



Teaching for Powerful Learning

Lessons From Gateway Public Schools

Channa M. Cook-Harvey, Lisa Flook, Emily Efland,
and Linda Darling-Hammond

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Executive Summary

Gateway Public Schools—a middle and high school serving a diverse group of about 800 students in San Francisco—was founded in 1998 by parents of students with learning disabilities seeking a supportive environment for their children. As a public charter organization with a lottery entrance system, Gateway seeks to admit a student body that represents the population of San Francisco’s public schools at large, giving priority to local residents and to students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Approximately 25% of students enrolled receive special education services, 80% are students of color, and more than 50% are from low-income families.

Gateway has a strong reputation for offering excellent supports for students with learning differences and is known for its high graduation and college attendance rates. Ninety-eight percent of the senior class achieved a 4-year graduation rate in spring 2017 and 2018; 96% have matriculated to college since the high school was founded in 1998. These outcomes are especially notable for a school in which over half of incoming students are reading below grade level when they start 6th grade.

Gateway’s founding ideals—focused on empowering students of all learning styles—have transformed into a set of guiding principles for effectively supporting students of all background. These include:

1. **Inclusivity and equity:** Gateway’s belief in engaging and supporting all students manifests itself through a school culture, policies, and practices that ensure that both students and teachers of all backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles feel included in the school community.
2. **Relationships:** Relationship-building at Gateway starts with creating an atmosphere in which each student feels seen, heard, supported, and included.
3. **Continuous improvement:** School staff regularly reflect on Gateway’s mission and the ways in which current school structures and instructional techniques are either meeting that mission or could be altered to better serve the student body.

These principles guide a set of structures and practices that are designed to instantiate these philosophies in students’ and staff’s everyday lived experiences. Each of the structures and practices works in tandem with the others, so there is a mission-driven coherence schoolwide. This case study documents promising school practices that illustrate how the creation of a positive school climate, along with a full and rich curriculum focused on meaningful learning, has led to improved motivation, sense of belonging, and student achievement that outpaces most similarly situated schools in California.

The ways in which educators at Gateway honor and nurture the multiple pathways for whole child development are well supported by research emerging from the sciences of learning and development. A recent synthesis of that research points to the importance of four major sets of principles that support whole student achievement and growth:

1. **Supportive environments** promote secure attachments and relationships, a sense of safety and belonging, and relational trust through structures that promote long-term relationships and effective care; classroom learning communities ensure students’ sense of physical and psychological safety and belonging; and collaboration strategies promote connections among educators, school staff, and families.
2. **Productive instructional strategies** connect to students’ experiences, support conceptual understanding, and develop metacognitive abilities; these strategies also support engagement and motivation and develop students’ ability to learn how to learn.

3. **Social and emotional development** promotes the skills, habits, and mindsets that enable self-regulation, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and resilience through regular opportunities to integrate social, emotional, and cognitive skills and through behavior supports that are educative and restorative.
4. **Systems of support** enable healthy development and address learning barriers through collaborative, multi-tiered systems of support that provide access to integrated health and social services and extend personalized learning opportunities.

These four principles characterize the practices observed at Gateway Middle School and High School.

Supportive School Environment

The Gateway schools have intentionally crafted a school climate and culture in which the conditions for learning are optimal: Students feel safe and supported to take on a rigorous and relevant curriculum, take risks, ask questions, and explore; teachers and leaders collaborate with one another regularly to refine practice and co-construct new pedagogies in order to stretch student learning and make schoolwide decisions; and families and community members are welcomed into a school community that is invested in harnessing the collective power of all partners in order to reach and effectively teach each child.

Structures that enable staff and students to become connected and sustain those connections include an advisory system that ensures each student has an adult advocate and liaison to the family, teaching teams that share students, and regular outreach to families. Building an inclusive community in which all students and families experience a sense of membership is a core aspect of the school's ethos that promotes social, emotional, and academic development. In addition to ensuring equitable opportunities for students with different learning styles, Gateway also engages in a constant effort to ensure that students of all backgrounds are given opportunities to participate in school programs. School staff work hard to build relationships between diverse members of the school community, and opportunities to collaborate with a variety of their peers give students a deep understanding of the importance of empathy and community-building.

While Gateway's foundational beliefs in inclusivity, equity, and relationship-building have remained constant since the school's founding, a spirit of continuous improvement among teachers and administrators ensures that faculty continue to develop new ways to integrate these values into the fabric of the school.

Productive Instructional Strategies

Gateway focuses on placing students at the center of the learning process while also focusing on ambitious curriculum goals. From their first contact with school, students are immersed in a culture of caring and high expectations, enacted through a belief in the potential of each student and coupled with supports to meet individual learning needs.

To inspire learning that sparks students' interests and inspires lines of authentic investigation, teachers at Gateway engage in inquiry-oriented instruction in which students take up questions that they work to understand or solve. Often this includes a project-based approach to learning in which students produce a culminating product after engaging in problem-solving or an investigation that responds to a complex task or authentic question. Teachers act as facilitators of learning rather

than as the gatekeepers of knowledge; they provide meaningful experiences for students to engage with topics in collaborative settings, all the while probing and prompting students to go deeper to uncover their own understandings, while offering strategic instruction and explanations.

In keeping with the founding mission to support students with different learning styles, the middle school and high school practice an inclusion model in which students with learning disabilities take the same general education classes as their peers, with various additional supports. Teachers work to identify and provide scaffolding for learning differences as early as possible. Getting to know students and what they need is a priority. As the school's mission indicates, teachers have two aims: to "create accessibility for all students in their class regardless of official diagnosis" and to "help students identify how they learn and advocate for their own learning needs."

Assessment at Gateway is designed to support learning rather than competition or labeling. Assessments (both formative and summative) are rooted in challenging tasks that encourage deep learning and create a sense of high expectations and mutual accountability. Mastery-oriented grading at Gateway makes standards, expectations, and goals clear and consistent across teachers. The staff created their own shared rubrics and routinely ask students to use these rubrics to evaluate their progress on a given project, set expectations for their own learning, choose how much they want to challenge themselves, and continuously improve their work. The opportunity for every student to learn and succeed is so ingrained in the fabric of the school that students are motivated to learn, and teachers give students the opportunity to show what they know in multiple ways.

Social and Emotional Learning

Educators at Gateway understand the fundamental importance of cultivating social and emotional skills in concert with cognitive abilities. The school explicitly teaches social-emotional competencies and then embeds social and emotional learning into academic activities in all courses, fostering an inclusive school environment that is psychologically safe and supportive for diverse learners. Developing and supporting teachers' own social-emotional competencies is another key feature of Gateway's comprehensive approach.

A student support office accessible to all students is fully staffed with the assistant principal, a mental health counselor, and the student support counselor. It serves as the hub for student support and intervention, including formal and informal counseling from a social worker, restorative conferences, peer mediation, and the general support a student may receive by speaking with a caring adult. In addition, the middle school uses Process of Learning rubrics as a way of focusing on the *how* of learning—in this case, the particular prosocial and pro-academic habits and mindsets that contribute to learning and healthy development. In addition, student-led conferences, held midway through the school year, allow students to formally share their cumulative work across the semester with their parents or guardians and teachers. These conferences help students build agency and self-advocacy while also encouraging self-reflection and metacognition—all important skills needed for meaningful learning.

Additionally, Gateway's behavior supports and practices are educative and restorative rather than punitive and exclusionary. Through restorative practices, students receive guidance around effective communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving. The school's use of restorative practices is effective because of the initial groundwork established by the school's culture of strong

relationships and inclusivity. The restorative process is about repairing relationships, restoring community, and helping students build the skills needed to establish and maintain positive relationships with peers, faculty, and other staff.

System of Supports

Students' needs vary, and they arrive at school with a range of prior experiences and current challenges. A key aspect of creating a supportive environment is a shared developmental framework among all the adults in the school, coupled with procedures for ensuring that students receive additional help for social, emotional, or academic needs when they arise, without costly and elaborate labeling procedures standing in the way. Multi-tiered systems of support include multidisciplinary student support teams, on-site pupil services personnel (e.g., social workers, school psychologists, counselors, and nurses) who are skilled in culturally competent academic and behavioral assessment, care coordination, and family engagement with support teams.

In addition to integrated strategies in the general education classrooms, Gateway also offers a robust suite of learning seminar courses and reading intervention classes. The learning seminar courses are designed to help students learn how to learn—students identify different behaviors, mindsets, or habits that undermine learning and receive feedback on the implementation of various strategies that can help to address those barriers. Another feature of Gateway's approach to supporting student learning is through involving students in planning their own IEP meetings. Not only do students come to their own IEP meetings, but they meet with their learning specialists and talk about what their IEP means for them. By the time they get to 8th grade, most students are proficient in understanding themselves as learners, and they leave the school knowing what they need and how to advocate for themselves.

Collaborative Work Environment for Faculty and Staff

Gateway has a high-functioning team structure in place. The school has intentionally built structures that enable shared decision-making, collaborative planning, and teamwork focused on common values and goals. Teachers collaborate in grade-level teams; content-area teams; and smaller, informal teams in which teachers might collaborate on joint unit and lesson plans to ensure continuity for an entire grade within a particular subject area. These planning meetings focus on ensuring that each Gateway student is receiving an effective education that includes both academic and social-emotional learning.

Professional development at Gateway is generally implemented in a thematic and conceptual manner: There are one or two focus strands for the year upon which each professional development meeting will extend or build during each successive meeting. Much in the same way that a unit plan, and the sequential lessons within, is organized by an overarching essential question and clearly stated set of learning outcomes, Gateway's professional development is directly related to an identified need and is universally applicable to the entire staff. This type of meta-reflection on the improvement process is typical of both administrators and teachers, who understand that to meet Gateway's mission to serve all students well and prepare them for post-high school life, the school must respond to constantly shifting factors and reevaluations of its own practice.

Through cultivating a positive climate with a focus on inclusivity of all differences, including learning differences, coupled with instructional practices that challenge students based on meeting them where they are, Gateway has successfully instantiated the research that we know supports learning for adults and children.

Introduction

Nestled in the middle of the block on a steep San Francisco street, Gateway Middle School has a welcoming brick façade with a small garden replete with four raised garden beds flourishing with winter vegetables. Two handball courts are painted with murals—one with a raised fist with a heart around it, and another with the sentence “Never underestimate the power you have.” Half a dozen students are in small groups around the yard at 3:00 p.m. on a Tuesday afternoon. Every 5 minutes or so a family exits the building chatting among themselves—a White father and Filipina mother with their son, a Latina mother and her daughter speaking to one another in Spanish, an African American family with a daughter and young son.

Greeting visitors and directing families to the appropriate classrooms for conferences, Ms. Gochez is answering phones and smiling as family members, students, and the principal pass by her desk and ask questions. It is student-led conference week at the school, and families are being welcomed into the school to hear from their children as they reflect on their own progress and set goals for the remainder of the school year.

A recent addition to Gateway High School, which was founded in 1998 by parents of students with disabilities, Gateway Middle School in San Francisco focuses on developing students’ leadership skills, college readiness, and self-awareness as both learners and members of society. According to Gateway Middle School Principal Aaron Watson, the school’s goal is to “support all of our diverse learners to succeed within a rigorous, college-preparatory program. We believe that middle school students learn best when they are known well and feel a sense of belonging; when they understand how they learn and feel that their individual learning needs are supported and respected; when they are challenged to think critically; and when they actively participate in the school community.”¹

Gateway’s student-led conference supports students in taking control of their own learning, as they share their work, their progress, and their goals with both their parents and teacher.

In a 6th-grade classroom, student Anisha and her advisor sit next to each other across from Anisha’s parents. The advisor explains that she will not be talking during the conference and that this presentation

will instead be led by the student. Anisha’s parents look a little surprised but eager to hear what their daughter will share. Anisha starts by reading a letter that she’s written to her parents: “Dear Mom and Dad, First, I want to thank you for coming today,” and she looks quickly at her notes to make sure she’s reciting the welcome letter just as she’s prepared. Her parents patiently smile and nod as their daughter reads; every so often Anisha peeks up from her paper and smiles.

Launching into the heart of the conference, Anisha pops open a large three-ring binder and flips to the Humanities tab, pulls out an assignment that she worked on last quarter, and hands it to her parents. As her parents look over the work, flipping through the various drafts, Anisha explains, “I am proud of this work because it shows I’ve built my skill at ‘talking to the text.’ I show here how I annotated and summarized my thoughts about what I was reading and was then able to draw

Gateway’s student-led conference supports students in taking control of their own learning, as they share their work, their progress, and their goals with both their parents and teacher.

conclusions with evidence.” She goes on to tell her parents what part of this she found challenging and how overcoming this challenge is evidence of her growth as a learner. She then flips to the next tab in the binder and pulls out her mathematics final exam. She explains that she is now able to use ratio diagrams to determine if a statement is true or false and that she is also incorporating her knowledge of a number line as a tool to solve problems. Repeating the same process for science, learning seminar, and art, Anisha highlights what she is most proud of, what she found most challenging, and how she has grown. Next, Anisha reflects on her contribution to the school community and on her overall goals for the quarter, saying:

This year I have contributed to the school community by building stronger friendships, creating shared spaces with my peers, participating in class more regularly, conducting community service, and volunteering to do small classroom jobs such as passing out papers. In the beginning of the year I didn’t raise my hand to share my thoughts during class, but now I participate and share out and speak up, especially when we’re doing work in small groups. I have grown so much from the start of the school year when I was really nervous to speak up.

Using sentence stems generated by her advisor to scaffold the flow of the conference, Anisha explains, “Resources that helped me feel more confident were my math teacher and my table group because they encouraged me and offered me some strategies to use, such as setting a goal to raise my hand once per class and to share ideas with my teachers before or after class even if I wasn’t able to speak up publicly.” And, finally, she ends with, “This goal in life and school is important because if I don’t learn to participate in my own learning, I will never get over feeling nervous and I won’t grow.”

Anisha’s parents sit across from her, beaming with pride, and politely inquire if they can now interject with questions.

In a 7th-grade classroom down the hall, another student-led conference begins with a decidedly more relaxed feel; it is evident that the student and the family are familiar with the process, and they all dive right in. Ilan, a precocious 7th-grader with a flare of red hair and scuffed Converse sneakers, sits next to his mother and younger brother and across from his father. His advisor is sitting slightly apart from the family, observing and taking down an occasional note in the Google spreadsheet open on her laptop. Ilan welcomes his family, shares the agenda for the evening, and immediately begins by describing how proud he is of the personal narrative essay he wrote for his humanities class.

For this project I had to analyze the text for structure, theme, tone, and character development, and then I had to use those skills to write a narrative from the first-person point of view. I’ve never done anything like this before, but I had a ton of fun. I look forward to doing more projects like this, and I may even want to be a writer when I grow up! The biggest challenge for me was the typing and the occasional writer’s block—even though I was writing from my own experience. A strategy I used to overcome this challenge was looking back at all of our old “Do Nows” when I got stuck on a scene.

Although Ilan uses the occasional sentence stem in his presentation of work, it is clear that he feels comfortable straying from the script and talking more freely with his parents. They too are more relaxed and willing to interrupt and ask clarifying questions during the conference. When presenting his math work, Ilan says with honesty, “I thought I’d get a lower score because math is not my favorite subject.” Looking around from his family to his advisor, Ilan continues, “You all know that last year I didn’t do well. This year, I got some pullout time and extra help, and this is the best grade I’ve ever gotten in math.” Ilan’s father interjects, saying, “Ilan, congrats buddy. You have worked so hard, and I’ve seen you gain so much confidence.” His father passes the math work to Ilan’s mother, and with the younger brother looking over her shoulder the whole family basks in a glow of pride and encouragement.

The conference continues in this way as Ilan reflects on all his classes. During the goal-setting time, the presentation becomes more of a conversation in which Ilan, his parents, and his advisor together brainstorm goals for next quarter. Ilan begins by saying,

Last quarter I wanted to be better at focusing, really tracking the speaker and asking for clarification when I needed it. I didn’t meet this goal. I forgot what my goal was halfway through the quarter, and then I know I have a hard time paying attention. Also, I am not very organized, so I forget what my homework is and then forget to check PowerSchool. When I realize I’ve forgotten, I have a hard time being disciplined enough to go back and make up work and check in with my teachers. Maybe I could go to study hall every day or set an alarm to remind myself or find an accountability partner.

To this, his advisor chimes in, “What kinds of things do you want to make the alarm for in your calendar? Only big deadlines? Or little assignments also?” Ilan and his parents discuss ways to think about organizing his electronic calendar and maybe also creating a paper calendar on the wall at home. His mom then wonders if maybe Ilan would benefit from joining the guitar club after school so that he can meet new friends and do something fun—she expresses a desire for Ilan to find a balance between the academic goals and the personal hobbies that make him happy. She says, “I don’t want you to burn out completely—maybe it’ll motivate you to know you can go to guitar once a week after school in addition to study hall.”

Ilan jubilantly concludes his conference feeling as if he has a plan of action and feeling confident about the next quarter of 7th grade; part of this joy is also Ilan relishing the fact that he gets to assign his parents “homework.” With smiles, they jokingly hem and haw and ask when the homework is due.

Overview of Gateway Public Schools

Gateway Middle School and High School sit in the heart of San Francisco’s Western Addition district, between the Anza Vista and Fillmore neighborhoods. Gateway High School, founded in 1998 by six parents of students with learning disabilities,² is designed to support students with learning differences and to actively encourage all students to develop self-awareness and self-advocacy around their own learning styles. Gateway Middle School opened in 2011 to extend these learning opportunities to more students starting at a younger age.

Grounded in deep knowledge of development and learning, the schools explicitly aim to include a substantial number of students with disabilities in an innovative inclusion model focused on student-centered teaching, collaborative project-based learning, and authentic assessment. According to Gateway’s mission statement:³

Gateway Public Schools’ mission is to prepare a broad range of learners for success in college and beyond.... We are committed to serving a student body that reflects the diversity of San Francisco including a special emphasis on students with diagnosed learning disabilities, and helping each and every one of our students get into college and thrive. We believe that all students are capable of learning at high levels when schools pair high expectations and a school-wide understanding that students learn differently. At Gateway, we combine a rigorous academic program with an approach where the individual talents, strengths, and needs of our learners are identified and supported.

As Marlies McCallum, the Director of the Learning Center at Gateway High School, explained, a dedication to helping all students learn successfully is manifested in the school’s focus on “figuring out the individual student and what the individual student needs and then [organizing] the resources to make sure that can happen.” Gateway Public Schools are unique in that they have figured out how to enable success for students who would, in other contexts, find themselves marginalized and much less likely to achieve in ways typically reserved for students with more of the social and intellectual capital prized in most schools.

Demographics and Outcomes

Gateway consists of two campuses—a middle school and a high school—that serve a diverse group of about 800 students, most of whom are students of color and students from low-income families. In 2017–18, Gateway Middle School served 311 students (16% African American, 10% Asian, 35% Hispanic or Latino/a, and 18% White).⁴ Just over 60% of the student body was classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged; 9% were identified as English learners; and 16% had documented learning disabilities in that school year.⁵ Gateway High School serves a similarly diverse mix of 482 students: 12% African American, 15% Asian, 34% Hispanic or Latino/a, and 21% White.⁶ About 48% of Gateway High School students were classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, 5% were identified as English learners, and 17% were identified as eligible for special education in 2017–18.⁷

As a public charter organization with a lottery entrance system, Gateway seeks to admit a student body that represents the population of San Francisco’s public schools at large, giving priority to San Francisco residents and to students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Although students with learning differences are not disproportionately represented among lottery applicants, Gateway has a reputation for offering excellent supports for these students, and so most who win a spot

in Gateway’s entering classes choose to enroll. As a result, the schools’ populations of students with disabilities are about 50% greater than in a traditional school.

There is a strong demand for the kind of education Gateway offers: According to Gateway’s Executive Director, Sharon Olken, in 2017–18 the middle school received approximately 400 applications for 102 6th-grade spots, and the high school received approximately 600 applications for 135 9th-grade spots.⁸

That Gateway’s innovative approach to instruction is working for this diverse population is evidenced by the outcomes it achieves. In spring 2017 and 2018, 98% of students who started high school 4 years earlier graduated, including 100% of African American and Latina/o students and 100% of students with disabilities.⁹ In comparison, the 4-year cohort graduation rate for San Francisco Unified School District students overall in 2018 was 72%, and only 52% for African American and 57% for Latino/a students.¹⁰ In San Francisco and statewide, only 66% of students with disabilities graduate within 4 years.¹¹

Gateway students’ high rates of persistence from 9th through 12th grade are related to the supports available to students throughout their school careers. According to the California School Dashboard, across the board, Gateway’s students are more prepared for college and career than students in the same demographic groups statewide.¹² Additionally, 96% of Gateway students have matriculated to college since the high school was founded in 1998.¹³ Of note, 42% of these students are the first in their family to attend college.¹⁴ These outcomes are especially notable for a school in which over half of incoming students are reading below grade level when they start 6th grade.¹⁵

Gateway’s wide range of students show strong academic performance. In 2016–17, for example, Gateway High School students ranked third among high schools in San Francisco in the proportion of students who met or exceeded standards on statewide English language arts tests.¹⁶ In both 2017–18 and 2018–19, Gateway Middle School’s 8th-graders met or exceeded state standards at higher rates than 8th-grade students statewide in both English language arts and mathematics. Gateway’s 11th-graders outperformed 11th-graders statewide in mathematics in both years and in English language arts in 2018–19 (performing about comparably in 2017–18). (See Table 1.)

Table 1
Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding State Standards on CAASPP Test (2017–18 and 2018–19)

School Year	Subject	8th-Grade Gateway Middle School Students	8th-Grade Students Statewide	11th-Grade Gateway High School Students	11th-Grade Students Statewide
2017–18	English language arts/literacy	66.3%	49.1%	54.2%	55.9%
	Mathematics	46.2%	36.9%	35.7%	31.4%
2018–19	English language arts/literacy	63.0%	49.4%	59.5%	57.3 %
	Mathematics	40.0%	36.6%	39.3%	32.2%

CAASPP = California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress.

Data source: California Department of Education. (n.d.). Test results for California’s assessments. <https://caaspp-elpac.cde.ca.gov/caaspp/> (accessed 09/19/20).

Gateway students at both schools overwhelmingly report feeling as if they belong in and are supported by their school. Middle school students who took the local climate survey in 2018 responded that 92% of students feel there is a teacher who cares about them, 88% said they feel part of the school, and 89% feel safe at the school.¹⁷ High school students feel similarly integrated into their school community: 92% said that they feel connected to school, 91% said that they feel safe in school, and 80% said they feel that their teachers care about them.¹⁸

Gateway's Mission and Vision

In the first decade of Gateway High School's existence, many of the staff began to feel that the students would benefit from more than just 4 years in Gateway's environment. "We thought it would be great to have a middle school where we could work with them for longer," remembers Suzanne Herko, who joined the high school in its second year of operation and currently teaches humanities and the learning seminar at the middle school. Out of this desire to immerse students in Gateway's academic and social cultures at an earlier age, Gateway Middle School was founded in 2011.¹⁹

As the schools grew in popularity and took in a more racially and socioeconomically diverse student body, Gateway began to develop structures to support students of all backgrounds, while maintaining its supports for students with learning differences. According to Gateway Middle School humanities teacher Elizabeth Colen, Gateway's students "represent the diversity of our community, academically and spatially and culturally and socioeconomically."

One of the central ways that Gateway meets a wide range of student needs is through an intentional focus on creating opportunities for school connectedness—the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about them as individuals.²⁰ A welcoming school climate and close relationships between teachers and students are critical to faculty and staff truly understanding each and every child and their respective needs. The relationship-centered nature of Gateway schools is fostered in part by the small size of both schools, as well as an intentional approach on the part of Gateway staff to grow a tight-knit school community in which every student feels supported and included in his or her learning journey and social-emotional growth.

One of the central ways that Gateway meets a wide range of student needs is through an intentional focus on creating opportunities for school connectedness.

Gateway's founding ideals focused on empowering students of all learning styles and have transformed into a set of three guiding principles:

1. **Inclusivity and equity:** Gateway's belief in engaging and supporting all students manifests itself through a school culture, policies, and practices that ensure that students and teachers of all backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles feel included in the school community.
2. **Relationships:** Relationship-building at Gateway starts with creating an atmosphere in which each student feels seen, heard, supported, and included.
3. **Continuous improvement:** School staff regularly reflect on Gateway's mission and the ways in which current school structures and instructional techniques are either meeting that mission or could be altered to better serve the student body.

These guiding principles inform a set of structures and practices that are designed to ensure that students have ample opportunities to develop and grow in optimal ways (see Table 2).

Table 2
Guiding Principles, Structures and Practices, and Alumni Competencies

Guiding Principles	Structures and Practices	Goals for Graduates ^a
<p>1. Inclusivity and equity: Gateway’s belief in engaging and supporting all students manifests itself through a school culture, policies, and practices that ensure that students and teachers of all backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles feel included in the school community.</p> <p>2. Relationships: Relationship-building at Gateway starts with creating an atmosphere in which each student feels seen, heard, supported, and included.</p> <p>3. Continuous improvement: School staff regularly reflect on Gateway’s mission and the ways in which current school structures and instructional techniques are either meeting that mission or could be altered to better serve the student body.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small schools and small class sizes • Advisories • Inclusion model and an emphasis on self-advocacy for learning needs • Authentic, project- and inquiry-based instruction and assessments • Skillful scaffolding and differentiation of instruction • Careful attention to both social-emotional and cognitive development • A commitment to continuous improvement around an equity agenda • Strong support for educator learning and collaboration 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-advocates who share responsibility for their learning 2. Models of integrity who contribute to an ethical community 3. Community advocates who create positive change for their community 4. Respectful of Differences—celebrating the strength in diversity and what we have in common 5. Critical and creative thinkers who possess the skills and content necessary for lifelong learning

^a Adapted from the *Gateway High School student handbook 2019–2020*. <https://gatewaypublicschools.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/FINAL%20Student%20Handbook%202019-2020.pdf>.

Learning at Gateway is deeply intertwined with these goals for students. The schools’ founding philosophies, beliefs, and value systems seek to instill in students a desire to collaborate with one another, respect each other’s differences, advocate for their needs, and devote themselves to their communities.²¹

In what follows, we discuss each of these features individually. However, it is important to note that each of the structures and practices works in tandem with the others, so there is a mission-driven coherence schoolwide. The ways in which Gateway staff have designed the school lead to a palpable campuswide synergy and power because each aspect of the school environment is designed to enable optimal effectiveness from its teachers and optimal learning from students.

This case study is based on interviews with students, staff, and faculty at both Gateway schools; observations of classes, professional development, leadership meetings, and special events; and reviews of pertinent school documents and publicly available accountability and school climate data. (See Appendix A for methodology.) Throughout this case study we document promising school practices that illustrate how the creation of a positive school climate, along with a full and rich

curriculum focused on meaningful learning, has led to improved motivation, sense of belonging, and student achievement that outpaces most similarly situated schools in California. We also show how such a school environment can in fact help students feel happier in school and create the conditions for faculty and staff to also feel happier and more satisfied with their jobs.

The case study demonstrates that Gateway's philosophies and beliefs are not simply abstract concepts written into its charter. As we elaborate further on the specific school structures, policies, and practices that instantiate these philosophies in students' and staff's everyday lived experiences, it is clear that they create a set of academic, social, and emotional supports, as well as a value system, that is recognized by staff and students alike.

Grounding in the Science of Learning and Development

Gateway’s successes with its students are associated with how well aligned its practices are with what is known about human learning and development. To explain the foundations of these practices, we frame our findings from this case study in alignment with a recent review of research from the science of learning and development that explains why and how the practices we observe at Gateway are critically important for productive student engagement and learning. These practices are especially beneficial for students who experience significant adversity outside of school or are placed furthest from opportunity within the social systems they inhabit.

Research from various fields, including neuroscience, developmental science, and the learning sciences, to name a few, have dramatically expanded our understanding of how biology and environment interact to drive human learning and development.²² Seven key findings that underscore the complexity and richness of this dynamic process are:

1. All children have the potential to learn and thrive. This innate potential can be realized by adults who know how to bring out the abilities and talents in every child.
2. The brain and development are malleable. The brain grows and changes throughout life in response to experiences and relationships. The nature of these experiences and relationships matters greatly for development.
3. Variability in human development is the norm, not the exception. The pace and profile of each child’s development are unique.
4. Human relationships are the essential ingredient that catalyzes healthy development and learning. Affirming, developmentally supportive relationships are critical to the development of brain architecture and the learning process.
5. Adversity affects learning—and the way schools respond matters. Stress is a normal part of healthy development and learning, but excessive stress can throw learning and development off track. School practices can either exacerbate or buffer the effects of childhood adversity.
6. Learning is social, emotional, and academic. Emotions and social dynamics can trigger or block learning. When schools, classrooms, and learning tasks support social-emotional safety and learning, academic performance improves.
7. Students dynamically shape their own learning. They actively construct knowledge based on their experiences, relationships, and social contexts. Effective teaching draws connections to these contexts and supports relationships and new experiences that facilitate the next steps in learning.

Educators at Gateway honor and nurture the multiple pathways for whole child development through a supportive set of structures and practices that permeate the school. Children’s development, learning and skill acquisition, and environmental supports are interrelated in a “constructive web” of instructional, relational, and environmental factors that support or undermine learning, along with the cognitive, social, and emotional processes that interact to influence how children learn.²³ Although these developmental processes are often

compartmentalized, the science of learning and development demonstrates how tightly interrelated they are and how they jointly produce the outcomes for which educators are responsible. Applying what we know to how schools and classrooms are designed can help many more children, including those who are marginalized and left behind, to achieve their full potential.

A recent synthesis of the educational research on the science of learning and development points to four major principles that support whole student achievement and growth:²⁴

1. **Supportive environments** promote secure attachments and relationships, a sense of safety and belonging, and relational trust through structures that promote long-term relationships and effective care; classroom learning communities ensure students' sense of physical and psychological safety and belonging; and collaboration strategies promote connections among educators, school staff, and families.
2. **Productive instructional strategies** connect to students' experiences, support conceptual understanding, and develop metacognitive abilities; these strategies also support engagement and motivation and develop students' ability to learn how to learn.
3. **Social and emotional development** promotes the skills, habits, and mindsets that enable self-regulation, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and resilience through regular opportunities to integrate social, emotional, and cognitive skills and through behavior supports that are educative and restorative.
4. **Systems of support** enable healthy development and address learning barriers through collaborative, multi-tiered systems of support that provide access to integrated health and social services and extend personalized learning opportunities.

These four principles, shown in Figure 1, characterize the practices observed at Gateway Middle School and Gateway High School. A summary of specific Gateway practices that map to these principles is shown below in Table 3.

Through a supportive environment, productive instructional strategies, ongoing opportunities for social-emotional development, and a system of supports, educators at Gateway promote conditions that enable students to learn and grow in ways aligned with and informed by science. In the following sections, we examine Gateway's practices in each of these four areas, illustrating how they draw on the principles that support learning and development and help accomplish the schools' goals.

Through a supportive environment, productive instructional strategies, ongoing opportunities for social-emotional development, and a system of supports, educators at Gateway promote conditions that enable students to learn and grow in ways aligned with and informed by science.

Figure 1
Framework for Whole Child Education

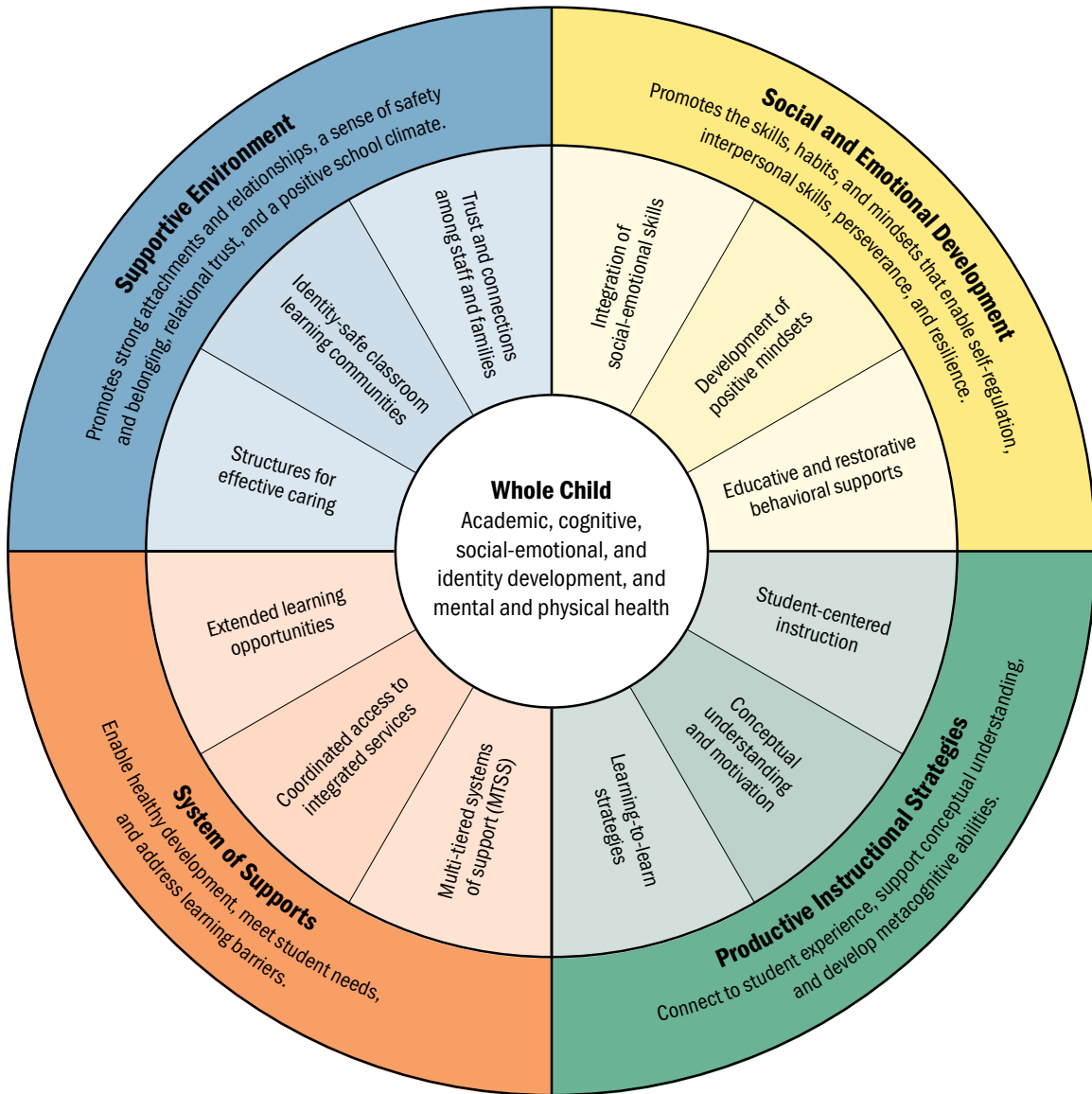


Table 3
Gateway Middle School and High School Practices Aligned With the Science of Learning and Development

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT	
<p>Structures for Effective Caring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational trust: Students feel they can reach out to teachers who care because they know them well. • Small school: 309 students are enrolled in middle school, and 479 students are enrolled in high school.^a • Advisory: This prime forum creates community and strong relationships among students, advisors, and families.
<p>Classroom Learning Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentional community-building: New students are connected with 8th-grade mentors (referred to as the Where Everybody Belongs, or WEB, program). • Cultural competence: A college-preparatory curriculum with differentiated learning opportunities and curriculum reflects students' backgrounds. • Identity safety: Explicit discussion and norms around learning differences and diversity promote identify safety. • Consistent routines: Teachers set classroom norms, assign roles for group work, and give prompts to guide discussion.
<p>Connections Among Staff and Families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff collaboration: Grade-level and department-level planning time is built into the day. • Staff engagement: Interactive, collaborative, discussion-oriented professional development (PD) promotes staff engagement, similar to the ways in which students learn. • Home visits: School staff/personnel visit students' homes to facilitate connectedness and information exchange. • Conferences: Regular parent-teacher as well as student-led conferences are held to review student progress and set goals. • Authentic family engagement: Events such as Cohort Coffee meetings and Cultural Thanksgiving build community.
PRODUCTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES	
<p>Student-Centered Instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized instruction: Teachers employ, for example, personalized study guides for learning needs. • Collaborative learning: This is often facilitated through group work with designated roles. • Cross-disciplinary teaching: Teacher teams facilitate communication and increase coherence, allowing students to make connections across subjects. • Interest-driven learning: Teachers give students the ability to choose topics.
<p>Conceptual Understanding and Motivation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry-based instruction: Project-based learning formats, which blend inquiry and direct instruction, provide opportunities for deeper learning. • Motivating tasks with skillful scaffolding: Use of current events, for example, that help students draw connections to history and develop critical thinking and analysis skills. • Performance assessments (exhibitions): These projects make learning visible and authentic and provide opportunities for public feedback. • Rubrics: By providing cognitive supports and making standards and goals clear and consistent across teachers, students can improve their own learning.
<p>Learning How to Learn</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metacognition and learning strategies: Teachers encourage students to engage in reflective practice during learning and after assessments. • Formative feedback, practice, and revision: Students have the opportunity to show what they know in multiple ways and to improve their work.

Learning How to Learn (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on learning rather than one-time testing: Mastery-oriented performance assessments allow students to revise work products until they reach proficiency, without the pressure of time constraints. • Student-led conferences: Students lead conversations with their parents or guardians about their learning, encouraging reflection and planning while empowering families to partner with the school in support of students. • Student-planned IEP meetings: Students come to know themselves as learners and learn how to advocate for themselves.
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	
Integration of Social-Emotional Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and emotional learning (SEL): Explicit teaching of intra- and interpersonal skills, empathy, conflict resolution, collaboration, and responsibility. These skills are also supported by structures such as the student support office (SSO) and advisory. • Opportunities to practice skills: Skills are integrated and practiced throughout the day using tools such as the mood meter, the reset/peace corner, and BATS (breathe, ask the size of the problem, talk to yourself, and then speak up). • Professional development: Teachers have opportunities to learn social-emotional competencies, which are explicitly developed and modeled among staff.
Development of Habits and Mindsets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of growth mindset, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging: Students set and work toward meaningful goals and build a strong sense of community. • Stress management: Students learn to use tools such as mindfulness and breathing.
Educative and Restorative Behavioral Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching behavioral skills and responsibility: Teachers provide guidance around effective communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving through advisory and WEB activities. • Restorative conversations: Students are brought together to work out issues. The process includes having students reflect in writing on what happened and then come together in a staff-facilitated conversation to repair the harm and make amends.
SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS	
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion model: Staff focus on providing universal Tier One support through intentionally designing curriculum and lessons that are accessible for the majority of students to reduce frustration and related behavioral issues. • Response to intervention (RTI): Staff have conversations about how to incorporate different strategies to address the different tiers of intervention. • High-quality special education services: Students who need personalized supports can easily access them, with or without an IEP or 504 plan. • Triage system: The student support office can handle issues that arise, from a conflict with a peer to behavioral issues that arise in class.
Coordinated Access to Integrated Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships with community organizations: Organizations such as the YMCA Urban Services Bureau in San Francisco and the Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS) organization provide families with comprehensive behavioral, mental health, vocational, and education services.
Extended Learning Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional academic support: In the student learning center, for example, students can self-select into a seminar that helps them with study skills, learning skills, and understanding themselves as learners.

^a Source for 2018–19 enrollment: California Department of Education school profiles for Gateway High and Gateway Middle: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sdprofile/details.aspx?cds=38684783830437> and <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sdprofile/details.aspx?cds=38684780123265>.

Structures and Practices That Support a Positive School Climate

Kids [at Gateway] expect to have a really good relationship with their teacher, and sometimes they need that relationship in order to learn.

—Gateway High School Math Teacher

Research shows that school environment provides an important context that helps shape children’s learning and development both through instruction and through relationships with teachers and peers.²⁵ Children learn when they feel safe and supported²⁶ and thus need both supportive environments and well-developed abilities to manage stress and cope with the inevitable conflicts and frustrations of school and life beyond school. Therefore, it is important that schools provide a positive learning environment, or school climate, that provides a measure of security and support that maximizes students’ ability to learn social and emotional skills as well as academic content.²⁷ Schools that effectively support their students create a learning culture and climate that are “both responsive to the changing needs of the individual and offer the kinds of stimulation that will propel continued positive growth.”²⁸

Relationship-Driven School Climate

The Gateway schools have intentionally and successfully crafted a school climate and culture in which the conditions for learning are optimal and students feel safe and supported to take on a rigorous and relevant curriculum, take risks, ask questions, and explore; in which teachers and leaders collaborate with one another regularly to refine practice and co-construct new pedagogies in order to stretch student learning and make schoolwide decisions; and in which families and community members are welcomed into a school community that is invested in harnessing the collective power of all partners in order to reach and effectively teach each child.

Structures that enable staff and students to become connected and sustain those connections are critical to the positive and relationship-focused school climate and culture that Gateway schools have achieved. To use a metaphor, the way a school is organized—its bell schedule, class offerings and composition, norms or rules, staff and leadership roles and responsibilities—is like the “form” of a poem—the stanza length, the rhyme scheme, and the way the poem itself sits on the page. This form reinforces and underscores the content of the poem and points the reader closer to what the author intended when writing the poem. In the same way, the structure of the school should reinforce and highlight the content of the school—its philosophy, beliefs, core values, and mission. At Gateway, there is an intentionality behind the way the schools are structured and the advancement of their purpose and mission. Because the school climate is so fundamental to whether and how much students will learn, the faculty and staff have designed the schools to facilitate opportunities for students to feel connected to one another, their teachers, and the schools themselves. Some of the features that promote relationship-rich climate and culture at Gateway are:

- Small schools with a stable staff (leaders, teachers, support staff, etc.)
- Daily advisory classes with a small cohort of students used for community-building and checking in on each student’s welfare and progress

- Advisors who loop together year after year from matriculation to graduation in the high school
- Block scheduling that allows students to have extended class periods and delve deep into curriculum, engage in collaboration with peers, and build meaningful relationships
- Instructional pedagogies that focus on discussion, collaboration, and group work
- New student orientation and summer bridge activities that help acclimate students to the community before school begins
- Peer mentoring programs that help to ensure student–student connectedness throughout the year

We know from research that warm, caring, supportive teacher–student relationships, as well as other child–adult relationships, are linked to improved school performance and engagement, better emotional regulation, increased social competence, and greater willingness to take on challenges.²⁹ Students who are at higher levels of risk for poor outcomes can benefit especially from nurturing relationships with teachers and other adults, which can increase student learning and support their development and wellness,³⁰ especially when these relationships are culturally sensitive and responsive.³¹ Such relationships help develop the emotional, social, behavioral, and cognitive competencies foundational to learning.

Warm, caring, supportive teacher–student relationships, as well as other child–adult relationships, are linked to improved school performance and engagement, better emotional regulation, increased social competence, and greater willingness to take on challenges.

This sort of climate is especially conducive to learning because when students feel safe, know that they are respected and understood, and know that their teachers are interested in who they are as people, then learning, which is inherently social, becomes deeper and more powerful. It is difficult for teachers to maintain a sense of connection to students when they teach large numbers of students every hour of the day. Studies have found that schools that utilize block scheduling, looping, and cohort models of student scheduling increase teacher–student connections, which directly impact students’ motivation and attitudes toward school.³²

Additional research has found a specific benefit of small schools for marginalized students, who demonstrate increased motivation when they experience meaningful teacher–student relationships.³³ Theories on stage–environment fit and person–environment fit highlight the power of secondary schools designed to meet the specific needs of adolescents.³⁴ These needs include a desire to belong, to be accepted, and to be supported in gaining competence during a time of major physical and psychological growth. These needs are difficult to meet in a traditional “factory-model” of schooling that offers limited opportunities for teachers to get to know their students well.³⁵

Further, when teachers know their students well, they are better able to personalize instruction, craft relevant lessons and assignments, communicate effectively with students, and create a classroom environment that is well suited for the individual needs of all learners.

Acclimating students and staff to the Gateway culture

Immersion in the Gateway experience and exposure to Gateway's cultures and values occur even before students step foot in their first Gateway class. The middle school and high school have orientation for incoming 6th-graders and 9th-graders before school begins so that students can meet their peers and begin to establish familiarity and relationships with one another. This orientation allows incoming 6th-graders to meet not just each other but also a supportive group of 7th- and 8th-graders who have volunteered to provide supports such as peer mediation and conflict resolution for the rest of the school.

Incoming freshmen at Gateway participate in a long-standing school orientation tradition: a class trip to a local university, often UC Berkeley. This trip not only “instill[s] college-bound expectations among students,” but also eases the transition to high school by helping students meet their classmates and understand Gateway's academic values before school starts.³⁶ The students we spoke to at both the middle school and the high school recalled fondly how important these structures were in helping to create a well-rounded sense of community and removing some of the fear associated with starting a new school.

When asked to reflect on their first few days at Gateway, students described an overwhelming feeling of welcome in which peers and teachers were nice and genuinely interested in helping new students feel at ease and that they belong. Nick, a 7th-grader at the middle school, said:

Well, my first impression, when I first got to Gateway, was kind of a new thing. We all got to know each other pretty quickly. When I was in 6th grade, we did a lot of community-building activities to learn the names of different people and what different people like. So I thought it was pretty cool, and I made friends pretty quickly.

The way students themselves talk about community and relationships at Gateway speaks to the effectiveness of the school's community-building strategies. A freshman student remembers her orientation earlier in the year as critical to her introduction to high school:

Even though I knew a majority of the students coming because I went to the middle school, I was so nervous. But after that orientation and meeting students who were in my advisory, who I would spend the next 4 years with, I felt kind of safe. I felt like I had people to talk to, people who could give me advice.... That kind of communion makes Gateway special.

That communion extends beyond beginning-of-the-year activities to the school atmosphere at large. “When you come to Gateway, you're invited, and you're not left out,” said one middle school student. Thanks to Gateway's small class sizes, “You get to meet more people and engage with them instead of just having a big classroom. [At Gateway], everybody is in one group, and they're all friends with each other.”

New teachers have a similarly structured induction process by which they learn the Gateway “way.” At Gateway Middle School, teachers participate in a 2-day new teacher orientation before school starts that familiarizes them with Gateway's mission and values as they are expressed in restorative practices and other equity strategies; classroom management; curriculum and assessment; differentiation; and the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills. (See Appendix B for the new teacher orientation agenda from the 2019–20 school year.) New-to-Gateway teachers also

meet monthly as a group with mentor teachers to address issues specific to their experiences as the year progresses. (For example, during Month 1 they might discuss classroom management practices; before the first grading period they might discuss both logistics and philosophy on grading and assessment.) All newer teachers (in years 1–3) receive coaching from a mentor teacher that involves a structured inquiry cycle. (See the section “A System of Supports in Service of Student Learning” for more information on teacher professional development.)

The care taken with teacher induction and mentoring is a key part of the reason that practices at Gateway are coherent across classrooms and that the supportive, developmental approach to students is so pervasive. Teachers are enabled to build strong relationships with students by the way the school is structured and the way shared practices build trust between and among students and adults.

Creating strong, trusting relationships

Gateway Middle School humanities teacher Elizabeth Colen, a Gateway High School alumnus, reflected on the differences between her own experiences as a student at Gateway as compared with other San Francisco schools she had attended.

The type of learning that was happening at other schools wasn't benefiting me and the way that I learned. It was a lot of “sit in rows and study from textbooks, and regurgitate information,” and I wasn't super successful. And so my mom said, “Hey, you know, I found this school that is small, and has small class sizes, and it's aimed at really helping all students learn.” I [thought], “Well, it's either that or a massive San Francisco high school,” and as somebody who is really shy, [I knew] that that wasn't where I was going to be successful. And then I got to Gateway, and I was like, oh my God, I can actually learn and feel successful as a student, and I am finally able to vocalize what I need to be successful.

Shira Helft, math teacher at Gateway High School, attributes student success to the relationship-driven culture of the school, which enables positive connections between teachers and learners and increases students' motivation to learn. This point is especially important for those students who face challenges with learning or have outside stressors in their home lives. According to Helft, “We [teachers] have to figure out who has a relationship with that student in the building and ask ourselves, ‘How do I get to know that kid better?’ There's a lot of that outside work to be done, and that's central [to teaching effectively].”

The positive climate at Gateway is palpable, and it extends to those who have been part of the school community for a long time as well as to those just visiting. College counselor Jericho Williams described how he felt when he first visited Gateway:

One of the first things I noticed when I first walked on campus here was a sense of knowing and feeling that the students are loved ... just [from] the way they interacted with each other. I was also really quite surprised how friendly students were to an unknown adult. There's a lot of love here, and it's definitely the basis of this community. It's the foundation overall.

Other teachers echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that love is at the core of how people interact and is foundational to establishing trust and safety. Spanish and ethnic studies teacher Diana Sanchez explained that the positive relationships that abound at Gateway allow “students to feel

like they belong.” According to Sanchez, the welcoming environment is indicative of “unspoken community norms and a universal understanding that kindness and love are really important, and it influences how they see us [teachers] interact with each other and with other students.” Teachers’ use of the term “love” to describe the environment at the school is simultaneously unique and important, indicating that the community acts more like a family than like a school. When one senior was asked what she will take with her from her Gateway experience, she answered, “The teachers’ support, and how much they support you.... They care about you. It’s real. The love is real.” The central concept that every student should feel at home at Gateway is the guiding philosophy for the school’s community-building structures and supports.

Students develop a deep understanding of the importance of empathy and community-building as they witness school staff working hard to build relationships between diverse members of the school community. The importance of good relationships is deeply woven into the fabric of Gateway students’ school experiences.

Gateway teachers who had taught at other schools explained how different the culture is from most secondary schools. Shira Helft, recalling her transition from a different high school to Gateway, explained that intentional relationship-building was something she had to improve on once she began teaching at Gateway. Furthermore, this is central to how new teachers are inducted at Gateway. Helft explained that when she coaches new teachers, relationship-building is something she spends “a lot of time” on with them because “kids expect to have a really good relationship with their teacher, and sometimes they need that relationship in order to learn. If you’re struggling with relationships, [if] that’s not a focus of what you do, I think it’s actually really hard to teach and manage a class.”

“Kids expect to have a really good relationship with their teacher, and sometimes they need that relationship in order to learn.”

Building an inclusive school environment

Building an inclusive community is a core aspect of Gateway’s ethos that promotes social, emotional, and academic development. Students experience inclusivity and community-building from their first contact with the school at orientation, and throughout their years at Gateway High School through clubs and advisory. Gateway High School also has an awards ceremony to recognize and reinforce students’ accomplishments and prosocial behavior. Students have opportunities to interact socially and get to know one another across grades and roles. Weekly lunch hours include all the grades, when students who would not normally interact have an opportunity to socialize and form meaningful connections. In addition, teachers host activities that they enjoy, apart from their roles as educators, which allows students to know teachers not only in their formal classroom role but also as people. The result of these deliberate efforts is a strong sense of community through which students feel cared for.

The culture of inclusivity at Gateway makes students feel welcome and invited by their peers, forming the basis for community. One student commented, “Everyone’s just themselves.” Other students described feeling at ease knowing that “you’re invited, and you’re not left out; everybody invites you in and talks to each other” and that other students “don’t judge you for which group you hang out with. They’re more inviting instead of judging.” Students express that bullying is not a problem because the culture at Gateway allows students “to actually understand each other and accept each other.”

Beginning with their orientation to the school, teachers learn how to create an environment that is safe for all members of the community. Teachers set the tone for understanding and talking about differences, such as “how we are all different kinds of learners,” but they do not stop there. Teachers also help students make new connections, sometimes stretching students’ comfort zones. A student commented, “All the teachers are trying to help you be part of the group, even if other people aren’t wanting you to be part of the group. They’re wanting those people to open up and also for you to open up, and pushing you to find new friends, too.”

Nigel, a 7th-grader at the middle school, attributed his sense of belonging at Gateway to having “a lot of friends around and having a lot of people supporting me, and that ranges from fellow students to the teachers and the staff. So, I feel like the teachers really care about who you are and what you want to do, and that just really makes me feel safe and supported within my community.” Octavia, an 8th-grader, echoed this sentiment, explaining that “there’s always someone to talk to, a teacher, if something goes wrong. And they’re going to handle it. They’re not just going to let it be.” Students see the diversity at Gateway as a strength that has taught them about different perspectives and will have a lasting impact on their lives.

Another student added, “I definitely learned a lot about people’s perspectives and [learned] that they may think differently than me, but it doesn’t mean that they’re wrong. It just means that they have a different point of view, [based on] their experience. I think I [will] take that along with me and understand people better.”

Gateway utilizes a variety of methods to build community, including orientation, clubs, and mixed-grade lunches. At orientation night, just before the school year starts, staff talk with students and engage them in different small-group activities so, as one staff member said, “they start off knowing at least three different people or four different people.” Staff continue team-building and “getting to know each other” activities in the first week of classes. A 6th-grade student remembers, “You were put into a group with some 8th-graders, and they took you on a tour around the school. And you also did some games that ... made you more engaged with the school and engaged with the people around you who are also coming into Gateway new.”

Students talk about the variety of clubs offered and how being involved in clubs has been a catalyst for meeting new friends. Said one student, “I think that after you’re here for a while and you do all these activities to get to know each other, you find your groups of people.” Gateway helps students connect with others who have common interests. There is a range of clubs, including a Harry Potter club, an ’80s club, a soap making club, and a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club. At GSA club, which takes place during lunch every Wednesday, students can talk about problems and raise money for causes. According to a member, it is “a place for anyone to come and feel comfortable.” Clubs are open to all grades, so students have an opportunity to intermingle with students across grade levels.

Mixed-grade lunches also provide opportunities to interact with students from different grade levels, strengthening community across the school. A student shared, “On Wednesdays, we have all-grade mixed recess and lunch. We also get to eat outside during that time, which helps us connect with everybody and see what it’s like in the next grade and sort of what the students are like in the next grade, and what they have to deal with.”

Students feel good about being celebrated for their effort and recognized by other members of the community through awards, peers nominations, and shout-outs. Each month Gateway holds an assembly to recognize students in front of the entire school. A Student of the Month award is given for classwork. An “Upstander” award encourages people to “stand up for each other.” And verbal shout-outs bring in students’ voices by allowing them to nominate each other.

The interconnectedness of relationships and learning

Gateway staff build relationships with students informally but with intention. Staff described this informal student outreach as an “investment” in student trust that translates into their learning. Research confirms that students are more likely to attend and graduate from school, attach to learning, and succeed academically when they have strong, trusting, and supportive connections to adults.³⁷

Many teachers thus go the extra mile to play board games with students during lunch or spend time eating alongside students regardless of whether they are assigned lunch duty or not. Many teachers at the school have an open-door policy, keeping their classrooms open before school, during lunch, and after school for students to come and do work, or chat with their teachers or friends, or just have a quiet place to sit and eat.

Humanities teacher Leah Ragen explained:

Just having our doors open, talking with students and taking that time are what drive the culture. I could just as easily close my door and shut myself off, and that would be fine. I could still be a teacher, but I wouldn’t have those relationships that make those kids feel seen and safe and heard.

One student described the way “the teachers are accepting and supportive” as “pretty cool,” saying, “I know that a lot of my teachers try to have kind of personal connections and try to relate to you.” A high school math teacher even went so far as to say that Gateway “runs on relationships,” and if there is not that personal connection and a sense of genuine care and interest from teacher to student, then teaching is actually more difficult.

Although much of the informal relationship-building that happens at Gateway seems organic and grounded in an almost invisible way, the school staff and leadership have explicitly identified academic and social-emotional goals that help focus on relationship-building as essential for learning. Articulated in “if ... then ...” statements, the following two goals from Gateway Middle School help to drive staff’s intentionality with a special emphasis on advancing equity:

1. **Academic goal:** If we design and implement engaging, accessible, and responsive instruction, leveraging our new schedule, then all Gateway Middle School students, especially our African American students and students with IEPs, will demonstrate growth to the next level of proficiency in English language arts and mathematics.
2. **Social and emotional learning (SEL) and positive culture goal:** If we develop our practice as SEL coaches who build positive relationships with students and support SEL through instruction (providing modeling and feedback), classroom routines, and restorative practices, then all Gateway Middle School students, especially our African American students and students with IEPs, will be able to self-regulate and build positive relationships.

Greg Grossman, humanities teacher at Gateway High School, explained that the teaching staff at Gateway are “unified in belief that every kid needs to be seen and heard, and that’s part of a small school vibe, but it’s also that we really value relationships with our students.” The relationships are, in fact, foundational, or “job one,” Grossman stated, and key to the school’s success is that the students must first find a way to feel safe and establish a relationship with at least one adult that they trust fully. Grossman echoed sentiments that we heard from every staff member we spoke to when he articulated, “I think we’re failing as a school if students don’t have [those trusting relationships]. It’s something that I know teachers are tremendously committed to.”

In fact, relationships are such an important factor for successful teaching at Gateway that the hiring committee actually seeks out teachers who naturally build rapport with students as well as have strong teaching skills. After an initial paper screening, potential teacher candidates are asked to do a model lesson, with students, while the hiring committee observes. See the section “A System of Supports in Service of Student Learning” for a more detailed discussion of teacher hiring practices.

Room for authentic selves

A critical part of having a strong, relationship-based school culture is that both the faculty and students are comfortable being who they are with each other within the school. Faculty and staff are transparent with students about aspects of their own lives, and they are willing to share a bit about who they are, making the communication between adults and students both reciprocal and genuine. Mary Plant-Thomas, science teacher at Gateway High School, explained that there is a general sense that students expect teachers to be human, too, and everyone can “truly be who they really are,” with all members of the school community growing and learning together and facing challenges and successes alongside one another.

As part of advisory, students also delve into issues of identity, reflecting on a range of questions: What is your identity? What is somebody else’s identity? How does that impact how people see who you are? What do you want people to see about your identity versus not see about it? In 8th grade, students watch a video of a TED Talk by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie titled “The Danger of a Single Story.” They then examine what it means to have a single story and explore how to combat overly simplistic and limited impressions of oneself and others.

In order for all members of the school community to feel safe enough to be their “authentic selves,” a sense of trust and mutual respect is required. Grossman elaborated that once students realize they are respected and safe in the school, they will share who they are more fully:

You know, kids tell you the most amazing things, right? With relationships and things that happened to them, things they’re doing outside school that may not be safe. Some really personal things. Whether they show up with blue hair one day, pink hair the next day, piercings, tattoos. We never react saying, “Oh, my God.” Instead, it’s just, “Hey Sean, good to see you again today.” Right? And ... whatever students are coming with, teachers are just open. It’s all good. Students are just trying to figure out their own identities and to figure out who they are, and it’s all good, and we [teachers] still see them as them.

Gateway staff take very deliberate steps to try to figure out ways to reach students who are not finding a connection to teachers. Gateway Middle School teacher Suzanne Herko explained that, because so much of the school’s model is based on relationships, it is imperative that all students have at least one trusted adult in the building. Periodically, the staff sit down to talk about kids who

seem disconnected or lack a strong adult relationship. During these discussions, staff and faculty identify intentional strategies to foster more connectedness. Examples of such strategies include specifically saying a particular number of positive things to the student each day or spending a certain amount of time in conversation with the student. In this way, relationship-building is a very conscious effort, especially with students for whom relationships do not naturally develop.

High school Spanish teacher Sanchez shared similar approaches to building relationships with students in her classes:

If I sense that a particular student and I haven't connected yet—and I say “yet” because it's an ongoing goal for all of us to make connections with our students on some level—I'll reach out to that student and just have a one on one with them; that's kind of what I do in terms of individual students until I can break the ice.

As indicated by Sanchez's use of the term “yet,” instructors at Gateway describe this focus on relationships as a constantly evolving process and an ever-present center of their work. Gateway staff often speak of relationship-building in terms of individual teacher initiative. “We have lots of conversations,” said Allyson Schoolcraft, the Assistant Principal at Gateway Middle School. “We talk through situations with students all day, every day.” Gateway teachers are willing to engage with students on a personal level, and the school's structures and schedules are designed to enable them to develop these relationships.

Another important part of maintaining a positive school climate is regular self-reflection and a willingness to take constructive feedback from community stakeholders. Every year, the school conducts its own internal student survey, and it administers the popular California Healthy Kids Survey biannually to gather feedback on school climate constructs, such as school support of

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SEL, caring adult relationships, opportunities for meaningful participation, connectedness, and academic expectations. Using the results of these surveys, the leadership team, which consists of administrators, directors, and lead teachers, brings the information to the school site council to discuss. The leadership team then determines the implications of the survey data for school practices and policies. Gateway Middle School mental health counselor Ken Angelo noted that the use of these data demonstrates how the school values “growth mindset and applies it to staff as much as ... to students.” This survey process is a means by which the school “constantly gets better.”

Daily advisory for daily connections

Daily advisory class is a prime forum for community- and relationship-building. Intensive work on social and emotional skills helps students develop strong inter- and intrapersonal competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and communication. During advisory time, students learn basic communication skills, from how to use sentence starters during difficult conversations to how to explore deeper issues of identity. For example, students learn the value of using “I” statements to express feelings: “When you do X, I feel Y.” During group discussions, teachers prompt students to choose from a list of sentence starters to launch a debate. A teacher explains that this work might

start off as “a little bit inauthentic,” but “by the time they get to 8th grade they’ve internalized a lot of these frames and the meaning behind them and can use them more naturally.” In this way, students are encouraged to become intentional about how they use language.

Another feature of the advisory class is the use of community circles, which give students an opportunity to talk about issues in their lives. Community circles are a part of restorative justice practices and provide mutual support. According to one student, in community circles “we solve problems and talk about different situations” or “what happened over the weekend, about our day, or our summer jobs, or activities, or things we’re planning to do.” Students also feel free to ask questions about their schoolwork, “and then other students from your advisory will be like, ‘Oh, I can help you with this. I’m really good at it.’” Students see advisory as another way they get to know each other, and “that’s a big contribution to the community; you get to build better friendships.”

Every student we spoke to said that the relationships with teachers were critically important to their learning and development in school. An 8th-grader at the middle school explained that:

Even if there’s something that you’re really insecure about, there’s somebody who you can talk to, and they won’t judge you for what you did in that situation because they understand that this is something that a lot of people do, and we’re young, and just testing out new things.

Another student reiterated this same sentiment, sharing that:

The teachers here want to know what you’re going through and how they can solve it and help you out during the situation, and they really ask you questions to make sure that you’re OK, and tell you you’re doing fine. So, you just don’t feel like you’re alone.

An additional benefit of the small school and daily advisory is that students reported feeling that everyone is well known. Students who had attended different middle schools or other high schools before coming to Gateway often pointed out the stark differences in school climate, describing Gateway as one “big community” where “everyone wants to be friends.”

What emerges from conversations with teachers and students is the mutually reinforcing cycle of the school’s focus on relationships as a necessary element of effective teaching and motivated learning. By creating a space in which relationships are valued and built into the classroom, school staff sends a message to students that the ability to collaborate and empathize with others is a necessary skill. In turn, students internalize this message and make their own efforts to welcome one another and create a student-led community of inclusion. When more students value relationships, both between their peers and with their teachers, their instructors are spurred to further strengthen connections between themselves and their students.

Valuing Diversity and Striving for Equity

Inclusivity as a way of providing students and staff with enhanced learning and planning opportunities is deeply intertwined with issues of equity. Aside from ensuring equitable opportunities for students with different learning styles, Gateway is also engaged in a constant effort to ensure students of all backgrounds are given opportunities to participate in school programs. Learning is deeply embedded in cultural contexts, which teachers must understand in order to appreciate the way children’s experiences can differ, and they must be able to see and build upon cultural experiences if they are able to help their students succeed.⁵⁸

At Gateway, in addition to a safe, inclusive culture, equity is advanced in many ways:

- All students have the chance to access rich college-prep curriculum in heterogeneous classrooms, and differentiated learning opportunities are built into all classes and projects—instruction is differentiated for students who need more challenge as well as for students who need more scaffolds to access curriculum.
- Curricular choices are representative of all different walks of life and identities so that students can see themselves in the curriculum regularly and not just during special months (e.g., Black History Month or LGBTQ Pride Month).
- Diverse staff are representative of the student body and the neighborhoods that Gateway serves.

At a baseline level, the schools' administrative teams closely follow correlations between student academic achievement and race in order to identify areas where some students might not feel as welcome or may not be receiving adequate support. "We shouldn't be able to predict students' graduation rates, or college going, or GPA, based on identifying demographic factors," said Gateway High School's Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Rebecca Wieder. "Particularly, we're concerned about race and ethnicity. We're also concerned about learning profile.... We want to disrupt patterns that correlate to identity."

Disrupting these patterns is a goal of school administrators, but also of Gateway's teaching staff. When a group of high school teachers noticed that students in AP and honors courses were disproportionately White and Asian, they decided on a campaign to encourage a more diverse group of students to enroll in those courses. Teachers met to determine eligible students who could be recruited to apply for the courses, decided to increase the number of spots in those courses by opening more sections, and made videos of a diverse group of students currently taking those courses to encourage others to enroll. As a result, 85% of Gateway students now take an AP or honors course at some point in their high school career.³⁹

School administrators note the twin missions of Gateway to both provide space for learning differences and also ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve at high levels. Gateway's Executive Director, Sharon Olken, summarizes the school's approach to equity:

We start from the premise that all kids can learn at high levels and that they all learn differently. Built into the founding philosophy of the schools is the idea that difference is part of ... any good school, and it's actually a source of strength. But you don't want those differences to end up being predictive of [outcomes].... And so we have to do different things. We have to think differently. We have to question what has happened historically at schools and society and in our own lives to be able to do right by all that difference in a room because, otherwise, we're just continuing to privilege the same groups and the same patterns.

It is Gateway's belief that open discussion of difference, in the context of helping all students achieve at high levels, will foster empathy and also a sense of empowerment among students. It becomes clear that teachers do not hold the magic keys to a high grade or the correct answer on a test, but rather are there to guide all students in their personal learning journeys and to provide the supports that each individual student needs to reach their full potential.

Students themselves uphold the inclusivity and diversity of the community as a personal value. “You can walk up to people and be bold, or you can let the person come up to you,” said one middle schooler. By the end of high school, students can recognize their own efforts to be outgoing and inclusive. According to one student:

If we’re sitting in an environment where there’s a lot of people from different places, I think we are just naturally friendly. I remember [when] I was a freshman. I didn’t know a lot of people.... I just started talking to everyone, and I was talking to this senior.... He said something pretty cool. He said, “In this school, I don’t think we see race. I don’t think we see color. I think we just see humans.” We all talk to each other as if we were all friends.... I felt like I could just be open to everybody.

The ownership that students feel in their school community, and their own empowerment in building relationships with their peers, allows them to carry out on their own terms the relationship-building that Gateway values.

Gateway is attentive to small instances of potential culture threats, as well as to broader and more obviously troubling concerns such as bullying. There are structures, supports, and processes in place to support students and staff on the journey toward creating a truly safe and positive school environment within which learning can take place. Despite intentional efforts to mitigate persistent societal patterns of inequity and prejudice, Gateway, like most schools across the country, still encounters and must address issues that arise when racism shows up on campus. Assistant Principal Schoolcraft gave an example of the type of things the school has done in response to such occurrences:

There was definitely some concern with students around racial and ethnic bullying or just negative comments. As such a diverse school in about every way that you can get, we really want to support students in breaking down those ... barriers between them. In response to these needs, we booked Challenge Day⁴⁰ for 3 years in a row to specifically work with the 8th-grade students.

Challenge Day provides an intensive, daylong, experiential, social-emotional training to build empathy, connectedness, and inclusivity as a way to build a more intentionally positive school climate and culture.

Another part of Gateway’s regular self-assessment stems from its desire to serve an increasingly diverse student body. Gateway’s commitment to equity in the context of its diversifying student body requires that the school evaluate the ways teachers and school structures work to disrupt racial and socioeconomic patterns in education. As middle school humanities teacher Aimee Heckman noted:

[Our instruction] is constantly evolving as our student population evolves because we’re meeting our charter far more successfully now in terms of the diversity of our group of kids, be it socioeconomic, their educational background, their race. And I think along with that diversity come different challenges and different opportunities.... Every single year I’ve been here, we’ve been working around making it better.

Gateway staff know from analyzing student surveys and academic data that there is work to be done to ensure equitable outcomes for each student, regardless of demographic factors. As reported by the California School Dashboard, African American students and students who are

socioeconomically disadvantaged are likely to be suspended at much higher rates than other Gateway High School students,⁴¹ and the middle school still sees some variation in academic performance based on student demographics.⁴²

One way the middle school is working to create more spaces where families of color feel welcomed and included is through parent engagement. Staff are thinking about ways in which they can use already existing parent-school channels of communication to reach more students. Gateway teachers of color have created a community group that seeks to “recruit and diversify our faculty,” noted Olken. “Our kids tell us they want to see more teachers who look more like them,” Wieder added. “So we know how important it is.” Teachers and staff acknowledge that improving equitable opportunities for participation and spaces for learning at Gateway remain areas for growth. They are implementing initiatives such as broader student recruitment and targeted student supports in order to achieve these goals.

Engaging Families as Partners

Relational trust among teachers, families, and school leaders is another key resource that predicts the likelihood of gains in achievement and other student outcomes when instructional expertise is also present. Trust derives from an understanding of one another’s efforts and goals, along with a sense of obligation toward each other, grounded in a common mission. As research has found, “Trust is the connective tissue that holds improving schools together.”⁴³ Relational trust is fostered in stable school communities by skillful school leaders who actively listen to concerns of all parties and avoid arbitrary actions, and who nurture authentic parent engagement, grounded in partnerships with families, to promote student growth.⁴⁴

Engaging families at Gateway is a natural part of building a relationship-driven culture schoolwide. Advisors play an important role as liaisons among teachers, students, and families. In addition to traditional parent engagement opportunities, such as Back to School Night, there are numerous other opportunities, such as:

- Student exhibitions of learning (described in more depth later in the report)
- Family orientations for transition grades (6th and 9th)
- Family conferences
- Student-led conferences
- Community outreach and enrollment campaigns conducted by parent volunteers
- Monthly staff appreciation luncheons organized by parent volunteers
- Biweekly family newsletters that explain what is happening in schools and list opportunities for family involvement
- Introductory calls from advisors to all new 6th- and 9th-grade students and their families
- Summer community-building activities such as Family Work Day and family picnics
- Wellness Together workshops geared at supporting families in developing students’ social and emotional growth at home
- Family affinity groups for Latino/a and African American families
- Parent participation on staff and faculty hiring committees

Additionally, the school's bylaws require that the school board include teachers from each school and at least one parent leader from each school. Of the 25 trustees, one quarter are current or alumni Gateway parents, including the board co-chair; one quarter are people of color; and four are current Gateway teachers. Of note, the parent trustees are voting members with all the same roles and responsibilities as the other board members, which include helping to set the strategic direction of the organization, reviewing and analyzing student and school achievement data, helping to create and monitor the budget and Local Control and Accountability Plan, and reviewing the performance of the executive director.

One way Gateway teaches students to advocate for themselves is through student-led conferences in which students engage in deep metacognitive reflection and set short-term goals for themselves to which they will be held accountable throughout the school year. (See the section in this report titled "Social and Emotional Learning as Key to Academic and Life Success" for a full vignette about student-led conferences.) Another benefit of the student-led conferences is that they provide a structure within which students and their parents or guardians have meaningful conversations about progress along social, emotional, and academic domains—something that is rarely discussed in such a structured and focused way in most schools' communications with families.

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The communication that happens between teachers and families during the student-led conferences often leads to more open communication throughout the school year. Instead of waiting for urgent matters such as a failing grade, teachers will reach out to parents or guardians with helpful tips or strategies that might help reinforce the learning goals that students are working on at school. Therese Arsenault, founding middle school math and science teacher, explained:

There's a real intention of getting to know families. Seeing the family as a partner. Reaching out at the beginning of the year with, "Hi, my name is ...," and really talking about what [you have] noticed has gone well with this student so you establish that we're all advocates. We're on the same page. Then there [are] also a lot of phone calls and emails that go back and forth between us and our students. Then, ... [during] the first conference of the year, ... you're really trying to establish the relationship with the parent and the child at that same time, to see that we are a model.

Other events that serve to build community include Cohort Coffee meetings that happen regularly for grade-level parents so they can start to get to know one another and build community. Cultural Thanksgiving is another much-loved tradition. At this event, everyone brings in a food that represents their family or culture, and the families come to serve the food. According to staff, there is "literally a buffet table from end to end of the cafeteria; all the kids come through, and everyone eats together."

Although family engagement is relatively high at Gateway, some family members are less likely than others to stay in touch. The school is intentional about reaching out to families in a variety of ways—email, text, phone calls—and about offering a range of times for meetings, from early in the morning to well into the evening, to accommodate families’ schedules. Schoolcraft underscored that it is “so important for the students to know that their parents are taking the time out of their schedule and supporting them in that way.”

There are some parents or guardians who are less inclined or less able to be in touch with the school or perhaps feel unwelcomed, given the ways that many other schools traditionally work with families. Administrators at Gateway Middle School felt that some of this distancing falls along racial and socioeconomic lines—a point worth discussing and strategizing around so that the school is more intentionally attuned to ways that they might be neglecting a portion of their population. Steve Juarez, Gateway Middle School Student Support Coordinator, elaborated:

What are some strengths and some weaknesses, and what are some areas of improvement? Along that line, one thing that we noticed from our parental engagement is [that] ... we’re not reaching out to all the parents, so [we are discussing] how do we reach out to all parents and how do we have discussions?

We have an email sent on ParentSquare. Who is missing out from here? A lot of [the parents of] our students of color ... are missing out. We asked them.... They just feel less comfortable. They have several reasons, or they just work late, and so now we’re trying to think about different mechanisms for trying to reach those different parents. One mechanism that we were trying to improve on was the use of emails or ParentSquare, but ... this tool is still only ... reaching a segment of our parents. How do we diversify our tool set so that we can reach more of our parents?

This example illustrates the self-awareness practiced at Gateway and a deep commitment to continuous improvement and reflection. Despite parent participation that is higher than at most schools and the diligent efforts of Gateway teachers and staff to reach out regularly, this area of strength does not yet reach all families. As in many things Gateway does, there is an openness to taking stock of what could be better and a willingness to address ways to improve.

While Gateway’s foundational values of inclusivity, equity, and relationship-building have remained constant since the school’s founding, teachers’ and administrators’ dedication to continuous improvement ensures that faculty continue to develop new ways to integrate these values into the fabric of the school. School staff reflect often on Gateway’s mission and on how current school structures and instructional techniques either meet that mission or could be altered to better serve the student body. Specific instructional approaches that illuminate these beliefs are discussed later in the report.

This continuous drive for improvement means that change occurs frequently. As noted by Maribel Fernandez, a learning specialist at the middle school:

Every year, there’s been a change.... We’ve changed our passing period so that they’re not all passing at the same time. We’ve added a student support coordinator. We changed our grading systems.... [We’re] noticing and adjusting to make the student experience better.

Productive Instructional Practices

At Gateway Public Schools, there is a focus on students at the center of learning, along with the focus on ambitious curriculum goals. Teachers regularly use small group work and project-based learning to enrich students' experience and make meaningful connections to their lives. From their first contact with Gateway, students are immersed in a culture of caring and high expectations that is enacted through a belief in the potential of each student, coupled with supports to meet their individual learning needs. As one teacher noted, the school makes sure students know "there's a huge community of folks behind them who believe in them, who want them to succeed." The focus on inquiry-based and group-based learning, strategically interspersed with teacher guidance and direct instruction, is backed by substantial research illustrating that students learn better when they work together and that active learning supports the transfer of skills and knowledge to new situations.⁴⁵

At Gateway Public Schools, there is a focus on students at the center of learning, along with the focus on ambitious curriculum goals.

Critical to the success of Gateway's instructional approach is the bell schedule: Class time allotments during the school day and week allow adequate time for group work and project-based learning. As described in the school's charter, Gateway has a modified block schedule in which students have five 70-minute periods on Mondays and Fridays and four 85-minute extended blocks on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. This block schedule allows students to see all their teachers on Mondays and Fridays and provides extended learning periods in a rotating block schedule in the middle of the week.

Core classes are organized in extended blocks to engage students in in-depth learning experiences in each class and to support co-teaching and push-in support from the school's learning specialists and Learning Center teams. All students are organized in cohorts of 26 students who have the same core academic teachers for humanities, math, science, and learning seminar. Students' advisory class meets daily for 30 minutes, and grade-level meetings or all-school meetings for teachers are held every other week. This schedule also builds in common planning time for core academic teachers, which is discussed further in a later section of this report entitled "A System of Supports in Service of Student Learning."

Different kinds of learning call for different kinds of teaching. Educational goals increasingly emphasize the problem-solving and interpersonal skills needed for 21st-century success, which cannot be developed through passive, rote-oriented learning focused on the memorization of disconnected facts.⁴⁶ Today's goals require paths to deeper understanding supporting the transfer of skills and use of knowledge in new situations.⁴⁷ With these goals and insights in mind, the science of learning and development suggests the following three principles for instructional practice:

1. Teaching should build on and expand children's prior knowledge and experiences, both to scaffold learning effectively as it expands to new areas of content and skills and to inform practices that are individually and culturally responsive. Given what each child is ready to learn, teachers should structure appropriately challenging activities that balance what a child already knows with what he wants and needs to learn, while introducing other rich experiences to support ongoing learning.

2. Teaching should support conceptual understanding, engagement, and motivation by designing relevant, problem-oriented tasks that combine explicit instruction about key ideas—organized around a conceptual map or schema of the domain being taught—with well-designed inquiry opportunities that use multiple modalities for learning.
3. To enable students to manage their own learning and transfer it to new contexts, teaching should be designed to develop students’ metacognitive capacity, agency, and capacity for strategic learning. This requires opportunities for self-direction, goal-setting and planning, and formative assessment, with regular opportunities for reflection on learning strategies and outcomes, feedback, and revision of work.⁴⁸

Embracing Learning Differences Through an Inclusion Model

In keeping with the founding mission to support students with different learning styles, Gateway Middle School and High School practice an inclusion model in which students with learning disabilities take the same general education classes as their peers, with various additional supports.⁴⁹ At a high level, this practice reflects the belief, articulated by Executive Director Olken, that “all the ways that people come to us different from each other are what make them unique and awesome and should not limit what they can achieve.”

This belief also reinforces the general attitude among Gateway teachers that all students have different educational and emotional needs, regardless of whether or not they have a documented learning disability. “The school is so dedicated to an inclusion model,” noted mental health counselor Ken Angelo. “Sometimes you kind of just lose sight of who has an IEP and who doesn’t.” Teachers, counselors, and administrators are trained to provide supports to any student who needs extra help, and the resources that exist to scaffold students’ learning—classes focused on reading comprehension, note-taking skills, general organization, and understanding one’s learning style; scaffolded packets and assignments for classwork; time with Learning Center specialists—are available to anyone who may need them.

Staff are explicit about discussing these learning differences from the outset to educate students about different ways of learning so that these discussions become part of their language, and they develop an understanding that, as one said, “It’s not everyone doing the same thing but everyone getting what they need.” One teacher explained:

We teach equity explicitly, and that’s a big deal. It’s not that we use that word with kids all the time, but we talk a lot about how one person’s strengths might be challenges for someone else. And what are the strengths that you bring to this group work, and what might be a challenge? We talk about how different people need different things and we bring different strengths to things, so that’s great, and that’s part of our diversity as people.

As a result, students appreciate that everyone has different needs and strengths, and students develop an understanding that equity involves accommodating individual needs so that everyone can succeed. This focus on equity also ties directly to the school’s founding ideal that differences—regardless of their origin or manifestation in the classroom—are in fact a source of strength for all students as they learn alongside one another.

By creating a safe environment around learning differences and a personalized approach that involves scaffolding to meet students where they are, all students are encouraged to grow in their zone of proximal development: the developmental locus at which students are productively challenged and receive appropriate support to take their learning to the next level. A student described what learning in this zone of proximal development is like:

It's not too far advanced to where I just sit there and can't understand it. But it's not really easy, so I just know how to do it automatically. So I like that I have to push myself a little bit, but I don't have to push myself to a breaking point. And if you don't get something, it's easy for you to communicate with your teachers and just ask them to help you with something.

Organizing for Differentiation

Teachers work to identify and provide scaffolding for learning differences as early as possible. Getting to know students and what they need is a priority. As the school's mission indicates, teachers have two aims: to "create accessibility for all students in their class regardless of official diagnosis" and to "help students identify how they learn and advocate for their own learning needs."

Additionally, the learning specialists share common planning time with content area teachers so that they are fully integrated into the instructional planning that happens—a point that is especially important because the learning specialists co-teach many of the lessons within the general education classrooms. The school's learning specialists are not peripheral or tertiary in any way; because of the underlying philosophy that all students have learning differences, some more specific and in need of interventions or modifications than others, having learning specialists meet with content area teachers during planning is a unique and important feature of the school's overarching pedagogical approach.

Cassandra Dougherty, director of the middle school's Learning Center, explained the power of collaborative planning as what sustains the work at both schools:

Whenever you have collective accountability to each other, that's going to push everybody to ask tough questions of one other. "How are we supporting all our students who are so far behind?" Also, "How are we also challenging students who aren't behind?" So, the collaborative planning is a firm piece of that.

Building on this sentiment, Gateway Middle School Principal Aaron Watson explained:

Learning specialists or special education specialists in other schools are [often] kind of treated like paraprofessionals and not really valued as teachers in the same way as other teachers in the building. And so that idea is kind of nipped in the bud, shooed away. The co-planning structures send a very clear message that this person has expertise that's invaluable, and so they need to be part of your planning process in order for you to really meet the needs of the kids in your room. And that's one of the big things that felt different to me at Gateway than other schools. Very rarely does a specialist have co-planning time with the teachers that they're collaborating with.

In addition to the formal team structures, there is a general culture encouraging informal check-ins among staff. This is an important feature of how the learning specialists and general education teachers work together to support students who have IEPs. As Gateway High School learning specialist Ellyn Rosenthal explained:

Teachers know who the students are who have IEPs, and they know who their case managers are. So they'll email or catch us in the hall and talk about students, especially if it's a student who's not in a co-taught class. There's a student of mine in the Spanish class who doesn't have a support person. The teacher will email us or check in with me, and vice versa.

The explicit inclusion of learning specialists—practitioners who help students who need extra assistance—in the general teaching staff is central to successfully integrating students with learning differences into general education classrooms and to fostering acceptance of all learning styles among Gateway students. Planning time between learning specialists and general content area instructors is key to the process. Learning specialist Maribel Fernandez noted that she meets with content teachers at the beginning of each unit and throughout the unit to talk about assignments and concepts with which some students may need more assistance.

The explicit inclusion of learning specialists—practitioners who help students who need extra assistance—in the general teaching staff is central to successfully integrating students with learning differences into general education classrooms.

Scaffolded texts for different reading levels are frequently available for students when coursework involves reading. These reading packets have been customized by staff from the Learning Center in conjunction with classroom teachers. For example, Fernandez noted, packets for supporting the reading of novels may be “scaffolded and have multiple choice questions for comprehension instead of short answers.”

Alternatively, a learning specialist might facilitate a small reading group that runs concurrently, with students in the class reading independently. These modifications are available to all students. They are so commonplace and accepted as part of the norm that students participate even without a formal IEP, recognizing that they could benefit from the extra help. If no previously created texts are available, Fernandez and the content teacher will devise other methods of differentiating instruction, from encouraging small-group discussion in between paragraphs to listening to an audiobook of the reading.

According to one teacher:

Whenever we're going to introduce a new unit, or within the unit, we talk about barriers and entry point. We talk about how [we are] going to divide the class up. We talk about what text we have available. If we don't have any available, [we talk about what we can] do to make sure that students can access the curriculum without having to be taken out of a classroom. That may be anything from having audiobooks or a teacher reading it out loud or a whole class [discussion], like what we've been doing in humanities. We pause, we talk, we discuss.

This intentional planning time between different instructors to ensure appropriately differentiated teaching speaks to the far reach of Gateway’s philosophy of inclusion—not only are students of all learning styles integrated in the same classrooms, but teachers of different expertise are also encouraged to include one another in their work.

Central to the success of the inclusion model is an emphasis on keeping students in the general education classroom whenever possible. One general education teacher commented:

We have a lot of kids with lower literacy skills. As general ed teachers, that’s our responsibility as well. It’s not seen as, “Those are your kids [referring to learning specialists], so they’re not my deal.” How can we as general ed teachers better support ourselves to support these kids, and what can we do that’s within the design of our classroom?

The ideas of equity and inclusivity in the classroom are explicitly introduced to students in the context of their own learning environments. Because Gateway practices an open inclusion model, with visible supports and scaffolded work for different students, teachers take the time to explain to students the importance of supporting all students and why different individuals might require different approaches to the same work. Explained middle school humanities and learning seminar teacher Kirsty Gipson:

I think many of us have open discussions at the beginning of the year with our class about what it means to differentiate. How we are all different kinds of learners. Fair is not equal. We do a whole lesson around that. There are some very explicit instructions around, “This is what you’re going to see going on in the classroom. This is why. Let’s try and gain an understanding of it.”⁵⁰

Classroom activities reflect this value. A teacher explained, “Any given day you might walk into a classroom and you’ll have a teacher working on the floor with the group, and somebody at the back table, and someone else in the corner with other students.” Students feel welcome in seeking assistance and empowered by the supports their teachers offer. As one student noted:

It’s super open-armed, like if you have a question, your teacher will try their best to help you, and they help other people and they let you and other people join in the conversation so it’s not just one person. The teacher can actually just sit with you a minute and they’re not just telling you what to do, but they’re giving you hints on what to do, so you can try and figure it out yourself.

Teachers also use evidence from student work to identify potential learning needs. One teacher explained, “We have protocols for when we analyze student data. We try to break down where we see the challenges with certain students. Are those academic skills that they’re lacking, or are they processing learning skills? And [we] try to group those and figure out how we might intervene.” For example, added another teacher, “If a student actually is scoring really well on standardized reading and math scores, but their grades in school are low, that might actually be an organizational issue. Then we have a group of students that need some organizational intervention that a learning specialist might pull to work with that particular process of learning.”

When students are “pulled” from the general education classroom for support, they will generally go to the Learning Center—which is designed as a space for intensive individual and small support as well as for quiet work for those who need a less busy learning space to focus. The Learning Center, which is available to students with and without IEPs, is an important complement to the inclusion model in that part of learning differences might require a different space within which to learn.

A learning specialist commented on read-alouds as a support for students, explaining, “I’ll just say, ‘I’m going to read aloud in the back. Anybody who wants to come and hear this read out loud, you’re welcome to come back here.’ So, it’s just self-selection. And sometimes it’s a gentle, ‘You should come with us,’ if I’ve got a kid who needs it, but they’re usually pretty good.”

The philosophy that everyone learns differently, and that different people require different support, permeates students’ views as well. As a result, the concept of “learning differences” is normative. Teachers work to develop this understanding through explicit classroom exercises, and they see the fruits of those discussions transform into unspoken acceptance of this central ideal. “We talk about strengths and challenges,” said middle school teacher Elizabeth Colen. “Every student has those, what are those for you?” In turn, she noted, students “get so used to everybody needing something different to be successful that it doesn’t necessarily faze them.” Learning specialist Fernandez spoke to the importance of making teacher support visible to all learners. In almost every class, multiple instructors—the content teacher and other specialists—are available and often actively working in small groups with different students, depending on the day. According to Fernandez, this constant available and visible assistance allows students to “see that everybody’s being supported and everybody is being checked in with a teacher.”

Teachers report that students are accustomed to the possibility that students might have variations of an assignment because the notion that everyone learns differently is so ingrained in how the school operates.

Depending on the class and the assessment, students with or without identified learning needs may be allowed to bring a study sheet to their exam. Teachers in some classes allow students to create and use a “toolkit” for every exam or assessment, whereas other teachers work with students individually to decide which types of supports would be best. The emphasis is on using and applying knowledge rather than rote memorization. This type of support reduces cognitive load and thereby frees students up to focus on higher-order thinking and problem-solving. Cognitive science affirms the importance of reducing cognitive load so that learners can attend to what is most important in order to engage meaningfully, rather than getting distracted or overwhelmed by peripheral tasks.⁵¹ As one teacher described the supports available for students to apply their learning:

We usually have either a half sheet or a full sheet that the kids can bring with them to an assessment [for] stuff that typically our students would have a harder time remembering [and are not worth] really memorizing.... To be able to use a resource is just as powerful ... and [to be able to] still access the content and feel good about an assessment is something that I’ve never seen in any other school. And that helps [students] tremendously. Even though they still struggle, they at least have a leg up. It evens the playing field a little bit.

Providing transparency around the acts of teaching and learning extends to students with learning differences, who are encouraged to take the lead in understanding and managing their own learning processes. Gateway teachers and students have ongoing conversations that encourage students to reflect on how they learn best, and on how to develop their own goals. “It takes away that magical thing, ‘Oh, my teacher’s in control, or in power;’” noted Gateway Middle School math and science teacher Therese Arsenault. Students are in control of their learning and “know that you’re in their corner. I think the transparency allows them to know that they have support and that they belong.”

For students with IEPs, there is ongoing coordination between learning specialists, case managers, teachers, and advisors, all of whom maintain high degrees of communication with one another to ensure that no student falls through the cracks and to maintain continuity when communicating with family members. Unlike schools in which IEPs are mostly a discussion *about* students, at Gateway the IEP meeting is a conversation *with* students about their own learning. Students with IEPs often lead their own IEP meetings and are included in discussions about how classroom work and assignments can be differentiated to meet their individual needs. The IEP meeting helps to facilitate student and parent engagement to identify goals and strategies.

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Through the process, students are empowered to learn and take responsibility for what their IEP means for them. A middle school teacher commented, “They leave this school knowing what they need and what to ask for. By the time they get to 8th grade, most kids are really proficient with understanding themselves as learners.”

John Stassen, a resource specialist at Gateway High School, explained that much of what he does with incoming 9th-graders, especially those coming from other schools, has to do with helping assuage parents’ fears by supporting them during their child’s acclimation to high school. He and his colleagues try to help parents and guardians loosen the reins and see their child as an adolescent who is learning how to transition between classes, to manage a more challenging course load, and to identify when and how to ask for help.

Supporting Inquiry Learning

To inspire learning that sparks students’ interests and inspires lines of authentic investigation, teachers at Gateway engage in inquiry-oriented instruction in which students take up questions that they are working to understand or solve. Often this includes a project-based approach to learning in which students produce a culminating product after engaging in problem-solving or an investigation in response to a complex task or authentic question.⁵² Building on this pedagogical approach is the strategy of “complex instruction,” through which teachers utilize group work as a means of facilitating student access to rigorous curriculum while relying upon one another as resources while the teacher actively works to disrupt status hierarchies that might develop based on student ability.⁵³

Group work and projects that build real-world knowledge and skills are prominently featured across classes, including math, science, art, and humanities. Instructional strategies feature a range of approaches to engage students, an “adaptive mode” of instruction in which “the educational environment can provide for a range of opportunities for success. Modes of teaching are adjusted to individuals—their talents, interests, and the nature of past performance.”⁵⁴

Teachers in this type of setting act as facilitators of learning rather than as the gatekeepers of knowledge; they provide meaningful experiences for students to engage with topics in collaborative settings, all the while probing and prompting students to go deeper to uncover their own understandings, while offering strategic instruction and explanations. The “facilitator” role for teachers may include the following: designing tasks that advance understanding, selecting materials, developing productive groups, setting time limits, asking questions, choosing students to respond, offering information, providing guidance, and deciding where the discussion or work should go next and where it should end.⁵⁵ Students are engaged in their own learning in a setting carefully designed by the teacher. At Gateway, teachers engaged in inquiry instruction do not shy away from difficult topics. They use current events and matters that students care deeply about to help students draw connections to history and develop critical-thinking and analysis skills.

The curriculum might involve literature such as *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *Warriors Don't Cry*, for example, which deal with themes of racism. Such topics, as one teacher noted, “are really touchy and could get really uncomfortable and could potentially turn out badly.” The teacher describes how to prepare students beforehand:

Before we read that book, we have a lesson about “What is the N-word?” And what’s the history of the N-word, and where did it come from, and how is it used today, and what’s the difference? And we have a conversation about race.... What is race? Is it a real thing? Is it a social construct that was created to put people down? Why do we use it? We have all these conversations that could potentially get really dicey.

Student discussion is also supported by the use of sentence frames that provide students with prompts for how to express their views and respect divergent perspectives. Teachers also give students choice, while still ensuring that students are developing common skills. For example, students might choose what civil rights movement to explore. As one teacher noted of the unit on social movements:

We’ll talk about what cops can and can’t do. [Students] are truly interested and all the while analyzing the cases, and doing tremendous critical thinking about “Was that allowable? Was that not allowable? Why? What’s the court case?” And they’re doing all the skill development around stuff that’s interesting and relevant.

Small choices in the classroom give students a sense of control over their learning. A student described what this looks like in her humanities class, saying, “Our teacher tells us what we have to do. But we get to decide when and how we do it, and I really like that about that class. It’s like, I’m not in the mood to read right now—let’s take our 5-minute break right now, and then let’s read. Or, I want to just get this reading over with and then take a small break.” Another student described a similar experience in art class:

My favorite class is art because (1) I love drawing, and (2) the way that Ms. Gelormino, our art teacher, teaches a lesson, it gets me really into it. We had this unit on Gothic architecture, and we had to draw one of our own Gothic churches.

And we could make our own rose windows. And I really got into that because I felt like, oh I can do this and that with these designs, and it was really nice of her to let us free draw, instead of having this particular design for each of us.

Students examine the very notion of education and their own experience. A teacher described:

In ethnic studies, right now we're doing a miseducation unit, and we listened to an old hip-hop song, "You Need to Learn," and [we] got into this discussion, that I actually videotaped, about school reform, and how different people have different ideas on how schools should be: What is it that they're learning now, and why do they think it doesn't matter, and how in some ways the older students know it does matter? It was this awesome conversation between sophomores and seniors, back and forth. Talking about their own learning and their own schooling experience.

In addition, students appreciate learning about their own and other cultures, which enlarges their world view. As one student shared, "Spanish is my favorite because we have these projects; one was studying legends and your culture and all, and I really like learning about my culture and showing people what my culture is." Another student added, "And not just learning about your own culture, but learning about other cultures and seeing what other cultures are like. So you aren't just looking at the world from one point of view; you can see what it's like from other different cultures."

Interdisciplinary projects

Teachers set students up for success in the work they do behind the scenes by working in cross-sectional teams and making connections across subjects. This cross-disciplinary communication allows for coherence so that students can carry and apply their learning across subjects. Rather than forcing students to adapt to different standards and formats from class to class, teachers are consistent in their approach; for example, science teachers use the same guidelines for exhibitions that humanities teachers had previously adopted. This permits students to put more of their energy and focus into mastering content.

According to a 6th-grade science teacher:

We try and make sure that [across disciplines] we're using similar strategies and ways that students can look at things so there's a familiarity with it. Then they're able to go deeper with that. An example is with our exhibition projects: Humanities had rolled out one particular way for the students to access all their information, so we're just using the similar format and applying [it] so that kids don't have to learn a whole new thing.

A 12th-grade teacher explained his approach:

We're talking about food in English 12, so we started today by reading a report from Harvard on dangers of sodium intake.... We compared it with a very powerful and sad poem about a young man whose father died of consuming too much salt. So, there was a way in which both of those texts made the other one more accessible. Then we're working on a chart, where [students] can really say specifically what makes the two texts different, the types of text and the content of the texts.

Above all, the staff at Gateway have a relentless commitment to students. They take the time to know students as unique individuals and truly care about their well-being, which teachers understand is deeply connected to their learning. According to one teacher, “There’s a commitment to serving, meeting kids where they’re at,” which, she noted, is essential to realizing the school’s 98% graduation rate.

Collaborative instruction

The Gateway faculty strongly believes that students learn not only from their teachers, but also from each other, and that students draw on sources from their lives and through online information, media, and print. Students at Gateway use a collaboration rubric (see Appendix B) to help guide the way they work together, and teachers use the rubric as a complement to group collaboration roles. The roles (for example, timekeeper or materials manager) describe what group members should be doing, while the rubric helps students to understand how they can improve their collaboration skills.⁵⁶ The rubric includes illustrations of how students focus on the task and share the workload, how they listen and engage sensitively with one another and problem-solve together, and how they contribute their ideas and skills and help others do so as well. The rubric can be used to help students self-assess or peer assess and gather teacher feedback afterward.

The vignettes below from 6th-grade science and humanities classes illustrate the collaboration students engage in as they undertake a variety of projects addressing real-world issues. In science, students work together to understand the causes and consequences of problems, such as disappearing bees or the excess of plastics littering the ocean, and to generate solutions. In humanities, students learn about the lives of historical figures such as Dorothy Dix and Sojourner Truth and how their work for social change has had an indelible impact on society.

Collaborative Inquiry in Science and Humanities (Gateway Middle School)

Across 6th-grade classrooms, small groups of three to four students are huddled together. In two of the classrooms, students are working on a topic web for science. The topic web is represented by a circle in the center of a page. The circle is labeled with the main topic, and several circles branch off from the center circle, forming clusters of circles attached by lines showing causes, consequences, and solutions. The problems students are researching are varied: Disappearing bees, the death of coral reefs, food waste, water scarcity, fast fashion (making cheap clothes that people throw away quickly), and ocean plastics are among the topics under investigation.

Projected onto a screen on a wall of the classroom is the acronym CHAMPS that reminds students how to work together:

- C—conversation (voices low, focused within small groups)
- H—help (ask group first, then ask teacher)
- A—activity objectives (to work as group to complete daily goal)
- M—movement (none. raise your hand to get material)
- P—participation (students work independently and collaborating)
- S—success (you become experts on your topic!)

After the classroom teacher introduces the topic, he and the classroom assistant step aside and are available for questions as the students move into action for this self-directed activity. Students take out their computers for the project.

A girl in a group of four students asks the other group members, “Do you have any ideas why ocean plastics are a problem?”

A boy responds, “When people drop stuff on the ground, it’s going to go in the sewer, then go in the ocean and pollute.”

In a group discussing causes of disappearing bees, a boy notes, “Some other causes are blood-sucking parasites,” adding to the group’s list that so far includes pesticides and colony collapse/disorder in their topic web.

Across the hall in Room 107, students are working on the same activity with similar topics represented. Each group has a worksheet with goals and tasks, person in charge, notes, and next steps documented to guide the groups and help structure their activity.

In a 6th-grade humanities class, small groups of students are researching historical figures to gather background information about their lives, how they worked for social change, and the benefits and outcomes of their work. A very soft-spoken girl explains, “We’re researching Dorothy Dix to see how her accomplishments changed things today. She helped the mentally ill.” Each of the three girls in the group is researching a particular aspect of Dix’s work and life.

Another group is researching water sanitation and the life of Ellen Swallow Richards. A boy in this group proudly shares, “She was the first woman to go to a scientific college.”

A group of four boys studying Sojourner Truth chose her because they “thought she was someone interesting to know more about.” They share that she was born into slavery, then escaped and became an abolitionist and fought for African American rights—and lesser-known facts, including that her original name was Isabella and her first language was Dutch. They are impressed that although she never learned to read or write, she worked effectively against injustice.

The teacher sounds a bell that brings the students to a pause for a moment. She asks students to do a time check, look at their goals, and think about what they accomplished, and reminds them that 25 minutes are left in this period.

Other groups are studying Mary Jane McLeod, who fought for African American women’s rights during the Depression; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, another important figure in the movement for women’s rights; Richard Oakes, an activist for Native American rights with ties to the San Francisco Bay Area; and Henry Ford, who revolutionized the auto industry and doubled wages for workers.

In the other 6th-grade humanities class, the entire class is studying Alexander the Great. Students are creating a chart of pros and cons to see if Alexander deserved the name “Great.”

One student notes that Alexander the Great was educated by Aristotle. Under the pros column of her list: He took over a lot of places, but still let people believe in their gods and do normal rituals; he was creator of the largest empire of the ancient world. She reads the cons list with a concerned expression on her face: “Burned down communities if the kingdom didn’t obey him,” “killed innocent people in war,” “fought in wars a lot.”

The teacher rings a chime, and when students’ attention turns to him, he instructs them to tell their partner if they are choosing to write about why he was a great leader or why he was not a great leader.

One of the girls says, “I’m going to tell why he was a great leader but also in the middle tell the cons.”

Then the students take a moment to share their viewpoint with the entire class. A boy pronounces, “He was not a great ruler.” The teacher asks, “Can anyone offer reasons?” A girl responds, “He burned down communities.” A boy adds, “He went to war with like 16 countries.”

The teacher then asks the class if there are any reasons why he was a good leader. A girl says, “He expanded his empire, and even though he conquered people he still allowed them to continue with their own religion.”

As the class period ends, a boy moves to the side of the room near a cabinet to collect computers. He claps and sings, “Bring up your computer, everybody.” The students readily line up to return their devices.

Group work at Gateway appears seamless and organic: Students move about the room and interact with one another in constructive and focused ways. The fluidity and comfort with which students work together is not innate; teachers spend significant time at the beginning of the school year teaching students how to work together productively. This begins with norm setting; clarity of expectations within the classroom spaces; teacher modeling of how to disagree and offer feedback; clear instructions for what each member of the group is expected to do and when; and, most importantly, rich and engaging tasks that are group-worthy in nature. Group-worthy tasks are open-ended, provide students with multiple entry points, are discipline-based and intellectually important, require interdependence as well as personal responsibility, and have clear criteria for evaluation.⁵⁷

The fluidity and comfort with which students work together is not innate; teachers spend significant time at the beginning of the school year teaching students how to work together productively.

As students work in groups, they develop content knowledge along with communication and collaboration skills they will carry into the future. According to a student, “[We] do a lot of projects that are interactive with other people and groups, and I think that’s really helpful to get to really know the topic.” Another student added, “And when we do these interactive projects, we often do presentations, so we work on presentation skills. I think it really helps me.” Students recognize that these are important life skills. Said one: “In real life you have to work with others. They put you in different groups, so you have to learn to work with others well and efficiently.”

A teacher explained that working in teams also provides a structure within which students can “build a sense of trust in their little micro-group that they lean on for activity after activity.” According to the drama teacher, they are “able to draw on what someone else is really strong at or realize for themselves that they actually can do that too.” A girl shared how working in groups helped her find her own strength, explaining:

In middle school, I really did not like math. It was my hardest subject. But now, because we get to work with different people, we get to find different ways to connect with each other, and we get to see the way people learn differently, and that helps me, because then I’m like, well, I can do this. And then it helps me learn. So, that’s why I like math.

Students are aware of the specific efforts their teachers make to encourage bonding. Teachers “put you in different groups, like almost every quarter, just so you don’t get too comfortable with the group that you’re in,” a high school student articulates. “So, you have to learn to work with others well and efficiently.” A student described how this type of structured collaboration gives way to an expectation that students will seek out new opportunities to work with one another on their own:

[Teachers] definitely start off by picking our groups around the beginning of the year, because they’re also trying to force you to get to know other people. And then by the end of the year, you go with friends that you never thought you would ever meet. So then they’ll let you pick, because they’re like, oh, you know you are chill with working with everyone in the classroom.

Ultimately, students understand why teachers ask them to collaborate and get to know one another. One student expressed the value of collaboration in these terms: “Even though they know you can do it individually, they want to prepare you for real life. In real life you have to work with others well.”

Teachers offer guidance, materials, and explanations, and they are readily available for questions and feedback; however, didactic instruction is minimal, and the bulk of class time is dedicated to active learning. As one student summed it up: “It’s really helpful when teachers engage me and [say], ‘OK, we’re going to do a lecture for 10 [or] 15 minutes where you obtain information so that next, when we do this activity, you know what to do, you have background information, and you can apply that to whatever we’re doing.’” Having established a clear classroom structure, teachers assume a supportive role in student-led activities. Classrooms are abuzz with students active in the process of questioning, researching, analyzing, and writing for the task at hand.

These types of interactive, applied projects provide the opportunity for students to develop a sense of mastery through authentic learning tasks. A student asserted, “You have to work with your partner just to get the work to be good.” This student-centered approach is captured in the vignette below from an art class in which students receive individual feedback while sketching animal figurines as part of a larger unit exploring the relationship between humans and animals. In this example, a clear structure is provided for students and they are genuinely interested and engaged in their work.

Art (Gateway High School)

In a high school art class on the ground floor of a three-story brick school building, the soothing, warm, rhythmic sound of ambient drum music fills the room. Students are seated around four long workshop tables arranged in a square, absorbed in drawing a small animal figurine propped up in front of each of them. The array of figures includes zebras, elephants, cheetahs, and a variety of dinosaurs.

In one corner of the classroom the guidelines are listed on a flip board:

1. Contour drawing—must touch four sides of page
2. Texture
3. Light: tonal value (shading and erasing and blend)
4. Give it life

The objective is to draw the figure as big as possible on a half sheet of paper. Earlier in the period, the class had talked about why humans are so fascinated with animals. Discussion centered on the notion that animals are similar to humans but also different and that this paradox fuels the fascination. The students will be overlaying their animal drawings on top of a cityscape they had drawn previously to represent the displacement of animals, which also connects to themes studied in their science class. The teacher circulates through the classroom, making comments such as, “You guys are taking time noticing the details; that’s great.”

A girl calls the teacher over, saying, “I’m not sure how to begin.” Pulling out a half sheet of paper, the teacher sits down next to the student and tells her, “You were born with the hand-eye coordination you need to do this.” The teacher starts to sketch next to the student and talks through the process of drawing, offering specific pointers as she sketches. The student takes her own pencil in hand and tentatively begins to draw the outline of her animal.

Continuing to walk around the room, the teacher comments, “Wow,” as she points at different students’ drawings. She stops at a student’s desk, noting “You really got that the second time. Sometimes you have to alter it to make it look realistic. What you can do now is compare. A lot of observation is comparison. How wide is the tail compared to the width of the neck? How wide is the top of the mouth compared to the bottom of the mouth?”

“What shape would you call that?” she asks. The student responds, “Kind of circular, oval.” The teacher points out that it also resembles a soft triangle. “If you erase those lines, you start to get the mouth,” she explains as she traces the contours of a triangle and erases the edges. Students are deeply engaged—observing, sketching, erasing—all the while swaying to the rhythm of the music.

The following vignette from a Heritage Spanish class highlights small-group work and illustrates how teachers organize the work to provide students with the opportunity to develop and exercise collaboration skills. In this lesson, students are analyzing a short story written in Spanish. A clear structure is provided, with each student assigned a specific role for the activity to help guide the group interaction. The exercise also draws on students’ ability to gain insight into how the characters might have felt by taking on their perspective. Cultivating this awareness of others is critical to understanding and deciphering the meaning of the text.

Heritage Spanish

In a Heritage Spanish class composed mostly of 10th- and 11th-graders, students sit at their desks, which are arranged in a semicircle. From a whole-class activity that involved identifying literary terms, the teacher, Lauren Buckley, transitions the students to small groups to read the last two pages of the work, *No oyes ladrar los perros?* [*Do you hear the dogs barking?*] and mark up the text and respond to questions.

Buckley prepares the class for their small-group discussion by asking them, “¿Cómo suena una conversación académica sobre la literatura [What does an academic conversation about literature sound like]? A student volunteers, “Being a skeptic.” The teacher translates, “Sean un crítico.” Another student offers, “Add on.” Translating again, the teacher says “Añadir.” The teacher provides additional suggestions, such as “Mantener contacto con los ojos [maintain eye contact]; “ser

descriptivos” [be descriptive]; and “No somos expertos, no perfectos, hace preguntas!” [we are not experts, not perfect, ask questions!]” From across the room a student adds, “Stay on topic.” “Mantenerse en el t3pico,” translates the teacher.

The students in each group are assigned “papeles” [roles] for their task. “El lector” [the reader] reads aloud and stops when the person in charge of “apuntes” [notes] poses questions after each paragraph about the main points. The person in charge of “conexiones” [connections] makes connections to real life, the historical context, and/or to the chapters from *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. Everyone is responsible for adding their points and contributing to the conversation about the work.

If students finish before the 20 minutes allocated for the in-class assignment, there is a list of things for them to work on:

1. Pregunta a tus compa1eros si hay algo que les confunde o trabajen para aclarar juntos. [Ask your partners if there is something confusing, or work together to clarify.]
2. Trata de conversar sobre los temas dentro de la obra. [Try to converse about the themes in the work.]
3. Identifican t3rminos literarios y an3talos. [Identify literary terms and note them.]

The teacher assigns three groups of three students along with a group of two students since one student is absent on this day. A pair of girls team up, and one reads the text aloud while the other marks her paper, highlighting text and making notes. She’s marking character traits: le gusta comer y dormir [he likes to eat and sleep].

The girl assigned the role of lector reads aloud, “el otro hijo que iba a tener la mat3.” “WHAT?!” exclaims her partner, and suggests, “Maybe she died while giving birth,” and makes a note in the margin of the page.

The girls continue to read, “Y t3 t3 la hubiera matado otra vez si ella estuviera vivida a estas alturas.” The notetaker drops her pencil. “Dang! That’s so deep,” she proclaims, and adds, “Even if she were alive she would’ve died because the things he’s done are so bad.” She scribbles a note in the margin: “Su mam3 le dar3a l3stima a saber que su hijo es malo.”

The student in charge of apuntes says, “My question is will Ignacio change to try to make his mom proud again?” The other student replies “yaaaah” with wonder.

The student who posed the question asks the teacher if they can write in English. The teacher responds that they can use English as support if it helps them understand and unravel, but what they submit needs to be in Spanish.

The girls return to their work, “How do you say proud? Orgullo. Orgullosol!” They figure it out together and formulate the question in Spanish, “¿Crees que Ignacio cambiar3a para hacer su mam3 orgullosa de 3l?”

Assessment for Learning

Assessment at Gateway is designed to support learning rather than competition or labeling. Fostering students' self-concepts as learners and helping them engage with challenging work require a sense of trust between the teacher and student as well as a learning environment that supports motivation by emphasizing effort and improvement rather than competition and comparison. Gateway teachers all alluded to the importance of offering students various routes to success and various entry points into complex or new curriculum.

Assessment at Gateway is designed to support learning rather than competition or labeling.

This is facilitated by teachers who have cultivated strong relationships with their students and know them well, and by an approach to assessment that regularly encourages attempts with feedback and revision. Humanities teacher David Booth described this in the following way: “We want our students to experience success.... Our students count on us to help them; they count on us to be there for them, to meet them where they are.”

This approach helps to build students' sense of agency and a set of pro-academic mindsets. Shaping productive mindsets can produce effects that accumulate over time to result in more positive school outcomes, such as increasing school affiliation and self-concept, resulting in higher levels of academic engagement that become self-reinforcing.⁵⁸ For example, a growth mindset—the belief that effort will lead to increased competence—contributes to learning and well-being in terms of student intelligence, emotion, and personality traits.⁵⁹

Students who have a growth mindset— who believe they can improve through effort, trying new strategies, and seeking help—are less likely to become discouraged and more likely to try harder after encountering difficulties. They are more likely to tackle tasks at the edge of their current skills than students who believe their intelligence is fixed. This can translate into stronger performance in school as well as in other tasks in life. The core principle that skills can always be developed is consistent with evidence that the brain is constantly growing and changing in response to experience.

In practical terms, providing feedback focused on effort and process encourages students to adopt a growth mindset, whereas feedback that focuses on traits (e.g., “smarts”) has negative consequences for student motivation and achievement.⁶⁰ Providing constructive feedback and opportunities for revision are instructional practices that encourage learners to grow.⁶¹

Shira Helft, math teacher at Gateway High School, explained that part of developing a growth mindset is teaching students to engage in productive self-talk that stimulates agency and motivation.

How do they have some of that internal self-talk: “I know that I can do it and be successful”? I think the same is true in the way that we talk about success. We want to give students tons of opportunities to show that they know it, which is great because you can see that switch when a student is like, “Oh I can do this,” and their motivations shift a lot, and that impacts their learning overall, over time going forward.

Students also recognize that making and correcting mistakes is a part of the learning process. A student said, “They gave us time to make our mistakes, to realize how to fix them and stuff, kind of figuring them out for ourselves, and [they] help us if we need it.” In an environment of trust, teachers can both scaffold student learning and gradually develop students’ self-motivation by triggering success. As another student added, describing this careful dance:

In 6th grade, we still have to get our planners signed. I used to never get mine signed. And at first, they let it slide, but then eventually they told us you actually need to get this done so you can get your homework done. So they gave that little bit of space at first, but then they got serious and [said], “OK, this is what you need to do.” Then I did it and it helped my grades and stuff.

Mastery grading: Setting students up for success

The grading system at Gateway supports the development of these mindsets. In traditional schools, grading practices are often based on social comparison aimed at evaluating students against each other, rather than on a mastery-based, standards-driven approach. Researchers have found that the competitive approach leads to decreased interest in school for most students, a distancing from the learning environment, and a reduced sense of self-confidence and personal efficacy.⁶²

A student-centered and learning-centered educational approach creates a seismic shift in the nature and purpose of assessments, away from tools and consequences designed to separate students from one another and toward strategies that promote learning and mastery for all students. A mastery-focused approach to assessment is based on the belief that effort and outcomes are related to one another, and it is this belief that maintains motivation over time. In a mastery approach, the “focus of attention is on the intrinsic value of learning,” and part of the ultimate goal is to orient learners “toward developing new skills, trying to understand their work, [and] improving their level of competence.”⁶³ Feedback mechanisms, such as rubrics and discussions of the learning process, feature prominently in such an approach, as do opportunities to revise work to meet standards.

Mastery-oriented grading at Gateway makes standards, expectations, and goals clear and consistent across teachers. The staff created their own shared rubrics and routinely ask students to use these rubrics to evaluate their progress on a given project, set expectations for their own learning, choose how much they want to challenge themselves, and continuously improve their work. One teacher described developing the rubric system for grading and their approach to assessment “to give students tons of opportunities to show that they know it” so students do not think that they only get one chance. Another teacher added, “We don’t want a child to think that there’s only going to be one high-stakes assessment and that’s going to determine success or failure.”

Like the collaboration rubric shown in Appendix B, the rubrics often look at not only the content of students’ work but also the process they have used to get there. As one middle school teacher noted:

The first year we were here we were only 6th grade, and we had started with an overview of what we call process of learning. [We] created this rubric that was helping us look at how ... students approach their work. How do they time-manage? How are they aware of their own learning? How do they advocate for themselves and collaboration?

Sometimes rubrics at Gateway are used to allow students to decide what level of scaffolding they want to receive as well as what qualities of work they can strive for. Students described this aspect of the system as motivating them to strive for a “Level 4”—on a 4-point scale, in which 3 is defined as meeting expectations and 4 is exceeding expectations. For example, said one student, “We have to write an essay or something. If you want a 3, [the teacher] will give you some sentence starters, but if you want a 4, they’ll give you the idea of what to write and then you have to write it.”

The ability for every student to learn and succeed is so ingrained in the fabric of the school that students did not even mention striving for a Level 1 or 2. Students are motivated to learn, and teachers give students the opportunity to show what they know in multiple ways. According to one student, they do this “because you want to be your best self. It helps your grade, but it also helps you to learn to push yourself, to try something new and just do your best all the time.”

At Gateway, assessments (both formative and summative) set challenging tasks that are intended to encourage deep learning and create a sense of high expectations and mutual accountability. These may include social science research papers; science experiments; literary essays; and mathematical models or projects that require in-depth study, extensive writing, and oral presentations. They may be organized into portfolios of work that are aggregated over time. For example, 9th-graders who take creative writing create a portfolio that displays their best, edited work, which they have revised over time.⁶⁴ Work may also be presented in exhibitions that offer an audience beyond the teacher, such as to families, peers, and others in the community, rather like a dissertation defense. These projects and presentations are evaluated according to standards and are revised until they meet the standards.

Researchers note that these tools can create higher academic expectations and a sense of shared standards across a school.⁶⁵ Additionally, assessment practices that require metacognition, that emphasize learning, and that encourage thoughtfulness and understanding—with value placed on growth rather than on scores earned at one discrete moment—have been found to create higher motivation and higher levels of cognitive engagement.⁶⁶

Student exhibitions of learning

Providing forums for presenting student work creates an external audience, which motivates students to put their best efforts forward and promotes student voice and agency. Students show and present their work to families and the broader community on a regular basis, reinforcing a sense of ownership of their work, encouraging them to revise to high standards, and giving them practice with presentation skills.

At the middle school, 7th- and 8th-grade students present interdisciplinary projects that incorporate all major subject areas, while the 6th-grade students primarily produce and present projects within one subject area. Prior to the exhibitions, students work in their classes to research, write, revise, and create presentation documents (e.g., papers, slideshows, poster boards, models, etc.). The project and presentation preparation work takes place over about 4 weeks and represents the culmination of content learning and skills developed in the classes.

Each component of the presentation (research, writing, modeling, oral presentation work, writing/presentation publication) is structured for both teacher and peer feedback and formative grading before the final presentation. Classroom teachers work together across the grade level to engage

in “backwards planning”⁶⁷ that first develops a set of goals for the project and then figures out the learning experiences that can help reach those goals. Classroom teachers are then responsible for implementing that plan in their classes.

In the days leading up to the exhibition, students practice their presentations in class, then do classroom exchanges so that the students present to other grade levels. In this way, 8th-grade students give feedback to 7th-grade students, and vice versa, helping students to understand what excellent public presentations look like.

At the high school, student exhibitions primarily take place through the humanities courses that focus each grade’s theme on issues of social justice and equity:

- 9th grade—Protest Movements and Tactics of Resistance Around the World
- 10th grade—Genocide Awareness Night (Holocaust speaker, followed by student-led discussions of other genocides around the world)
- 11th grade—My American Story (presentations about migration and immigration)
- 12th grade—Evening of Action (students present social justice research projects)

Families are welcome participants at student exhibition nights; for many family members, attending one of these events is the first time they’ve seen their student present in front of such a large crowd about their learning. Roughly 80–90% of families attend the exhibitions to support their students.

A student explained that the exhibitions are “fun” because they provide an opportunity for students to both “work together with partners” and learn how to conduct themselves publicly—an experience that many students had not had before in such a high-stakes way.

Gateway High School 9th-Grade Presentations, March 22, 2018

It is an unusually warm March evening in San Francisco, and the windows of the second floor of Gateway High School are open to let in the fresh air. Adults, siblings, and teachers bound up the steps and gather in the second-floor hallway, eagerly awaiting the night’s events: the Gateway freshman class’s year-end humanities presentations. Programs with information on the presenters and their topics sit on a table with a mint green tablecloth in front of the entrance, next to two vases of bright yellow daffodils. Three senior Gateway students sit at the table and direct the guests to the space where presentations will soon begin. All the doors to the school are open for visitors to come and go—tonight, the whole Gateway community owns this space.

In the hall, members of the 9th-grade class wait in nervous excitement in groups of three or four by poster boards. This is their first high school presentation night, and many have dressed up for the occasion. Their eyes roam over the diverse crowd chatting in the hallway, searching for family members and other guests. As 6:00 p.m. approaches, the crowd begins to separate into discrete groups to listen to the presentations. The student presentations will run concurrently for the next hour, so that the guests can roam among the groups and listen to as many presentations as they can. Groups repeat their presentations for each new audience, leaving time for questions at the end.

The groups delivering their presentations tonight are each speaking on one of three historical movements—the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico, the fight for Indian independence from British rule, or the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa—and comparing those movements to current social justice movements. Most of the groups reference present-day movements for racial equality, particularly Black Lives Matter, and protests against sexual harassment.

As one group presents on the Zapatista rebellion, the three boys and one girl in the group shift back and forth nervously in front of their poster, stacks of yellow notecards in hand. Each student is careful to make eye contact with the audience members and to prompt fellow group mates when it is their turn to speak. The students first provide an overview of the Zapatistas' aims and tactics, noting the movement's creation of autonomous communities and establishment of revolutionary laws granting women more rights, as well as the charisma of the movement's leaders. They compare the Zapatista movement to three present-day issues: racial injustice, sexual harassment, and homelessness.

The present-day protest movements and the Zapatistas both had “unique ways of making change in their communities,” the girl notes.

At the end of the presentation, each of the students shares a personal reflection on the effect that preparing for the presentation had on them.

“I have a new view concerning how people, especially students,” can make a difference in their communities, one student notes.

“I now know how important it is for me and my peers to advocate when something is not right,” says another.

Across the hall, another group of students—two girls and one boy—also presents on the Zapatista movement. The girls both went to Gateway Middle School, where they participated in similar presentations, so tonight's events are not new for them. The students take turns introducing the three movements they will speak about: the Zapatista movement, Black Lives Matter, and recent protests against sexual harassment. They look at the movements with a critical eye, as each addresses how the movements succeeded, and one way each of the movements needs to change to be more effective. At the end of the presentation, a parent asks the group how social media has “changed the landscape” of protests. The students quickly jump in with their thoughts, citing hashtags such as #blacklivesmatter and #nastywoman as an effective technique to rally a large group of people around an issue.

“Social media is a good way to communicate so that everyone can see,” one student notes. Her group mate adds: “I think it helps bring people together.”

Just as in the first group, these students build off of one another in their answers to the Q&A session. They tie their personal experiences to their academic material, using their own fluency with social media to analyze the organization of social movements.

In a third presentation, a group of four students discusses the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The students begin their presentation with an introduction on the persistent presence of racial injustice in the United States today. Tying various historical threads together, one student notes that “apartheid was South Africa's version of segregation in America.”

Careful not to read from the poster, the students speak in turns, drawing from their notecards. They address successful elements of the anti-apartheid movement as well as lingering areas of segregation in South Africa today. “People of color in South Africa still face the same injustices,” a student acknowledges.

Another group of three students, also presenting on the anti-apartheid movement, has structured their presentation differently from the previous group. They introduce three movements—the anti-apartheid movement, Black Lives Matter, and protests against sexual harassment—at once, reviewing the demands of each movement as well as each movement’s successes.

Connecting anti-apartheid with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, one student announces that Black Lives Matter, like anti-apartheid, “has succeeded in bringing national attention to the injustices faced by people of color.” Students cite specific examples of recent events in the United States that correspond to different elements of apartheid and the movement to counter it. One student mentions the killing of Oscar Grant in Oakland in 2009 to highlight the parallels between police brutality in segregated South Africa and in the United States today. The talk concludes with students’ reflections on how learning about these three protest movements has changed their own behaviors.

As the presentations draw to a close, the evening’s guests begin to line up for the potluck dinner provided by family volunteers. A long table stands in a hall connected to the main presentation space, laden with pizza, lasagna, fried rice, fruit salad, and a large cake. Students and teachers help serve the food, bringing out aluminum serving platters from a nearby classroom. When the 9th-graders finish their presentations and join the potluck line, their faces shine with relief. They mingle and joke with one another and each other’s families, and the hallways fill with conversation and laughter.

About 20 minutes after the presentations finish, families and students begin to disperse. A 9th-grader bounces down the hallway in happy relief. One of her teachers at the other end of the hallway calls to her and exclaims, “I bet your presentation was brilliant!” She blushes and happily joins her friends eating pizza at the end of the hall.

Gateway’s rich approach to instruction is a deliberate effort by a talented and dedicated staff who put in many hours behind the scenes to set students up for successful learning that can motivate future efforts.

Social and Emotional Learning as Key to Academic and Life Success

Found

Once upon a time, there was a little girl
Once upon a time, she danced in a whirl
Once upon a time, she grew in a swirl
And once upon a time, I was the little girl.

Once upon a time, I thought this great big building to be intimidating
Once upon a time, I felt my meager confidence dissipating
Once upon a time, I was welcome to integrating
And once upon a time, I sat here contemplating:

Since when did I ever speak out?
Since when did I ever so speak loud?
Since when did my words ring through hallways our way?
Since when did I find this pride so proud?
Since when did I ever get over my doubt?
Over drought's devout I chose this bout
Since when did I ever choose this route?
Become a poet, a writer writing what this is about
Since when. Since when. Since when. Since now.

It is on this campus that I found myself
Shook my spirit to my soul and pulled my talents from the shelf
Took a word made it words made it rhyme made it well
Took a girl made her strong made her whole made her bells
Made her bells of voice bells of choice
And so she'd get up got up when she fell.

It is on this campus that I faced my reflection
Told me I am who I am and there's no need for correction
Raised my heart from anxiety and ash depression
In the dark I stood and watched my own resurrection
Found friends bound together found together in a single club section
Found adults who never laughed at my poor inflection
Found mentors who stood for me and became my protection.

It is on this campus that I learned to speak
It was in these hallways where I found my peak
Where I realized each thought let out a creak
Where I listened to where the voices did leak.

It is on this campus where my second home did settle
Where I forged my weapons from pen and metal
To show my mettle through barbs and nettle

—Student, Grade 10

This poem, written by a 10th-grade student, encapsulates the role that Gateway plays in cultivating students' social and emotional learning (SEL). Her sense of confidence and agency, developed through her experiences at school, helped her find and channel her voice through writing.

Educators at Gateway understand the fundamental importance of cultivating social and emotional skills in concert with cognitive abilities. The school's approach has evolved over time and involves embedding SEL into academic activities, providing opportunities to explicitly build skills, and fostering an inclusive school environment in which diversity is valued. Numerous activities and structures are in place to support students in developing these skills, from orientation and advisory, which are part of every student's experience, to a student support office (SSO) that is accessible to all students. Developing and supporting teachers' own social-emotional competence is another key feature of Gateway's comprehensive approach to empowering students and nurturing lifelong skills.

Social-emotional competence involves intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, along with developing habits, skills, and mindsets that support academic learning and well-being. The CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) framework consists of five core social-emotional capacities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.⁶⁸ Intrapersonal skills include self-awareness and self-management. Interpersonal skills involve social awareness (extending awareness to others) and relationship skills. Responsible decision-making comes into play for the individual as well as in social contexts and is supported by developing these critical intra- and interpersonal capacities. Other habits, skills, and mindsets that are beneficial for students include an ability to set goals, plan, and organize; a mastery approach to learning; and a growth mindset. Helping students develop these competencies fosters effort, motivation, and independence.

Explicit Social and Emotional Learning Strategies

At Gateway, there is a systemic commitment to developing students' SEL competencies. The middle school, for example, uses Process of Learning (POL) rubrics as a way of focusing on the *how* of learning—in this case, the particular prosocial and pro-academic habits and mindsets that contribute to learning and healthy development. At different points in the school year, students complete a POL Self-Assessment to help students, teachers, and family members identify areas of strength and growth in terms of students' self-perceived abilities to use academic learning strategies and habits with various degrees of help. The self-assessment also encourages reflection on behaviors associated with growth mindset, self-confidence, self-advocacy, collaboration, and community skills (see Figure 2). These habits, skills, and mindsets are explicitly taught, developed, and practiced in virtually every course in conscious and deliberate ways.

Figure 2
Process of Learning Self-Assessment



Process of Learning Self-Assessment

SR#:	Name:	Date:
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Mark the box that describes how you would respond to the statements below.

4	3	2	1
I can do this by myself.	I sometimes need help with this task.	I usually need my teacher's help with this task.	I still need a lot of help with this task/skill.

Academic Strategies: Uses learning strategies and resources to follow directions and show quality work.		4	3	2	1
Using Strategies	I use the strategies and tools I learned in class to better understand the subject.				
Quality	My work is shows my own thinking & effort. It is accurately completed according to the directions.				
Resources	I use the resources available to me (toolkits, extra help, peers, teachers) to better understand the subject.				

Academic Habits: Organizes, plans, studies, and completes homework to present best effort.		4	3	2	1
Homework	I turn in my completed homework in on time.				
Attendance	I am on time for every class. If I am absent from school I make sure to collect and complete all of my missing work.				
Planner	I use my planner to write down all of my homework assignments and due dates.				
Binder / Notebook	I keep all of my current assignments and homework in the correct folder or section of my binder. I keep my notebook up to date. I bring all my materials to class.				
Studying	I use time outside of class to review material & study for tests.				
Presentation	I give careful attention to my work so that it reflects my best effort.				

Self-Awareness & Growth Mindset: Knows strengths and needs and takes action to become a better learner.		4	3	2	1
Self-Awareness	I know what talents and strengths I bring as a learner and use them in my learning. I know when I'm stuck so that I can use strategies to get unstuck.				
Openness to Growth	I accept my areas of challenge as opportunities to become a better learner. I try new strategies that may help me to become a better learner.				
Risk-Taking	I participate in all class activities, even if the activity involves a skill I find challenging.				

Self-Advocacy: Communicates learning needs, takes responsibility and demonstrates persistence to achieve goals.		4	3	2	1
Reaching out	I ask for what I need when I know I need help (ex: schoolwork or social-emotional)				
Diligence/Ownership	I take responsibility for my own learning, including checking my grades regularly and getting all missing work when I miss class.				
Persistence	When confronted with a challenge, I'll keep giving my best effort until I get it.				

Collaboration & Community Skills: Applies social-emotional awareness & social skills to work well with others.		4	3	2	1
Emotional Awareness	I show an awareness of my own emotional needs as well as the needs of others & I respond with consideration.				
Pair/Group Interactions	I listen attentively when working with others. I contribute and share the workload with my partners for the shared success of my group.				
Relationships	I help other members if they don't understand or are having trouble completing the work. I also accept help from others when I am stuck on a topic.				
Acceptance & Openness	I could be paired with anybody in the class and I would work productively together with that person to get the work done.				
Conflict Management	I use strategies to understand conflicts & resolve them for the benefit of myself & my community.				
Upstanding	I do the right thing for myself and others even when others are not looking.				

Source: Gateway Public Schools. (n.d.). Student agency rubric. <https://gatewayimpact.org/student-agency/resources/student-agency-rubric> (accessed 03/16/20).

To support students in recognizing and managing their feelings, the middle school teaching team also came up with a system called BATS, which stands for Breathe, Ask what’s the size of the problem, Talk to yourself, and then Speak up. Teachers remind students to use their BATS practice when they feel frazzled or stressed to help them get back on track in the classroom. This tool gives students an alternative, as one teacher put it, “to not engage and [not] escalate something that’s a little molehill into a mountain.”

There are also “peace corners” in many classrooms, where students can take a 5-minute break to breathe deeply, calm themselves, or simply take some space before re-engaging in classroom activities. Staff describe the purpose of the peace corner as a way for students to “take themselves out of the fray, breathe, regroup, come back.” Peace corners are an important strategy to help students build their social-emotional competence. First, students learn to become self-aware—that is, notice when they are feeling anxious, distracted, angry, or tired—and

There are also “peace corners” in many classrooms, where students can take a 5-minute break to breathe deeply, calm themselves, or simply take some space before re-engaging in classroom activities.

then learn to self-regulate, such as by identifying this emotion and picking a strategy that will work for them to redirect their energy and refocus on schoolwork. A peace corner is not a time-out, and it is not a place that teachers send students to; instead, a peace corner is an inviting space with comfortable seating, such as a bean bag or carpet, and is well stocked with coloring books, fidgets, worksheets to do reflective writing, stuffed animals, and books on managing emotions. Teachers spend time teaching students how to use the space, often implementing hand signals or other nonverbal cues so that the student can communicate with the teacher that they need a temporary change of environment. Practicing how to use the peace corners also ensures that all students are following the shared agreements on how to use the space. The power of a peace corner is that it teaches students to calm, soothe, and control themselves in a nonpunitive fashion while also staying in the classroom. This means that students can still hear and access the curriculum—a much more inclusive strategy than having students wait outside in the hallway until they refocus.

Teachers praise the value of a peace corner in the classroom as a way to allow students to “stop in the moment” and “learn from how they’re feeling.” Students describe the peace corner as a “mini-SSO” where they can “sit and calm down.” There are “little activities that you can do, like coloring, drawing, fidgets, timers, books, and stuff.” Another student describes how using the peace corner helps him stay focused: “When you feel stressed, or if your partner is distracting you from doing your work, you can keep doing your work back there if you want.” The peace corner also engenders a sense of responsibility in students. As one student says, “And you figure it out, like, ‘I need space, so I’m going to do this for myself,’ as opposed to being sent to the peace corner. They’re making you responsible for [managing yourself].”

Many teachers also use a mood meter in the classroom, which guides students to pause, then determine whether a problem is small, medium, or big and whether their response matches the problem. Developed by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence through its RULER initiative (an acronym for Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotions), the

mood meter is designed to help students become more emotionally intelligent as they “become more mindful of how their emotions change throughout the day and how their emotions in turn affect their actions.”⁶⁹

Teachers combine these everyday classroom activities that provide opportunities to exercise and build SEL with explicit instruction around SEL competencies. Once per week in the middle school advisory classes, students have direct SEL instruction via Second Step curriculum. Second Step is a universal classroom-based SEL curriculum designed to teach skills and competencies such as managing strong emotions, setting and meeting goals, making good decisions, and developing positive relationships.⁷⁰

Finally, additional supports for students around SEL are also provided by the SSO, which many students commented on as being a primary source of support for issues big and small.

Integrating Social and Emotional Learning Into Classroom Instruction

Gateway teachers provide regular opportunities to integrate social, emotional, and academic skills into learning. Teachers support students to develop executive functioning—those cognitive capacities involved in setting, planning, and working toward goals—through strong organizational routines that include setting classroom norms, assigning roles for group work, and providing prompts to guide discussion. Teachers also set clear expectations for tasks, while giving students autonomy to make decisions that are developmentally appropriate about how they approach the work. Instructional strategies that involve group work and students’ presenting their work (such as exhibitions and student-led conferences) promote vital SEL competencies such as collaboration, reflection, and communication.

Teachers share examples of class norms and emphasize that setting norms is a collaborative, generative process with students, with one teacher saying:

The first whole month in 6th grade we create the class norm together: “So these are things that you’ve said are important to you in the classroom.” That holds them accountable. We talk about what does it mean? [We] define what is respect, what is a problem, then give examples of what it is, what it’s not, so everything’s clear.

Students are actively involved in the process and come up with ideas such as “one mic, so one person is talking at a time,” and “expect that people are trying to not say something mean or like they have your best intent in mind.” Another student describes a practice referred to as “three before me,” in which you “ask three people before you ask the teacher the questions to see if there’s somebody else who can give you the answer to what you’re asking.”

The norms set a foundation for the classroom as a safe space for students to interact. Within this framework, students value learning from each other and finding out about different perspectives. They have opportunities to collaborate and learn from one another through group work and project-based activities, which are staples of the instructional approach offered at Gateway. Students describe making friendships, collaborating, and improving the quality of their work as some of the benefits of group work.

In addition, student-led conferences, held midway through the school year, allow students to formally share their cumulative work across the semester with their parents/guardians and teachers. The vignette below highlights how these conferences can nurture students in ways that are equitable and support learners from all backgrounds.

Student-Led Conferences

The 300 students at the middle school all participate in student-led conferences, held midway through the school year. At this time, advisors help prepare their advisees to gather together a portfolio of work—one artifact from each of their classes: humanities, learning seminar, math, science, and art or Spanish—so they can facilitate a conversation with their parents as they reflect on the prior quarter. Each student-led conference has similar elements: a welcome and introduction; a description of the assignments and work presented in the portfolio; and a reflection on growth, areas of challenge, and points of pride. They review progress on goals from the prior quarter and share a statement of new goals for the upcoming quarter, with corresponding strategies to accomplish those goals. Then each conference ends with “homework” for the parents to complete: They are asked to write a letter to their child that includes both warm and constructive feedback on what they heard from their child.

In the 8th-grade wing on the first floor of the building, Michael sits across from his mother for his student-led conference. Unlike in the 6th- and 7th-grade conferences, Michael’s advisor sits a good distance away and listens, while respectfully staying separate from the conversation taking place between mother and son. Michael is in the final semester of his 8th-grade year at Gateway Middle and is preparing to step into the more rigorous and more high-stakes world of high school. Michael is a student who struggles to find motivation and engagement with his schoolwork. His true love is basketball, and his mother clearly wants him to see the value in both school and athletics.

Michael spends some time reflecting on ways that he would like to continue to grow as a person as he finishes his 8th-grade year and prepares for high school. He has been mentoring 6th-graders who want to improve their basketball skills over the past few months and has enjoyed teaching his younger peers and watching their skills improve. Michael has enjoyed being seen as an expert in this area that is so important to him, and for the 6th-graders, having access to such a cool and talented 8th-grader has helped bring the community together in a new way. He shares a bit about where he started and where he hopes to be next year:

In 6th grade I didn’t really talk to many people, but now I do. That’s going to help me when I go to high school because even though I like to be alone, I realize now I can learn new things from other kids and that I have something other kids want to learn from me. And that’s pretty cool.

When the conversation shifts to Michael’s goals for the rest of the school year, his advisor pulls her desk close and joins the discussion with mother and son.

Michael: My goal this quarter was to focus and not get distracted because that takes away from my learning and then I don’t know what’s going on in class. I’m also trying not to distract others—like when I shoot trash into the garbage can from across the room.

Advisor: How do you think you’re doing on this goal?

Michael: It’s hard for me to get started on work, and I don’t like to ask questions so sometimes I just sit there.

Advisor: But if you need help, how will you get help?

Michael: Ask.

Mother: Your job is to focus and listen and not miss anything. When you get to college, you're just a seat. And right now you are preparing for college, so be the kid that sits in the front row.

Advisor: Part of this is trying to figure out what works for you. In college I took a lot of notes and tried to figure out afterward in my dorm what just happened in class. Find a strategy that works for you. When I'm walking around the room, grab me when I walk by so it's not in front of everyone—that's why I circulate. Also, I've seen a huge change since winter quarter—you've really worked on being more focused.

Mother: High five! (They slap hands and smile.)

Advisor: In terms of the math—as your advisor, what can I do to help?

Mother: When you do math and science work, do you understand what you're supposed to do? What's not resonating for you?

Michael: It's the subject itself.... I don't get math and I'm not interested in it. With history, I like learning about the past, so it's easy for me.

Advisor: Michael, I've seen you do really well with word problems and scenarios in your science class, but the same sorts of problems in math class seem to stump you. Is there something in the way you perceive the information that is more challenging in one class than the other?

Michael: I don't know how to explain it—I feel like in science I just get it. I can picture it. So I can do the work a little better.

Advisor: It sounds like if we can make a connection to what interests you that might help.

Michael nods his head, yes.

Mother: OK, we'll get it. Even if we have to write up a paragraph for each problem in math so we can put the problem in a little story, so it is in context and seems more relatable. How does that sound?

Michael: Cool.

Advisor: Let's spend time during advisory and before and after school to do that hard stuff at school with someone who can help, and not leave it until you get home. But you have to want to do it. You have to show up. You're in 8th grade so I'm not going to chase you down.

Michael: I can do that.

All three give each other high fives, and the conference ends.

The student-led conference is a practice that incorporates many features designed to encourage learners to grow. Students build skills such as planning and self-reflection, and the clear feedback and value for student work that is expressed motivates students and encourages their growth. The kind of feedback that Michael received, which is focused on effort and the learning process, encourages students to adopt a growth mindset. This can be especially important for students who have received societal or school-delivered messages that they are less capable as a function of race, ethnicity, language background, gender, economic status, learning disability, or other status.

At Gateway, student voice is valued and encouraged. For his ethnic studies class assignment, a high school student described how his actions had a tangible impact. The student wrote a letter to the principal at Gateway about his desire for off-campus lunch to be available to juniors. He describes the process:

The last assignment from my teacher was to write letters to the principal [about] something you want to change in the school. And for me, I was like, OK, so next year I want to have off-campus for lunch really bad. Because back then, only seniors could go off campus. And I was like, that's stupid. Let me go off campus to eat. So I wrote the principal a letter, and he got back to me. He said, "OK, we're going to talk about this. Let's figure out something." And we had other students [come] to talks and meetings with juniors, [with everyone] talking about what they want to change, and when spring break started, we [got to] have off-campus lunch. That's really cool because I feel like they really listen to what we say."

Restorative and Educative Practices

Gateway's behavior supports and practices are educative and restorative rather than punitive and exclusionary. Through restorative practices students receive guidance around effective communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving. Structures in place to support students in developing these essential skills include regular meetings in advisory, "Where Everybody Belongs" (WEB) activities, and restorative circles. The emphasis on restorative justice encourages students to take responsibility for their actions while making amends and proactively contributing to their community. In the rare circumstance when students have to leave the school, a plan is put in place for them to reintegrate or re-enter the school in a thoughtful and inclusive way.

The emphasis on restorative justice encourages students to take responsibility for their actions while making amends and proactively contributing to their community.

The school's use of restorative practices is effective thanks to the initial groundwork established by the school's culture. Before students have to have difficult conversations about behavior or consequences there is a lot of emphasis placed on intentionally creating a learning environment that is organized by agreed-upon norms. Middle school humanities and learning seminar teacher Lucy Hilarides described the 6th-grade induction process that helps to acclimate new students to the Gateway way, "The first whole month in 6th grade we're drilling them, teaching them. We create the class norms together, so these are things that [they've] said are important to [them] in the classroom."

High school Spanish and ethnic studies teacher Diana Sanchez described how she communicates classroom expectations and how she handles situations within her classroom:

From day one at the beginning of the school year I'm clear with the students that I am all about comfort and safe spaces. But if I sense or feel that there's some kind of unsafe action or words being said, I'm going to ask the people involved to

figure out what's happening. If I mistakenly ask you, then I will apologize after, but the integrity of the space is first and foremost for the integrity and safety of the students.

When someone violates one of the norms or needs an intervention because of an interpersonal conflict, the school is ready to intercede to help facilitate restorative conversations. Humanities teacher David Booth described a tense interaction with a student that had gone poorly in the hallway right outside of his classroom.

This student was being noisy in the hallway and I asked her where she was supposed to be, and she got very upset with me. I was surprised at how upset she got, so I told the SSO about it, and they said it sounds like we should get you two together [to talk]. That wouldn't have been possible for me to do that effectively just by myself, especially because I didn't know her, and she had made assumptions about me and so I needed someone else [to help resolve the situation]. It's really important, because I couldn't have had that same conversation without that third person.

We did have that conversation, and she's still mad at me, but it was a step. She's going to be my student next year, and she's already told me that she's not looking forward to that. But what we've done is we've started this process and there'll be more conversations; that we can do this has made things better even though it doesn't seem like it right now.

In other schools this particular encounter, albeit fleeting, might have been written off as an insignificant student problem, perhaps warranting disciplinary action, but not worthy of spending any additional time on. At Gateway, this type of tense, yet brief, interaction signals that more interaction is needed; the way people communicate with one another is fundamental to building a relationship-driven school culture, and taking steps to repair the relationship between teacher and student, regardless of how small, is important.

Restorative meetings that are facilitated by staff bring students together to work out issues. Before the restorative conversation takes place, students reflect on what happened through writing. Then students come together in a conversation facilitated by staff so that they can repair the harm and move on. A student describes the restorative process:

We have restorative meetings with the person we have problems with. After we cool down, we talk about the situation, that this isn't personal. We tell Ms. Khaziran [Assistant Principal] or another staff member what happened. The other person goes and tells them what happened, and they talk it out, make sure we're going to have a restorative meeting in a few days. We get together, talk it out. We solve the problem, which is a really good thing. I really like it because it sets aside the beef, and all the drama, so we don't have to worry about it. Because we're going to be here for the next 4 years, so who wants to carry all the drama, you know what I'm saying?

New to Gateway High School, drama teacher Velina Brown recalled how an incident in her class that required a restorative circle stood out to her as an example of how powerful the school's culture is in helping teachers and students engage in difficult conversations together.

Since this is my first year here, I have a coach and she agreed to come and lead the restorative circle. I wanted to be part of the circle, and it was so helpful to have that support there of someone who has been coaching me. Because she knew some of the students, she could really help everybody understand the importance of what happened and why the incident needed to be addressed and why this could never happen again. Anyway, I just felt really supported having someone be able to come in and do that and also show me how it's done here in Gateway. And it really did take the class to another level as well, in terms of intimacy and people working together.

In another incident, a student was using hurtful language toward another student, who was upset and crying. A staff member had them talk about it from each of their perspectives. The student who was crying explained how he felt. Then the other student went on to explain his behavior that was irritating the other student. As he listened to the student who was hurt, his expression changed, showing remorse as he realized that what he had said was really hurtful. The conversation brought more awareness to light.

Students reported feeling like the process is fair. One student said, "If there is a problem between two kids, they're really trying to see both sides of the story." Students expressed gratitude for the readily available resources and personnel available to support students in working out differences when conflicts arise. One 7th-grade student said, "I know at all schools there are going to be problems, but because [Gateway is] a tight community, if you have a problem with someone, there are people not only helping you but understanding how you're feeling, and it's not necessarily always a teacher, but also other students."

One staff member shared how the restorative process can also be extended for a larger group process into a restorative circle:

We had a bigger whole class restorative circle in October of this year. About five or six students were using homophobic slurs in a joking sense, and a few students were really impacted by their personal preferences and by family members, so our assistant principal at the time helped facilitate a restorative circle, and both the math and science teacher and I were present. We did the first bit around educating people about this and then people were sharing. It was just extremely powerful in bringing to light. Those students that were affected were able to share with the whole cohort why they were so impacted. With those community circles, since we do them so often, the norms and things were already set so we were able to restore a whole class, which was pretty powerful. That was my first experience with something that big scale.

The restorative process is about repairing relationships and restoring community, not excluding. As a student said, "Occasionally if it's a really significant incident, they [the student] may not head back to class that period, but I've definitely been at other schools where teachers are just like, 'I don't want to see this kid again today.' That's not the culture here."

As a result of these restorative meetings, a student observed that “Gateway doesn’t have as many fights or as many problems as other high schools. I really noticed that. I’ve seen two people have an issue, and after going in and talking, next day they’ll be laughing and talking about something. So that’s really cool.”

Student support office

The SSO is fully staffed with the assistant principal, a mental health counselor, and the student support counselor. It serves as the hub for student support and intervention, such as formal and informal counseling from a social worker; restorative conferences; peer mediation; or any general support that a student may need, such as first aid, a snack, a call home to speak with a caring adult, or information on work permits or public transit schedules.⁷¹ The SSO is open to students on a drop-in basis during lunch and before and after school, as well as during class if needed; students can get passes from their teachers or a referral when behavioral issues arise.

Students see the SSO as an invaluable resource. One student said, “It’s not just ‘If you’re in trouble, you go to the SSO.’ You’re getting support in a lot of different ways in that space. That’s where you go if you’re in trouble or you got into a conflict with somebody or even something ... like getting a Band-Aid if you get hurt.” That same student continued:

[Going to the SSO] can be your own choice, whether you feel stressed during a test, or you’re there because you got in trouble. So say if you got into an argument and then you didn’t want to be in class, you can just go to the SSO, take a 5-minute break, and then return to class and get your work done. Or if the class is too noisy, you go down there and do your work there because it’s a lot more quiet.

As one teacher explained, the SSO has a system to “triage those [issues] and try to create a place that isn’t too open that kids are wanting to leave class for it, but ... a place where they can be heard, where they can reset themselves if they’re emotionally dysregulated, and where they have an adult that is going to listen to them and help them work through things.”

Students appreciate the process. One student explained, “I like the form of the warning: You get sent outside of the classroom and talk to the teacher, and then sent to the SSO,” compared to his previous experience, “because in my elementary we didn’t have that, you just get yelled at or something.”

The non-blaming approach makes students feel safe. According to a middle schooler, “There’s somebody who you can talk to, and they won’t judge you for what you did in that situation. Because they understand that this is something that a lot of people do, and we’re young, and just testing out new things.” The SOS walks students through the restorative process of a reflection to write out what happened and then brings together whoever is having a conflict to figure out why it happened and enable them to solve the problem.

Peer Support

“Where Everybody Belongs” (WEB)⁷² is a middle school orientation and transition program designed to create a structure for peer support and mentorship, build connection and community among middle school students, and provide opportunities for leadership and community service.⁷³ When students first arrive in 6th grade at Gateway Middle School, they are welcomed in an orientation

led by 8th-grade WEB leaders who have been selected from among 8th-grade students who apply. Current WEB leaders take pride in being role models for younger students. As one WEB leader said, “We like to do different activities with the 6th-graders as community building, and just life lessons and lessons within middle school. So teaching them study habits and things like that.” WEB leaders feel empowered to help “if they see something that the 6th-graders are having a problem with, or they think they could do something to really help. We have that ability just by going up to Mr. A [the WEB advisor] and talking to him about it.” Also, within WEB class, there are different committees—for example, an academic committee and a service committee. Each committee specializes in designing activities to help the 6th-graders in a particular area.

Younger students learn from and feel supported by their older peers. Students recall, “The WEB leaders would come in and play a game with us. Basically we do a lot of stuff just for social interactions. Kind of like how to deal with things in the real world. We do some games.” Also, “They’ve been in 6th grade, so they understood, and they helped us out.”

Another forum for students to discuss and work out problems is student council. Students can bring up concerns about their school to student council. Along with a teacher, the council finds ways together as a group to solve problems that affect the school. Students think having a student council is important “because we’re able to see how other people feel, and teachers or students can give input.”

All the effort and structures put in place to provide opportunities for connection and support result in empowering students to help themselves and others. A student remarked, “What I’ll bring with me is self-advocation, because I think this school’s really taught me that for myself, and that’ll be really helpful, especially later in life, my other job, or I’m in college, or something like that.” Another student added, “I also feel like it’s not just doing your own part, it’s helping ... others do their part. Not like doing their part for them, but helping people understand what their part is, and how to actually do it. It’s like helping out others instead of just worrying [about] yourself.”

Developing and Modeling Adult Social and Emotional Learning

Importantly, adults develop and model SEL behavior for students in their interactions with students and with colleagues. A teacher explained:

As the adults, we have our community norms that we really hold for each other. Things like assume best intent and expect there’s going to be times of discomfort. We really genuinely hold those for students too, and in general, when there’s a problem or an issue with a student, I think most of the faculty really hold it as either “this student needs information” or “they need to develop a skill.”

Teachers described specific practices they use, with one teacher reporting, “We were teaching the kids BATS [Breathe, Ask what’s the size of the problem, Talk to yourself, and then Speak up], so I’m doing it myself.” Another teacher described how as teachers they also practice community circles: “We talk about issues that are happening every day on the news or we think ahead. ‘OK, this is going to happen, the elections are coming, this is happening, what are we going to do the next day?’”

Teachers are intentional about showing trust, respect, and authenticity in their interactions with students to encourage them to be themselves. Teachers model these behaviors, recognizing that “when you’re in the presence of someone who’s being authentic, it gives everybody else permission

to be that.” Teachers expressed, “We want our students to be able to be who they actually are” and that a foundational part of community is being able to “bring who we really are and still feel safe.” Teachers are emphatic about their unconditional care and commitment to supporting students.

As needed, teachers also seek out support for restorative approaches when problems arise. A teacher referred to holding a restorative circle during her first year at Gateway to address a minor incident that occurred in her class. She asked her peer teaching coach to come in and lead the restorative circle, so that she could, herself, be part of the circle. The teacher recalled, “It was so helpful to have that support there of someone who has been coaching me. She could see who I’d been talking about for months, and really [helped] everybody understand the importance of what happened and why this needs to be addressed.”

As a result of the deliberate effort of teachers and other staff, students feel comfortable talking about their concerns and they feel that teachers genuinely care about them. A student remarked:

If I feel uncomfortable about something, or if I don’t like the way something is going, I feel really comfortable telling my teacher and being like, alright, I don’t want to do this anymore. Or can I take a step back and do something else? Or just anything that I have a problem with, I feel really comfortable telling them, because they’ve created that relationship with you where they’re like, if you need anything, you can talk to me; I’m not just your teacher, I’m also here to help you in everything.

According to one student, teachers “invite you in and they don’t judge you. And they want to know what you’re going through, and how they can solve it and help you out during the situation, and they really ask you questions to make sure that you’re OK, and [that] you’re doing fine.” Teachers make time for their students, and students feel connected. They know there is someone who has their back, as one student said, “so you just don’t feel like you’re alone.” Another student added, “There’s always going to be one teacher. You know what I’m saying? They’ll sit down and talk with you. I really appreciate that a lot.”

A System of Supports in Service of Student Learning

The leadership team, consisting of the principal, assistant principal, director of the Learning Center, director of the student support office, college counselor, and lead content area and grade-level teachers, meets weekly. The following vignette offers a glimpse into a typical Gateway High School leadership team meeting, illustrating how the team focuses on students' and teachers' needs with a strong focus on equity and continuous improvement.

Gateway High School Leadership Team Meeting

On a Thursday morning in early May, all six members of the leadership team huddle around the school's conference table adjacent to the principal's office. The running agenda for leadership meetings is housed on a shared Google Doc in which team members can add agenda items, questions, updates, and other notes in advance of the meeting. Each agenda item has its own stated objective or guiding question as a guide and process (e.g., clarify, provide feedback, discuss, share, reflect) by which participants will engage in collaboration.

Before getting started, there is light-hearted conversation about how delicious the morning's snacks are as oversize butter croissants and scones are passed around; one lead teacher jokes that the school should be getting a discount for the number of pastries purchased by their faculty in any given year.

The facilitator launches the meeting with a community builder, posing the following sentence starter to the group: "The best way to get through the end of the school year is...." Each person shares aloud what they most enjoy: watching basketball with their daughter; biking to and from school because it's light earlier and later in the day; having a glass of wine and listening to music; doing summer activities, such as swimming or hiking, now.

Next on the agenda is a review of the norms. Participants take turns reading the norms aloud as a reminder of how they've agreed to interact as a team:

- Consider who's talking (equitable share time)
- Consider how we allow space for others (providing pause time)
- Consider a curiosity stance (tell me more, building off ideas)
- Consider the experience of others (how does our own identity shape who we are, and how might this differ from the views of others?)

After an update on the school's search for a new principal is shared (then-principal Michael Fuller was returning to the classroom after 15 years in leadership at the school), Jeff Sprague, lead humanities teacher, shares a draft of a PowerPoint he wants to use with staff during the next professional development meeting he is facilitating on the topic of noncognitive/SEL skills that they are wanting to incorporate more explicitly into content area instruction. He begins by framing the problem of practice he's encountered and asks his colleagues how they can best offer him feedback. After his presentation, members of the leadership team (LT) offer the following types of probing questions and feedback:

- What if you have them do a Think-Pair-Share for the issues of privilege and equity?
- On slide four you write "Best Means"—what do you mean by that?

- What if you ask them to engage in a little metacognition and start with “think about mistakes you’ve made...”?
- I’m not sure how much time our staff need to spend talking about the “why” of noncognitive skills—I think they already see the value.
- The real question here is about building staff capacity to incorporate new strategies, so how can we avoid the trap of them potentially being in debate mode because their defenses might be up?
- What if we anticipate some of the questions that group facilitators might have to field and potential discussion questions to help organize the discussion preemptively?

After the feedback discussion, Jeff types up a list of action steps he will take and who in the group will help provide additional thought partnership as he continues to tweak his presentation.

As mentioned, the school is ramping up to take a more intentional focus on the teaching of noncognitive, social-emotional skills and competencies, and one way for the leadership team to be ready to lead the staff through this process is by building their own capacity and working through many of the nuances, challenges, and benefits of this schoolwide focus. The leadership team spends the remaining meeting time discussing the big takeaways from three readings: *The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance*,⁷⁴ “How Metacognition Boosts Learning,”⁷⁵ and “Improving Adolescents’ Social and Emotional Lives Must Go Beyond Teaching Them Skills.”⁷⁶ The LT engages in a lively discussion, with ideas, thoughts, and questions bouncing around between members:

- I’m left feeling like we have to teach the learning strategies explicitly.
- Yeah, it’s about building mindsets; as teachers, we could misinterpret students not caring for not having skills.
- We need to attend to what’s happening below the surface versus spending all our time looking at behaviors; if we do that, we end up banging our heads up against a wall.
- I think there’s got to be a clear connection for teachers to the question of “where does this fit and how do I teach it.” If we can make clear that this is going to impact behavior management, which I spend a lot of time on, it makes it worth it.
- Certain aspects of the research are not about teaching a skill but about creating an engaging learning environment.
- I appreciated the categories to conceptualize certain things in the first article.
- I was thinking about student and adult identity and equity and privilege that are present here as well.
- The metacognitive article is about the “why” and how the questions we ask students can help develop these skills.
- If the academic mindsets aren’t there, then you can’t teach the social skills or the content, which is an important point for me.
- Our biases often come up when we assume students don’t care—that comes up a lot in our counseling sessions.
- Students checking out can lead to behavior issues and not learning.

To wrap up the discussion of the articles, the facilitator poses the following question: “Where do we want teachers to be by the end of the next school year?” Discussion ensues:

- I think we’re comfortable with being in experimentation mode, where they are trying new ideas for the coming year.
- We need to define the overall objective for the faculty.

- That could include a small list of strategies they want to experiment with re: non-cog next year.
- Understanding of what we are talking about when talking about non-cog—establishing a common understanding.
- Having a common purpose—why this matters.
- Changing classroom environments to be more engaging.
- Continue our race, bias, and equity work—can we have people do some summer work to dig into these issues further? Let’s find a reading that overlaps.
- Clearly articulate and understand how much non-cog fits into the equity work. We also need to define what we as an LT need to muddle through moving forward to reduce teacher anxiety.

As the meeting concludes, based on the ideas generated, members of the LT collaboratively build the next meeting’s agenda, with different members volunteering to take on different tasks and roles.

Because students’ needs vary, and they arrive at school with a range of prior experiences and current challenges, schools are in a prime position to provide a host of additional services to support students in meeting the academic expectations set forth. A key aspect of creating a supportive environment is a shared developmental framework among all the adults in the school, coupled with procedures for ensuring that students receive additional help for social, emotional, or academic needs when they arise, without costly and elaborate labeling procedures standing in the way. Multi-tiered systems of support include multidisciplinary student support teams comprising on-site pupil services personnel (e.g., social workers, school psychologists, counselors, and nurses) who are skilled in culturally competent academic and behavioral assessment, care coordination, and family engagement with support teams.

While there can be many tiers, most systems include three tiers.⁷⁷ The first tier is universal—everyone experiences it. Ideally, it uses teaching strategies grounded in universal designs for learning that are broadly successful with children who learn in different ways, as well as positive behavioral support strategies that are culturally and linguistically responsive.⁷⁸ Tier 2 services and supports address the needs of students who are at some elevated level of risk or who need some additional support in particular areas. The risk may be demonstrated by behavior (e.g., number of absences) or may be due to the student having experienced a known risk factor (e.g., the loss of a parent). These could include academic supports (e.g., Reading Recovery, math tutoring, or extended learning time) or family outreach, counseling, and behavioral supports. Tier 3 services involve intensive interventions for students who are at particularly high levels of risk or whose needs are not sufficiently met by tier 2 interventions. Tier 3 services might include wraparound services and effective special education.⁷⁹

Instructional Supports and Interventions

At Gateway, there is a focus on providing universal tier 1 interventions as a way of staving off potential challenges from the outset. Sam Kary, middle school humanities teacher, described the way in which lessons are designed and rolled out as an example of the intentionality with which teachers approach their instruction:

We’ve always been in part project-based, and I think the way that the curriculum has evolved over the last 5 years that I’ve been here we’ve focused on universal lesson design and treating every assignment first through the lens of looking at barriers and entry points and trying to figure out how to put tier 1 supports in so that a lesson or a project is accessible for the majority of students prior to rolling that project out. That, I think, goes hand in hand with some of the stuff about behavioral issues and social

dynamics and stuff that sometimes start to play out if students feel frustrated. We're trying to mitigate that by opening up an assignment and making it as accessible as possible. Then also having a plan about what we know is going to be challenging by pre-thinking through those barriers and how we're going to address them.

Staff and faculty reported that there is a frequency of response to intervention (RTI) conversations about how to incorporate different strategies to address the different tiers of intervention. Because the school uses a full inclusion model, there are a host of challenges that come with offering rich and relevant instruction for truly heterogeneous classes. As the school's population continues to evolve, growing numbers of students are enrolling with relatively low literacy skills. General education teachers are of the mindset that "all of the kids are all of my kids," and no kids are "passed off" to the learning specialists or marginalized because of challenges that they have when they enter the school. Middle school teacher Kirsty Gipson explained:

We do a huge amount to meet tier 1 and tier 2. It's seamless with the running of our classroom. I think if you go into any classroom, you're going to see things that might in other settings be described as extra support or more targeted support. But it's just part of the mix of our classroom, because we think about it when we're planning, and we deliver it in that way. It's a constant challenge.

Another feature of Gateway's approach to supporting student learning is through involving students in planning their own IEP meetings. Not only do students come to their own IEP meetings, but they meet with their learning specialists and talk about what their IEP means for them. By the time they get to 8th grade, most kids are proficient in understanding themselves as learners, and they leave the school knowing what they need and how to advocate for themselves.

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Starting in 6th grade, learning specialist Maribel Fernandez talks directly with students, offering feedback about what she and other teachers have noticed in the classroom. She begins to work with students to clarify and refine their own learning goals and come up with ideas and strategies that they can work on together, along with a plan for meeting their own goals. According to middle school math and science teacher Therese Arsenault, the process of involving a student in his or her own learning in this very transparent and intentional way is "empowering."

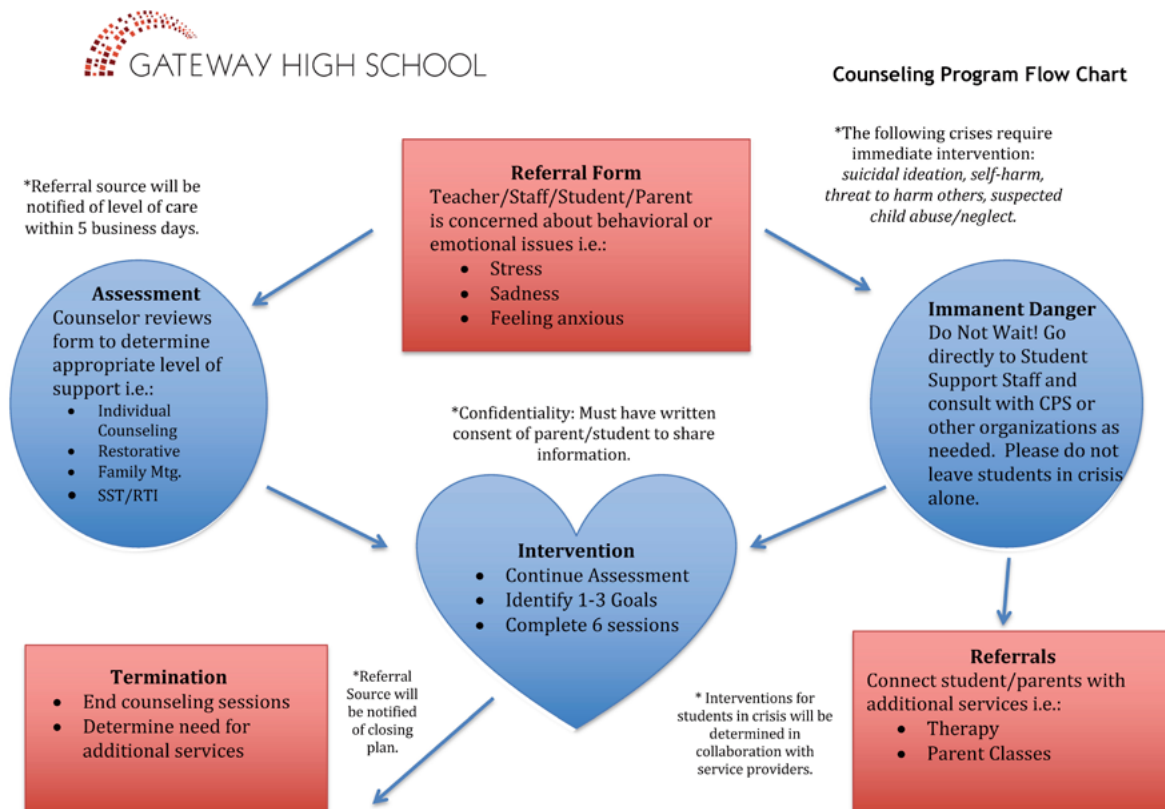
In addition to integrated strategies in the general education classrooms, Gateway also offers a robust suite of learning seminar courses and reading intervention classes. The learning seminar courses are designed to help students learn how to learn, enabling them to identify different behaviors, mindsets, or habits that undermine learning and to receive feedback on the implementation of various strategies that help them address those barriers. The reading intervention classes are specifically designed to meet students where they are with regard to their literacy levels. There are some classes that are for students who struggle with decoding and other classes that are for students who need support with reading comprehension. There are typically no more than three or four students in each class, which further adds to the intimacy and safety afforded to these adolescents who are in the process of improving their reading proficiency.

Partnerships With Communities and Health Service Providers

A number of approaches have emerged to creating integrated student services (ISS), also called wraparound services, which link schools to a range of academic, health, and social services. ISS programs address the reality that children whose families are struggling with poverty—and the housing, health, and safety concerns that often go with it—cannot learn most effectively unless their nonacademic needs are also met. The goal is to remove barriers to school success by connecting students and families to service providers in the community or bringing those services into the school.

A key feature of the schools' response to student needs is seen in the robust mental health and counseling support available to students. Either by staff or parent referral, or by student request, students can speak with an on-site licensed marriage and family therapist to seek help for urgent crises that arise, such as suicidal ideation or in response to the death of a family member, or for more chronic needs, such as anxiety, depression, or stress (see Figure 3). The clinician, who is a full-time member of the Gateway staff, can assess the level of care needed; provide direct counseling services at the school; and coordinate services with outside providers through private insurance or through Medi-Cal, if deemed necessary.

Figure 3
Counseling Program Flow Chart



Source: Gateway Counseling Office.

Gateway also has strong partnerships with a host of different community organizations that provide a range of services to students both on and off campus, including job training and workforce preparation, support for college matriculation and graduation for first-generation college students, and mentoring programs for at-risk youth. Because Gateway is a San Francisco Unified School District charter school, Gateway students with IEPs can take advantage of the state's WorkAbility program. Designed especially for special education students ages 14–22 who wish to gain experience in the working world, WorkAbility's mission is "to promote the involvement of students, families, educators, employers, and other agencies in planning and implementing an array of services that will culminate in successful student transition to employment, lifelong learning, and quality of life."⁸⁰

In conjunction with Jewish Vocational Services (JVS), Gateway students can become interns during the school year and/or over the summer to gain job experience and skills. Other students participate in the Mayor's Youth Employment and Education Program (MYEEP), which provides job-readiness training, academic support, internships, and personal development training for youth.⁸¹ Some Gateway students also participate in the College Track program,⁸² which seeks to empower students from various underserved neighborhoods in San Francisco to graduate from a 4-year college.

Through a partnership with the YMCA Urban Services Bureau⁸³ in San Francisco, Gateway students and families who need health, mental health, and social services can receive a range of supports on and off campus. Some of the interventions available include family and youth counseling, crisis intervention, substance abuse prevention programs, and parent education and support programs. Gateway also has a partnership with the Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS) organization, which is a service provider offering students a range of comprehensive behavioral, mental health, vocational, and education services.⁸⁴ Finally, through a program specifically designed for students receiving special education services, Gateway learning specialists coordinate with Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) to refer students for supports when their emotional and behavioral needs impede their participation in special education services. ERMHS services can be provided on campus or in students' homes or community and become documented in students' IEPs, where progress is regularly monitored and services are adjusted where needed.

How the Work Gets Done: Collaborative Work Environment for Faculty and Staff

Gateway has a high-functioning team structure in place, operating at multiple levels in which all participants engage in many of the same collaborative practices that students are expected to employ: establish group norms, use distinct roles (such as timekeeper, notetaker, visualizer, facilitator, snack provider, etc.) that rotate each week, and set clear agendas with articulated outcomes and next steps. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4
Common Practices for Team Collaboration



Common Practices for Team Collaboration

Common Practices

Here are a few practices that we use within our collaborative teams to support effective, equitable and efficient teaming.

Practice:	Examples:
Establish norms as a team and check-in as a team about your norms	<p><i>Norms to consider for planning:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timeliness and productivity (you’re producing materials together) ▪ Equitable participation norms ▪ Strengths-based teaming: How can you respect and use each other’s strengths/approaches and support each other with challenges? <p><i>Process check-ins:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do end-of-meeting debriefs ▪ “From the Balcony” or “Process checker” role (observes process)
Use roles to make meetings and collaboration more effective	<p><i>Example roles:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ rotating facilitator (keeps team focused and ensures that tasks are accomplished) ▪ note-taker (ensures that key ideas, plans and action items are documented) ▪ time-keeper (monitors time for each agenda item) ▪ “From the Balcony” or “Process checker” role (observes process, participation and norms)
Set clear agendas with goals and time limits	<p>Establishing routines is helpful</p> <p><i>Example team planning meeting agenda:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Check-in / review agenda and goals for the meeting (and prioritize agenda items) ▪ Quick reflection on lessons and student learning from previous week ▪ Set learning goals for the coming week ▪ Develop weekly/daily plans (lesson plans/agendas, assessments, etc.) ▪ Review action items and assign responsibilities (who’s doing what)
Keeping records and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keep plans on GoogleDocs (and share the document with everyone who is involved) ▪ Establish a consistent note-taking structure or template (e.g. agenda item, discussion notes, action, who is responsible)
Set and keep sacred a weekly planning time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ While “on the fly” planning and collaboration happens all of the time, a weekly time is essential to be proactively plan and reflect ▪ We’ll set times during Faculty Week, to avoid schedule conflicts
Be proactive about co-teaching, and Learning Specialist and General Education Teacher teaming	<p>We schedule common preps to support Learning Specialist-General Education teaming, so discuss this collaboration process as a team. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When is best time to collaborate on planning? ▪ What are the specialist’s and para’s roles in planning and instruction? How can they be most effective within the planning/teaching team? ▪ How can we team to create opportunities for differentiation?
Other helpful practices based on our experience?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seek to find connections between our different teams/goals

Source: Gateway Public Schools. (n.d.). Practices for team collaboration. <https://gatewayimpact.org/student-agency/resources/practices-team-collaboration> (accessed 03/16/20).

Meetings at Gateway are considered sacred. Middle school principal Aaron Watson explained that both the meeting time and the teams themselves are “respected,” so “people come on time, they aren’t on their phones and doing other stuff. Sometimes [meetings] may be short, but we very rarely miss one. And I think that’s a part of the culture of this school.” Organizing the adults into teams is a key feature of the way Gateway supports its staff to continue the hard work that

Grade-level teams of teachers and learning specialists have the opportunity to collaboratively plan together, both within their subject area and across curriculum areas.

is expected. While students are involved in co-curricular classes, grade-level teams of teachers and learning specialists have the opportunity to collaboratively plan together, both within their subject area and across curriculum areas. Finally, early dismissal at 2 p.m. on Wednesdays allows for whole-school professional development and collaboration. All curricular planning teams have common planning time, which amounts to more than 4 hours per week.

Gateway has intentionally built structures that reinforce the importance of shared decision-making, collaborative planning, and teamwork focused on shared values and goals. At Gateway, teachers collaborate in three kinds of teams: (1) grade-level teams in which teachers of a particular grade, regardless of content area, meet to discuss various topics and share strategies; (2) content area teams in which teachers can vertically plan within a content area (e.g., the entire math department); and (3) smaller, more informal content teams (e.g., the two 9th-grade humanities teachers might spend time collaborating to plan shared unit and lesson plans to ensure continuity for an entire grade within a particular subject area). A middle school teacher explained that the collaborative planning time allows for the teaching staff to get on the same page and “make sure that within the subject area we’re doing the same things and expecting the same things from kids. And for the grade-level teams, it’s the same: that what we’re expecting from kids and how we’re supporting kids is consistent.”

There is also a culture of continuous improvement that draws on a wide variety of resources. School leaders dedicate themselves to reviewing both numeric and anecdotal data on student achievement, student experience, and teacher experience to determine “what it tells us about what’s working and what isn’t and how that relates to our overall goals and our mission,” explained Executive Director Sharon Olken.

Instructors and other staff schedule regular meeting times and planning sessions among their own teams to reflect on how their everyday work is meeting the needs of all students. These planning meetings focus on ensuring that each Gateway student is receiving an effective education that includes both academic and social and emotional learning. Content teams might meet to examine ways in which their rubrics, tasks, or instructional methods might be enhanced,⁸⁵ while student support staff might look at logs of how often students come into a support office to receive emotional support. At every level of Gateway’s structure, colleagues come together to share data and anecdotes that will help them think intentionally about the kind of experiences students are exposed to within the schools’ domain.

Middle and high school leadership teams place a great emphasis on community-building between the adults in the building. Gateway Middle School Student Support Coordinator Steve Juarez directly links relationship-building among adults to the school's focus on ensuring all students have positive relationships with adults:

As far as the school culture in terms of supporting students, I think it starts with our leadership team here and the culture that's established here with teachers and staff. I think you just observe. We start out with community circle; we start out with shout-outs. We always start out with positives, and actually before we even dive into some of these topics that invite potential[ly] uncomfortable conversations, we go over our norms, and so I think these kinds of things that may be easy for us to take for granted kind of establishes [a] culture of sifting through different discourses.

In other words, the practices and norms that staff commit to among themselves reflect the kinds of collaborative work and community-building that they bring to their students.

Cassandra Dougherty, Director of the Learning Center at Gateway Middle School, articulated that the positive work culture among the staff is something “that really sets Gateway apart from other schools.” Having been a district-based coach for a few years before coming to Gateway, Dougherty has been in a lot of different schools and considers them important points of comparison. The power of the staff culture is also important, in that the positivity permeates all the ways in which staff work together and how students perceive their teachers. Dougherty explained that “the way we model for kids how to have positive relationships with people, even people who are very different from you, is critical; even people who maybe are not your friends. We show students what it looks like to have meaningful collaboration, and be friendly, and be welcoming, and be inviting. It feels like people want to be here.”

Learning specialist Fernandez explained that Gateway is the first school where as a new teacher she could “feel the support,” and, in experiencing that, she recognized the importance of translating that support to students, who notice how adults interact and collaborate. Drama teacher Velina Brown echoed this sentiment, saying that at Gateway, “The faculty and staff are very supportive of each other, and everybody seems passionate about teaching and about making a difference in the lives of the students.” Greg Grossman asserted that in his 12 years as a humanities teacher at Gateway, “One thing that's very nice [is that] it's a very supportive administration, but also a very supportive faculty.” The support that teachers refer to stems from a shared sense of community that is jointly enacted among the faculty and staff on a daily basis.

In our interviews, teachers reflected on times when they had to navigate challenging interactions with students and how their colleagues stepped in to either coach the teacher privately or actually mediate a conversation between the teacher and student. Again, the keen focus on relationships does not mean that conflict will not arise; however, when it does arise, there are avenues through which teachers and staff can rely upon one another to help. This interdependence and cooperation are part of the culture of the school, and there is an understanding that repairing strained relationships is as important for maintaining a positive culture as anything else they do as a staff.

High school learning specialist Deidre Durling described how different it is working at Gateway, where the special education team, or learning specialists, are fully integrated into the teaching faculty and are considered integral to all students' success—those with IEPs and those without.

I've worked in a couple of different high schools all over the country [but] never worked in a school like this, where teachers are actually willing to let us do the work that we do so easily. So, it's not a lot of pushback about teaching styles not matching. People are so open because, I think, if you get hired here, it's under the assumption that you're willing to work under this philosophy—that "We're going to do things differently." And it's so collaborative, so every teacher I've worked with has been open to suggestions and collaborating and planning together. And that's so refreshing and different than any school I've worked at before.

In many ways, the kinds of activities that Gateway staff engage in mirror the discussions that teachers have with their students about the importance of working with a diverse group of people. Teachers and administrators thus have the space in their own professional lives to work on topics they wish to ingrain in their students' habits of mind.

Content-level and grade-level teams

The scene described in "High School Math Team Meeting" illustrates how the math department at Gateway High School works together in their team. In this example, one teacher has designed a final assessment problem for her class, has brought the problem to her colleagues to get feedback on the validity of the culminating task, and is seeking input on whether the task is indicative of the type of critical thinking and content knowledge she is hoping to assess.

High School Math Team Meeting

On a Friday morning, four math teachers sit around a crescent-shaped table. It is silent in the room: The teachers are each reading and annotating an article titled "What Isn't Mathematical Modeling?" which discusses how to address Common Core Math Practice 4 ("model with mathematics") in the classroom. When they are finished reading, they begin to debrief:

"What sticks out to me, and this is probably the most challenging, is the problem has to be as close as the students would encounter it in the world," one of the teachers begins. "It can't be contrived."

Others concur: "I do think a lot about beginning with the mathematics and then moving to the real world, having them apply it."

Another teacher adds another wrinkle to the dilemma of realistic mathematical modeling: the need to find a question that reflects both something that could happen in the real world and also something that students are likely to encounter. She refers to one of the example questions: "Like this question; you're making a garden that's 60 square feet. I don't know anyone who thinks that way. Maybe farmers do."

Another teacher proposes a way to frame the design of compelling questions that use modeling: "If you're a student, what would you be really curious about solving?"

“You have to provide a situation that’s interesting enough so that students are going to want to figure something out about it,” adds the teacher to the right. “Then they actually think about the question, with some steering.”

With this framework in mind, the group transitions to discussing a proposed question they are co-designing for students’ end-of-unit assessment. The question gives certain information about the height and rotational speed of a Ferris wheel, and asks students to make inferences and judgments based on the information provided. Before discussing the question, each of the teachers sits with it for a few minutes to approach it as a student would. They then begin to offer constructive feedback to the designer:

“Maybe this is part of it, but I don’t see a question. I see “justify your solution,” but what are you supposed to be justifying? Maybe number 1 is we’re supposed to label as many times and distances as we can?”

The algebra teacher who designed the question responds: “Yup, I’ll change that. That would be helpful.”

“What about this task allows us to assess students’ ability to find important information?” another teacher interjects. They all begin to discuss which parts of the question ask for different levels of understanding. “There’s a lot of levels,” a teacher adds, “and probably everyone can do something.”

Another cautions, “Before we go to editing it and changing it, what about its current form do we think gets at our goal for students?”

A teacher comments, “There are different ways to interpret this. One of our goals has sometimes been for kids to come up with a question, and/or look for different entry points. I still feel like where you get on the Ferris wheel to ride it is still not known, so the answer can be completely different depending on how you interpret that.”

“I did put a plaque on; this is where you get on,” the question designer clarifies.

Group members amiably but assertively offers opinions on this: “I disagree. It does not say she gets on at the plaque. Think about this, guys. If you read a plaque on the ground, you still have to go upstairs to get on the platform.... The plaque is probably on the ground, so who’s to say the stairs don’t take you higher?”

“If they interpret it that way, then they just have to defend it,” another teacher offers.

Yet another pushes back, expanding the conversation to include differences between this question and questions that older students may see in higher-level math classes: “I say this because when you teach trig, so many times you think about something off the unit circle, where you start at a horizontal angle.”

The conversation shifts to a discussion of how much information—data points and units—the worksheet could include, and what kinds of student understanding that inclusion decision could assess.

“I didn’t put units on the numbers. I’m curious to hear what people think about that.”

“I think there should be units,” one teacher answers, though another says, “I was saying it was an intentional choice to not put that. We want to make sure that students know that they are answering in meters, not seconds.”

After further deliberation and in-depth consideration of all parts of the proposed question, the meeting leader suggests transitioning to planning activities that will prepare students to answer this question on their final test. “If people have final thoughts, that’s awesome, but I’d love to move on to figure out how we can get kids there. We can take time to brainstorm on what are some tasks we can do that get kids to this point.” She asks an algebra teacher who will be preparing students for the exam what kind of planning would be most helpful in the remaining meeting time.

“Maybe if we can come up with something concrete,” the algebra teacher answers.

“All right, so y’all are going to need computers,” the meeting leader announces. “There’s a link in the agenda if you want it.”

Everyone gets out their computer, goes to a website, watches a video, and completes a task. The video asks students to map out the position of a man in relation to a cameraperson circling around him.

The teacher who asked for the group’s assistance in designing concrete tasks to prepare students for the Ferris wheel question opens up the discussion: “How do we increase the number of points where students are going to be in conversation about this, making sense of it? Where do we pause to sense-make? What other tools will help kids make sense?” She points to question #5 on the online activity: “I can see some students knowing that, and some students without this image on the slide not being able to do that.”

One teacher asks her if she wants to give kids hints.

“Not necessarily hints, but how can I make sure kids are noticing the thing I want them to notice?” She responds. “If I ask, why is the graph like this? Some kids are going to be like ohh! And some kids are going to be like, why is it like that? Why isn’t it a circle?”

The group ponders different ways of helping students understand the setup of the question. Some suggest having students make a physical rendition of the problem instead of drawing a diagram.

“That makes me think about the different representations,” another teacher adds. “We can introduce a physical representation, and how can we get to a drawn representation as well. If we want them to get practice drawing this stuff.... What if you ask the question, ‘If I go twice as fast, what about my diagram changes and what about it stays the same?’ I wonder if that will help with the graph of the piece.”

The algebra teacher facilitating this discussion brings the conversation back to its relationship to the Ferris wheel test question: “I’m thinking about how this ties to the Ferris wheel. In the Ferris wheel we were given information that would help us visualize the term, and here we’re given a visual. Maybe we could ask students what information they would need to graph this.”

“Is it too scaffolded to do a screenshot of the cameraperson when he’s far away and ask, ‘How far is he from the camera?’” another teacher asks.

The math department lead offers a suggestion to close out the meeting: “I would ask students to make an initial sketch, [and] say, ‘Here’s a screenshot of this person, now how do you need to revise your sketch?’”

According to teachers, teaching at Gateway is simultaneously a demanding and remarkably satisfying experience. Across the board, teachers, support staff, and leadership said that being part of a collegial, professional, fun-loving, and dedicated staff is what keeps them coming back year after year. This is a group of educators who appear to enjoy one another, their work, and the ways their efforts translate into noteworthy outcomes for the students about whom they all care deeply.

Teacher voice, shared decision-making, and faculty hiring

The maintenance of Gateway’s climate and culture can be partially attributed to a faculty and staff roster that is remarkably stable; teachers tend to stay and move up to leadership positions, and new staff are attracted to the schools because of Gateway’s reputation for having a supportive and collegial work environment.⁸⁶ Because of the tight-knit nature of the schools’ staff, the hiring process is an important means by which to filter candidates for both skill and culture-fit.

New teachers join two teams—a grade-level team and a content area team. As such, it is important that the members of each team are able to meet and interact with the candidates with whom they will potentially be spending significant time within various contexts. Humanities teacher Sam Kary described the hiring process as a “collective process of deciding as a team whether or not we think that the person best fits with our values and our model of collaboration and instruction, as opposed to just the principal making the decision.” Teachers agreed that this approach “helps with the continuity and in maintaining a certain culture as a staff.”

As part of the hiring process, candidates are asked to respond to questions that cover a range of topics—from teacher collaboration and leadership, to addressing learning differences, to supporting students’ social-emotional development. For example:

- In learning seminar, we address reading skills and noncognitive habits of being a student (self-awareness, growth mindset, executive functioning, etc.). Do you have any experience of direct instruction in these areas? How do you embed these habits of mind and skills into your teaching?
- Can you give some examples of how you assess student learning in your classes? How do you use this information and other student learning data to inform your teaching?
- How do you differentiate instruction to meet all students’ learning needs? Please describe an example from your classroom.
- How do you create a classroom culture of excitement about learning and high expectations for all students?
- Please describe one of your experiences working on a collaborative team (preferably a teaching team).
- This will be a small school in which we will all be leaders. What are your strengths as a leader?
- How do you build relationships with families?

Michael Fuller, former Gateway High School Principal and teaching veteran of 14 years, explained that often they are lucky enough to be able to hire teachers who already have many of the skills and mindsets they are looking for. Nevertheless, new faculty go through a specific onboarding process, regardless of their prior experience. This new teacher and staff induction begins with a series of summer readings and professional development sessions aimed at communicating some of

Gateway's core values and modes of being. Then, during the school year, each new Gateway teacher has a coach who helps them acculturate to the school, receive feedback, and reflect on their mastery of the California Standards for the Teaching Profession.⁸⁷

Teacher voice is valued not only in the hiring process but also in other contexts at Gateway, which facilitates a sense of community and overarching respect. Learning Center Director Cassandra Dougherty explained, "There's serious value put into getting input from all stakeholders in the building.... We're constantly asking questions of our faculty and listening really closely to their answers." Fostering trusting relationships depends on giving all stakeholders a voice in a decision-making process and in seeking out perspectives from a diverse group of community members. Dougherty's description of the way in which school leadership teams at Gateway check in with their faculty mirrors Assistant Principal Schoolcraft's comment that staff "talk through situations with students all day." On every level, from leadership teams down to student-teacher interaction, Gateway staff make a conscious effort to include everyone in the building in the school community.

Another avenue through which myriad voices are heard and valued is the local school site council and through the school board's teacher representatives. Science teacher Mary Plant-Thomas described the importance of the distributed leadership approach at the school, in which teacher voices are heard and welcomed with regard to school-based decision-making and overall governance.

One thing that's important to me in terms of my position here [is that] I'm also our faculty representative to the board.... I feel like I'm able to [influence the] broader spectrum of the school. And I think even before I was on the board, I still felt that way, and that felt really important to me because I was in a position where if something didn't feel right, [I didn't] just have to sit with it forever. Change can happen, and it can happen in terms of education relatively fast.

That's really important professionally for me, but [it also] trickles down to students.... If something's not feeling right on the day-to-day with students, it actually is in our control as teachers to make a change about it, whereas I think in a lot of situations those decisions happen very top-down. But I feel like teachers are really valued here, and our voices are really valued, and so we can be heard if there's an issue.

Professional development

Across the board, teachers we spoke with characterized Gateway as a school that "supports the whole student and the whole teacher as well." Middle school humanities teacher Taylor Pennewell began at Gateway as a student teacher and sought out a full-time position at the school once she obtained her credential because she had seen and experienced the school's commitment to continual improvement:

I knew I wanted to work at Gateway because I knew that I was going to be trained to be the best teacher that I could be. Even years into my career, that training would never stop, and so I think when we think about how [to] support students with note-taking and content strategies, whatever, it starts by actually training the teachers on how to teach and what to look for.... The school is really conscious about building that development into a teacher's experience here.

Teachers recognize the support they receive in their own professional development from administrators. Every new teacher, regardless of experience, gets a coach in their first year at the school to help them acculturate to the environment and develop their practice in tune with school values and pedagogical beliefs.⁸⁸ The drive to continuously improve school structures extends to an individual level, with every teacher supported in their improvement efforts.

Professional development at Gateway is generally implemented in a thematic and conceptual manner: There are one or two focus strands for the year upon which each professional development meeting will build during each successive meeting. Much in the same way that a unit plan, and the sequential lessons within, is organized by an overarching essential question and a clearly stated set of learning outcomes, Gateway’s professional development is directly related to an identified need and is universally applicable to the entire staff. Not surprisingly, because the school values the input and leadership of its faculty, there are many times when teachers join leadership to plan and facilitate the professional learning of their colleagues. Examples of some of the professional development topics include incorporating language of restorative justice into the way teachers respond to students, building relational trust, unpacking the process of learning standards, and revamping the grading system.

A professional development long-term planning template (see Appendix B) provides a structure for school leaders to thoughtfully sequence yearlong professional development for their teachers. It identifies an instructional problem of practice based on data and observations, along with the staff capacity needed to address the problem. It then identifies professional development plans for the fall and spring semesters. In addition to various workshops or specific activities, the plans list the supports that will occur between sessions (e.g., coaching, professional learning community time, grade-level meetings, and/or planning time) and what will be accomplished there, along with data that will be collected to determine the progress being made. Gateway leadership uses this template to determine the scope and sequence of teacher learning over the course of the year, recognizing that the steps taken to achieve these goals might change flexibly in response to teacher learning.⁸⁹

Change at Gateway comes from two directions—it is supported and encouraged by the schools’ leadership teams, and it is also carried out by teachers through their everyday planning and implementation work. Each year, the leadership teams at both schools meet to consider, as Dougherty explained, “Who is in our building, both teachers and students, and what does everybody need right now?” This kind of flexible planning allows school administrators to address needs as they arise, while setting the tone for the focus of both schools’ individual and collective improvement efforts over a year. The leadership team is not alone in thinking about how to improve the student experience and school operations. Teachers also engage in this reflective work. “It takes work to understand how to support kids with their habits, so it’s something that I feel like we intentionally spend a good amount of time on,” commented middle school teacher Lucy Hilarides.

Change at Gateway comes from two directions—it is supported and encouraged by the schools’ leadership teams, and it is also carried out by teachers through their everyday planning and implementation work.

As Kirsty Gipson, another middle school teacher, explained:

Whenever we're designing or planning professional development [PD], we always think about who can people work with and what is the most effective way to share this? [In] this afternoon's PD, there's an opportunity for grade-level teams to get together. We're always trying to do tangible work in those [PD sessions], as well as giving theory and readings and data.

This “tangible work” inherent in Gateway’s approach to PD is really about facilitating adult learning, so that the instructional strategies explored in the PD meetings are useful for teachers in classrooms and with students. In this way, learning is happening on two levels: in the modeling of instructional practice and in the delivery of content. Examples of strategies include mix and mingles, inner-outer circle discussions, pair-shares, table talks, and more. Often, facilitators ask teachers to try out a strategy and share about it at the next meeting. For all PD, there is an overarching emphasis on giving faculty more and different time to talk to and collaborate with one another.

In the 2017–18 academic year, teachers had a strand of PD dedicated to SEL. Teachers see SEL as embedded in everything that happens at the school. For example, teachers might look at collaboration, which is one element of the Process of Learning (POL). As one teacher shared:

We have expanded [POL] into a more student-friendly guide on what great collaboration looks like. We will meaningfully bring that into the work we're doing on exhibition now. We'll look at that rubric and we'll talk about what we're looking for and what those skills are and how [students] can meet them. That would be one example, that we'll take one element of it and really focus on it and very explicitly teach those skills to the students.

Along with administrators, teachers are making a current push to create rubrics for SEL, in a format similar to the rubrics they have carefully crafted for grading.

One particular PD featured a protocol that focuses on determining what motivates student behavior: SCARF, which stands for Status (sense of being valued; refers to one’s sense of importance relative to others), Certainty (pattern recognition and the ability to predict the near future), Autonomy (feeling of having choices and input), Relatedness (social group belonging), and Fairness (sense of just and nonbiased exchanges between people). (See Appendix B.) Teachers learned how conditions can be created in these five domains to provide a sense of safety and access to learning for all students. As one teacher noted, faculty learned to examine:

What triggers certain students? Is it social capital, relational capital? What is it that they want? So then we have protocols where we think [about] our challenging students and try to figure out what are things that they're motivated by.

The PD gives teachers language to use with their students, such as, “What happened?” “What do you need?” “How can I support you?” Rather than being punitive, the focus is on understanding where the student is coming from through a series of questions. This approach tends to defuse situations and brings the restorative process into the moment with students.

While the schools' overarching belief in the importance of continual self-assessment has led to the establishment of concrete planning and reflection spaces, school administrators acknowledge the need to balance immediate needs and future areas for improvement. "You can't sustain work on everything," noted Gateway Middle School Principal Watson, "so at a given moment, we'll have to ask, 'What does the school need now?'" At the same time, faculty consciously try to streamline their own processes for reflection and improvement. Said Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Gateway High School Rebecca Wieder:

We've gotten better about really naming a priority and sticking with that over time until it's at a point where we feel like it needs regular attention, but it doesn't need deep-dive learning and cycles of inquiry in the same way.

This type of meta-reflection on the improvement process is typical of both administrators and teachers, who understand that to meet Gateway's mission to serve all students well and prepare them for post-high school life, the school must respond to constantly shifting factors and reevaluations of its own practice.

Conclusion and Practice Implications

In the midst of a diverse and socioeconomically stratified San Francisco, Gateway Public Schools stands out as a model for how high expectations and high support can come together and create a learning environment that works remarkably well for students and staff alike. There is a level of energy and community on the campuses that feels both familial and focused. In the years since its inception, Gateway has honed and developed a methodology by which to ensure that optimal learning conditions are established and maintained for all students on its campuses. The very first pillar of the schools' success might be attributed to the centrality of relationships; that is, structures, policies, and practices that foster connections and allow for meaningful collaboration. These are seen as necessary in order for the school's culture to take hold, for learning to happen, and for healthy student development.

Another key lesson of Gateway's approach is how parallel structures have been put in place for both adult and student learning, development, and support: Where there are particular opportunities for students to grow academically, socially, and emotionally, there are similar opportunities for adults to learn and grow in their practice as educators and in how they relate to one another and students in the learning environment. The schools' administration empowers teachers, teachers empower students, and together the campus culture is one dually aimed at developing self-awareness and collaboration in service of learning. Gateway has figured out how to instantiate the research that we know supports learning for adults and children.

A key feature of such a learning environment is that it does not marginalize nontraditional learners but rather seeks to understand and unlock their potential. To appreciate Gateway's efforts at full inclusion, one might first consider how full inclusion fits into a broader framework of diversity and equity. If diversity means that the unique perspectives, experiences, identities, and backgrounds of children add strength, value, and complexity to schools, equity might be defined as an attunement and responsiveness to each individual's diverse needs.

At Gateway, inclusion is the enabler of diversity, allowing each child to participate fully in a setting in which he or she is included, respected, and connected, making equality of outcomes more likely for all children.⁹⁰ As learning differences are considered normative at Gateway, a lens aimed at achieving greater equity in opportunity and equality in outcomes drives the schools' continuous improvement efforts. Professional development, feedback and coaching cycles, and even the structure of the school year and school day all coordinate to push teachers, leaders, and school staff to collaborate in ways that focus on fulfilling Gateway's core values.

Although Gateway continues to struggle with gaps in performance outcomes for its diverse population of students, there is an intentionality not only to reduce those gaps but to be reflective about how the schools, rather than the students, need to adjust in order to get the outcomes they seek. The school's equity agenda is evident in the way curriculum, instruction, and assessment are designed: rigorous, culturally relevant, engaging, and differentiated. Across the board, students at every grade level and at the middle and high school campuses spoke about how much they enjoyed learning at Gateway and how much more invested they are in their own learning processes and preferences because of the school's support for them to be both self-aware and self-advocating. In short, learning at Gateway is an active, co-constructed, ongoing process among and between adult and student learners.

Through cultivating a positive climate with a focus on inclusivity, coupled with instructional practices that meet students where they are and challenge them to grow, Gateway makes a tangible impact in students' lives. The success of Gateway's approach illustrates how the sciences of learning and development can be translated into productive habits and mindsets that are reflected in students' strong engagement, academic achievement, and high graduation rates, imparting the social, emotional, and academic skills that set students up for a lifetime of success.

Appendix A: Methodology

This dual-site case study investigated how a public charter middle school and high school create an inclusive culture in which students feel that they are part of a community; engage in deeper learning through meaningful pedagogy and instruction; develop social-emotional skills, including through restorative practices; and have access to holistic supports that allow them to graduate and matriculate to colleges at high rates. The goal of the study was to help practitioners and policymakers understand how such a culture can be created and sustained so that more schools can promote equitable learning that helps students overcome barriers to learning. To this end, this investigation sought to answer the following questions:

1. What does a prosocial and pro-academic school culture and climate look like?
 - a. What are features of such a culture?
 - b. What student behaviors are associated with such environments?
 - c. How does a prosocial and pro-academic culture contribute to achieving desired student outcomes (graduation rates, attendance rates, academic achievement, enrollment in postsecondary training for career and/or college)?
2. How do the school's philosophy, leadership, structures (organizational and instructional), policies, and practices contribute to and/or support a prosocial and pro-academic school culture and student behaviors?
 - a. How is students' social-emotional development supported?
 - b. What is the relationship between student engagement in deeper, meaningful learning and students' development of social-emotional attitudes and skills?
 - c. What impact does student engagement in deeper, meaningful learning have on the development and sustainability of pro-academic school culture?
 - d. How does a prosocial, pro-academic school culture and climate support students to feel a sense of social and academic belonging, to engage with a curriculum focused on higher-order thinking, and to persist through personal and academic obstacles?
 - e. What policies, practices, supports, and mechanisms are in place to reduce student marginalization and exclusion and to resolve interpersonal and/or school conflicts?
3. How did the school's philosophy, policies, and practices toward a prosocial and pro-academic culture develop and evolve over time? What factors influenced these developments? What factors created challenges to these developments?
4. How do the school's philosophy, policies, and practices take into account and/or respond to the larger social, political, and economic context of the community the school serves?

Because the study sought to surface best practices aligned with the science of learning and development, researchers used purposeful sampling to identify schools that could be “information-rich cases.”⁹¹ The research team sought to learn from a school that has demonstrated success in creating a prosocial and pro-academic culture, particularly among students who face adverse circumstances. Identifying the structures, practices, and cultural features that have facilitated success can provide insights into factors that can enable these types of supportive, whole child cultures to take hold, thereby highlighting lessons that can inform policy and practice.

Gateway Public Schools was purposefully selected as an example of an information-rich case, offering insights into specific practices aligned with the emerging evidence from the sciences of learning and development about how best to educate the whole child. These practices lead to known outcomes of interest for students who are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and learning abilities and disabilities.

To answer the study’s research questions, a three-person research team engaged in an in-depth case study approach. Case studies allow researchers to investigate real-life phenomena in context, thus generating understandings of a phenomenon and its interplay with its environment.⁹² This design is also best suited to studying phenomena that require an analysis of multiple sources of data not subject to experimental treatment.⁹³ With its sensitivity to context and its ability to capture a multitude of processes, a case study approach is an appropriate method to elucidate the dynamic and complex ways that schools support whole child development.

Data Collection

Data were collected from February to May 2018. Primary data sources for this study include interviews, observations, documents, and databases.

Interviews

The research team conducted a total of 51 interviews with key stakeholders, including the principal, administrators, teachers, students, and counselors at Gateway Middle School and Gateway High School. (See Table A1.) Interviews were conducted across three consecutive days in May. The school’s leadership organized focus group sessions for the research team with school personnel and students who could speak to the school’s climate and instructional practices, as well as share reflections about their experiences at the school. This strategy used the knowledge and experience of the school’s leadership to identify respondents who could best speak to systems, practices, and structures that the school develops and implements.

Table A1
Study Interviewees

Role	Number
Principal and Administrators	4
Teachers and Teacher Leaders	18
Counselors and Student Support Staff	4
Students	25

Interviews and focus groups were semistructured and typically lasted 45–60 minutes each. Interview prompts asked participants to describe the school’s key pedagogical and discipline practices; its staff onboarding and professional development processes; its approach to supporting students socially, emotionally, and academically; and its restorative justice practices. Interviewees were also asked to discuss challenges that have emerged in the development and implementation of the identified pedagogical and discipline practices. At times, the researchers tailored the

protocol based on the role of the interviewee, tenure with the school, and classroom observations made. This differentiation ensured that particular questions could be explored in more depth with the respondents who were most likely to hold relevant knowledge on the topic. Interviews were recorded with the permission of participants and submitted for transcription services.

Follow-up interviews with selected staff were conducted as needed in the subsequent months to clarify specific practices and confirm data.

Observations

Observations comprised the second primary data source. The research team attended a professional development session and observed leadership and team planning meetings. Attendance at these events provided insight into the school’s collaborative approach to instruction and ongoing professional development that foster creating a prosocial, pro-academic culture and also allowed researchers to triangulate data retrieved from interviews and documents on the school’s professional learning supports and intentional culture-building efforts.

The team also conducted site visits to the schools to observe practices and to interview school leaders, teachers, and students in situ. (See Table A2 for observation and site visit information.) Visiting the school and different classes during the school day allowed researchers to garner a range of perspectives and insights from individuals who varied in their affiliation with the school and/or familiarity with its prosocial, pro-academic culture.

Table A2
Observation and Site Visit Information

Date of Visit	Observations Made
February 20, 2018	<i>Student-led conferences:</i> Observed three students from 6th, 7th, and 8th grades present their work
March 22, 2018	<i>9th-grade exhibition:</i> Humanities Social Movements Exhibition
May 2, 2018	<i>Classroom observations:</i> Gateway Middle School: Exhibition project groups, math, humanities <i>Staff meeting observations:</i> 8th-grade staff meeting, 6th-grade humanities co-planning meeting with learning specialist <i>Professional development:</i> All Gateway Middle School staff after-school session on assessment and learning
May 3, 2018	<i>Classroom observation:</i> Gateway Middle School: small-group reading/frontloading intervention; Gateway High School: Art, Spanish
May 4, 2018	<i>Career Day:</i> 50 professionals volunteered to speak about their careers to Gateway High School students <i>Staff meeting observation:</i> Gateway High School math team meeting <i>Classroom observations:</i> Gateway High School: Humanities, Spanish, learning skills

Documents and databases

The final data source for this study was organizational documents and databases. The research teams collected and reviewed documents, including:

- **Administrative documents:** School policy, mission, and vision statements; written and electronic communications sent to students and families; documents and readings provided to teachers for professional development; schedules; and webpages
- **Curriculum and assessments:** Professional development materials, curriculum overviews, classroom visuals, and rubrics for teacher feedback and performance assessment
- **District documents:** District data about school's performance; district data about school's demographics
- **Press:** News reporting about the school's history and performance, news about the district's discipline policies, news and documents about state education policies, and documents on neighborhood demographics

Researchers reviewed these documents to understand the school's history, its mission and impact, contextual factors, and its programmatic approach for teacher and student learning. Curriculum and assessment materials also helped researchers triangulate data with regard to the continued implementation of the school's project-based approach to learning; its integration of social and emotional skills development into academic learning; its system of professional learning supports; and its efforts to be responsible to its mission to be an inclusive community, respectful of differences and committed to cultivating self- and community advocates who are critical and creative thinkers.

Analysis

To analyze the data, the researchers engaged in a multistep process. First, they created a preliminary code list based on the ideas present in the semistructured interview protocol. They then supplemented this code list with codes drawn from emerging science of learning and development research.

Once the codes were refined, researchers applied them to interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. To increase interrater reliability, researchers met periodically to refine their analysis and their findings consistency. Once coding was completed, researchers triangulated findings across multiple data sources, seeking confirmatory and disconfirmatory evidence, and collected additional data related to points that were emerging from the evidence but needed further clarification.

Appendix B: Gateway Materials

Figure B1
Collaboration Rubric



Cohort _____ SR# _____ Name _____ Date: _____

Collaboration Rubric

Learning Target: I can use social-emotional skills to work as a team.

Category	4	3	2	1
Academic Strategies	Consistently shares the workload. Consistently focused on task completion.	Needs a few reminders from teammates to stay focused and/ or share workload.	Needs many reminders from teammates and teacher to stay focused and/or share workload.	Unfocused and has not worked towards task completion. Does not make positive changes after teacher reminders.
Collaboration and Community Skills	Consistently demonstrates sensitivity to others. Consistently listens to others' ideas. Resolves group problems without teacher help.	Needs a few reminders from teammates to demonstrate sensitivity to others. Needs a few reminders from teammates to listen to others' ideas. Resolves group problems with teammate help.	Needs many reminders from teammates and teacher to demonstrate sensitivity to others. Does not listen to teammates ideas after teammate and teacher reminders. Does not make effort to resolve group problems with teammates and teacher help.	Demonstrates insensitivity to others. Does not listen to teammates ideas after teacher reminders. Does not make effort to resolve group problems with teacher help.
Self-Awareness & Growth Mindset	Consistently contributes knowledge, opinions, and skills. Consistently helps others and accepts help to get unstuck.	Needs a few reminders from teammates to contribute knowledge, opinions, and skills. Needs a few reminders from teammates to give or accept help.	Needs teammates and teacher support to contribute knowledge, opinions, and skills. Needs teammates and teacher support to give or accept help.	Does not share knowledge, opinions or skills. Does not give or accept help.

Strengths: When collaborating, one area of strength for me is _____.
For example, _____

Area to grow: When collaborating, one area for me to grow in is _____
For example, next time I would like to _____

Source: Gateway Public Schools. (n.d.). Collaboration rubric. <https://gatewayimpact.org/student-agency/resources/collaboration-rubric> (accessed 01/09/20).

Figure B2 New-to-Gateway Orientation Agenda, 2019–20 (Days 1 and 2)



New-to-Gateway Orientation: August Faculty Week 2019-2020

Objectives: New-to-Gateway teachers understand the mission, values, frameworks, and structures that guide our work, while getting to know each other and other members of the faculty.

Tuesday, August 6: Teaching All Students

Time	Topic	Objectives	Fac/Location
8:30-9:15am	Community Circle	Objective: Become familiar with an important Restorative Practices routine while getting to know each other.	Becca and Tony <i>Impact Lab</i>
9:15-9:45am	Gateway's Mission	Objective: Understand Gateway's history and mission, and explore its implications in practice.	Sharon <i>Impact Lab</i>
9:45-10:00am	BREAK		
10:00-10:45am	Focus on Equity	Objective: Understand the centrality of our focus on equitable student outcomes; understand the concepts of the Discourse I/II thinking, stereotype threat, and implicit bias, and how they impact our practice.	Joel <i>Impact Lab</i>
10:45-11:00am	School Tour	Objective: Get to know the physical space and how it relates to our mission and values.	Stephanie
11:00am-12:00pm	Restorative Practices & Classroom Community	Objective: Understand the Restorative Practices philosophy and its implications for teaching and Advisory.	Tony and Saundre <i>Room 103</i>
12:00-1:00pm	LUNCH	HR Onboarding, Computer Pick-up	Chad, Chris, Adam
1:00-2:15pm	Planning, Assessment and Grading	Objective: Review the Understanding by Design Framework and how it informs assessment. Consider the purpose of assessment grading while learning how to set up your gradebook using a standards-based grading approach utilizing the four-point scale.	Jeff <i>Impact Lab</i>
2:15-3:00pm	Process of Learning & Non-cognitives	Objective: Understand the role of non-cognitives in learning and how we can use the Process of Learning category to develop these factors.	Jeff <i>Impact Lab</i>
3:00-3:15pm	Debrief and Appreciations	Objective: Share takeaways and feedback from the day that can inform tomorrow's work.	Becca <i>Impact Lab</i>

Wednesday, August 7: Developing the Whole Student

Time	Topic	Objectives/Process	Facilitator
8:30-9:00am	Community Circle	Objective: Become familiar with an important Restorative Practices routine while getting to know each other.	Stephanie and Tony <i>Garden (meet at the Impact Lab)</i>
9:00-10:30 am	Classroom Community and Environment	Objective: Reflect on our own beliefs, assumptions, biases, strengths and challenges as they relate to establishing a positive, productive, equitable classroom environment. Understand Gateway's guiding frameworks around establishing and maintaining a positive, productive, equitable classroom environment.	Becca/Stephanie <i>Impact Lab</i>
10:30-10:45 am	BREAK		
10:45-12pm	Classroom Community and Environment	Objective: Create classroom environment plans that are reflective of our guiding frameworks.	Becca/Stephanie <i>Impact Lab</i>
12:00-1:00 pm	LUNCH BREAK		
1:00-2:00pm	Intro to Career Stages Models	Objective: Understand the Career Stages Model and what this means for evaluation and support of new teachers. Understand contract addenda.	Sharon/Becca <i>Library</i>
2:00-3:00pm	All Kinds of Minds	Objective: Understand our approach to teaching all kinds of learners, including some key structures and accommodations.	Marlies <i>Learning Center</i>
3:00-3:15pm	Debrief and Appreciations	Objective: Share takeaways and feedback from the day that can inform upcoming New-to-Gateway training.	Becca <i>Impact Lab</i>

***Note: There will be two additional new teacher sessions during Faculty Week:

- Monday, 8/12, 1-3pm Tech Training in the library
- Tuesday, 8/13, 1-2pm Advisor training (Advisors only) in room 07

Source: Gateway High School.

Figure B3
Professional Development Long-Term Planning Template



Professional Development Long-term Planning Template

School-wide Goal: _____

Professional Development Cycle Goal: _____

Overview of Professional Development Basis, Goals & Outcomes	
Instructional Problem of Practice:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on behavioral data/observations, surveys, and academic data, we observe that: _____ As a staff, we need to build additional capacity to: _____
Theory of Action:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If we learn and gain tools to _____, then we will be able to support our students to _____
Overall Professional Development Arc Outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the fall semester _____ During the spring semester _____
Data Collection (to evaluate impact and process)	Student data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From classrooms: _____ School-wide: _____ Teacher data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From classrooms: _____ School-wide: _____

Use as many sessions as your Professional Development arc has in its allotted timeline. Feel free to add rows as needed.

Session/Date	Topic	Outcome	Agenda	Task(s) to be completed	Framing needed or follow up from last session	Differentiation for teachers (expert vs. novice)
Session 0 Date: _____	Review overall goal and strand		1. State overall goal of strand. 2. Review data that brought us to this goal.			
Session #1 Date: _____						
	List support that will happen between sessions (i.e., coaching, PLC time, grade level meetings, planning time) and what will be accomplished here.					
Session #2 Date: _____						
	Between session support					
Session #3 Date: _____						
	Between session support					
Session #4 Date: _____						
	Between session support					
Session #5 Date: _____						

Source: Gateway Public Schools. (n.d.). Professional development long-term planning template. <https://gatewayimpact.org/student-agency/resources/professional-development-long-term-planning-template>.

Figure B4
SCARF Classroom Environment Planning Tool—List of Strategies



SCARF Classroom Environment Planning Tool - List of Strategies

The five domains of SCARF can be supported to provide a sense of safety and access to learning for all students. The following tool can be used to plan for the routines, environmental supports and community and relationship building practices you intend to use to build a positive classroom environment.

This example includes some of the teacher moves we will be using over the next two days in addition to some of the environmental supports you will see around our school and in our classrooms; it is by no means exhaustive.

How do I structure my classroom environment and community to support the five domains?			
Domain of Human Social Experience	Classroom Routines (e.g. Do Now and agenda, chunking of time)	Classroom Environment (e.g. environmental supports like timers, anchor charts)	Community and relationship building practices (e.g. greeting at door, circles)
Status: <i>Sense of being valued Refers to one's sense of importance relative to others.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do Now/Opening routine (name tags) Application of Norms Community circle Think-Pair-Share Turn and talk Talk to the text Connect-Extend-Challenge Gallery walk/Carousel Exit ticket Positive behavior narration & stars Appreciations and shout outs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name tags for new seating arrangements Flexible seating arrangements Student thinking displayed on walls Stars Alternative reading places Student classroom roles board Group roles chart 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greet at door (high five, fist bump, handshake) Share out of Do Now Creating norms as a class Community circle Think-Pair-Share Turn and talk Gallery walk / Carousel Positive behavior narration & stars Appreciations and shout outs
Certainty: <i>Pattern recognition-ability to predict the near future</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily use of Powerpoint Do Now / Opening routine Daily agenda and LO Application of norms Think-Pair will be followed by share! Turn and talk Talk to the text Exit ticket 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PPT Timers Anchor charts Noise level reminder Essential Question displayed White board set up Student thinking displayed on walls Seating chart Missing work systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greet at door (high five, fist bump, handshake) Reading corner Small group table
Autonomy: <i>Feeling of having choices and input</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do Now / Opening routine Name tags Think-Pair-Share Turn and talk Connect-extend-challenge Gallery walk / Carousel Exit ticket Appreciations and Shout outs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student thinking displayed on walls Reading recommendations Classroom library Student roles pocket chart Group roles pocket chart Peace corner Preferred Activity Time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name tags Creating norms as a class Community circle Think-Pair-Share Turn and talk Gallery walk / Carousel Appreciations and Shout outs
Relatedness: <i>Social group belonging</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think-Pair-Share Turn and talk Gallery walk / Carousel Positive behavior narration & stars Appreciations and shout outs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student thinking displayed on walls Stars Reading corner Small group work area Student roles board Group roles pocket chart Peace corner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greet at door (high five, fist bump, handshake) Share out of Do Now Name tags Classrooms norms Community circle Think-Pair-Share Turn and talk Gallery walk / carousel Positive behavior narration & stars Appreciations and shout outs
Fairness: <i>Sense of just and non biased exchanges between people</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think-Pair-Share Turn and talk Gallery walk / Carousel Exit ticket Appreciations and shout outs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equity sticks Inclusion posters Social skills posters Sign out systems Missing work system Bathroom & office sign out sheets Reflection sheets Peace corner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greet at door (high five, fist bump, handshake) Community circle protocol Think-Pair-Share Turn and talk Gallery walk / carousel Appreciations and shout outs

Source: Gateway Public Schools. (n.d.). SCARF classroom environment planning tool—list of strategies. <https://gatewayimpact.org/student-agency/resources/scarf-classroom-environment-planning-tool-list-strategies>.

Figure B5
SCARF Classroom Environment Planning Tool



SCARF Classroom Environment Planning Tool: Use the following tool to plan for the routines, environmental supports and community and relationship building practices you intend to use to build a positive classroom environment. We will revisit our plans 4-6 weeks into school.

SCARF: The following five domains of social threats often provoke a survival response (or can be supported to provide a sense of safety and access to learning).

How do I structure my classroom environment and community to support the five domains?			
Domain of Human Social Experience	Classroom Routines (e.g. Do Now and agenda, chunking of time)	Classroom Environment (e.g. environmental supports like timers, anchor charts)	Community & Relationship Building Practices (e.g. greeting at door, circles)
Status: <i>Sense of being valued. Refers to one's sense of importance relative to others.</i>			
Certainty: <i>Pattern recognition- ability to predict the near future</i>			
Autonomy: <i>Feeling of having choices and input</i>			
Relatedness: <i>Social group belonging</i>			
Fairness: <i>Sense of just and nonbiased exchanges between people</i>			

Source: Gateway Public Schools. (n.d.). SCARF classroom environment planning tool. <https://gatewayimpact.org/student-agency/resources/scarf-classroom-environment-planning-tool>.

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