



# Explaining Effectiveness: An In-depth Exploration of Personalization for Social and Academic Learning

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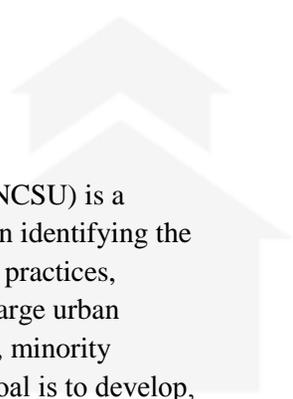
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THE UNIVERSITY  
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The National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools (NCSU) is a national research and development center that focuses on identifying the combination of essential components and the programs, practices, processes and policies that make some high schools in large urban districts particularly effective with low income students, minority students, and English language learners. The Center's goal is to develop, implement, and test new processes that other districts will be able to use to scale up effective practices within the context of their own goals and unique circumstances. Led by Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, our partners include The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Florida State University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Georgia State University, and the Education Development Center.

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# Explaining Effectiveness: An In-depth Exploration of Personalization for Social and Academic Learning

Over the last twenty years, policymakers have increasingly turned to standards and assessment policies in an effort to improve student achievement. By setting academic standards and linking them to standardized assessments, policymakers accurately assumed that school administrators and teachers would align curricular and instructional practices around the high-stakes subjects, grades and students (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Au, 2007; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Mintrop, 2003). As implemented, these policies have highlighted the instructional “core” of schools, namely the teachers’ work in their classrooms (Bidwell, 2001, Kennedy, 2004; Little, 2009). Principals have become instructional leaders who attend to supporting teachers’ classroom activities (Firestone, 2004; Ladd & Zelli, 2002; Rutledge, 2010; Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita & Zoltners, 2002).

Thirty years of research on school effectiveness identify the focus of high stakes accountability--quality instruction, a rigorous and aligned curriculum as well as systemic accountability—as critical elements of effectiveness. However this body of research also identifies other characteristics of schools as equally important to effectiveness as measured by improving student achievement. Many are organizational factors that directly support the instructional core—such as a culture of learning and school leadership focused around student learning—however others highlight elements of schools such as cultivating a learning community in which students feel a sense of belonging as well as drawing on structures to build strong relationships between the students and adults in the school. These latter findings draw our attention towards elements of schooling that are less directly related to supporting teaching and learning yet are arguably equally important, namely, the social and affective purposes of schools and their role in shaping students’ learning.

This paper presents findings from a year-long multi-level comparative case study exploring the characteristics of school effectiveness in four high schools in Broward County, Florida. Specifically, this paper explores one of the primary findings of the study, namely, that the effective high schools had strong and deliberate structures, programs, and practices that personalized the learning environment for students. This paper frames a discussion and exploration of this core finding by describing the literature base grounding the study, the methods used, and findings on personalized learning. It follows findings with an extensive discussion on the ways in which schools attend to social elements of schooling more generally and personalize the learning environment for students more specifically, and ends with a call for greater attention to the social components of schooling necessary for learning to take place.

This focus on the social elements of schooling comes at a critical juncture. With policymakers focusing on the instructional core of schools through standards and assessment policies, the ways in which schools attend to students’ socio-emotional needs have become largely overlooked. Further, research has rarely looked comprehensively at the programs, policies and practices that constitute an effective school-wide approach to addressing students’ socio-emotional needs. Put differently, while there are a number of studies that identify practices that support students’ socio-emotional lives, few have examined how schools implement these in a systemic way. With its comprehensive framework drawn from the school effectiveness literature, this study highlights the importance and potential of attending to the social components of schooling both to support the instructional core, as well as to address students’ socio-

emotional competencies and outcomes more generally. The research questions explored in this study are: What are the characteristics of personalization for academic and social learning at our case study schools? What does the research on personalization for academic and social learning suggest about our findings and this line of inquiry more generally?

### **Study context and conceptual framework**

The findings of this study emerge from a larger research project aimed at identifying the characteristics of effective high schools. The National Center for Scaling Up Effective Schools (NCSU) is a five-year study aimed at developing, implementing and testing processes to scale up effective practices in urban high schools. There are a number of reasons why high schools need attention. Despite being important sites for transitioning students from childhood into the early adult activities of college and the workforce, little is known about their effective practices. High schools are large and complex organizations with multiple administrative layers and disciplinary based teaching. In reform efforts, high schools often experience tensions and a lack of coherence around programs, policies and practices (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Research on high school students suggests that three decades of high school reform aimed at improving disadvantaged student achievement has not resulted in narrowing achievement gaps (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Cook & Evans, 2000). Many schools face persistent underperformance particularly with low income and minority students (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). Given their multiple challenges, high schools are important sites for improving the outcomes of students.

With their focus on high schools, the researchers at NCSU developed a guiding framework and study design centered around eight components of high schools effectiveness that emerged from a comprehensive review of the research (Dolejs, et al., 2006; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). Researchers employed the framework to guide data collection including interviews and classroom observations as well as coding and analysis. During the data collection process, two additional components emerged and were explored.

This general framework of ten components of effectiveness, therefore, served as an overarching tool through which to identify the enactment of effective programs, policies and practices in the case study schools. (See Table 1). A first component of the framework is a *Rigorous and Aligned Curriculum*, which focuses on the content that schools provide in core academic subjects (Gamoran, Porter, Smithson, & White, 1997). A second component is *Quality Instruction*, the teaching strategies and assignments that teachers use to implement the curriculum (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Wenglinsky, 2002, 2004). A third component is *Learning-centered Leadership* that entails the extent to which leaders hold a vision in the school for learning (Murphy, Goldring, Cravens, & Elliott, 2007). A fourth component is *Systemic Use of Data*, including data to inform classroom decisions, and multiple indicators of student learning (Kerr, Marsh, Ikemoto, Darilek, & Barney, 2006). A fifth essential component is *Personalized Learning Connections*, developing strong connections between students and adults that allow teachers to provide more individual attention to their students (McLaughlin, 1994; Lee & Smith, 1999) as well as developing students' sense of belonging (Walker & Greene, 2009). The sixth essential component is a *Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior*. This component refers to the extent to which teachers take responsibility for their students' performance and the degree to which they collaborate (Little, 1982; Lee

& Smith, 1995). The seventh essential component is *Systemic Performance Accountability*, both external and internal structures that hold schools responsible for improved student learning (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006). The eighth component is *Connections to External Communities*, the ways in which schools establish meaningful links to parents and community organizations or local social services (Ascher, 1988; Mediratta & Fruchter, 2001; Sanders & Lewis, 2004). The two components that emerged during the data collection and analysis process were *Organization of the Learning Environment*, which focuses on the ways high schools organize the learning environment around student achievement, and *Variability in Schooling Experiences* which examines the programs, policies and practices that schools have in place to promote equal and equitable access to school resources and set high expectations for all students.

### Site selection, methods and data analysis

To understand the characteristics of effective high schools, the Center sought to apply the framework in high schools in the same district with the idea that schools nested in the same district, state and federal context would share many of the same critical characteristics, resources, and policy context. Broward County, Florida was identified using a simple value-added achievement model (VAM) to estimate the relative performance of the state's high schools.<sup>i</sup> The district serves large proportions of traditionally underperforming student subgroups, including low-income, minority, and English language learners (ELL). The student population during the 2010-11 school year was 38% African American, 28% Hispanic, 27% White, and 7% other. In the district, 48% of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches and 10 percent are classified as ELL. Four high schools in the district - two higher performing and two lower performing - were selected for case study on the basis of findings from the VAM analysis. In Table 2, we provide the demographic and performance profile of each school. We describe each school here.

Pine Coast, one of the two higher performing schools, enrolled between 2800 and 3000 students during the 2010-2011 school year. Of those students, between 30-40% qualified for free and reduced priced lunch. Students of minority status comprised 50-60% of the student population and 5-10% of its students were classified as English Language Learners. The school grade has moved between an "A" and a "B" over the last several years. Its Differentiated Accountability status was Correct II.

Beacon Hills, the second higher performing school, had approximately 2200-2400 students during the school year. Students eligible for free and reduced priced lunches represented 45-55% of the student population. The majority of the student body was of minority descent, comprising between 65-75% of those enrolled. Between 5-10% of students are English language learners. Beacon Hill's school grade has been an 'A' over the last several years and has been placed in Correct I status - the only case study school to have this distinction - of the state's accountability program due to the school's success in meeting AYP. One other characteristic that set Beacon Hills apart from the other case study schools was that enrollment to the school was based on a lottery system; however, there were no performance criteria required for admission and enrollments must match the demographics of the district at large.

During the 2010-2011 school year, Bay Mountain had between 1800 and 2000 students. Approximately 60-70% of students qualified for free and reduced priced lunch. Between 55-65% of the population is of

minority status and 10-15% of its students are classified as English language learners. The school grade has moved between a “C” and a “D” over the last several years, and its Differentiated Accountability status was Correct

Cyprus Cove had between 2100 and 2300 students in 2010. Students qualifying for free and reduced priced lunch made up 45-55% of the student body. Approximately 55-65% of the population was minority 5-10% of its students were classified as English language learners. Its school grade has fluctuated from As to Bs over the last several years. During the 2010-2011 academic year, it was in Correct II status by the state of Florida.

### *Data Collection*

Researchers collected data during three weeklong visits to each of the four case study high schools during the fall, winter and spring of the 2010-12 school year. Data collection consisted of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, student shadowing, observations of selected administrative and professional development meetings, and document collection. We used two classroom observation methods. First, we used the Classroom Assessment Scoring System for Secondary classrooms (CLASS-S), an observational tool, to observe and assess the quality of teacher-student interactions in classrooms.<sup>ii</sup> Second, we used simple scripting to document classroom activities and student-teacher interactions (Slayton & Llosa, 2005). In total, 706 classroom observations segments were scored in ELA, mathematics, and science classrooms predominantly serving students in Grade 10.<sup>iii</sup> We chose to observe 10th grade classrooms to explore differences in the instructional quality and personalized learning connections across tracks and sequences. We choose grade 10, as it is the latest common year in which Florida requires students to take standardized exams in Mathematics and ELA.

In addition to classroom observations, we conducted 174 semi-structured interviews lasting between 35 and 120 minutes with the principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, the department heads for ELA, mathematics, and science, the eighteen observed teachers, instructional coaches, ESE coordinators, ELL coordinators, and behavioral specialists in each school. The interview protocols were designed deductively around the program and practices that support and sustain the “essential components” and inductively to probe for other components participants credit with school effectiveness. We also conducted three focus groups in each of the case study schools with teachers from different departments and grade levels. Another three focus groups included students identified by school personnel as taking primarily AP, honors, and regular/remedial classes, respectively.

In addition to interviews, we observed an administrative team meeting as well as a scheduled professional development day activities at each of the four schools. We also shadowed six students at each of the four case study schools. Shadowed students were chosen based on their course assignment track. Researchers followed the student’s daily schedule by attending the student’s classes as well as observing the student during non-instructional times such as passing time between classes and lunch. Researchers ended the two- day shadowing period with a semi-structured reflective interview. The interview focused on the student’s educational and social experiences within the school. Finally, we collected a uniform set of documents such as the course assignment matrices and School Advisory Committee minutes from each school as well as documents that emerged as relevant during the fieldwork.

## *Data Analysis*

The CLASS tool was scored, and interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pattern coding of interview and focus group transcripts, field notes, and documents were used to identify central constructs in the data (Fetterman, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1989). We began by coding our data with codes from our conceptual framework in a master file created in NVivo. To establish dependability, multiple analysts (i.e., coding pairs/triads comprised of at least one “senior” researcher with experience using NVivo and a “junior” researcher) coded the preliminary data. A three-phase approach was used to guide the coding and analysis of the data

The initial round of coding involved a subset of 28 data files across participant and data types. The purpose of this round was to construct definitions for codes for each component and subcomponent; to identify qualitative dimensions in the subcomponents, where they exist; and, finally, to identify any emergent themes that may not be captured under existing subcomponents. Coding in round two involved re-coding and analyzing data coded in the first round. During this process, each pair/triad engaged also in a reliability-building process. The pairs coded the first 28 files individually. Then they ran the Kappa score function in NVivo and met as a team to systematically discuss and compare coded text. After achieving inter-rate reliability, members of the pair/triad in the third round coded seventy-five additional files, chosen to equally represent schools and data types. The full coding team met weekly to share findings and discuss emerging themes.

Each pair/triad wrote memos throughout the coding and analysis process. Memos are written records that contain the products of the analyses of the components/themes that emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Memoing in this project was aimed at identifying the properties and dimension of our components as they were manifested in our case study schools.

## **General study findings**

The major findings from the general study identified three main areas of effective practices themes that cut across our essential components. These were personalization for academic and social learning, a professional culture rather than an audit culture for teachers, and a culture of high expectations for students.<sup>iv</sup> We found evidence for personalization across all ten of our components. Our findings show that the higher value-added (VA) schools made deliberate efforts through systematic structures to promote strong relationships between adults and students as well as personalize the learning experience of students. In addition, the higher VA schools maintained strong and reliable disciplinary systems that, in turn, engendered feelings of caring and, implicitly, trust among both students and teachers. Leaders at the higher VA schools talked explicitly about looking for student engagement in classroom walkthroughs as well as in their interactions with students. Teachers at the higher VA schools were more likely to discuss instructional activities that drew on students’ experiences and interests. The higher VA schools also encouraged stronger linkages with parents.

While all of the schools in our study faced strong state accountability pressures and all teachers described strong structures of accountability over their work, we also found that teachers in the higher VA schools reported more autonomy over a number of practices as well as more frequent and meaningful

collaboration with their peers. Administrators at the higher VA schools were more open to engaging teachers in either corrective or supportive feedback in response to classroom observations than the administrators in lower VA schools. We found evidence for this finding across six of our components (LCL, OLE, CLPB, SPA, RAC, SUD).

Finally, we found a culture of high expectations for students at the higher VA schools. Participants at the higher VA schools were more likely to describe a stronger degree of academic focus among the student body. While the two higher VA schools enacted this differently, both promoted cultures of high expectations for students. We found evidence across six of our components for this finding (PLC, CLPB, RAC, QI, SUD, VSE).

One of the most intriguing findings of the general study was the lack of differences in the area of instruction and specifically on the CLASS-S, the instrument that we used to measure instructional differences. Given that the two higher performing schools had higher student achievement, a logical explanation would have been stronger instructional methods leading to more engaged and motivated students who, in turn, learned more. Yet, the findings from our student shadowing show no major differences between time-on-task between the HVA and LVA schools with the highest performing students experiencing the most amount of time off-task. Further, and more importantly, findings from our measure of teacher quality, the CLASS-S instrument, identified few major instructional differences between the four schools and, in particular, identified the lowest performing school, Bay Mountain, as having the highest instructional ratings. The strong federal and state accountability context at these four schools as well as district policies such as an instructional focus calendar identifying the curriculum for our observed subjects may account for the lack of instructional differences. It should be noted, like other studies, we found significant between track differences within each school, but no significant differences between schools.<sup>v</sup>

### **Personalization for Academic and Social Learning**

As discussed above, we found that personalization for academic and social learning cut across all ten of our components. In what follows, we describe the different elements of our main finding of personalization for academic and social learning with particular attention as to how they are manifest at the HVA schools. We begin by focusing on the organizational structures at both schools as they provided the infrastructure for PASL. In this section, we describe not only the structures themselves, but also mention the enabling supports that we found contributed to the effectiveness of the organizational structures.<sup>vi</sup> We then turn to the ways in which the HVA schools supported the instructional core directly as well as the socio-emotional supports they provided more generally. We then discuss preliminary findings on the types of student engagement we found at the high performing schools.

It should be noted that while our main focus in the findings is on our HVA schools, we did identify a number of the same policies, practices and procedures at the LVA schools. We summarize these findings in comparison with the HVA schools at the conclusion of each section.

#### Organizational structures at the high performing schools

Schools with higher value-added scores in our study enabled personalization for academic and social

learning by adopting dually-focused strategies that leveraged both academic and social structures, creating a culture that fostered opportunities for student learning. The HVA schools made deliberate efforts through the use of systematic organizational structures to personalize the learning experience of students as well as promote strong relationships between adults and students. As one teacher at Beacon Hills reported, “I would be remiss if I didn't mention that the way that we personalize education here I think is amazing ... There is the sense of community here that is palpable. You can feel it.” While the lower performing schools in the study employed many of the same strategies and structures, as we will discuss, they did not deploy them in a deliberate, coherent and systematic manner. For example, we find that the leadership teams at the two HVA schools supported structures that tend to be proactive and purposeful in nature, rather than reactive. Next, we will discuss these academic and social structures as well as the enabling supports that sustained student learning at the HVA schools.

We identified a number of school-wide programs at the HVA schools that fostered personalized learning connections. These organizational structures included targeted looping in which assistant principals, guidance counselors and teachers shared the same students over the years; data driven practices; behavior management systems; network of school-wide extracurricular programs; college readiness programs (i.e. AVID or CAT); instructional coaching teams; comprehensive middle school articulation; curricular alignment; formal and informal culture of personalization; feedback orientation to classroom observations; and small learning communities (SLCs). These organizational structures supported the practice of meaningful conversation among students and the adults at these schools, including administrators, guidance counselors and support personnel. Here, we are going to discuss in depth a few of these structures and how they worked in these HVA schools. (See Table 3 for summary of findings of these organizational structures.)

The looping practices at Beacon Hills were a particularly strong example of sustained adult-student-parent relationships as well as active student engagement in the classroom. While all schools in the study had guidance counselors who looped with students from 10<sup>th</sup> through 12 grade, at Beacon Hills an assistant principal, guidance counselor and secretary were assigned to an incoming ninth grade class and then they stayed with these students through graduation. In addition, an English and social studies teacher were part of the looping process with the lowest performing students for the first two years. For these students, the A.P, guidance counselor and teachers met weekly to discuss students. Participants at Beacon Hills reported that looping supported and sustained personal relationships among faculty, staff, students and their parents. This team effort contributed to a culture of learning and professional behavior among these participants as well. The relationships established with the parents were important as well. To this, an assistant principal at Beacon Hills states: “All of us rotate and stay with a cohort of kids until they graduate, this is to increase the level of personalization not only with the students, but the parents as well.” He continued, “I have met with some of these parents on a regular basis over the last two years. So from an administrative standpoint...it's invaluable to our success.” At Pine Coast, students looped with their guidance counselors for 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The guidance director reported that she fought to maintain “this almost every year because I am a strong believer the students need to know their counselors for three years.”

Another important organizational structure that enabled personalization for academic and social learning was the use of data by administrators, teachers and support staff to monitor student progress and provide feedback to students. Both of the HVA schools in the study had coherent systems in place around data

analysis and use. At Pine Coast, administrators used data, such as grades, attendance records, and discipline referrals, to address student problem areas on an individual basis. “I have individual conferences with every senior that's on a list that I call the danger list, in danger of not graduating.” At Beacon Hills, data was used to drive professional development. An assistant principal reported “We learn through benchmark testing, and ACT scores, and AP scores, and then we also use that information to develop staff development.”

The AVID/CATS program implemented at Pine Coast was an example of a successful program aimed at increasing students’ sense of belonging at the school and personalization. To participate in the CATS program, administrators identified students who scored either a two or three on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test, which has a scale of one through five, and provided them with additional support in the form of tutoring, extra guidance toward higher education, and an extra course on academic and social skills. One administrator at Pine Coast described the depth of the ties between students and teachers participating in the AVID/CATS program:

It was like a team and family. They feel like a family. They all work together. They go to classes together. And the teachers commonly plan together, so they do things together in order to help all of them be successful.

A student described in this way “It's a program, it's usually open to smart kids so they can pay for attention for school work and get things done. It's like a huge family. So you see the same people all of the time.”

Participants at the HVA schools also reported a comprehensive middle school articulation program. Participants at both schools reported that a variety of stakeholders participated in programs focused on the transition from middle to high schools. Pine Coast, for example, had a multifaceted approach to middle school articulation. Participants including the principal, members of the leadership team, teachers, guidance counselors from both Pine Coast and the feeder middle schools met regularly several times during the school year to discuss issues related to both articulation and the transition. The Pine Coast principal reported playing an integral role in building these relationships.

The middle school articulation extended to collaborating with feeder middle school on the vertical alignment of the curriculum, specifically in math and English, going back to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. A Beacon Hills teacher reported “the fact that we have the middle school [close by], we work every year with the middle school English teachers to get these best practices from the AP vertical teaming in place from 6th through 12th.” Beacon Hills’ administration reported that teachers participated in activities specifically directed to middle school articulation, meeting during planning periods and other opportunities. As part of the personalization component, the principal gathered faculty and staff from the high school and brought them to the middle school for “a transition meeting. He lined up all of the guidance counselors, our custodial staff, or cafeteria staff, our security guards, our police officer, put them in front of the stage [at the middle school] and said, all of these people you can talk to any one of them.”

The behavioral management structures at the HVA schools were also priority at both schools. Participants reported that it fostered a positive learning environment through strong and reliable disciplinary and support systems for students that, in turn, engendered feelings of caring and, implicitly, trust among students, teachers and administration. When students at the HVA schools received discipline

referrals to the main office, both sets of administrators used them as an opportunity to discuss the student's academic standing, as well as the disciplinary infraction in question. These meetings, therefore, were not strictly punitive. As stated by an administrator at Beacon Hills, "you could have the best teachers, best buildings, best text books, but if the kid doesn't think the school cares, that's to me the biggest component."

The participants at the HVA schools also reported a large network of school-sponsored programs that were available to students that encouraged students to feel connected to the school. Multiple participants across the HVA schools—including administrators, teachers and students—identified after school activities as central to feeling connected to the school. A student in a focus group at Beacon Hills reported, "If you participate in groups and activities they have, then you feel like you are part of Beacon Hills. But if you come here and go home, you are not going to be a part of anything."

In addition to the organizational structures in place specifically for the students, these schools also presented multiple opportunities to connect students and parents with the teachers and the administration. When considering the opportunities for connecting with parents at Pine Coast the principal reported, "We meet with the parents. I think there is good communication with the family. Very rarely do I have a mom or dad come in and say, I didn't know, or what's going on, or why is this happening. We try to keep them in the loop."

In sum, we found that the HVA schools pursued a number of similar organizational strategies and structures that personalized the learning experience for students. Not only did the schools have these structures, but we identify purposive, proactive, and systemic qualities in these structures. While we found that the LVA schools had many similar structures in place to support students—looping with APs and guidance counselors, middle school articulation programs, extensive extracurricular offerings, —we found that these schools lacked an intentionality and sense of purpose to make the intent behind these structures part of the larger school culture. For example, while all schools had behavior management systems in place, administrators, teachers and students at the LVA schools reported inconsistent follow through with disciplinary infractions, time delays between infractions and resolution, and weak sense of trust between administrators, teachers and students around discipline. Put differently, while many of the same structures existed, we did not find a shared sense of purpose between stakeholders around the intent of these structures, nor did we find coherence between these structures as we did at the HVA schools. In sum, at the HVA schools we identified common organizational structures as well as enabling supports such as a sense of purpose and deliberateness, that we found largely absent at the LVA schools.

#### Academic supports at the high performing schools

In addition to the organizational structures aimed at personalizing schooling for students, we also identified deliberate efforts to personalize the learning experience for students in classrooms. The administration at the HVA schools made efforts to have personalization permeate the classroom through explicit supports to classroom teachers as well as in the practices of teachers to support personalization and differentiate instruction. Given the lack of findings of instructional differences between the four schools on the CLASS-S instrument, the ways in which personalization supported the instructional core of schools is important.

We found that the HVA schools presented students with a variety of academic supports that were personalized to support student learning. Administrators and teachers reported, for example, that when a student was brought to the office for disciplinary issues, the infraction was treated both as a social and academic problem. In interviews, teachers reported more of an effort to differentiate instruction and personalize academic content than at the LVA schools (although neither of these were particularly strong). The academic supports at these schools were reinforced from the top down and provided a framework for appropriate and effective academic supports that were both personalized and available to students. As one teacher from Beacon Hills reported, “Strengths really start at the top; the administration, from principal, assistant principals, are very, very supportive. They are constantly on guard. It’s just incredible the way they run this school. They have eyes all over.” The HVA schools also had strong academic supports in place that provided opportunities for students to be challenged and motivated academically, whether the effort was targeted to specific student populations or overarching on a school-wide basis. Multiple participants in the HVA schools identified a targeted focus on academics as well as a college-going culture. The staff at the schools complemented and helped kids to be motivated and wanting to try, wanting to care. The principal, assistant principal and college advisor at Beacon Hills, for example, all reported “it’s cool to be smart.” A teacher at Beacon Hills similarly reported “I think everybody knows what is expected. Everybody works together.” A similar culture was present at Pine Coast. Even though there was a strong vocational programs at Pine Coast, a teacher reported “it’s more of an academic environment than vocational environment.”

Administrators and teachers at the HVA schools also stressed the importance of discipline in the classroom and bell-to-bell instruction. At the HVA schools the administration reported that that academics went hand in hand with discipline. As one administrator reported at Beacon Hills “any conversation that I have with a child has to do with student learning.” In these schools, behavioral management and discipline in classroom created an environment conducive to student learning. Teachers at these schools concurred that administration backed the teachers when dealing with student discipline, something we notably did not find at the LVA schools where teachers complained that administrators were slow or even negligent in following through on disciplinary issues in a timely manner.

Teachers at the HVA schools were more likely than at the LVA schools to discuss instructional activities that drew on students’ experiences and interests. At Pine Coast, one teacher reported, “The whole personalization is what matters in this job, the key component to having success.” While using data to inform a variety of academic supports, an assistant principal at Beacon Hills reported, “We use data to create our school-wide literacy plan. We use data to create our do-nows, our daily math things, or science daily math things, for differentiated instruction. Teachers recognize the administration’s support of these efforts, reporting that “a couple of years ago, we did a whole-staff development ... on differentiated instruction, which I think was very helpful.” An assistant principal reported “When kids get to high school, differentiated instruction is definitely a big piece ...”

In our interviews and focus groups at the four schools, students at the HVA schools were also more likely to identify teachers as caring and motivating. They described liking and learning from different teachers based on the style of the teacher and even recognizing the need for varied instruction due to students’ different learning styles.

At the HVA schools, the guidance departments played a strong and critical role in providing academic supports and services for every student in the school. The supports at these schools were focused on

students from 9<sup>th</sup> grade orientation through post-secondary school plans and aimed to be comprehensive and inclusive of all students. These schools deliberately planned that each student have contact with the guidance department early on in their high school career and that the students were informed of the services that were available. A guidance counselor at Pine Coast, for example, reported that they “do a class visit in every grade level. Most schools don't, but we do it prior to December. Every class has been visited, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th, to make sure they are aware we are here for them.” While we observed efforts by the guidance offices of the LVA schools to provide services to students, efforts were targeted less towards personalization and more towards supporting students in crisis, not all students. The guidance departments at the HVA schools also took pride in the organization of their guidance office as a “hub” of academic and social interactions. These schools made sure that students knew where to go for assistance. A Beacon Hills guidance counselor reported that their interactions with students and parents in addition to the use of data, supported positive connections for supporting student academic needs.

As with the organizational supports, we identified many of the same activities at the LVA schools. Individual teachers at both LVA schools, for example, discussed efforts to differentiate instruction and personalize the learning experience. Each school had a dedicated college advisor available to students interested in pursuing higher education. There was, however, a marked difference between the behavior management systems between the HVA and LVA schools, particularly in the ways in which this supported academic endeavors at the schools.

#### Socio-emotional supports at the high performing schools

The HVA schools also sought to provide socio-emotional supports for students. The focus here was more so on the nature of the interpersonal connections between adults and students. As discussed above, the HVA schools promoted a culture of personalization through a number of structures, policies, and practices. In fact, the concept of personalization was an evident part of the schools’ lexicon and a number of participants discussed the concept without being prompted. For instance, when discussing looping, one counselor remarked at Beacon Hills, “They personalize the education... we try to take a big school and break it down to a small school, which is why we have small learning communities.” A Beacon Hills teacher reported, “we personalize education” such that “there is a sense of community that is palpable. You can feel it.” Data use to identify and monitor students in need and to guide their instruction was viewed as an important “personalization piece.” School personnel also referred to several activities that illustrated a culture of personalization. To one teacher at Pine Coast, “The whole personalization is what matters in this job, the key component to having success.”

Similarly, we observed that school personnel were knowledgeable about students. Teachers at the higher value-added (HVA) schools reported making a concerted effort to having personal knowledge of their students’ names, cultural and academic backgrounds, and academic aspirations. Some school personnel were conversant with or made efforts to understand students’ home life. A Beacon Hills counselor reported, “You get to know your kids. Teachers get to know the kids as well... It's close knit family because everybody wants the kids to do well.” One Pine Coast teacher described an instance of asking a student about the position he played on the basketball team and what that felt like. In another example, the teacher researched an artist that a student had mentioned and, the next day, engaged in conversations with the student about this artist. The teacher concluded:

I think that's an example of personalization, getting to know your students, your clientele, and it goes

back to does this teacher care. Once they realize that you care, I think you will get them working and going above and beyond.

Teachers also illustrated care and concern in trying to find out about their students' background. A number of them at Pine Coast reportedly "went on a school bus and... drove through all of the low income areas" where one-fifth of the students live in order to get a sense of the environment in which some students lived.

Administrators at both HVA schools were also found to be leading by example to endorse and foster formal and informal personalized learning connections. They mentioned knowing a host of students by name. Beacon Hills' principal explained that "knowing the kids, knowing their background, and creating a sense of family I think goes a long way." To that, all administrators reported daily spending the entire lunch period in the cafeteria interacting with students. Once every three weeks, however, the principal reportedly had lunch with several seniors who had been chosen by their teachers. The principal also reported that he sponsored lunch for various students, especially those on the athletic teams. Students confirmed that these formal and informal interactions occurred and expressed a lot of fondness for the principal. The principal at Pine Coast disclosed that he interacted with the students "in the cafeteria pretty much every day, and kids come to me all the time about anything... Very rarely do I talk to a kid and not ask about how classes are going, who is your favorite teacher, that type of thing."

Our findings indicate a high degree of perceived social/interpersonal support (i.e., assurance about the availability of school personnel and friends) among students in HVA schools. Students at Beacon Hill perceived the administrators as caring, because they had a visible presence on the compound and "they talk to us." A.P.s reportedly visited the classes regularly and the principal would readily accept invitations to student activities. Students in all three of our focus groups at Beacon Hill agreed emphatically that "the principal is caring." Students reported that, "Administrators really go to the extreme to help out each individual club and to help every student get to what they need and what they want, and we always see them walking around and in the classes." By and large, there was a view that the teachers and counselors were accessible: "You can talk to anybody if you have trouble or something."

While, again, we found that some participants at the LVA schools reported isolated activities to personalize the experience of students, we did not find that the activities permeated throughout the school. Neither LVA school provided a formal structure to develop positive connections between school personnel and individual students. At both schools, participants suggested that the higher performing, upper tracked student had stronger connections to adults than the lower performing student. At Cyprus Cove, participants gave mixed reviews about school-wide adult-student connections. The principal concurred that not all students had positive connections with adults; he attributed this to a lack of motivation on the part of the student, notwithstanding the multiple programs that exists to foster stronger personalization. The APs and the counselors said that while they tried to promote school-wide connections, they were not always successful. A department head at Bay Mountain also reported that the school did little to help the students feel connected to the school:

Administration is so overwhelmed with this FCAT, and the school grade, and we got to up our scores with the AP kids, they don't have time to make sure there is a connection. They are not doing it intentionally; they just don't have the time. They don't. I would say nothing. Then they wonder why attendance is going down. I tell them, why should a kid come to school every day if there is nothing else

but preparing them for FCAT. That's all we are talking about.

Participants at both LVA schools seem to reason that students' connections with adults were shaped by their individual involvement in extra-curricular activities, their personal levels of motivation, and their behavior.

There also appeared to be marked variability in the level of student involvement at the LVA schools. At Cyprus Cove, some students reported participation on athletic teams, which made them feel like they are "family". However, they also complained that turnout at school events, such as Homecoming, Prom, and football was low. Among Cyprus cove participants, there are also discrepant views about school spirit and student motivation. In sum, we found that while there were individual student-adult relationships that were established and maintained, in general, at the LVA schools, these relationships were much less systemic.

### **Discussion of Personalization for Academic and Social Learning**

The comparison of the HVA and LVA schools in our study reveals critical differences in the ways in which the schools addressed the socio-emotional needs of students. Given findings of no differences in instructional quality between teachers in three of the core instructional areas between the schools, the findings here suggest that schools that support both the instructional core through personalization as well as attend to students' sense of trust, safety and long-term goals, may experience higher student achievement. Our findings indicate that the HVA schools implemented systemic, school-wide approach to meeting the academic and socio-emotional needs of high school students. Through deliberate structures as well as efforts to promote a culture of personalization, students exhibited a stronger sense of belonging towards the school than did the students at our LVA schools. In turn, we found that administrators, teachers, guidance counselors and students reported higher motivation, engagement, and sense of self-efficacy.

While we primarily report here on the systems, structures, programs, policies and practices at the HVA schools, it is important to underscore that many of the same programs, policies and practices were present at the LVA schools. There were guidance counselors who met with students at both schools, a 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy at 102, looping with A.P.s, guidance counselors and 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students at both schools, for example. Some adults and students reported strong relationships. Both schools offered extensive and diverse athletic and extra-curricular offerings. While there were components within both schools that personalized social and academic learning, however, these practices were neither systemic nor widespread throughout the schools.

The comparison between the schools, therefore, directs our attention not only to individual programs, policies and practices, but also to systemic characteristics of schools such as school culture, the ways in which administrators, teachers and other staff communicate this culture, and feelings of trust and safety for all actors. Put differently, the individual programs are supported by a strong ethos that personalizing the experience of high school students is vital and important.

## **Exploring personalization for academic and social learning beyond our study: Extending the findings**

As a qualitative case study of four schools, we cannot make a causal claim that personalization accounted for the differences in test score achievement among low income, minority and ELL students at our case study schools. However, we can report that we found, through our extensive interviews and observations, major differences, across all ten of our components, that seemed to account for the stronger student achievement between the high and low schools.

In the absence of causal data, we can also turn to the literature that informs personalization for social and academic learning to both validate and extend our findings. This research not only provides evidence that the types of practices employed by the HVA schools lead to higher student achievement, but it also helps to identify areas of limitations in our HVA schools that could be improved. We discuss our preliminary directions in this area here.

We draw from two main bodies of research to inform the theoretical grounding of PASL. Research on the social organization of schools provides the first foundation for personalization. Organizational theorists have posited that schools have elements that are both mechanistic and organic (Rowan, 1990). They identify a number of features of schools that fit into either category. A mechanistic perspective of the organization of schools highlights the hierarchical top-down control of schools by administrators over teachers and the classroom. It foregrounds efforts to rationalize the technology of teaching through prescribed curricula and instruction and the bureaucratic controls used to oversee its implementation (Rowan, 1990). This perspective theorizes that student learning will be maximized by clear and focused attention on classroom technology and the means to convey it to students.

The organic perspective on the organization of schools, in contrast, highlights the networks of actors within a school. Most of this work has focused on the behavior of teachers in schools and the role that collegial networks as well as their decision making plays in teaching and learning as well as school reform (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009; Rowan, 1990; Spillane & Healey, 2010). “Network structures replace hierarchical structures of management, and technical work comes to be guided by information and advice received from colleagues rather than by centralized and standardized task instructions” (Rowan, 1990, 367). However, there is also evidence that organic forms can also be carried through to the entire school organization, including schools. Lee and Smith (1996), for example, discusses the importance that schools have a strong professional community that coalesces around shared norms and values around a commitment to student learning. From a theoretical perspective, therefore, PASL can be grounded in ideas about the organization of schools. Going forward, we will explore this line of inquiry in more detail to understand the promise and limitations of framing PASL in this way.

Theoretical grounding for personalization for academic and social-emotional learning can also be found in the area of psychology and, specifically, Bandura’s work on Social Cognitive Theory. Of particular relevance for social cognitive theory are the concepts of social modeling and human agency (Bandura, 2001, 2005). Social modeling occurs in schools when adults model behavior that facilitates high academic and social outcomes. When adults in schools personalize the learning environment for students, they are not only interacting on a regular basis with students, but they are also modeling behaviors conducive to social and academic success. Human agency refers to the process by which adults and students in schools intentionally take responsibility for influencing student behavior and future life

circumstances. Schools that promote human agency provide academic and social opportunities for students to explore and identify areas of interest that, in turn, are likely to encourage students to perform. They promote students' "ability to construct appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution" (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). Students in schools who feel that they are able to pursue their interests, realize their potential, and are supported by adults in the school are more likely to feel perceived self-efficacy or the belief in one's capacities to exercise self-control and self-determination (Bandura, 1990; 1993; Zimmerman, 2000). High degrees of perceived self-efficacy at the individual level can lead to a school culture of collective self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000).

According to these studies, when schools attend to personalization for academic learning, they infuse personalization in the area of academics in the classroom. Administrators and teachers who hold high expectations for student's academic success, coupled with their intentional efforts to become knowledgeable about their students, bolster the students' sense of belonging and engagement in their own learning (McLaughlin, Talbert, Kahne, & Powell, 1990). Teachers personalize instruction through activities such as differentiated instruction or targeting students' interests and experiences (Keefe and Jenkins, 2002). Through these varied personalized instructional approaches they become more aware of and attend to students' individual learning styles, interests, and needs that, in turn, motivates and engages students in their academic work (Jenkins & Keefe, 2002).

When schools promote personalization for socio-emotional learning, they are also attending to students' social-emotional competence and engagement. Social-emotional competence involves "the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish relationships with others" (Zins & Elias, 2007, p. 234). A personalized school environment reflects what Noddings (1988, p. 219) refers to as "an ethic of caring" or "a relational ethic" by which students develop their capacities to engage their peers, teachers, and school community at large. Students evidence several positive outcomes, including a higher sense of self-efficacy, more participation in class and school activities, more pro-social behaviors, less behavior problems, and improved academic performance (Zins and Elias, 2007). Students' perceptions of teacher support and caring has a positive effect on the culture of student learning (Klem & Connell, 2004; Tucker & Griddine, 2010). Schools with strong personalization implement formal school structures such as small learning communities (SLCs; Connell & Klem, 2006; Felner, 2007), advisory programs (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010; Meloro, 2005) and the looping of administrators, guidance counselors as well as teachers (Burke, 1997; Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1997). These arrangements deliberately place students with specific teachers, administrators, guidance counselors and staff to promote relationships and address students' individual needs. Schools with strong personalization also provide authentic and relevant opportunities for students to participate in school-related activities and programs. They actively encourage student involvement in extracurricular activities. Finally, schools with strong personalization encourage informal personalization through a positive school climate achieved through administrators and teachers' expressed care and concern for student's well-being, intellectual growth, and educational success. Critical to personalization is a behavior management system consistently enforced by administrators and teachers that addresses student behavior in an individual and fair manner and in which students feel safe. Specific, clear and fair disciplinary structures support a school culture where students feel secure as well as a sense of belonging (Akey, 2006; Kuperminc et al, 2001; Gottfredson et al, 2005; Ways, 2011). School personnel are developmentally responsive (Felner, 2007). Due to the formal structures discussed above, administrators and guidance counselors have the opportunity to build relationships with all students. In the area of behavior management, administrators,

counselors and teachers draw on their prior relationships with students, and also also rely on established pathways for information and support.

Finally, we draw empirically from research that has been conducted on different personalization programs and approaches. Our review of research informing our components identified, for example, strong connections between adults and students at the school (Breunlin, et al., 2005; Jenkins & Keefe, 2002; Keefe, 2007), data driven practices (Cohen-Vogel, 2011; Gallagher, Means & Padilla, 2008; Agnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Firestone & Gonzalez, 2007; Lyons & Algozzine, 2006) and middle school articulation (Chapman and Sawyer, 2001; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Smith, Akos, Lim, & Wiley, 2008) as research-based practices associated with higher student outcomes. Other approaches that we explored after our case study findings such as studies on AVID programs (Avid.org, 2012; Watt, Huerta & Mills, 2009) and looping (Burke, 1997; Hampton, Mumford, & Bond, 1997; Ovalle, 2004) also proved to be associated with higher student outcomes.

Taken together, we identify both a theoretical and empirical research base informing personalization for academic and social learning. These studies suggest that schools would be well served to attend to the social infrastructure of schools that not only supports academic activities in schools, but also attends to the social needs of students as well.

## **Conclusion**

In this era of standards and accountability policies, policymakers and school actors have identified the instructional core as the primary foci for school improvement. This study on high school effectiveness, however, turns our attention to activities in schools that both support the instructional core as well as the socio-emotional life of students. The research from this study as well as other research on personalization in schools suggests that by providing for and attending to the personalization of academic and social learning (PASL), high schools may see rewards in student outcomes.

While our study finds that personalization is critical, we do not mean to suggest that the instructional core does not matter. In fact, we believe that the high stakes context of Florida may account for the lack of instructional differences we find between schools. Further, we believe that there is room for instructional improvement at our case study schools. That said, our findings here provide evidence for the importance of adults in schools attending to the socio-emotional lives of students.

Our study identifies three ways in which personalization occurs: through organizational structures, by attending to supporting personalization in classrooms, and by paying attention to students' socio-emotional needs. The HVA schools in our study engaged in deliberate and purposive activities aimed at personalizing the learning environment for students. They were proactive. They approached personalization in a systemic way. While the LVA schools had many of the same structures in place, they tended to have more fragmented systems and made less of a concerted effort to personalize the learning experience for their students.

While our study is only of four high schools, we identify two main theoretical strands undergirding personalization: the social organization of schools (Rowan, 1990) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001, 2005). These theoretical perspectives offer important insights into why schools with stronger

personalization may be more effective with student outcomes. Further, there are a number of studies that find that individual programs, such as looping, middle school articulation, data driven practices, and behavior management systems are important supports for high school students.

As we move forward, we will be focusing in more detail on developing the theoretical underpinnings of PASL as well as understanding the role that individual programs and strategies play in improving school effectiveness. Personalization for academic and social learning presents an exciting and systemic way to understand the ways in which high schools support the academic and socio-emotional needs of students.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The estimated fixed effect for each high school in the state was put in rank order and classified by deciles of value-added. These analyses indicated only one Florida district, Broward, with multiple high and low-performing schools serving our target student subgroups.

<sup>ii</sup> Based on development theory and research suggesting that interactions between students and adults are the primary mechanism of student development and learning (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Morrison & Connor, 2002; Pianta, 2006; Rutter & Maughan, 2002), the CLASS-S specifically measures interactions between teachers and students across three domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.

<sup>iii</sup> Following the CLASS-S protocol, researchers observed eighteen tenth-grade mathematics, English and science classrooms in each school for, at minimum, two class periods to complete the recommended four 20-minute cycles. One school had block scheduling, so we scored six 20-minute cycles.

<sup>iv</sup> For a full discussion of the Year 1 findings, see Cohen-Vogel, Rutledge, Osborne-Lampkin & Harrison, 2012

<sup>v</sup> For a full discussion of the Year 1 CLASS-S findings see Smith, Cannata and Vineyard, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> See Cohen-Vogel, Rutledge, Osborne-Lampkin & Harrison, 2012 for a discussion of enabling supports.

**Table 1: Essential Components**

<b>Essential Component</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Rigorous and Aligned Curriculum</b>	Effective schools that have a rigorous and aligned curriculum 1) align the curriculum with state, district, and school standards and assessments 2) implement the curriculum with consistency and integrity to the standards, and 3) have a rigorous curriculum that includes ambitious content and high cognitive demand for all students. That is, they ensure the availability of college preparatory courses to all students and engage all students in complex content and demanding activities that focus on inquiry and higher order thinking, not just memorization and computation.
<b>Quality Instruction</b>	Teachers engaging in quality instruction (1) meet the individual needs of their students with individualized/adaptive pedagogy, (2) use collaborative learning strategies, (3) practice authentic pedagogy that relates to students' lived experiences, and (4) emphasize "higher order" thinking skills through rigorous, challenging content. They foster the development of "higher-order" thinking skills in their students, promote creative thinking, embrace rigorous, challenging content, and incorporate real-life applications in their classrooms. In turn, quality instruction develops classrooms characterized by students' intrinsic motivation, retention of material, and positive attitudes toward learning.
<b>Learning Centered Leadership</b>	Principals engaging in learning-centered leadership prioritize student learning. They possess an ambitious vision for learning and hold high expectations for all students and staff. Such leaders (1) set a vision with specific priorities around student learning and (2) facilitate continued school improvement and support for improving instruction through collaborative, shared leadership. They engage both school-level factors (such as the school mission and faculty governance structures) and classroom-level conditions (such as student grouping and instructional practices) to focus staff, resources, and improvement strategies squarely on students' academic and social learning.

<p><b>Systemic Use of Data</b></p>	<p>Effective high schools are data-driven and information rich environments, where actors operate in a culture of data use targeted toward improving the learning experiences of students. In these schools, streamlined information management systems are in place, giving actors across organizational levels ready access to comprehensive sources of data. Administrators, instructors, and staff are well trained in the use of these systems, and systematic efforts have been made to build the capacity of all actors to make meaningful use of available information. Finally, faculty and staff utilize these resources to take action, working collaboratively to target students for intervention, adapt instructional practices, and promote student success. In doing so, they demonstrate an internalized “culture” of data use, in which the necessity and beneficial nature of data-driven practice are an accepted organizational perspective.</p>
<p><b>Personalized Learning Connections</b></p>	<p>Personalized learning connections are the ways in which students in a school have a connection or sense of belonging to the school as a whole, as well as meaningful, positive connections with other adults (teachers or other staff members) and students in the school. At effective schools, participants (i.e. teachers, students and administrators) report strong connections between the students and the school, as well as widely distributed meaningful relationships among students and adults at the school. At effective schools, connections between students and adults are authentic, relevant and responsive to students’ needs and interests. The opportunities for connections among students and the school interact and build upon one another. For instance, personalization and positive relationships are contingent upon the organization and structure of the school.</p>

<p><b>Culture of Learning and Professional Behavior</b></p>	<p>Actors in effective high schools take part in a strong culture of learning and professional behavior. This culture is defined by a shared focus on high expectations for students and emphasis on students’ academic needs among the administration, staff and faculty of the school. Students internalize these cultural values, as well, taking responsibility for their own learning and working together to promote their academic success. Finally, effective cultures of learning are collaborative, with actors across organizational levels working together to accomplish the mission of the school. Such collaborative activity is strongly supported by the school leadership, both through careful development of collaborative structures and the devotion of necessary resources.</p>
<p><b>Systemic Performance Accountability</b></p>	<p>The individual and collective responsibility among leadership, faculty and students for achieving rigorous student learning goals.</p>
<p><b>Connections to External Communities</b></p>	<p>Connections to external communities are deep, sustained connections between the school, parents, and community that advance academic and social learning. The focus is not on what parents do, but on what the school helps parents to do. Two elements comprise <i>Connections to External Communities</i>: (1) <i>parent involvement</i>, i.e., what schools encourage parents to do at school and what they do at home to support their children’s learning. An important element of parent involvement entails teachers’ and administrators’ roles in reaching out to parents and creating a culture that supports parents reaching in; and (2) <i>connections to the larger community</i> that enhance and support students’ learning opportunities. Connections with the community entails linkages to the greater community (e.g., for internships, service projects, etc.). Effective community-school partnerships require structural support, trust amongst partners, and investment in collaborative work.</p>

<p><b>*Organization of the Learning Environment</b></p>	<p>The organization of the learning environment entails how the schools organizational structure shape the interactions of students, parents, teachers, support personnel, and school leadership. It looks at the policies and processes by which students and teachers are assigned to classes, support systems are aligned to meet student needs, and schools are governed. Student achievement is at the heart of the academic organization of schools. Shared governance is a salient feature of school success. Power is dispersed broadly throughout a network of leadership teams. Effective schools foster functional relationships and exemplify a strong collaborative culture. In this regard, schools demonstrate flexibility in their assignment of teachers and support personnel to adequately meet the needs of students. Overall, the effective school is oriented around student achievement and organized to ensure ample participation of stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>*Variability in Schooling Experiences</b></p>	<p>Actors in effective schools recognize that students' experiences vary and understand that policies, practices and programs implemented at the school level can help to promote positive educational experiences across groups of students. Effective schools promote equal and equitable access to school resources, minimize differences across ability levels by having high expectations for all students, and identify opportunities to promote inclusion of all students in all aspects of the schooling experience.</p>

\* These two components emerged during data collection and analysis.

**Table 2: Description of Case Study Schools**

School	Grade	Trend	Enrollment	%Econ	%Min	%ELL
Pine Coast High	B	Steady	2800-3000	30-40	50-60	5-10
Beacon Hills High	A	Steady	2200-2400	45-55	65-75	5-10
Bay Mountain High	C	Mixed	1800-2000	60-70	55-65	10-15
Cyprus Cove High	A	Mixed	2100-2300	45-55	55-65	5-10

**Table 3: Description of organizational structures at the HVA schools that promoted PASL**

<b>Structure</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
Targeted college readiness programs	<p><b>At the secondary level, programs such as AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) and CATS (Cultivating Achievement and Thinking Skills targeting students in the academic middle who “have the desire to go to college and the willingness to work hard” (Avid.org, (2012). These students are enrolled in advanced courses while also taking an elective course providing a curriculum focused on “organizational and study skills.” This elective course also provides students with the opportunity to “work on critical thinking and asking probing questions, get academic help from peers and college tutors, and participate in enrichment and motivational activities that make college seem attainable” (Avid.org, 2012).</b></p>	<p>“I think this year, if I didn't join the CAT program, and I have the classes I have now, I wouldn't be like-- my GPA wouldn't be anything like it is. My GPA went up from 3.3 last year to 3.6 this year. Mostly it's because the kids in there, like it's a family as well, where we all sit around and help each other with homework because we all have the same homework. It's not like we give someone our homework to copy. We sit in big circle, and study for a biology test because we all have the same test, or math test.” (Student at B104)</p>

Data-driven practice

Today's educators operate in information-rich environments, in which numerous performance data exist that may inform decision-making and facilitate efforts to promote personalization for academic and social learning (Anderson, Leithwood & Strauss, 2010). Research supports the idea that a wide variety of performance data are available to school actors (Firestone & Gonzalez, 2007; Guskey, 2007; Halverson, Grigg, Prichett & Thomas, 2007; Ingram, Louis & Schroeder, 2004; Guskey 2003). These data are derived from multiple sources; actors may, for instance, have access to data derived from external sources, like state or district performance assessments, as well as internal, and often more informal, sources like teachers' grades or classroom observations. A number of authors (Gallagher, Means & Padilla, 2008; Wohlstetter, Datnow & Park, 2008; Halverson, Grigg, Prichett & Thomas, 2007; Kerr, et. al., 2005; Murnane, Sharkey & Boudette, 2005) assert that developing capacity for data use among school actors, primarily through focused professional development, is vital in establishing effective data-driven practice in schools. School actors translate this capacity to use data into meaningful action in a variety of ways (Cohen-Vogel, 2011; Gallagher, Means & Padilla, 2008; Agnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Firestone & Gonzalez, 2007; Lyons & Algozzine,

“[W]hen it comes to raw data, that's the data we are trying to discuss to see which kids we need to make sure we highlight, which kids do we need to give that extra support ... one of the things I try to do, I don't always go through the teachers' classrooms that I have concerns. I try to plan when I go through to hit kids' classrooms that I know are in that bottom quartile. Not so much from the teacher, so the teachers knows, but just to put my hand on that kid's shoulder, to put a face with a name, so that when I see that kid in the cafeteria I can have a conversation, how are things going: ‘These are mediation programs.’ ‘Are you taking advantage of the after school tutoring?’ ‘Are you going to FCAT camp?’ That's my strategic way to give that kid that push, or that stroke they need...” (Assistant Principal at B104).

“[W]e have to analyze our data. There is the time we come in, during planning time, and we have to attend a work shop so to speak on analyzing your data. We have a guidance counselor that's there. We can call them over if we have any questions. You are supposed to focus on your students that are in the lower percentile for a certain area. Then we do look and see where their weaknesses are, and we are supposed to gear, probably some of the times, how we word our questions for different curriculum, and try to gear it toward helping them succeed with whatever their weak points are.”

<p>Instructional coaching team</p>	<p>The pressures of the national movement toward standards and accountability, however, have introduced new pressures on districts to achieve a greater level of standardization in instructional practice and capacity. As such, schools may be adapting to develop more fully developed technocratic structures, allowing for the centralized analysis, evaluation, and development of practice within the school. Often, these structures take the form of teams of “instructional leaders” or “coaches”.</p>	
<p>Looping</p>	<p>Looping is a practice in which schools match teachers, administrators and/or guidance counselors with students for two or more consecutive grade levels. While staff/student and year configurations differ by school, the purpose of looping is to build relationships between faculty and staff with students and their parents (Burke, 1997). Looping is typically seen in elementary and middle schools, but can also be found in high schools where administrators and guidance counselors loop with students during the four years (cite).</p>	<p>“You got four adults who have the same kid for two years, so you are really creating a sense of personalization.” (Principal at B103)</p> <p>“Yes, looping. So [teachers] loop with those students. That’s been something that’s big for us. It’s allowed the students and teachers and parents to get comfortable with those students in every aspect to where they got to know them on a personal basis.” (SP ELL at B103)</p>

<p>Middle school articulation</p>	<p>The transition from middle school into high school has been explored throughout the educational research literature. The need for suitable transition programs, both within the middle school, and in conjunction with the high school, has been identified as a way in which to increase success in high school (Mac Iver &amp; Epstein, 1991; Hertzog &amp; Morgan, 1999). A number of studies indicate that students transitioning from middle school into high school have a multitude of concerns, including intimidation of the older students, problems navigating around the campus, difficulty in course work and becoming involved in extra-curricular activities. (Chapman and Sawyer, 2001; Smith, Akos, Lim, &amp; Wiley, 2008).</p>	<p>“[...]so I had a vertical team meeting with the department head from math for the middle school kids, and they met with our department head for our 9th graders. And, our 9th grade teachers are going to some middle school ... and may teach a couple of lessons, show them tell them what to be prepared for when they get to Algebra 1 at the high school level. They think they are in Algebra over there, but it's nothing like when they get to high school.” “We need to prepare them better at the middle school level to be prepared to come to high school.” (Assistant Principal at B103)</p>
<p>Curricular alignment</p>	<p>Savard and Cotton (1982) define curricular alignment as the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. BCPS ensures schools’ curricular alignment to the Sunshine State Standards and, therefore, to the FCAT through electronic distribution of instructional focus calendars (IFC) for each core subject. In addition to promoting curricular alignment, the IFCs are also aimed at ensuring that instructional pacing is similar across schools by identifying what concept is taught when and for how long.</p>	<p>“there is a group that goes to the feeder middle schools a couple of times a year to discuss...how they are implementing vocabulary, and how they are going to continue its implementation at the high school level.”</p>

<p><b>Formal and Informal Culture of Personalization</b></p>	<p>Personalization in schools refers to the ways in which students in a school have a connection or sense of belonging to the school as a whole, as well as meaningful, positive connections with other adults (teachers or other staff members) and students in the school. Schools with strong personalization have “structures, policies, and practices that promote relationships based on mutual respect, trust, collaboration, and support” (Breunlin, et al., 2005, p. 24). They also attend to students’ individual learning styles, interests, and needs/wants (Jenkins &amp; Keefe, 2002). In fact, the student is the starting- and end-point of personalization, whether it is classroom-based or school-wide (Keefe (2007).</p>	<p>“Speaking about the strength question, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that the way that we personalize education here I think is amazing. There is the sense of community here that is palpable. You can feel it. (Teacher at B103)</p> <p>“The whole personalization is what matters in this job, the key component to having success.” (Teacher at B104)</p>
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**Feedback Orientation to Classroom Observation**

Major challenges to teacher effectiveness identified by principals involve classroom management skills, lesson implementation skills, and rapport with students (Torff & Sessions, 2005). Performance feedback based on classroom observation is viewed as a promising strategy for informing and sustaining effective instructional practice and improving academic, social, and behavioral outcomes (Colvin, Flannery, Sugai, & Monegan, 2009). Of necessity feedback is oriented toward enhancing personalization. Colvin and colleagues (p. 96) posit, “Performance feedback through the use of objective observational methods can serve as a means by which teachers learn how to examine relations associated with instructional materials, tasks, and student behavior.”

**Small Learning Communities**

Small learning communities have been at the core of school reform efforts to personalize schools (Feltner, Seitsinger, Brand, Burns & Bolton, 2007; Oxley, 2001; Supovitz, & Christman, 2005). Whether labeled as “school-within-schools,” “small schools,” “houses and/or teams,” the basic premise is to develop collaborative communities within schools as a central strategy for improving student learning (Supovitz and Christman, 2005). Scholars such as Feltner et al (2007) posit that the central focus across these efforts (i.e., creation of small learning communities) is to “create ‘conditions’ that engage students, support learning, and enhance development” (210).