Vanguard, Urban Academy, Manhattan International and Talent Unlimited, a performing arts school. There is also a middle school for children with autism and a pre-K—8 elementary school. Although each possesses strong ties with the campus community, JREC schools operate autonomously, with separate budgets, staff and curricula. Perhaps most importantly, each school has its own distinct culture. For this report, we highlight Vanguard High School and Urban Academy, focusing on their successes as part of the JREC community.

Urban Academy opened in 1985 as a half-day program for less than three dozen students. The program went through several transformations before Herb Mack, the founding principal of the school and one of the founders of JREC, moved Urban Academy into the Julia Richman building in 1995. Unique in many ways, Urban Academy is a transfer alternative school that accepts students who have been unsuccessful at their previous schools. Many of its 140 students are overage for their grade and/or behind in credits.¹⁰⁰

Vanguard High School opened in 1993 as a school intended for the Julia Richman building, though it was hot-housed in an off-site location for two years before moving into the complex.

This incubation period allowed the school to develop its own unique culture and model for success. Starting with a student population of 80, Vanguard has now grown to more than 300 students.

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

The co-directors of Urban Academy, Herb Mack and Ann Cook, and Vanguard Principal Louis Delgado take different approaches to school leadership, but all three emphasize student responsibility, respect for all and effective communication. Though distinctive, their approaches are complementary and contribute to the culture of responsibility and self-awareness at JREC.

From an early morning talk with a student to facilitating JREC's building council meetings, Mack says small moments and budding issues deserve his attention as much as the big picture.¹⁰¹ But even with day-to-day management challenges, Mack says students can always command his undivided attention. A former social worker and skillful listener, he has both the ability to engage students and the desire to do so. Students know Mack is accessible and that they are his top priority. One recent grad told Cook that if he and the superintendent were both waiting at Mack's office, Mack would speak to the student first.¹⁰²

Mack's administrative style reflects the principles upon which Urban Academy was founded: an empowered student voice and participatory learning. Mack emphasizes the importance of giving students a role in the school's decision-making process. He encourages teachers and staff to listen to students and to incorporate their ideas and concerns into the discipline code. Not only does this help to establish an environment of trust and respect, but it is also an educational tool. "These are the future decision-makers," Mack said. "If they can't defend their own opinions, then what is the point of education?"¹⁰³

Inverse to Mack's on-the-ground role as an administrator, Cook often works outside of the school. She advocates at the city level for the school's welfare and stability and its continued permission from the New York State Board of Regents to experiment with alternative practices and policies. She stresses the importance of administrators who have teaching experience. Both Mack and Cook were teachers prior to their role as directors. Cook believes that if administrators understand what their teachers have to contend with on a daily basis, they can facilitate discussions based on knowledge and experience.¹⁰⁴

Cook is also a coordinator of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, a growing network of 31 schools—including Urban Academy and Vanguard (as is Humanities Prep, also profiled in this report). Consortium schools allow students to utilize a performance-based system of assessment to receive credit, instead of taking Regents exams. At least one study has suggested that Consortium schools are better at preparing stu-

dents for college than schools with Regents testing, and they boast lower dropout rates.¹⁰⁵ Because the students are more involved with the learning process at a Consortium school, they are less likely to become frustrated and disengaged from the curriculum and more likely to feel at home at their school.¹⁰⁶ Cook has worked to incorporate statewide initiatives that have the support of the New York State Board of Regents, and her efforts have paid off with a recent five-year extension of the Consortium schools initiative.

The work of juniors and seniors at Urban Academy is assessed by their demonstration of college-level skills in social science research, literary analysis, application of mathematical skills and the scientific method, creative arts and art criticism. “The way some people identify success is through test scores,” Cook said. “But there are far more effective ways to assess what students know and can do. Assessments should reflect the curriculum—not be imposed on it as are standardized tests. A complex, rich and challenging curriculum requires multidimensional assessments.”¹⁰⁷

Delgado is also engaged and relaxed, partially because he has had experience playing a number of different roles in the school setting. Like Cook and Mack, Delgado was a teacher before he became an administrator. Before that, Delgado started his career as an SSA. He had such a rapport with the students that the principal asked him to spend time in the classroom as a paraprofessional. From there, he moved on to a teaching position in Lower Manhattan. He became principal of Vanguard High School at its inception in 1993.¹⁰⁸ Because he is familiar with the functions of school employees at every level, he is free of the need to micromanage but still recognizes when something needs adjustment. His strong relationship with his teachers and SSAs is due in large part to his experience working as both a teacher and an SSA.

Delgado said his personal philosophy is based on respect, and others in the school community say respect is a distinct trait of life at Vanguard. Teacher Carol Saft, who considers Delgado a mentor, believes that “once young people know that you respect them, you also gain trust; and once you have trust, you have [the] possibility for very good communication.”¹⁰⁹

A STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL RULES

While most New York City high schools create a list of rules for their students and use a combination of threatened punishment and loss of incentives to enforce them, Urban Academy has established a different approach. It has just one fundamental rule: No personal attacks. That includes no fighting. “That’s basically like we can’t hurt other peoples’ feelings intentionally—we can disagree as much as we want, but we can’t make them feel bad,” explained student Mio Cook.¹¹⁰

Teachers, students and administrators describe this maxim as not really a rule, but a social responsibility that the community takes to heart. Mack explained that the development of a workable one-rule system took time and dedication: “We set up a tradition. Now, it didn’t happen overnight. ... If you’re working to develop a culture, you just have to be patient.”¹¹¹

Urban Academy teacher Caitlin Schlapp-Gillgoff incorporates the “no personal attacks” rule into classroom debate and decorum, stressing the importance of consistency. “It’s not just about what you say, it’s about your facial expressions, it’s about your body language,” she said. “In the beginning of the school year, teachers take on more of a responsibility for reinforcing that rule and they will stop class discussions and say something as often as it takes to create that culture within the classroom. But over time, often the kids in a class will call each other out on personal attacks even if the teacher doesn’t hear it.”¹¹²

Over time, students have taken ownership of this school norm, and have an active role in its enforcement. For instance, student Mio Cook (no relation to Ann Cook) encourages her peers to follow the rule, not because they will be disciplined otherwise, but because it is in the best interest of the community.¹¹³ If students do not respect each other, the community’s sense of unity, cohesiveness and strength begins to fall apart.

Ann Cook’s philosophy rests on the notion that rules do not matter if students are unhappy in the school environment. “You can have all the rules you want but if kids don’t want to be there, then the rule becomes useless,” she said. “You have to first create the climate where kids really want to be in a place.”¹¹⁴ Students like Mio Cook believe that Urban Academy has created that climate.

Vanguard High School’s approach to rules is a little more traditional, but only a little. At Vanguard, rules are referred to as values. Administration and staff believe that “rules” are not the best guides for their educational environment. Instead, the school’s structure begins with exploring and improving interpersonal relationships. Using the Coalition of Essential Schools model of “common principles,” the Vanguard community works to integrate values of trust, decency and respect into everyday school activities and relationships. Their core values are similar to those of other CES schools, including Humanities Preparatory Academy, also profiled in this report. The values do not include a dress code, which is all too often the spark that ignites a conflict between a teacher and student.

Principal Delgado and JREC’s SSAs believe that dress-code violations are less urgent than a student’s emotional needs and academic success. “Adolescents are beginning to carve out their space in the world,” Delgado said. “How they dress or how they walk or the music they listen to is part of that makeup. ... I think students could learn with a hat on, could get here on time

with a hat on, and could do homework and follow through on their responsibilities with a hat on.”¹¹⁵

POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES TO EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Instead of relying on a zero tolerance discipline model, Vanguard High School operates on the notion of fairness. Each discipline issue is handled on an individual basis, and there are no mandatory punishments.¹¹⁶ Often before resorting to punishment, teachers and administrators will meet with a student and his or her parent to discuss the student’s behavior and what can be done to help that student improve. Principal Delgado makes it clear that, while Vanguard students must take responsibility for their actions, it is the school’s responsibility to address the root causes of conflicts and disruptive behavior.

With guidance from administration and staff at Humanities Prep and CES, Vanguard has adapted mediation and restorative justice techniques such as fairness committee to their own environment.¹¹⁷ By drawing on the successes of another Successful School, Vanguard capitalizes on experience without investing resources in systems that fail.

Vanguard’s fairness committee, like that at Prep, is student-run. As both judge and jury, members of a student leadership team listen to the case of a fellow student who has been accused of violating one of the school’s values. After hearing all sides of the story, the committee recommends an outcome that best suits everyone. If the student is found “guilty,” the committee determines how to help him or her become a better member of the community.¹¹⁸ This proactive approach is most effective in a system based on communication and fairness. Teacher Margaret Lum said the fairness committee allows students to have more of a voice in disciplinary issues, teaching them to identify potential problems before they get out of hand.

Though Urban Academy does not have formal conflict-resolution programs, student leadership often steps in to calm conflicts. Student Zoe Magik is a member of the school’s student committee where, among other things, disagreements between students are mediated.¹¹⁹ However, Urban Academy rarely sees conflicts escalate into school safety incidents, perhaps because of the success of the “no personal attacks” rule. The rule encourages students to identify and constructively deal with aggressiveness before acting out. This is a key element in the practice of conflict resolution.¹²⁰ Students learn to communicate thoughtfully and without fear. “We can express our thoughts without having to fight to express our thoughts,” said Mio Cook.¹²¹

Moreover, there are no “hallway sweeps” at Urban Academy—the rounding-up of students who are caught outside of class once the late bell has sounded—because the hallways double as a student lounge. Cozy couches and a kaleidoscope of chairs and tables line the halls so that students have a place to wind

down. “When students are not in class and they’re not assigned to a class, they’re allowed to be in the hallways,” parent Danielle Gonzalez explained. The student lounge concept invites students to feel comfortable at school, to reinforce the feeling that they belong, rather than “sweeping” them out of hallways as if they were trespassing.

Like Vanguard, Urban Academy has no rules against hats, and eating is allowed almost anywhere except computer classes.¹²² Students at Urban Academy are given a level of autonomy unusual in New York City schools. However, this freedom is not awarded arbitrarily. The environment of high expectation, personalized attention and trust was built upon a strong foundation of individualized discipline.

COMMUNICATION AND CLEAR LINES OF AUTHORITY BETWEEN SSAS AND EDUCATORS

While Urban Academy and Vanguard High School are distinct in many ways, they share a school safety unit. A team of five SSAs, led by Agent Rebecca Lemon, presides over the building. Teachers, parents and administrators all say they are comfortable with the limited role that SSAs play in their schools. “Our security guards... know everyone in the building,” parent Gonzalez said. “My daughter says she feels like a superstar when she comes in because all the security guards greet her; they ask about her day.”¹²³

The majority of SSA Lemon’s time is spent talking to students rather than punishing them. “[Students] come with all kinds of concerns and you just have to stop and listen,” she said. “They just want someone to talk to.”¹²⁴ JREC’s SSAs believe that making students feel welcome when entering the building helps establish a culture of safety.

Lemon has been a safety agent for 18 years and a supervising sergeant for the past 10 years. She feels that the success of Urban Academy’s and Vanguard’s school safety policies can be attributed to school-wide communication. At JREC, principals, teachers, staff and SSAs meet on a weekly basis, so the channels of communication are always open. This also allows the individuals to develop relationships with one another and avoid confrontations over their roles in the school.¹²⁵

But it was not always this way. “Before we got our current supervisor,” Mack said, “we had guys who loved to put kids in handcuffs because it’s a good statistic. But Rebecca, she’s interested in students, in teenagers, and not in creating a career that will let her into the Police Department.”¹²⁶

Mack, Cook and Delgado emphasize the importance of good communication in maintaining a cohesive atmosphere in the school community. In order to achieve that sense of unity, these leaders rely on clear communication of roles and expectations,

and open channels for sharing thoughts and voicing concerns. All three make it a point to plan, attend and facilitate regular meetings with teachers, students, staff and parents. As building manager, Mack checks in periodically with SSAs about school safety issues. He also runs Urban Academy's weekly schoolwide meetings.

All three administrators are members of the JREC building council, in which all principals at JREC and their staffs gather to discuss common causes. The building council operates entirely by unanimous consent: no decision is made without the approval of every member of the council. This contributes to campus harmony and ensures the best decisions are made for the entire complex. While the administrators acknowledge occasional dissonance and though obtaining unanimous consent can take a while, "once participants reach a decision, they take ownership of that decision," said Ann Cook. In the long run, all members of the community say they are happier. For nearly 15 years, the system has proved successful.

"What makes this place work is that there is a continual conversation with everyone on the staff," Mack said. "There's not a hierarchy. We listen to people, seeing what the problems are, and contending with the problems we have to deal with."¹²⁷

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS' NONACADEMIC NEEDS

Urban Academy makes a serious effort to understand students' personal struggles and challenges before they become the basis for behavioral problems. A teacher's center located within the JREC building provides professional development for teachers from across the city. The center is always accessible to JREC teachers for professional development and discussion. It provides workshops in hands-on curriculum and inquiry-based teaching and learning. The center helps teachers develop and explore their skills in pedagogy and instruction.¹²⁸

In addition, all schools at JREC take advantage of Mt. Sinai Health Center, and social workers and physicians' assistants conduct workshops for staff. Mental health experts, for instance, educate teachers about the challenges some of their students are facing.¹²⁹ Members of Mt. Sinai Adolescent Health are often invited to speak with students about drug prevention, depression and sexual health.¹³⁰ They are an important part of the JREC community and are able to answer questions confidentially. They have become such a trusted presence within the building that students feel free to consult with Health Center staff independently.¹³¹

Vanguard has collaborated with a social work program, Liberty Partnerships, which works within the DOE. Liberty Partnerships provides services in counseling, parental engagement, crisis intervention and academic support.¹³² Vanguard has many

students with learning challenges, and the school works with Liberty Partnerships to provide supplemental tutoring and to design inclusive curriculum.

Because Urban Academy does not have guidance counselors, the teachers often counsel students. For more serious cases, Urban Academy (with help from a grant) works cooperatively with two clinical physiologists to meet with students and provide licensed support. One psychologist works six hours a week with students in school and another works outside of the building. Students are referred to her by administration or Mt. Sinai staff.¹³³

Another important program within the JREC building is First Steps, an infant and toddler daycare center for the children of teen parents.¹³⁴ First Steps is part of a citywide initiative known as LYFE, providing developmentally appropriate child care for children from two months to three years of age. Teachers are also able to enroll their children in the program, but there is no charge for JREC students.

EMPOWERED PEDAGOGICAL STAFF AND CLOSE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

The power of student voices and self-expression is also a prevalent characteristic at Urban Academy. There is a new-student orientation every fall and winter semester to help incoming students adjust to the school and learn about its alternative structure. School assemblies invite students to make their concerns known to a broader audience. Even in classrooms, teachers engage students in vigorous debates. These opportunities for dialogue build students' confidence in the classroom. "As students, we are so prepared to be in college, to write, to discuss, to just present our ideas," said Mio Cook.¹³⁵

Ann Cook believes that schools must have a strong belief in the intellectual and reasoning capacity of their students. "Kids at Urban are engaged and they're interested—and they have something to say," she said. Students are invited into the decision-making process because adults at Urban Academy respect their opinions and expect great things from them. In turn, students believe in their own ability to make mature and informed decisions.

Urban Academy assigns students to "organizational tutorials," small groups of students led by a teacher that meet three times a week throughout the year.¹³⁶ The tutorial allows students to develop a strong relationship with a teacher, who can monitor their work and help them develop good study habits.

Vanguard has a similar system, called advisories. Advisories are small groups that operate similar to homeroom classes. Students report to the same room every day for 40 minutes; and, like the tutorials at Urban Academy, teachers take the role of advisor and discussion leader, providing students with the space to air grievances or discuss issues of conduct. Vanguard's advisories

are also important avenues through which students influence school rules. During advisory sessions, students tackle a school-related issue or problem from different angles and attempt to solve the problem together.¹³⁷

Another avenue enabling Vanguard students to influence decision-making is the Student Leadership Team (SLT). The SLT functions like a student government. Each advisory has one representative who attends weekly SLT meetings. The assistant principal is present, as well as at least one member of the faculty. At SLT meetings, students are able to relay to the administration the discussions they have had during advisories and present recommendations for adjustments to school rules.¹³⁸

Urban Academy teachers also make a concerted effort to incorporate student voices in shaping school norms and policies.¹³⁹ Urban Academy has developed a series of projects that cater to the interests of students while keeping disruptive behavior at a minimum. One way of addressing disruptive behavior is to provide an outlet for it. To that end, the school installed a graffiti wall where youth can express themselves constructively and creatively without causing trouble.

SCHOOL CULTURE OF TRUST AND RESPECT

School culture refers to the intangible qualities of school life: the way in which individuals in a school relate to one another, their roles and expectations, their community values and norms, and their approach to school work and school conflict.¹⁴⁰

The culture at Urban Academy is best described by Danielle Gonzalez, the mother of two young JREC students. “The idea that you can’t take a cookie-cutter model and apply it to every kid I think is greatly understood here. ...The staff, the parents, the students, all respect the idea that every opinion, every set of skills, every individual is viable, is important. People need to be heard, people need to be seen. All those things are taken into consideration and encouraged.”¹⁴¹

Positive relationships between staff members are influential and are reflected in the positive relationships that students from various grade levels and backgrounds have with each other. Principal Mack encourages student interactions and collaborative work to build relationships and solve problems. While there is no formal conflict resolution program, Mack relies on the responsibility students feel for one another to keep the school peaceful.¹⁴²

Part of that sense of shared responsibility comes from being members of a multi-age community.¹⁴³ Gonzalez said she was initially concerned about her small children going to school in a building that houses four high schools. But her fears were alleviated when she realized the students took on the responsibility of caring for their younger counterparts. “[O]ne of the things that

I noticed was a pre-K student walking down the hallway [with] this huge high school student,” said Gonzalez. “They were addressing each other by first name, saying ‘What’s up.’ And it wasn’t an aberration; it wasn’t just these two students who knew one another. This was the prevailing feeling in the building.”¹⁴⁴

This multiage school setting is another important factor in the social development of young people. “Adolescents look at the world differently when they know there are young children around,” Mack said. “It softens their way of interacting with each other.”¹⁴⁵

At Vanguard, school culture relies heavily on the trust that community members build with one another through constant dialogue. “This is our community, this is our safe space,” Saft said. “I don’t have to talk about theft or danger, because we spend a lot of time trying to create open communication.”

Saft also explained the role Vanguard teachers take in their students’ lives. “I say to the students, ‘I’m here today, and I’m going to be here next year, and I’m going to watch you graduate. ...I’m going to be here and I’m going to clap, and watch you graduate, and I’ll be cheering for you.’”

At Vanguard the culture revolves around having a concrete understanding of young people and a belief in their potential. Teachers say they have faith that their students are vessels of intellectual growth, constantly learning and evolving as they mature into adults. Teachers and students describe their classroom as having an optimism and confidence often missing from other urban schools.

“The kids come in here happy,” Gonzalez said. “The staff seems happy to be here and the security officers seem happy to be a part of the community in this building. You don’t get this type of happiness when there’s turmoil, when there’s mistrust. ... People are happy to work with one another—teachers, students and parents. That becomes the overall feeling or aura in the building. I don’t worry about my kids here.”¹⁴⁶

LEHMAN HIGH SCHOOL (BRONX)



Table 7a. Demographics: Lehman

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% White	11.8
% Black	23.4
% Latino	58.2
% Asian	6.1
% Male	55.5
% Female	44.5
% Free or Reduced Lunch	75.5
% Limited English Proficient	6.9
% FT Special Education	7.4

Table 7b. Indicators of Success: Lehman

INDICATORS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% 4-Year Graduation	58.2
% Dropped Out	16.1
% 7-Year Graduation	78.5
Average Daily Attendance	82.0
% Student Stability	82.0
% Planning 4-Year College	40.0
% Planning 2-Year College	32.0
# Violent Incidents Per 100	0.2
# Property Crime Incidents Per 100	0.0
# Other Crime Incidents Per 100	0.4
# Non-Criminal Police Incidents Per 100	0.8
# Suspensions Per 100	4.1

With more than 4,100 students, Lehman High School is one of the largest high schools in New York City. The major challenge at such a large school—and one that struggles with overcrowding—is to unite the student body and establish a sense of belonging to keep students secure, peaceful and engaged. By this measure, Lehman has been a great success. Unique course offerings and the division of students into close-knit groups known as houses help students develop a sense of identity while connecting them to the larger school community. In addition, conflict-resolution programs, school-employed safety aides, and an array of support services allow this huge school to operate as smoothly as schools a fraction of its size, without resorting to suspensions or metal detectors to keep the peace.

Lehman High School's student body comprises several ethnic and racial groups, including students who are immigrants and students for whom English is a second language. This type of diversity can lead to cliques, disagreements and even violence. But that is rarely the case at Lehman, where teachers, social workers and administrators have largely succeeded in harnessing diversity and drawing on the strengths of a large school to empower students. "We have our own issues, but for the most part, it's just a calm, cool, and collected environment, and it's just like a little family," recalled Francis Eward, Lehman High School graduate. "I may not know everybody; but at the same time, when it's time to rep for your school, we're all for Lehman."¹⁴⁷

Students do not want to disrupt Lehman's "calm" atmosphere. "For the most part," said one student, "the environment was just so regular, not hectic, and I don't think anybody really wanted to disturb that."¹⁴⁸

SCHOOL CULTURE OF TRUST AND RESPECT

Part of the way Lehman bridges the cultural gulfs between its students is by allowing them to affiliate with one of 12 houses. Houses are communities of students, each with a name and identity, headed by its own student government consisting of a student president, secretary, treasurer and other officers. Each house is coordinated by a guidance counselor, ensuring each student has access to a trained guidance professional—a rare feat in a large high school.¹⁴⁹

The Ninth-Grade Academy is a house that helps new students get acclimated to the large school by taking them on campus tours, assisting in the transition from middle to high school and providing daily after-school tutoring. The Ninth-Grade Academy is led by five staff members, three of whom are certified counselors.¹⁵⁰

Other houses help students feel connected to the school by providing social activities such as pizza parties, fundraisers, award ceremonies and events geared toward a particular subject or interest area.¹⁵¹ Older students can affiliate with a house based on academic achievement, personal interests or participation in school leadership activities. For instance, the Def Academy is a house open to students who are admitted to the school's honor roll and/or ethics roll.¹⁵² There are also houses dedicated to the performing arts, sports and computer technology.¹⁵³ This approach provides the benefits of small-school life to students, while still offering the targeted programs and wide-ranging choices available at a larger campus.

Lehman also contributes to the sense of community by offering many extracurricular activities for students, even in a time when many schools are cutting these programs. For instance, Lehman has basketball and football teams, dances, Senior Week activities and pep rallies.¹⁵⁴ It also provides uncommon electives for students including guitar, aerobics and fishing classes.¹⁵⁵

POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES TO EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE

Like many of the other Successful Schools, Lehman has a conflict-resolution program where students who are involved in a fight or altercation are encouraged to seek common ground with the help of a mediator. But with such a large student body, conflict resolution alone is not enough to ensure that every student has a safe and productive school day. To that end, Lehman has adopted policies and programs to offer a larger proportion of students the assistance they need, both personally and academically, to resist negative behaviors. In addition, the administration and faculty at Lehman remain open to alternatives to suspension so that punishment is proportional to the offense committed.

At many schools, discipline problems, such as absenteeism and tardiness, are punished with suspensions. But former Lehman social worker Ebony Wright Campbell says teachers and administrators at Lehman are willing to examine the situation from different vantage points and "make the punishment fit the crime."¹⁵⁶ Part of the Lehman strategy of educating the "whole" student is determining when a student has problems at home or in a relationship that are causing negative behavior at school. Often students are referred to counseling, or even required to attend sessions with a social worker, as an alternative to suspension.¹⁵⁷ For students who are late, the usual first stop is a guidance counselor's office, not a meeting with a dean or SSA.¹⁵⁸

At Lehman, there are no hallway sweeps. Alumnus Zamira Castro says that if a safety aide found a student in the hallway during class time, the student would not be taken to the principal's office but, instead, escorted to his scheduled class.¹⁵⁹ That way, students who are tardy do not miss more class time.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS' NONACADEMIC NEEDS

Lehman High School is home to several student support programs, including social, health care and counseling services. Students with access to medical and mental care and counseling services can focus on their studies and may carry less anger and anxiety into school with them.

Lehman has an on-site health center sponsored and run by Montefiore Hospital that provides free health care to students. Staffed by a doctor, a mental health provider, a nurse and a community health organizer, the clinic provides free services to many students who might not otherwise have access to medical care. The clinic offers everything from regular checkups and physicals to sexual health care, weight loss and body-image counseling, flu shots, treatment for asthma, and stress management.¹⁶⁰

Lehman also offers an in-depth counseling program for students called SPARK. SPARK combines prevention and intervention strategies to assist adolescents with forming healthy relationships, coping with family challenges, developing social skills, exploring sexuality and gender identity, and substance abuse prevention. The program is headed by two social workers, one of whom also runs another program called RAPP—Relationship Abuse Prevention Program. In addition to offering group and individual counseling, SPARK and RAPP employees conduct workshops and train students to be peer leaders.¹⁶¹

A STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL RULES

The Lehman High School Student Council often discusses school rules and presents the concerns of the student body to administrators. One student we interviewed said the purpose of the Student Council is to “bring forth issues to the table and then try to do something about it.”¹⁶² The presidents of the houses are often invited to Student Council meetings, allowing more students to participate in leadership activities and ensuring that a broad range of students’ concerns are heard and addressed.¹⁶³

Lehman student leaders also have the opportunity to attend some administration meetings to directly express the concerns and opinions of the student body. In addition, Lehman has an all-student executive board, where 12th grade students are given the opportunity to plan events and activities and contribute to the school’s overall governance.¹⁶⁴

COMMUNICATION AND CLEAR LINES OF AUTHORITY BETWEEN SSAS AND EDUCATORS

One hallmark of Lehman’s safety and security policies is that teachers take an active role in managing discipline issues in their classrooms. While the practice at many city schools is for teach-

ers to call on SSAs to deal with disciplinary issues, at Lehman the teachers attempt to work with students before calling security. And when SSAs intercede, the teachers try to stay involved and make a fair assessment of the student’s behavior, which will factor into any discipline that follows.¹⁶⁵ The relationship between SSAs and teachers at Lehman is characterized by open lines of communication and mutual respect.¹⁶⁶ Their ability to work together in managing school discipline is vital to Lehman’s low suspension rate.

In addition to the SSAs, Lehman is staffed by school-employed safety aides who answer to its administration. This helps give faculty and staff a say in discipline issues and the types of incidents that require the involvement of security.

The SPARK program is also available for in-class training and counseling on topics the teachers and students request. Alumnus Eward said, “If a teacher is getting on your nerves or you’re feeling angry or you want to fight, they have people there that you can talk to and communicate with so you won’t get in trouble if you’re thinking about doing something.”¹⁶⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS V.

All of the Successful Schools have created safe and orderly environments while improving academic performance. In all the schools we studied, security and disciplinary policies are based on mutual respect, an expectation of self-discipline and proportional responses to rule breaking. These successful policies have only been possible because of a strictly limited police presence: no metal detectors and only a very minor role for SSAs and other NYPD personnel. Therefore, our primary recommendation is that the DOE reduce its reliance on police personnel and policing tactics such as metal detectors.

We also recommend a small number of programs and practices that have achieved security at the schools surveyed. But these programs will only have a chance to work if there is a high-level commitment to let them. The top priority must be to reestablish the control of educators over all but the most exceptional disciplinary matters.

Cutting back the heavy police presence in city schools is not pushing the system into uncharted waters. This report demonstrates with six real-life examples that high schools can do a better job of educating students and maintaining security without metal detectors and squadrons of police personnel patrolling the hallways. The alternative models we have presented in this report are not merely theoretical. From Brooklyn to the South Bronx, alternative discipline models are working on students who are demographically no different from those in heavily policed Impact schools.

Our research also suggests a strong correlation between the Successful Schools' security methods and the improved academic performance of their students, with higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates. "You'd think the Department of Education would want to know all about us, but they don't," said Principal William Jusino of Progress High School. "But we're one of the best kept secrets in New York."

This report recommends the following to the Department of Education:

Discourage the use of metal detectors and install them only as a last resort, for a limited period of time and following community approval.

The Successful Schools have a key common trait that separates them from other, less successful schools that serve similar populations: no metal detectors. School administrators, parents, students, teachers and staff consistently agreed that the lack of metal detectors did not make their schools less safe; rather, it engendered an atmosphere of trust, respect and dignity that led to greater student retention rates and fewer dropouts. Conversely, many principals, teachers and students at schools with metal detectors will privately say that the scanners are easy to circumvent and that they do not promote real safety—a conviction that is all too often tragically affirmed by violent, weapons-related crimes at schools with metal detectors.¹⁶⁸ The DOE should strongly discourage schools from installing metal detectors.

The qualitative and quantitative data in this report prove that schools can create safe and successful learning environments without relying on metal detectors. The absence of metal detectors reduces flashpoints of confrontation between students and the police—much to the benefit of SSAs. It also reduces the instances in which police personnel are enforcing minor school rules. Students feel more welcome in these schools and are more committed to reporting violations of the code of conduct, including the presence of weapons in the school.

Should a school decide to install metal detectors, it must do so for a limited period of time and only after a careful review of alternative safety mechanisms and a determination that less intrusive means are unavailable to ensure student safety in the face of a credible danger. All members of the school community, including students and parents, must be consulted prior to the installation of metal detectors. And they should only be

installed following a deliberative process that allows for public input, including the approval of the Citywide Council on High Schools or local Community Education Council.

Schools must maintain data that will allow them to make a determination about the metal detectors' impact on the school environment. Schools should keep data on the number of scans conducted each day, the wait-time for each scan, the number of students subjected to a secondary scan, the number of students subjected to a more intrusive body search and the number of altercations that result from a scan, including but not limited to the number of fights and arrests. Schools should also retain demographic information on the students being subjected to metal detector scans and searches, as well as on students who are involved in altercations that originated from a metal detector scan.

Schools with metal detectors must follow an annual evaluation process to determine the impact the instruments have had on the educational environment and to assess if they are still needed. In addition to the data gathered directly from the daily scanning of students, the evaluation must include an analysis of student attendance, retention, dropout rates and loss of class time. Special attention should be given to whether certain student populations have been disproportionately impacted by the metal detectors.

Adopt a school governance structure that restores discipline responsibilities to educators.

While the NYPD and the DOE take the position that SSAs are responsible for enforcing criminal laws and not school discipline, the inconvenient truth is that the vast majority of incidents in which SSAs become involved may be interpreted as both, resulting in grave confusion for SSAs, educators, parents and children alike. When does a shoving match in the hallway constitute a criminal assault? Is a child who shouts or refuses to sit down guilty of disorderly conduct and subject to an arrest? Is refusing to leave school grounds after school considered trespass?

The DOE must adopt a clear governance structure, ideally in the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU), that outlines the roles and responsibilities of SSAs and DOE personnel, including principals and teachers, in maintaining discipline in the schools. Such an MOU must also address when children shall be subject to arrest, referral to juvenile court or other law enforcement interventions.

A school governance document must make clear that a school's principal has final authority in the school building. An MOU must provide school administrators with decision-making authority over the training, placement and removal of SSAs. School administrators are in the best position to oversee, evaluate and discipline SSAs.

In order to ensure consistent communication and oversight, the MOU must mandate regular communication among all school staff with responsibilities over school safety. SSAs should provide weekly reports to the school principal and school staff and meet with principals on a biweekly basis. Periodic meetings should take place that include students and parents so they can provide feedback on school safety matters.

Finally, the MOU must be clear that police personnel are responsible only for criminal law enforcement, and not school discipline matters. Therefore, minor disciplinary infractions, such as disorderly conduct, trespass, harassment, loitering, profanity, and tardiness should be handled exclusively by school officials. Students should be arrested only as a last resort, and no student should be arrested at school absent an immediate and ongoing physical threat to students or staff. Principals—and to the extent possible parents or guardians—must be consulted prior to the arrest of a student. SSAs should not use handcuffs—not even the purportedly more humane Velcro handcuffs—or other physical restraints on a child absent an immediate and ongoing physical threat to students or staff that rises to the level of a crime.

Place fewer School Safety Agents in city schools.

The responsibilities of SSAs should be limited to enforcing the penal law and not school discipline matters; therefore, the number of police personnel patrolling New York City's schools should be reduced significantly, leading to financial savings and the strengthening of the educational mission of city schools.

The very presence of SSAs in city schools places them in the difficult position of having to become involved in minor disciplinary matters. For example, when a minor fight breaks out in a school without a police presence, it is generally resolved by educators unless the situation rises to the level of a serious violation of the penal law. However, in schools with a permanent police presence, minor fights escalate quickly to involve SSAs and, subsequently, the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems.

There are more than 2,000 additional police personnel patrolling the schools today than there were when school safety was first transferred to the Police Department. Most of this increase occurred under Mayor Bloomberg. Today, the DOE spends an extra \$88 million a year to support the additional police force in the schools.

Reducing the number of SSAs in the schools will allow for the hiring of non-police personnel to handle school disciplinary matters in a manner that will not expose children to the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The savings should be redirected to the hiring of guidance counselors, social workers, discipline deans and school aides that are trained in conflict resolution and restorative justice methods to handle disciplinary infractions.

Mandate alternatives to harsh discipline.

Schools throughout the United States and Europe have begun to implement restorative justice alternatives to harsh discipline, with great success in reducing suspension and dropout rates. The DOE should mandate trainings for all school staff in restorative justice practices and subsequently implement restorative justice programs in all city schools.

In 2004, the Youth Justice Board of England and Wales released a report on its use of restorative justice programs in schools to reduce the number of infractions and bullying in schools and to improve student attendance.¹⁶⁹ Twenty-six schools in London and other districts facilitated conferences to resolve incidents involving physical or verbal altercations between students and between students and teachers. According to the report, 92 percent of conferences resulted in an agreement. Two to three months following the conferences, 96 percent of agreements had been upheld. Eighty-nine percent of students were satisfied with the outcomes, and 93 percent reported that the process was “fair” and “justice had been done.”¹⁷⁰

A similar experiment in two Colorado school districts in 2002 found that following 95 percent of the restorative conferences, the offender completed the terms of the agreement. Moreover, 92 percent of participants felt that the restorative process helped to create a safer school, 91 percent indicated that the process helped to hold offenders accountable for their actions and 96 percent felt satisfied with the outcome of the process.¹⁷¹

In 2002, a Minneapolis school adopted a restorative justice program for students recovering from chemical addictions. Since implementation, the number of disciplinary problems had dropped, and students reported a greater sense of connectivity to the school community and to one another.¹⁷²

The DOE should mandate trainings on restorative practices, peer mediation, conflict resolution and fairness committees for all staff and mandate implementation of a face-to-face resolution process as a first step when addressing disciplinary problems. Moreover, students should receive credit for taking classes that educate them on restorative practices and for participation in conflict resolution boards. Evidence strongly suggests that such a mandate will decrease the number of incidents in schools, while at the same time improving student attendance and encouraging closer relationships between students, teachers and authority figures such as police personnel.

Encourage student input into school rules.

The DOE should develop protocols for schools to ensure that students are given meaningful opportunities to provide input on school rules.

The DOE produces an annual discipline code that includes a lengthy list of proscribed behavior for students. While it is important to have consistent standards to adjudicate student behavior in all schools operated by the DOE, it is as important for schools to have the flexibility to amend minor rules that are determined to be nonconducive to fostering a nurturing learning environment. Rules on matters such as carrying cell phones or wearing hats have a strong impact on a student’s perception of the school environment and should not be subject to one-size-fits-all solutions.

Students should be able to participate in a school’s review of its rules. Such exercises in participatory democracy enhance the legitimacy of school rules, increase the students’ incentive to obey them and strengthen students’ sense of belonging to the community.

Institute transparency and accountability in school safety practices.

Oversight of police practices in the schools is essential to both the safety and well-being of students, and to the maintenance of the public’s trust and confidence in the Police Department and the DOE. Yet, there are currently few mechanisms in place to ensure adequate accountability and oversight of police practices in the schools. The DOE conceals from the public key data on school safety practices, and shields school safety personnel from proper oversight and accountability. The DOE must bring transparency and accountability to its school safety practices in order to gain the trust of New Yorkers.

The DOE must release to the public basic raw data that will allow New Yorkers to determine the effectiveness of school safety practices. At a minimum, the DOE must regularly release the following data: the number and type of noncriminal and criminal incidents; the number of incidents due to metal detectors; the type of police action taken—including the number of individuals arrested—following each incident; the number of student suspensions and expulsions; the duration of each suspension; and a description of each incident that resulted in a suspension or expulsion. All of this information must be broken down by school, race/ethnicity, age, sex/gender and student status (general education, special education or resource room) to determine whether school safety practices have a disproportionate impact on certain communities.

Moreover, SSAs—who have the same authority as police officers to stop, search and arrest students—should be subject to the same oversight and accountability as police officers. The DOE must support expansion of the jurisdiction of the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) to accept complaints against abusive SSAs. The public currently has the right to file a complaint with the CCRB against police misconduct on the streets. The public should be able to file similar complaints with the

CCRB against abusive police behavior in the schools. Moreover, the DOE should allocate 1 percent of its current school safety budget to fund the expansion of the jurisdiction of the CCRB.

Further, the DOE should support the Student Safety Act, Intro. 816, which is pending in the City Council and would mandate the above reporting and oversight requirements. The legislation is cosponsored by a majority of Council members, including the members of the Public Safety and Education committees. The DOE should work with the City Council to pass this important civil rights legislation.

Provide support services for students' nonacademic needs.

Medical, mental health and social services connect students to the larger school community and address students' nonacademic challenges before they become a basis for behavioral problems in the classroom. The DOE should seek ways to foster connections between individual schools and medical and social services providers to offer students medical and mental health care and resources to access public assistance, housing, child care, counseling and other social services.

The DOE will reduce future costs associated with higher dropout rates and entanglements in the criminal justice system by investing in programs that assist students with their nonacademic needs and addressing behavioral problems that will inevitably make their way into the classroom.

In 2005, the Board on Children, Youth and Families of the National Research Council of the National Academies issued a report with recommendations for school districts to adopt to improve student graduation rates, particularly in urban school districts. The board explained its reasoning for issuing the report:

Disengagement or dropping out of school have negative consequences for all students, but the effects are especially problematic for those youth who do not have the social or economic resources available to cushion the effects of academic failure. If students do not acquire the basic skills needed to function in adult society, whether or not they complete high school, they are at significant risk of unemployment, poverty, poor health, or involvement in the criminal justice system.

The report concluded with a set of reform strategies for schools to adopt to foster greater motivation and engagement among students. A key recommendation included:

Schools should make greater efforts to identify and coordinate with social and health services in the community, and policy makers should revise policies to facilitate students' access to the services they need. *Federal, state, and local policy makers should work*

with school administrators to improve access to physical and mental health resources, social services, and other community supports. [Emphasis in original]

The DOE should follow the advice of the National Academies and provide services for students' nonacademic needs in an effort to improve student retention and graduation rates.

BUSHWICK COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL (BROOKLYN)

Table A Ia. Demographics: Bushwick Community

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% White	1.6
% Black	43.2
% Latino	54.6
% Asian	0.5
% Male	44.3
% Female	55.7
% Free or Reduced Lunch	96.8
% Limited English Proficient	4.3
% FT Special Education	0.8

Table A Ib. Indicators of Success: Bushwick Community

INDICATORS	PERCENT OF STUDENTS
% 4-Year Graduation	6.2
% Dropped Out	38.5
% 7-Year Graduation	38.0
Average Daily Attendance	65.0
% Student Stability	65.0
% Planning 4-Year College	79.0
% Planning 2-Year College	5.0
# Violent Incidents Per 100	0.0
# Property Crime Incidents Per 100	0.0
# Other Crime Incidents Per 100	1.6
# Non-Criminal Police Incidents Per 100	4.3
# Suspensions Per 100	1.1

On July 1, 2004, Bushwick Community High School (BCHS) opened as a transfer school for 17- to 21-year-old students. Transfer schools are smaller, full-time high schools designed to re-engage students who are overage and under-credited or have dropped out of high school.^{*} According to founding Principal Tira Randall, “[BCHS students] have not been successful in their previous school, have had attendance issues, might have gotten pregnant, left school for awhile, and now they’re ready to come back. Whatever the case, the typical student is about 18-years-old and comes to me with anywhere from 0 to 15 credits.”[†]

STUDENT VOICE IN SCHOOL RULES

All entering students must attend a three-day orientation. In addition to preparing students for the academic challenges that

lie ahead, this orientation also allows students to help shape BCHS school policies.^{*} On the first day of orientation, school staff presents the rules to the new students. On the second day, students provide their feedback. Student participation in decision making over the school rules allows them to take ownership over the rules, which then leads students to obey the rules they helped define.[‡]

COMMUNICATION AND CLEAR LINES OF AUTHORITY BETWEEN SSAS AND EDUCATORS

The success of Bushwick’s school safety policies is the product of a team effort by all members of the school.^{**} Everyone at BCHS seems to agree that School Safety Agent Gayle Baine is the backbone of Bushwick Community High School.

For more than 16 years, Baine has worked as a safety agent in the building that houses BCHS. She was head of security when

^{*} New York City Department of Education Website <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OMPG/TransferHighSchools/default.htm>.

[†] Tira Randall, personal interview, 13 Aug. 2008.

^{*} Aaron Boyle personal interview, 23 Sept. 2008.

[‡] Ibid.

^{**} Aaron Boyle personal interview, 23 Sept. 2008.

the school was known as Bushwick Outreach.^{††} Her years of experience and her approach to school safety seem to have earned her a profound level of admiration from the BCHS school community. Teacher Aaron Boyle said of Baine, “She’s someone who really plays a key role. ... She’s the person who interacts with students first. They’re coming up the stairs, and the first person they see is Baine. And she holds down the line. But she does it in this really loving and supportive way. Every time she’s speaking to a student, she’s communicating how much she cares about them. And being able to set that kind of tone right from the beginning is so important for students.”^{†††}

While the middle school that shares a building with BCHS has metal detectors, Bushwick Community High School does not. Teacher Neil Pergamant believes that even without metal detectors, the school is a safe place, mainly due its proactive discipline policies.^{‡‡}

While working during the summer semester, BCHS guidance counselor Millie Lopez-Martir met guidance counselors from other schools in New York City. “They were amazed at the fact that I had students who [used to be] fighters; kids that had been arrested,” she said. “[They] were in my school for at least a year [and] hadn’t been arrested or in a fight. They said, ‘Is it because you’re so strict?’ and I said, ‘No, [it’s] because they know I love them.’ But with the love there has to be discipline. And with the two there has to be balance.”^{‡‡‡}

“I have Bloods. I have Crips. I have Latin Kings,” said Principal Randall. “I’m sure I have Nietas, and every other gang that’s represented in New York. I know that I have those students in my school. But what I will say is that [in] four years, we haven’t had a single act of violence. And our policy extends so far that our students know that if you fight in the street a borough away and we hear about it, you will meet with somebody here to discuss why.”^{††††}

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS’ NEEDS

The two guidance counselors and three social workers employed at BCHS work with students from the moment they

arrive.^{†††††} Principal Randall believes that BCHS must serve as a resource for students to address problems, not only in school, but outside of school as well. This includes acting as a resource for the provision of basic social services and assistance with day-to-day problems. “We work with the student to get things in place—housing, child care, public assistance, health insurance,” explained Randall. “Whatever the issues outside of the building are, my social work and guidance staff access those services and get it taken care of for the student before they [begin classes].^{††††††}

A SCHOOL CULTURE OF TRUST AND RESPECT

Mutual respect is an important aspect of Bushwick’s school culture.^{†††††††} Teachers such as Pergamant are very conscious of the role that respect plays in classroom dynamics. “You can’t talk to kids in a way that’s going to put a student down, even if you don’t mean to belittle them,” Pergamant explained. “You have to be very cognizant that you may be belittling them if you talk to them a certain way.”^{††††††††}

Millie Lopez-Martir, once a Bushwick Outreach student, is now the head guidance counselor at BCHS, having graduated from Teachers College at Columbia University.^{†††††††††} “I remember my first day of orientation clearly,” she said. “That was in 1995. I was greeted with warmth and acceptance. I didn’t feel like they were judging me...I was thrown out of three schools, so I was one of those kids that was always getting into trouble, fighting and cutting, I was a truant. There was just something about this place from the minute you walked in the door.”^{††††††††††}

When asked to describe Bushwick’s environment, student Carl Cochrane replied, “It’s like, when you’re outside, you feel stressed, like everything negative comes on you; and when you’re in this school, it releases. Like, you don’t have to worry who’s gonna fight you, you know? And that’s a good feeling.”

Elizabeth Billingsea has a much simpler answer for the question of school culture at BCHS. “It’s just the love,” she said. “I think everything comes down to the bond and the love that people have for one another.”^{†††††††††††}

†† Tira Randall, personal interview, 13 Aug. 2008.

††† Aaron Boyle, personal interview, 23 Sept. 2008.

‡‡ Niel Pergamant, personal interview, 23 Sept. 2008.

‡‡‡ Millie Lopez-Martir, personal interview, 23 Sept. 2008.

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††††† Ibid.

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†††††††† Niel Pergamant, personal interview, 23 Sept. 2008.

††††††††† Millie Lopez-Martir, personal interview, 23 Sept. 2008.

†††††††††† Ibid.

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SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaires used to interview teachers, students, SSAs, parents and administrators for this report are on file with the New York Civil Liberties Union. Below is a sample questionnaire used to interview school administrators.

INTRO

1. How long have you been an administrator here?
2. Where did you work before?
3. Why did you become an administrator?
4. How long has this school been in its current format?
5. What was the school like before?

SCHOOL RULES

6. Does the school have rules or a code of conduct? Are they effective?
7. Do you have any influence in setting standards for student behavior?^{††††} Does anyone else?
8. Does this school encourage opportunities for students to decide things like school rules?^{†††††}
9. Does this school clearly communicate to students the consequences of breaking school rules?^{†††††} How?
10. Do teachers and staff explain the reasons for rules?^{††††††} How?

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

11. Does this school provide professional development opportunities for staff on how to deal with the social, emotional and developmental needs of youth?^{††††††}
12. This year, did teachers receive professional development in classroom management?^{†††††††}

SAFETY POLICIES

13. Are your school's safety policies effective? Why?
14. Does this school have a well understood procedure to deal with criminal incidents? Non-criminal incidents?^{††††††}
15. Are there written guidelines on safety procedures?
16. Do the educators and SSAs work cooperatively to keep the school safe?
17. Do educators and SSAs meet collaboratively to discuss safety policies and incidents? How often?
18. Please describe what would happen in your school in the following situations and which staff members would be involved:
 - o A student arrives 45 minutes late to school.
 - o A fight breaks out in the hallway and one of the students has a knife.
 - o A student refuses to remove his hat when asked by a teacher.

^{††††} Consortium on Chicago School Research, Surveys of CPS Schools, 2007.

^{†††††} CA Dept. of Education, California Healthy Kids Survey, 2006.

^{†††††} CA Dept. of Education, California Healthy Kids Survey, 2006.

^{††††††} Belden Russonello and Stewart, Annotated questionnaire: survey of 1000 public high school students in New York City for Citizen's Committee for Children of New York, 2001.

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^{††††††††} Belden Russonello and Stewart, Annotated questionnaire: survey of 1000 public high school students in New York City for Citizen's Committee for Children of New York, 2001.

^{†††††††††} CA Dept. of Education, California Healthy Kids Survey, 2006.

SSAS

19. How effective are your SSAs at preventing incidents, breaking up incidents, reporting incidents?*****
20. How would you describe the relationship between SSAs and the following groups at your school: teachers, administrators, other staff, students, parents?†††††††
21. Do you feel you have authority over SSAs?
22. Do you feel that the educators run the school, as opposed to the SSAs?
23. Do you have any influence in hiring new SSAs?†††††††
24. Do you have any influence in removing SSAs?†††††††

SECURITY MEASURES

25. Does your school use any of the following: metal detectors, magnometers, student ID cards, staff ID cards, surveillance cameras, cutting/holding room(s), hallway sweeps?*****
26. Has your school used any of these in the past?
27. Who monitors surveillance camera footage?
28. Who stores surveillance camera footage?
29. Who has access to surveillance camera footage? Under what circumstances?

PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY IN SCHOOL

30. Is your school a safe place? Why or why not?
31. Is violence towards teachers a problem at your school? Robbery or theft? Vandalism? Gang activity? Fights or incidents between ethnic groups? Disorder in classrooms? Physical conflicts among students? Student disrespect of teachers? Disorder in hallways?†††††††
32. Are there any other kinds of safety problems?

SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

33. What makes your school a safe community?
34. Does this school provide conflict resolution instruction?†††††††
35. Does this school provide harassment or bullying prevention?†††††††
36. Does this school use any restorative justice practices such as peer mediation or peer juries?
37. Does this school use mentoring?

DISCIPLINE PROCESS

38. Does this school handle discipline problems fairly?*****
39. Can you give an example of discipline in your school?

***** Belden Russonello and Stewart, Annotated questionnaire: survey of 1000 public high school students in New York City for Citizen's Committee for Children of New York, 2001.

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

40. Are parents very involved in your school?
41. Does the school involve most parents in school events or activities?+++++
42. Does the school encourage opportunities for parents to decide things like class activities or rules?+++++
43. Does this school collaborate well with community organizations to help address things like substance abuse or other problems among youth?+++++

DEMOGRAPHICS

44. What are your qualifications?
45. What is your gender?
46. What is your race?
47. What relationship do you see between race and school safety policies? At your school? In general?

RECENT IMPACT SCHOOLS

Abraham Lincoln High School, 2005

Adlai E. Stevenson High School, 2005

Canarsie High School, 2005

Christopher Columbus High School, 2005

Evander Childs High School, 2005

Harry S. Truman High School, 2005

**High School for Service & Learning at
Erasmus (K539), 2005**

**High School for Youth & Community
Development at Erasmus (K537), 2005**

John Brown High School, 2005

Lafayette High School, 2005

Norman Thomas High School, 2005

Samuel J. Tilden High School, 2005

**Science, Technology & Research Early College
High School at Erasmus (K543), 2005**

Sheepshead Bay High School, 2005

Springfield Gardens High School, 2005

Theodore Roosevelt High School, 2005

Thomas Jefferson High School, 2005

Walton High School, 2005

Abraham Lincoln High School, 2006

Canarsie High School, 2006

Christopher Columbus High School, 2006

Harry S. Truman High School, 2006

John Brown High School, 2006

John F. Kennedy High School, 2006

Lafayette High School, 2006

Newton High School, 2006

Norman Thomas High School, 2006

Samuel J. Tilden High School, 2006

Sheepshead Bay High School, 2006

Walton High School, 2006

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- ¹⁶⁶ Ibid.
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