Bringing Student Responsibility to Life: Avenues to Personalizing High Schools for Student Success

Daniela Torre

SRI International

Tim Drake

North Carolina State University

Courtney Preston

Florida State University

Ellen Goldring

Marisa Cannata

Vanderbilt University

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Despite continuous reform efforts at the local, state, and federal level, high schools across the country have not been able to raise the achievement of at-risk student populations. Instead, a stubborn achievement gap persists across both race and class lines—a gap that has not been substantively alleviated by programs or policies aimed at impacting student outcomes.

There is a rich body of literature dedicated to identifying and explaining reasons for high school drop out, low academic achievement, and low rates of enrollment in college among certain groups of students. Many authors have focused on the education production function to model how different inputs are related to different outputs, finding that the negative repercussions of living in poverty, less access to high quality teachers and leaders, unequal funding for schools in poor neighborhoods, and the inequities inherent in a de facto segregated school system are salient predictors of low student achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2010; Hanushek, 1995; Ladd, 2008; Orfield, & Lee, 2005).

Alternatively, another body of research takes a more holistic approach to understanding schools and the relationships within them that impact students. This research suggests poor academic outcomes for high school students may be the result of toxic school cultures that do not foster caring or personalized relationships between adults and students and are not characterized by high academic press (Author, 2014; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). This literature suggests that creating school cultures that focus both on developing personalized and caring relationships between teachers and students as well as setting high academic expectations for students, can increase student engagement and student and teacher efficacy, which ultimately leads to achievement gains (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Lee & Smith, 1999; Muller, 2001; Rodriguez, 2007). School cultures that support student achievement and school improvement typically are underpinned by a strong vision that includes a focus on

both student and teacher relationships as well as academic press and support (Auerbach, 2007; Author, 2015; Bryk et al, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to explain how a common vision for school improvement shaped school policies and culture and ultimately influenced student success in one urban high school. This project emerged from a larger study of effective practices in high schools in large urban districts. In this case study, we seek to understand how one high performing high school distinguished itself from low achieving schools in the same district. Specifically, we ask the following research questions:

1. What structures for both adults and students foster positive attitudes and behaviors?
2. How do these structures alter student and teacher attitudes and behaviors?

Literature Review

Caring, Personalized Relationships, and Academic Press

Caring and personalized relationships between students and adults can have a profound impact on the academic trajectories of students (Legault, 2006; Whitney, Leonard, Leonard, Camelio & Camelio, 2005). Inside the classroom, teachers are the primary agents of developing caring and personalized relationships. To develop personalized learning connections based on an ethic of caring, teachers must show interest in their students, be enthusiastic, and attend to their needs (Noddings, 1984; Whitney et al., 2005). Their interactions with students must occur both formally and informally (Stronge, 2002). Teachers demonstrate caring by listening to students, treating students with respect, validating student feelings, helping students develop their own sense of efficacy, and giving students opportunities to make responsible choices (Collier, 2005). Students also tend to identify particular teacher behaviors as indicative of a caring culture in

classrooms, including explicit expectations for school work and behavior, collaborative structures that allow every student to be included, evidence that the teacher is prepared for class, safe and organized physical spaces, relevant curriculum, and opportunities to engage at a personal level.

When students and teachers share caring and personalized relationships, student engagement and attachment to school increases (Howard, 2002). When students feel attached, they are more committed to their work and to the school (Taines, 2012). Ultimately, caring and personalized relationships help students avoid alienation, that is, the feeling of powerlessness and isolation that occurs when students lack a sense of belonging (Smerdon, 2002; Taines, 2012), which is associated with dropping out of school, cutting class, and low achievement (Rumberger, 2011).

One indicator of a caring culture is strong academic press (Author, 2014). Academic press refers to a norm shared by students and teachers of working towards successfully reaching high standards of achievement (Lee, Smith, Perry, Smylie, 1999). In schools or classrooms characterized by academic press, "teachers set high, achievable goals for students; students and teachers perceive that students work hard; and students are respected for their accomplishments" (Werblow, Urick, & Duesbery, 2013).

Researchers have found that academic press is related to both increased student engagement and academic achievement. In a case study comparing two small high schools with different levels of academic press, Rodriguez (2007) investigates how students understand and experience academic press and the impact that has on their engagement with school. Students in the school with high academic press explain how their teachers both push them to meet rigorous academic goals and provide support for them to reach those goals. As a result, students

interviewed at the school expressed feelings of academic self-efficacy, that is, an ability to achieve high academic expectations and aspirations to do well in high school and beyond.

Academic press must be accompanied by structures that provide academic support in order to successfully promote academic achievement. In a study using survey data collected by the Consortium of Chicago School Research, researchers found that academic press was significantly related to student academic achievement (Lee & Smith, 1999). The authors used a hierarchical linear modeling strategy to estimate how student's perceptions of teacher care or support and the school's academic press was related to math and reading achievement. They found that the positive impact of perceived academic support on student achievement was contingent on their enrollment in schools with medium or high academic press. Importantly, they also found that students who felt that their teachers cared for them or provided support did not perform better than other students if there was not also a moderate or high level of academic press in their school. The authors concluded that a singular focus on either care and support or academic press is insufficient; instead, school improvement efforts must be based on strengthening both at the same time.

The Relationships between Teacher Efficacy, Collective Efficacy and Student Efficacy

Another strand of school improvement research focuses on the positive correlation between teacher efficacy and student engagement and achievement. Teacher efficacy is defined as a teacher's belief that they have the capacity to influence student learning. Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of obstacles, more likely to seek out new ideas or methods to support student learning, more likely to plan for learning, and less likely to criticize students (Collier, 2005; Jerald, 2007). Teachers gain a strong sense of efficacy when

they experience success in their classroom, when they receive positive affirmations of performance from leaders and colleagues, and when they see other teachers succeed with students (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002).

Similarly, collective efficacy is a faculty's belief that as a whole they can influence student learning. In schools with collective efficacy, there is a proactive culture in which teachers work together to solve school wide problems and take collective responsibility for the outcomes of all the students. Such schools also tend to be characterized by strong academic press coupled with high levels of support. Support comes in the form of classroom practices that facilitate student learning, such as scaffolded instruction (Alper, Fendel, Fraser & Resek, 1997), collaborative group work (Staples, 2007), and the use of formative assessments to track student progress (Brown, 2008).

In the absence of either personal or collective efficacy, teachers tend to locate responsibility for poor performance in the student, rather than in their own actions (Protheroe, 2008). A teacher who believes that personal characteristics of a student, such as their prior achievement, English language ability, perceived work ethic, race/ethnicity, culture, or gender, can explain academic outcomes is unlikely to hold equally high expectations for all of her students (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Milner, 2010). In their ethnographic study of four urban elementary schools with high concentrations of low-income African American students, Diamond and colleagues (2004) conclude that in schools where teachers' expectations of student ability are driven largely by a focus on perceived student deficits, teachers took less collective responsibility for student learning.

Teachers' attitudes and perceptions of student ability at the individual and organizational levels impact students' beliefs about themselves (Brophy, 1983; Jussim & Harber, 2005;

Rosenthal, 1987). This is important because prior research on the self shows that "individuals' perceptions of themselves and their capabilities are vital forces in their success or failure in achievement settings" (Schunk & Pajares, 2005, p. 85). Research in urban high schools demonstrates that when teachers disrespect or disregard students, it impedes mutual understanding between students and teachers and leaves both parties feeling alienated from the other (Becker, 1990; Whitney et al. 2005). In a case study of one high school servicing a large population of Portuguese immigrants, Becker (1990) finds that teacher's racist and negative perceptions of immigrants impede the development of caring relationships and are an obstacle to teachers' sense of efficacy. Teachers in the school feel unable to help the Portuguese students who they perceive as lazy, ignorant, and disobedient. Unsurprisingly, the immigrant students who attend the school for several years describe being ashamed of their heritage and ultimately disengage from school.

This interactive relationship between teacher and student beliefs underscores the importance of changing student beliefs and mindsets in order to increase a student's sense of *self-efficacy* (Bandura, 1997). Students who have strong, positive mindsets and a high degree of self-efficacy exhibit more positive academic behaviors, choose more difficult tasks, have higher engagement with academic work, demonstrate more persistence, and have higher achievement across academic areas (Farrington et al., 2012; Schunk & Pajares, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000).

Common Vision

Researchers of school leadership and organization have identified "vision making" as a critical lever school leaders can use to shape the culture within their school (Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Valentine & Prater, 2011). Effective school leaders are able to establish a vision, that is, a

set of guiding principles, goals, or beliefs that ground the school's instructional programs as well as school culture (Dinham, 2005; Fullan, 2002; Siu, 2008). A strong vision for school improvement consists of several parts: a student driven and academically focused mission that demands collective responsibility for learning from all stakeholders; specific goals for student achievement that are both challenging and attainable (Dinham, 2004); and high expectations for both students and teachers (Bryk et al., 2010; Robinson, 2008).

A vision in and of itself will not effect change in a school; instead, it is the strict adherence to the vision by all stakeholders that ensures success. All decisions regarding the establishment or implementation of school policies, programs, and structures, should be driven by the vision. For instance, schools that have established a vision that includes creating a culture of academic press and support should create structures that promote high expectations and provide opportunities for students to receive academic support, such as, weekly structured advisory periods with a clear purpose and sufficient resources for teachers (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Nasir, Jones, & McLaughlin, 2011).

In order to ensure buy-in from teachers and other stakeholders, the vision for school change should be created collaboratively. At best, not only teachers, but also students and parents, should participate in establishing the mission, goals, and expectations that will define a common vision (Bierman, 1996). In a study of how principals develop and implement a vision that include a focus on family engagement, Auerbach (2009) emphasizes that as teachers will be the school staff that interact most with students and their families, they must be involved in creating the vision and crafting the policies and structures that support that vision. In one of the high schools she studies, the principal initiated a program of school change by holding regular meetings with interested parents and staff to create a reform agenda grounded in a shared vision

for creating a caring and inclusive community.

Summary

In this review, we described how caring and personalized connections between students and teachers, coupled with a focus on academic press and support, interact with teacher efficacy to influence student self-efficacy, student attachment to school, and ultimately greater student achievement (Figure 1). All of these components, in turn, are linked by a vision for school change that is supported by all school stakeholders.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

In this case study, we use the framework outlined above to explore the ways in which school structures and actions driven by a shared vision can shape culture and attitudes, ultimately influencing student success. Specifically, we describe how one urban high school developed a vision for holding students responsible for their own learning. Driven by that vision, the school established a set of processes and structures to create a culture that focused both on creating caring and personalized relationships as well as academic press. We also discuss some of the key enabling conditions that were vital to the success of this model.

Methods

This case study comes out of in-depth fieldwork in four high schools in Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) in Texas during the 2011-2012 school year (Author, 2012). FWISD has a student population of over 80,000, making it the 6th largest district in Texas and the 39th largest school district in the nation. The students of FWISD are predominantly

Hispanic (59%) or African American (23%) and the majority of students are economically disadvantaged (76%). FWISD has a sizable population of students who are learning English as a second language (28%). There are 142 schools, including 14 high schools, across the district.

Lakeside High School[1], the focus of this study, was determined to be a higher value-added school as its school-level value-added rankings in English/language arts, math, and science consistently put it near the top of the district. In the 2010-2011 school year, Lakeside did not make Adequate Yearly Progress because of its math performance, but the school is not under any NCLB sanctions and is rated academically acceptable by the Texas Education Agency. Lakeside has the second highest graduation rate (85-90%[2]) and second lowest dropout rate in its district (5-10%). There are between 700-1200 students at Lakeside. The majority of students are Hispanic (75-85%), 5-10 percent are white, and 5-10 percent are African-American. Over 80 percent are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Table 1 provides further information on Lakeside High School.

[Insert table 1 about here]

Data collection

We collected data in three waves from late 2011 to the spring of 2012, including nine focus groups (with students, teachers, student activity leaders, and district-parent liaisons); 54 interviews with principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, support personnel, teachers, department heads, students, district personnel, and students; classroom observations in English,

[1] The school name has been changed for anonymity.

[2] Ranges are shown for all demographic and publicly available outcome data to protect school confidentiality.

mathematics, and science classrooms; and collected school and district artifacts. Data collection primarily focused on 9th and 10th grade students and teachers in core subject areas of English, mathematics, and science, although we balanced this focus with other data from key staff and a cross-section of the school (e.g., teacher and student focus groups spanned all grades and subject areas) to gain a comprehensive understanding of our schools. Table 2 below shows the types and amount of data collected at Lakeside High School.

[Insert table 2 about here]

All six teachers in each of the three core subject areas that taught classes designed for 9th and 10th grade students were selected for classroom observations and interviews. All department heads and lead content teachers (LCT) in the three target subjects were interviewed. Support personnel were sampled in two different ways. First, individuals with specific roles in the school, such as special education, LEP coordinators, and testing coordinators, were interviewed. Second, we used a snowball sampling technique to interview school personnel who were identified by other participants as serving in key support roles. These roles included stay-in-school coordinators, coordinators for programs working with students placed at risk, and parent liaisons.

As our initial data analysis after the first wave of data collection highlighted the important role of student extracurricular activities in engaging students, we also conducted focus groups with teachers and other adults who supervise these activities to learn about how they are manifested in the school during subsequent site visits. Student activity leaders were sampled to ensure representation from five types of student activities: sports, community service activities, academic-focused activities (i.e., poetry club, academic competition groups), social clubs (i.e., Spanish club, prom committee), and programs/structures the school provides to engage students (i.e., AVID, after school programs, JROTC). Further, we attempted to include activities that

served both small and large numbers of students.

Additionally, we conducted three types of focus groups. First, teachers who were not sampled for individual interviews were invited to participate in focus groups. These focus groups were designed to reach a wider group of teachers from the school, including both teachers in subjects other than mathematics, English, and science, as well as teachers in those subjects who taught grades 11 and 12. About eight teachers participated in each focus group. Second, we conducted focus groups with students selected on the basis of grade and course taking patterns. We focused on students in grades 10 through 12 because of their familiarity with their high schools, but some 9th grade students also participated in the focus groups. Student focus groups were organized to include one focus group of students taking primarily "advanced" courses, one of students taking primarily "general" courses, and one of students enrolled primarily in "remedial" or "basic" courses. Students were selected based upon the convenience of their schedules, with the goal of having a broad cross section of students in each focus group that was representative of the demographic composition of students within that course level.

Students in each school were also selected for shadowing and individual interviews based on the level of courses they typically took. Four to five students were selected among those students who take mostly advanced (Advanced Placement, pre-AP, or honors) classes and four to five students were selected among those students who were in "on-level" or "regular" classes. Again, we attempted to obtain a demographically representative sample of students in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and free/reduced lunch status. Students were shadowed for one school day and a structured observation log was used for observations, with an individual interview the following day. Students who had previously participated in focus groups were not eligible for shadowing and interviews.

Finally, we observed some of the administrative, department, and new teacher meetings. A structured observation log was used for these observations.

Analysis

All interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed to facilitate analysis using the constant comparative method. Constant comparative analysis is an ongoing and iterative method that allows themes to emerge that might be neglected using a deductive research process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; LeCompte and Schensul, 1999). The research team consisted of five people who coded all interview and focus group transcripts using NViVo, a qualitative coding software. All but one analysis team member had first-hand experience collecting the fieldwork data at Lakeside. Members of the research team began by coding eight interview transcripts for the 10 essential components of effective high schools (see Author, 2012 for a detailed description) as well as any emerging themes or ideas (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). Emerging themes were used to code subsequent interview transcripts. Evidence from additional transcripts was used to create new categories, as well as refine or eliminate initial categories. We used the explanation building technique (Yin, 2009) to explain how and why particular components of effective high schools emerged in our case study school. The research team met on a weekly basis for about four hours to triangulate findings and present emerging themes. This process recurred until all transcripts were coded and resulted in the themes we explain in the results section.

Once all of the interview and focus group data were coded, school-level teams developed a narrative about each essential component. Coders strove to provide a thorough, well-supported set of claims about the drivers and/or inhibitors of essential components, as well as the practices

and policies through which these were enacted. Using emergent, grounded theory allowed for a more iterative analytic process that enhances the interrogation of the claims being made, adding to the internal validity (Patton, 2002). It also permitted more explicit attention to the themes that cut across components and explicit testing of emerging hypotheses and triangulation among different types of data, adding to the validity of our process (Patton, 2002).

Results

Emerging from the data were several interrelated structures and processes that enabled Lakeside to increase teacher and student efficacy and ultimately instill in students a responsibility for their own learning. These include 1) creating a shared vision and coherent structures aligned to that vision, 2) holding teachers accountable for their implementation of the vision, 3) increasing academic press and academic support, and 4) increasing support for teachers from peers and administrators. Importantly, these structures and processes were contingent on a number of key enabling conditions, including relatively stable faculty and student population and a safe and orderly environment.

Creating a Shared Vision and Coherent Structures Aligned to that Vision

The administration worked with staff over several years to create a vision that focused the school on making students responsible for their own learning. The development of the vision was intentional and focused on increasing student responsibility for learning. As the principal explained,

> a group of us got together and said […] what is it that we really need to do to really get our students to learn more effectively? What's going on? What are the

> hurdles? We decided a lot of it was because of adults. That we had created systems and trained students to either consciously or unconsciously in these systems to be very dependent upon us for their learning and that as long as that was the program, that there was a ceiling to that, that there would be some things that could only take us so far and we feel like we had reached that and so what we feel like we had to do was to give learning back to the students.

The vision was brought to life by the enactment of the Lakeside Code, as well as through structures meant to support students and teachers in living and learning by the code. The code include the following 7 academic behaviors expected of all students:

1) Attend school and be on time;
2) Come prepared to class and take advantage of tutoring opportunities during Lakeside Time;
3) Find out what assignments are required after missing school;
4) Be able to either explain what the teacher has emphasized or have a question about what isn't clear;
5) Practice independent applications of material to ensure understanding and attend Lakeside Time when you don't understand;
6) Talk to teachers about assignments and tests where you struggled; and
7) Monitor your own progress through Assignment Logs.

The preceding list of rules or expectations did not by itself lead to a sustained change in school culture; schools commonly have some sort of code dictating the expectations for students and do not see positive change in school culture. The Lakeside Code seems to be distinct and effective because it focuses on academic press and because it is a central component of the

school's vision. Unlike other school codes, the Lakeside Code is not buried in a student handbook and only accessed when there is a transgression; instead, it is a daily part of teacher and student activity and communication. Teachers were frequently observed referencing the Lakeside Code during class and relating the code to other school structures (i.e. Lakeside Time, student assignment logs, and the intervention committee). School time is structured in order to facilitate student adherence to the code; for instance, there are multiple points during the day for students to seek additional information if they are falling behind in one of their classes. The code establishes a foundation for a school culture predicated on academic press, student responsibility and academic achievement.

Holding Teachers Accountable

A parallel code was created for teachers that enumerated the expected teacher behaviors that would support aspects of the student code. As part of the Lakeside Code, teachers agreed to:

1. Ensure that all assessments are directly tied to Student Expectations embedded in the curriculum.
2. Ensure that all activities and assignments are designed to prepare students to perform independently and successfully on assessments.
3. Provide opportunities for students to get help prior to assessments and due assignments.
4. Regularly assess and evaluate student progress.
5. Communicate effectively with parents regarding their child's progress.
6. Establish and maintain an environment that encourages effort, participation, metacognitive learning, and self-monitoring on the part of all students.

For example, the teacher expectations that accompany student expectations 2 and 5 (that students

are to attend Lakeside Time when they need additional support) are that teachers make themselves available during Lakeside Time. The principal reported that teachers are not only evaluated on content-related areas, but on their implementation of the Lakeside Code as well. Teachers are held accountable for implementing the school vision through the ongoing, looped feedback they received from administrators. During walkthroughs, administrators might verify that teachers were enforcing the use of the assignment logs to support expectation 7, or using questioning strategies to support expectation 4. Professional development regarding the implementation of the code is available to teachers. Administrators send frequent emails to teachers to gauge teacher understanding of particular structures and strategies and seek any questions teachers may have about implementation. For instance, there is a push throughout the school to use bell ringers to engage students from the moment they walk into the classroom. Teachers report principals checking in via email to remind teachers of the bell ringer procedure and ask for feedback.

Like the code for students, the code for teachers was intentionally developed to encourage a change in culture and thinking among teachers. The principal explained that the idea was to get "teachers off the stage" and encourage them not to "tell students anything because they're not listening to you, [but rather] ask them questions." Further, teachers were expected to take responsibility for the success of their students and find ways to foster achievement. A teacher explained that if a student was failing a class, the "administrators are going to come to [the teacher] and say, "Have you been giving them tutorials? Have they been showing up to tutorials? Are you giving them the help they needed? Are you differentiating your instruction? Have you called parents to let them know that your student has repetitively failed?" In sum, it was not acceptable to simply blame students for underachievement; teachers were expected to

find a way to support every student.

The Lakeside Code effectively created a common set of expectations for student and teacher behavior, allowing teachers across the school to develop collective responsibility for students. The expectation was explicit enough that teachers frequently identified "getting students to be responsible for themselves" as the major focus of the administration. Further, the code gave students explicit ways to be responsible and teachers explicit strategies for supporting students.

Increasing Academic Press and Academic Support

In conjunction with the establishment of the Code, the administration has established several structures and encouraged instructional practices aligned to the Lakeside Code intended to support students who are struggling to take responsibility for their own learning. One teacher reported that changes were pervasive, and included "Attendance policies, tardy policies, like I said, any policy that they can think of to you know teach accountability, responsibility, [and] dedication." Specifically, school structures designed to support struggling students included Lakeside Time, the use of assignment logs, and the intervention committee. In addition, instructional practices designed to support students included the use of bell ringers, cooperative learning strategies, and a new grading policy. Students perceived these supports as being effective ways to ensure their academic success. In one student focus group, the students concluded that they did not often experience academic failure because their teachers consistently "stay on top of 'em." Mirroring this sentiment, a teacher explains that "we expect 'em to do things, and when they don't, we're all over 'em!"

Lakeside Time. The most frequently discussed structural support among both students and teachers was the creation of "Lakeside Time," a one-hour period offered around lunch time during which students who are not passing a class are required to attend tutorials. Importantly, this time also provided an opportunity for students to interact informally with teachers and other adults. Lakeside Time was particularly important as it provided students with family or other obligations after school a time to attend tutoring during the school day. One teacher emphasized the importance of Lakeside Time, saying,

> I love [Lakeside Time] because before, some of our kids are bussed over here. So, they cannot come in before school or stay after. And so, if it wasn't for [Lakeside Time], when would I get to work with them or when would they get to come and finish a test, you know?

For students who were not using the time for remediation, Lakeside Time also served as time for clubs and intramural sports to meet. Both teachers and students related that Lakeside Time offered students a chance to get extra help, as well as an opportunity to cultivate personal relationships in an informal setting.

A number of students reported participating in Lakeside Time two to three days a week, while others attended Lakeside Time until they caught up or understood something they were struggling with. Students largely understood that when they did not do well in class, they needed to attend tutorials during Lakeside Time and complete the work they had missed. In addition to the structured one-hour tutorial period, students also reported coming before or after school to seek extra assistance from teachers. Importantly, as the school day and teacher expectations were structured to make going to tutorials "normal", students came to internalize this expectation.

As part of the Lakeside Code, students are expected to attend tutorials for all classes they are failing. During tutorials students and teachers work one-on-one or in small groups. Students can also work independently during this time to complete missed assignments. Through the Lakeside Code, students know what the standard for excellence is at the school, and through Lakeside Time, students falling short of the standard are given an opportunity to seek extra help. An administrator explained,

> I'd like to think the [Lakeside] Code plays a big factor in … them having to be in class, be [in] class with materials … this is the first time for our kids that they're actually asked and expected to do homework. For whatever reason, our kids come to us with this expectation that well, homework is not that important. I don't have to do homework. And we're trying to change that mindset and get them to realize that they have to do homework 'cause homework is what's gonna help them to pass their tests. And we're trying to … base most of their grades upon test scores rather than homework. So we try to get our kids to, through the Lakeside Code they're required if they don't understand something, ask questions.

The responsibility for using this time wisely rests mainly with the students: teachers do not actively monitor where students are or whether they are attending the correct tutorial. Evidence from student interviews indicates that students are well aware of the expectations in spite of not being constantly monitored. When asked about what helped her learn best, one student explained that while Lakeside Time was voluntary, "It's in the school's code of conduct that you have to go to it. You're failing a class, you have to go." While teachers and students

mentioned that some students did not use this time wisely, the general consensus was that students take advantage of this time in order to complete assignments or receive extra help.

Incentives for academic achievement were built into the tutorial structure. Students who were scoring above an 80 in all of their classes were not required to attend tutorials and could use that time to participate in organized clubs or sports, or simply socialize with friends. Several students explained that even when they were not required to attend tutorials, they often would spend that time in a teacher's class socializing or working independently. This suggests that the students felt attached to particular teachers and appreciated this additional time to interact in a less formal manner with both their teachers and other students. It was during this time that teachers were best able to demonstrate the authentic caring requisite for forming trusting relationships with students.

Assignment logs. The assignment logs, or planners, are intended for use by students to track both their assignments and their grades. The Lakeside Code mandates that at any given moment, students are expected to know whether they are passing a class (with an average score of 81% or higher). Teachers are expected to teach students how to use their planners and check assignment logs periodically, but more importantly, to teach students how to monitor their own progress. In practice, students were not using the assignment logs as often or methodically as intended, with many students reporting using them only as necessary as a hall pass. However, some students did report that assignments logs are the primary way they know how they are doing in school and that teachers check to see whether or not they have completed them.

The intervention committee. The intervention committee is a support enacted for

students who are not meeting the expectations of the Lakeside Code. Members of the intervention committee include the school social worker, an intervention specialist, five teachers and the dean of instruction. The first stage of intervention for students not meeting expectations is facilitated by teachers who remind students and their parents of the expectations set out in the Lakeside Code. If this intervention is unsuccessful, students meet with the intervention committee who review data about students' performance and speak with students individually in order to investigate the root cause of the problem. Based on this investigation, the intervention committee develops and monitors an individualized improvement plan for each student. One member of the intervention committee explained how it benefited their students: "Our kids need support. They need people. They know that my door's open. They can come in here and they know that [a technology teacher], who is one of our committee members down the hall, that she loves them and cares for them and that she will help them, and not just with that, but you know, I've got a desk in here for a reason. They come in and they do their homework in my office. They work when they're in here."

In addition to this formalized intervention team, a less formal network of support existed to assist students. Teachers frequently explained that when a student was struggling, they would call on other adults within the building for help in getting the student back on track. One support personnel explained part of his role, "That's probably the main thing that I do from here is I'll, teachers will communicate with me if they have struggling kids in those classes and I try to call them in and conference. And then, give them strategies of how to put forth the effort." Student activity leaders reported checking with other teachers on the needs and progress of students in their organizations weekly to ensure they were following the Lakeside Code and maintaining averages above an 81 percent.

Classroom practices. The Lakeside Code for teachers also shaped their classroom practices. Teachers were encouraged to use instructional strategies and learning goals that pushed students into higher-level thinking, including questioning and cooperative learning formats. Accordingly, many teachers referenced shifting towards student-centered pedagogy in their classrooms and taking on the role of facilitator rather than lecturer. Numerous teachers had attended professional development addressing how to structure cooperative learning to keep students engaged and promote inquiry. One teacher explained that cooperative learning strategies gave students an opportunity to "bounce those ideas off of each other" and gain confidence in their ability to complete assignments.

Two specific strategies delineated in the teacher code that were frequently mentioned by teachers was the use of timers and random calling. Timers were used to create a sense of urgency among students to work productively during class time. Random calling, a strategy in which teachers call on students randomly instead of according to who has their hand raised, kept students engaged as they had to be ready to answer at all times.

Teachers also received training on how to better diagnose student misunderstandings through an intervention program called "Schools Attuned." This training was intended to help teachers identify and address the root cause of academic problems and, as one teacher explained, provided "a lot of strategies […] that help address individual issues that might be preventing kids from being fully engaged." This training was aligned with the norm of finding ways to support students established by the use of the formal and informal intervention teams mentioned above.

In addition to changing instruction to align with the Lakeside Code, the school changed its grading policy to encourage academic press. To pass any course, students had to achieve an 81% average on their assessments and assignments, as opposed to the benchmark of 70% set by

the district. This policy was a codification of the high expectations for student achievement in the school. One teacher explained that high expectations, coupled with giving students freedom to take responsibility for their learning, were the reasons for the school's higher achievement relative to other schools in the district. This higher level of expectation was coupled with a higher level of support for students who were struggling, in the form of Lakeside Time and the intervention committee. Many teachers we interviewed expressed a relentless willingness to support students, even as students struggled to adhere to the Lakeside Code. One teacher verbalizes how he cares for students as individuals, regardless of how many times students struggle:

> These kids they're not perfect around…sometimes they're not disciplined; sometimes they just don't care about education. […] I know they're going to make mistakes, and what I try to do is I always try to help them out, I always give them responsibility, I say if you're going to do this today, you know I let them do whatever they have to do, whatever task I give them I let them do it and they're going to make mistakes, some of them are going to quit, and I'm not going to stand for it, I talk to them and say well it's your choice to quit, but you know I want you to do it, this is good for you, and if they'll do it they'll do it, and if they don't they don't. but most of the time they come back and they finish the task, it's just how you talk to them and how you approach them, cause we're not here to treat them bad or get upset at them, I'm here to help them and they help me a lot."

Again, because the teachers were available to support students in reaching high expectations, students responded positively and were more capable of taking responsibility for

their own learning. Most students in interviews and focus groups, when asked what teachers expect of them, answered that they expect them to show effort and in the words of one student, "actually like try. Whenever I'm not trying she can tell and she wants me to do my best, so she just kind of pushes me." Another student explained, "a good teacher doesn't enable the students. Like they let them get the information for themselves."

Academic press and academic support help students develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning. In one focus group, students explained how structured support helped them take ownership of their own learning. When asked how much the students might study for a test, they responded "As much as we need till we understand," and that when they struggled with particular content they would "see the teacher during Lakeside Time for tutorials." Further, the students elaborated by saying that although they did not attend Lakeside Time daily, they would go "when we need the help" until they could "get on track of what [we] need to learn." Another student responded that she stays motivated to complete her assignments because,

> they're understanding about your learning here even though you, I guess like it's like effort instead of the actual answer, so if you're putting effort and you're trying to learn and you study and stuff and you still don't get, I mean they still, they're understanding about it and they'll give you some sort of credit for it.

Her comment suggests that she perceived teachers as understanding and fair, willing to treat each student as an individual. At Lakeside, academic support and press came in the form of the Lakeside Code as well the supporting structures and practices. By giving both teachers and

students strategies for how to take responsibility for learning, these structures and practices helped increase student and teacher efficacy.

Increased Support for Teachers from Peers and Administrators

The vision that anchored the changing culture throughout Lakeside was not only focused on creating more successful students, but also more successful teachers. The principal explained that the focus for teachers was continuous improvement,

> [Teachers] need to be continuing to learn, to accept that they're not perfect, they need to take risks in terms of experimenting with instruction, they need to be comfortable doing that and knowing that as long as they are making an effort just like the students that they're going to be fine. But they need to continue to be students.

In order to cultivate a norm of continuous improvement and learning among teachers, the administration created informal and formal structures of support.

Support from the administration came primarily through frequent and non-punitive feedback and communication with teachers. The principal mentioned frequently observing teachers for brief segments of a class and providing targeted feedback. Within the structure of the Lakeside Code for teachers, teachers were allowed a certain amount of flexibility and autonomy to take risks in their practice. One teacher reported, "The administrators seem to be very much 100% behind the teachers… if a teacher comes up with something that works even better for them then the administrative team is behind you."

Discussion

How School Support Structures and Academic Press Foster Caring, Personalized Relationships

The school structures described above were instrumental in fostering more caring and personalized relationships between students and adults. When describing a caring teacher, one student mentioned that the teacher held high expectations for the students by teaching like the professors at the local college, and also supported the students by pointing them to additional resources when necessary. Among teachers, caring for students by helping them with academics or getting to know them personally during Lakeside Time was a common refrain.

The explicit nature of the Lakeside Code makes teacher behaviors seem "fair" to students. Students know exactly what they are expected to do, and so when teachers hold students accountable for their performance, there are few surprises. Perceptions of "fairness" are important for developing trusting relationships (Libbey, 2004) and for fostering engagement (Chory-Assad, 2002). Additionally, the Lakeside Code created consistency in the way teachers related to students, and this consistency enabled more trusting relationships. Building these trusting relationships is a foundational step in personalizing learning and developing student responsibility for their own learning.

By defining failing as an 80 percent or below, high expectations became a structural characteristic across the school. This expectation that all students would earn at least a B in all of their classes, or else be expected to participate in remediation, sends a message to students that each individual is valued as a learner and that teachers believe that all students can succeed.

Students know that teachers will not allow them to fail, and high expectations from teachers make them feel cared for. These perceptions are reinforced by the wide safety net of adults who take responsibility for each child's academic achievement. Teachers, counselors, and program leaders all were part of formal and informal networks of support for students. A high level of support and contact with adults can help mitigate students' feelings of isolation or alienation, and increase engagement.

Lakeside Time is perhaps the most concrete structural feature related to building caring and personalized relationships. This structure created a non-threatening and low risk space for students to engage with teachers on both an academic and personal level. Lakeside Time is explicitly academic, but allows for much informal interaction that creates the more personalized relationships. During this time, both teachers and students report being able to discuss non-academic problems and understand each other on an individual level. The school is sending a message that not only do teachers care about students' academic success, but also their personal well-being. This time fosters authentic caring, where the teacher is able to address both social and academic needs of individual students, as opposed the aesthetic caring that leaves students feeling frustrated and disengaged.

How School Structures Increased Teacher Efficacy

The second mechanism at work in increasing student engagement and responsibility for learning were the structures that helped increase both student and teacher efficacy. As mentioned above, strong feelings of efficacy are promoted when people experience or observe mastery of particular skills, or by receiving positive affirmations (Jerald, 2007). The Lakeside Code for students and for teachers helped increase efficacy by elucidating what success looks like. By

demystifying what it meant to be a good student or good teacher, students and teachers better experience success. Instructional practices also helped students and teachers become more efficacious. Collaborative learning strategies allow students to work together to solve problems. In such settings, students are more likely to take on the role of teacher and experience competency. Working in a group also allows students to receive praise or feedback from other students as well as from adults.

For the teachers at Lakeside, frequent feedback from colleagues and the administration can explain a strong sense of efficacy. Collaborative planning across subjects and grade levels allowed teachers to share best practices. Much like group work with students, learning from and teaching colleagues can be a source of feelings of competency and provide opportunities to receive affirmation. Non-punitive feedback from the principal on specific teacher practice is another source of affirmation that can help teachers have more mastery experiences. Teachers knew that they could seek help from their grade level teams or the intervention team to support student learning, and so could maintain positive and high expectations for all students.

Conclusion

In this study, we offer a framework to explain how school wide structures and academic press can engender a culture among teachers that promotes personalized connections with students. It provides specific examples of how teachers and students are building more caring relationships and develops further insights into how schools might cultivate shared responsibility for learning when serving at risk high school students. Importantly, the structural reforms outlined above were driven by a strong vision created by the administrative team over a number of years. Buy-in for the vision among teachers was also strong because teachers had been

allowed to help craft the vision before its current implementation, increasing their ownership of it. The school leadership also reported hiring teachers that shared this vision.

Moreover, the accountability structures in the school created an open channel of communication between teachers and administrators that resulted in greater relational trust and buy in for the school reform program. Furthermore, as teachers witnessed the effects of the vision in action, in the form of students beginning to become more responsible for their own learning, they become more supportive of the vision. It is significant to note that the structural reform was effective in this school because it was aligned to a coherent vision that had significant teacher buy in. Absent a vision or teacher support, it is unlikely that these same structures would catalyze change.

The high level of trust among faculty and between faculty and the administration made implementation of the vision possible. High levels of relational trust facilitated teacher buy in for new structures and practices implemented to support the vision. Trust was built between administrators and teachers through the use of non-punitive, two-sided communication. Trust between members of the school staff was also rooted in the relatively low levels of teacher turnover. This high level of trust engendered a strong sense of both individual and collective efficacy among teachers.

In summary, we believe this case study highlights the need for administrators to develop buy-in from teachers around a cohesive vision centered on developing student responsibility for their own learning in order for structural reforms to be effective. In an era of outcomes based accountability and reform, this paper provides evidence that children must be cared for and respected as individuals before school reform can succeed.

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Tables

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics and Performance Indicators of Lakeside High School

School characteristics	
Enrollment	700-1200
Percent Black	<20%
Percent Hispanic	>75%
Percent economically disadvantaged	>75%
Percent Limited English Proficient	>7%
2010 Graduation Rate	>85%
2011 State Rating	Academically Acceptable
Value-added rank within district	
Average Rank All Subjects, All Students	1
Average Rank All Subjects, FRL	2
Average Rank All Subjects, LEP	11
Average Rank All Subjects, Black	2
Average Rank All Subjects Hispanic	1

Table 2: Types and amounts of data collected.

Data type	Lakeside High School
Interviews	54
School Administrators	5
Teachers	18
Deans of Instruction	1
Department Heads/Lead Content Teachers	3
Guidance Counselors	3
Support Personnel	16
Students	8
Focus groups	9
Students	3
Teachers	3
Student Activity Leaders	3
Observations	87
Classroom Periods	73
Students Shadowed	8
Faculty/School Administrative Team Meetings	6