

What’s the Difference Between an ‘A’ and an ‘A’?: High School Students’ Conceptions of Good Work

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Introduction

Calls and proposals for reforming high schools are perhaps as old as high school itself. Since their inception in the late 19th century educators, politicians, and others have continuously sought to change and improve high schools. At various times, reformers argued that high schools would be better if they were larger and more comprehensive (Conant, 1959) or smaller and more personal (Meier, 1995; Raywid, 1996); if they offered more choices like a “shopping mall” (Powell, Farrar & Cohen, 1985), or if they better prepared students for the worlds of higher education and employment (National Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006; National Academy Foundation, 1982). Perhaps, because the shape and future of public education remains both a national and a local concern, there is a tension with respect to which reforms high schools choose or are compelled to institute. Public education continues to be one of the rare institutions where the values and virtues of American society, both public and private, are still actively and explicitly debated and reproduced (Labaree, 1997). Whether these arguments represent the values and needs of the citizenry, the taxpayer, or the individual, for over 100 years we have seen, as Joe McDonald (2004) characterized it, “alternating efforts to tighten and then loosen the mission and the curriculum of the high school” (p.26).

Even though decisions around reforming high schools affect them directly, students do not have much, if any, real authority to tell adults what those decisions mean to them. While there are a growing number of research studies that pay attention to youth perspectives (Mitra, 2004; Pierce, 2005), most adults and most reports on high school reform have not been very interested in listening to young people or incorporating students’ views into their analyses. It is comparatively rare for students to have opportunities to think and talk openly with people in power about the why, how and when they learn. Additionally, students are held accountable to many layers of adults whether

parents, teachers, school boards, or districts about their performance in school, but rarely are students in positions to hold adults directly accountable.¹ As Wilson and Corbett (2001) and Cushman (2003, 2005) have shown, educators should not continue to ignore students because students have particular insight into what is going on in their schools. And if schools fail to meet their needs, students will also vote with their feet and leave prematurely. In an era of increased accountability, one in which students and schools are held to higher standards of accountability with their accompanying core content standards and exit exams, and a climate where dropout rates, especially among minority students, remains unquestionably high (Orfield, Losen & Wald, 2004), we believe that there is benefit to listening and considering what students think about their own work and what experiences in high school are valuable to them.

High Schools Today

Despite all the attention, high schools are enormously difficult to change. Because of their size and specificity of content areas they are more complex than elementary or middle schools and also more expensive to operate and maintain. Reform models come and go and yet problems persist. Dropout statistics remain high, especially among low income and minority youth (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Unlike lower grades, test scores remain flat, and reaching agreement about content standards across disciplines has proved to be a long and protracted struggle for consensus. Recent studies have also shown that many students, across a broad spectrum, largely view their high school experience as boring or as a mere grade game, trying to get by with as little effort as possible (Burkett, 2002; Pope 2002). Additionally, both colleges and industry complain about the lack of readiness recent graduates possess (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2006; Griffith & Wade, 2001). Urban schools present particular problems. While there are small scale examples of successful reforms of select urban schools, large-scale efforts have not improved outcomes for most urban youth (National Research Council, 2002; Puma, et al, 1997).

It is important to keep in mind that some of the most inspiring, dedicated and talented administrators, teachers and students anywhere in America can be found at work in urban schools. Unfortunately there are not enough of them. Urban high schools struggle to meet, and in some cases to finesse, the federal legislative requirement of having a ‘qualified teacher’ in every classroom. Increasing numbers of urban students arrive poorly equipped to read, let alone succeed, at the level of high school curricula and leave school not well prepared for their next stages of life, be it higher education or the world of work (National Center for Education and the Economy, n.d.). Additionally, without necessarily the resources and facility, urban public schools continue to accommodate a

¹ It is interesting to note that there are a series of grassroots student activist movements to hold schools and school districts accountable for providing the level of education promised and mandated by law. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss them. For examples of their activism efforts see websites: www.soundout.org; www.yuc.home.mindspring.com; www.nwbcc.net/nwbcc.

staggering array of diversity issues, be it multiple languages and ethnicities, learning abilities, family conditions, and neighborhood economies.

Once inside the crumbling infrastructures of local high schools there are too many teachers who feel dispirited and under attack and simply hold on to what shards of identity they have left by exercising control over their classrooms, resisting pedagogical and instructional change and settling for just getting by. Students likewise may feel under attack in their schools. Anyone entering urban high schools today can immediately sense an emphasis on security and control as they walk through metal detectors, past armed guards and, in some schools, through gated hallways. This is the environment that over one-third of the nation's low-income students and nearly half of all its minority students enter daily (Letgers et al, 2002). It is of course no surprise that these circumstances contribute to dropout rates, as well as those students who are 'pushed out' by aggressive school discipline policies that rely on suspension or expulsion to control student behavior (Noguera, 2003) or students who otherwise disappear into the cracks in the system. These are some of the conditions on display in most urban schools across the country.

In spite of these challenges, each day, many students persevere and carry into urban high schools their own and society's expectations that learning will occur. High schools are one of the few experiences most Americans share with one another and they remain a place where the collective belief is that each new generation will become prepared and equipped to take their place in society as citizens, workers and responsible adults.

The Standards and Accountability Movement

Overlaying today's environment in high school is the political landscape dominated by a push for higher standards and accountability. Beginning in the early 1980s, the standards movement has steadily gained traction and prominence as the major school reform dialogue. Standards advocates argue that not unlike other aspects of society (e.g. water, air and food quality) public education should operate under a comparable set of federal standards to ensure a certain level of quality (Ravitch, 1995). While critics in the 1990s tried to foreshadow the demise of the standards movement, they became a central piece of President Bush's education agenda, and as Jim Spillane (2004) has noted, "the movement's resilience makes it something of an oddity in education where fads are customary" (p. 4).

In essence, the fundamental formula for school success is that students should be held to high, common academic standards, and schools and teachers should be accountable that their students achieve them.² At the high school level, the presence of *No Child Left*

² Cynics and skeptics counter that the emphasis on accountability is not intended to bring all students up to a agreed-upon standard but rather to accelerate the collapse of the system of public education and open wider options for privatization and free enterprise. For example, see A. Kohn (2004) and S. Karp (2004).

Behind (NCLB) legislation has served to give the ‘high stakes’ testing movement greater momentum and legitimacy. In addition to the long standing practice of college entrance exams (i.e. ACT/SAT), over the past ten years an increasing number of states have instituted their own high school exit exams, that along with other standardized tests, constitute a ‘high stakes’ testing universe. The primary rationale behind ‘high stakes’ testing appears to be that when schools and students are faced with the prospect of sanctions for poor performance teachers will teach more effectively and students will study harder and perform better, and these changes will be reflected in increased test scores.³ It is largely an ideological and emotive argument rather than one based upon objective empirical evidence. This is the overall environment in which students are expected to perform and achieve success. But what does success actually mean? The simple equation is that success equals scoring at or above passing levels on national and state exams. Those scores are meant to be indicators that schools and students are performing at a level that satisfies state requirements. And these indicators operate irrespective of whether they correspond with what college or the world of work say is needed for success, whether standardized tests alone are accurate means of assessing students’ skills and competencies, or what students themselves think about how these exams relate to their high school education.

As outlined above, the increased emphasis on standardized measures and high school exit exams are the predominant means by which state and individual school districts and schools assess the ‘products’ coming out of their schools. Acceptable progress or student work is calculated by state tests scores and labeled, at least by NCLB, as “proficient or better.” Schools that achieve these ratings are not troubled by the sanctions, real and imagined, that await those who fall short of this metric. Additionally, since the scores are largely based upon a very finite number of subjects and their content area (i.e. English/Language Arts, math and science), the core curriculum is subject to a narrowing of focus to ensure that students are prepared to succeed come test time. Within departments, teachers are also pressed to standardize their content and syllabi to make sure all students are receiving the appropriate information relative to the chosen standards, benchmarks and assessment tools. Course grades remain a traditional expression of assessment, however according to the most recent NAEP High School Transcript Study (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) while grade point averages have gone up slightly over the past ten years, scores on reading and math tests have not. Similarly, college professors complain that students are coming to school unprepared to engage in college-level work (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2006). It is therefore highly debatable, based on standard measures, what is actually being learned by high school students today and whether the instruments used are capturing said learning.

Research Agenda: What Counts as “Good Work?”

In a recent publication entitled ‘The New Accountability’ (Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003), Leslie Siskin makes the point that “through establishing standards, choosing which subjects (and what content) will be tested, and then attaching stakes to

³ This is a belief that was postulated earlier in the widely referenced publication ‘A Nation at Risk’ (1983).

achievement scores on those tests, the states materialize what kinds of knowledge counts, and for how much” (Siskin, 2003, p.88). While in the current educational climate of core curriculum standards and accountability academic achievement is defined primarily with externally established measures based on standardized testing, or even state exit exams, our study focuses on what students themselves had to say about what achievement in school meant to them. How did high school students articulate the conditions inside and outside of school that contributed to their success in school?

When designing this study we chose to use a more expansive, student-friendly and less research-laden term rather than a more school-based notion of success, such as "academic achievement." Our research team chose to use the term "good work" to gain an understanding of the effort and work students put into particular tasks. We made this decision for several reasons. We wanted to get a sense of students' engagement in tasks both inside, as well as outside, of school and we felt the term "good work" was more applicable to both these environments. Along with that, we wanted to encourage students to think more expansively about how they describe and discern their own quality of work. We posed the question “How do you know when you’ve done ‘good work’ in school?” as an entry point for students to discuss and describe their own criteria for success in school. How did students’ opinions and perspectives mesh with what the adults in their lives think about their academic success, and where did their ideas fit within the current accountability framework? Inquiring into how students talk and make sense out of what engages and motivates them to do well in school and in life are questions that researchers rarely ask, yet they seem central to understanding students’ engagement (or lack thereof) in school.

We did not define the term "good work" for students, but rather let their discussions about how, when and why they put effort into projects or tasks serve as definitions for the term itself. We found the focus group format particularly useful for this purpose, as part of the nature of this data collection tool is that an individual's ideas can develop as other participants weigh in with their views on the given topic. For example, we found that while our initial question, "How do you know you've done good work?" generated responses such as teachers' comments, grades, and test scores, further discussion and cross-talk around this topic resulted in richer and more nuanced responses centering on students' internal measures of what good work looked and felt like to them.

In this paper, we present findings from our study of 11th and 12th graders in New Jersey and New York and their perspectives on “good work” in school. As standardized tests and state exit exams become more definitive measures of teaching and learning, our research was designed to better understand what students had to say about their own performances and experiences in school, what their own academic achievement looked like and meant to them, what roles their teachers and families played in their motivation to do “good work,” and lastly, where, if at all, they saw their states’ exit exams fitting into their concepts of academic achievement.

Study Design

This paper is based on a study conducted during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years. Our data came from a series of eighteen semi-structured focus groups of between eight and twelve 11th and 12th graders that we conducted at nine schools, four in New Jersey and five in New York. We selected these two states to see what the presence and importance of these exams had to do with how students thought about them and their relationship to “good work” in school. The New York Regents Examinations (Regents) are the oldest of all state tests, while the New Jersey High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA)⁴ has only since been in place since 2002. Both exams are aligned with their states’ respective core curriculum content standards.

Unable to gain entry to our New York schools until 2005-2006, we chose to interview 12th graders in order to keep the same cohort of students we interviewed in New Jersey the year before. We recognize that by electing to talk with only 11th and 12th graders we omit a key sub-population who are quite vulnerable to leaving school prematurely. While insights from 9th and 10th graders could provide another valuable perspective, because we wanted to include data on the impact of exit exams we opted to interview only those students who had already taken their state tests. In all, 125 students participated in the focus groups (two at each school); they also completed a short written survey. Although we asked the schools to provide us with focus groups that were representative of their overall student body, we had little control over who showed up. During the course of our interviews we discovered, through student self-reports, that slightly more than 25 percent of the focus groups in our schools were composed entirely of honors, AP and/or identified student leaders.⁵ Not having access to school records we relied upon self-reporting measures and what we could learn about the schools from internet websites. In terms of their academic performance, 8.5% of students reported getting mostly A’s, while 48% said they got mostly A’s and B’s, 14% said mostly Bs, while 24% of students said they earned mostly Bs and Cs. Approximately 6% reported that their grades were either only Cs, or Cs and Ds.

The schools were all either urban or urban-fringe, and ranged in size from over 2300 to several small schools of slightly more than 400 students. Some of the schools were traditional comprehensive high schools. Some operated small learning communities within their school, and others recently reformed as small public schools. Pedagogically, the schools varied from more traditional comprehensive to specific reform models⁶ to brand new small schools within schools. Their populations ranged from between 71% and 99% minority students. Of the students we interviewed, 44% were African-American, 28% Hispanic, 9% Asian, 8% identified as biracial, 7.5% were Caucasian, and less than 3% said they were either Native American or Jamaican. When we looked at the

⁴ An earlier iteration, the High School Proficiency Test was first administered in 1983 and became a graduation requirement in 1991.

⁵ One theory we had was that when we asked for a sample of students who were representative of the school at large, administrators heard us ask for representatives of the school.

⁶ One school was a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES).

school data on free and reduced lunch, we saw a wide range from the lowest at 8% to the highest at 93%.⁷

Written surveys were also administered to their teachers. Our intention was to administer surveys only to those teachers who worked directly with our sample of 11th and/or 12th graders. Teachers' self-reported survey data on their years of experience showed that slightly more than 24% had five years or less while 23% had been teaching for twenty or more years. In all, we collected 214 teacher surveys, although this number represents a disparate response rate across the sample schools. In those schools where we personally administered the surveys during our visit, the response rates were between 80% and 100%. Not surprisingly, at schools where we were not permitted to administer our survey and left it to school administrators to do it for us, our response rates fell to between 0% and 40%. Because of the variance in response rates, we made use of the teacher data for descriptive purposes and as modest contrasts with our student data. We did not attempt comparisons of teacher data across schools and/or states.

Data Analysis

All teacher and student survey data were coded and entered into SPSS, a quantitative software program and simple frequencies were calculated. Answers to the one written question that asked teachers for an explanation of the letter grade they awarded their school, we collated and examined for patterns or categories of response. All student focus group data were recorded and transcribed. All the focus groups were coded and entered into a qualitative software program (Atlas ti). Our approach to analysis was a series of stages of moving the raw data to final conclusions using a process of data reduction. Codes were initially developed working from our interview protocol that broke down the transcripts into large categories. Once entered into Atlas ti, codes were run, read and re-read to identify thematic categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and the data was further reduced into smaller categories. We collaborated at each step along the way, from code creation to data reduction and analysis, with individual members providing inter-reader reliability to the process. The first level of analysis produced summary reports to each school we visited that we called analytic memos. It was our hope that schools might want to discuss our findings and that dialogue would add to our understanding and serve as further reliability checks. However, given the demands of operating urban high schools, it was no surprise that no school had the time (even if they wanted) to respond to our work. Nevertheless, these memos served as an important iterative step in data reduction and analysis and allowed us to look for thematic categories across schools and states. For the purposes of this paper, our analysis restricts itself to describing the range of student perspectives on their notions of "good work" and how they compare and contrast with standardized measures adults employ to assess student

⁷ It is worth noting that applications for free and reduced lunch still carries some stigma or embarrassment for some families, and the reported percent at one school, for example, was 30% while its mean annual family income was less than \$30,000. For a more complete demographic profile of each school see Appendix A.

achievement. An earlier publication of this research (Goldwasser & Bach, 2007) offered a more expansive conceptual framework and analysis of data than this paper addresses.

For the students in our study, “good work” took on a greater dimensionality than simply their grades and test scores. In analyzing our data we saw at least three interconnected categories where students described what “good work” looked like and what it meant to them. The remainder of the paper discusses their conceptions of “good work” in light of these three categories that we call: a) ‘Playing the school game’; b) ‘How it feels to me’, and c) ‘Good work is relational.’ In these sections we also offer several analytic vignettes to further explicate the meaning of these types of conceptions of “good work” that students held. It is important to keep in mind that that these categories, while useful analytically to describe our findings, operate interactively and simultaneously and that, in addition to the traditional scores and grades, are all available and may be used by students to describe their “good work.” Students may assess that in certain classrooms and with particular teachers it is in their best interest to learn how to ‘play the game’ of school, whereas in others looking at the work they accomplish is much more an intrinsic sense of value. Similarly, how students feel about the work they have done is often bundled together with the types of relationships they have with different teachers. And the students we spoke with had their own opinions for what constituted effective instruction and pedagogy.

Findings

Before discussing our findings, it is worth noting that, as researchers, we frequently came away from our focus groups feeling how challenging it was to initially get students to talk about what “good work” looked like to them. It seemed to us that many of these students had rarely, if ever, been asked to think and talk about what assessment and academic achievement meant to them. Our question, “*How do you know when you’ve done good work in school?*” gave us opening responses indicating that grades and/or teacher comments were students’ primary measures of their academic achievement. However, as the discussions were allowed to continue, and as we pressed students to elaborate on their answers, the vast majority of students told us that “good work” was more than their grades and test scores. They said it was also linked to their own appraisals of themselves and as something that they were able to recognize individually, as well as the supportive relationships they had with adults that encouraged them to do their best.

Regardless of the type of classes they were in (AP, honors, general education, etc.) students’ definitions had much more to do with how they felt about their work, their degrees of effort exerted and whether what they learned had any relevance to them. Students, especially those not enrolled in honors or AP classes, told us that they wished that their classes were more challenging and that their teachers pushed them harder. By “harder” they meant not simply giving them more difficult work, but by coaching and encouraging them to rise to the challenge. A recent national survey showed that students across the country felt the same (National Governors Association, 2005) and believed that they would be more motivated and engaged if classes were more challenging. For all

their idealism and wishful thinking, these students were also realists and saw the handwriting on the wall. If they were to be successful in school it was also because they learned the way the school and the adults in charge said it worked. While they shared their critiques of the school and teachers with us, apart from one student who contemplated refusing to take his state exit exam on principle, no one confessed to taking an oppositional stance, based on principle that they were not going to play by the rules of the game. As we previously noted, perhaps because our sample was restricted to 11th and 12th graders many students who might fit that oppositional identity may have already left school by the 11th grade. Those that remained knew that part of their success was in how they played the game.

A) Good Work as Playing the School Game

Vignette One: The Difference between an ‘A’ and an ‘A’

Mr. Richards’ 10th grade history meets as a 2-period block each Monday and Wednesday. Jamaal strolled into class moments before the first bell on Monday morning. All semester long, Mr. Richards used the block’s first 15-20 minutes to catch up on his paperwork. A few conscientious students used that time to read ahead in the textbook while the rest of the class slept, played cards, or with their cell phones they’d snuck through the school’s metal detectors. Jamaal knew he could count on perhaps even more time, what with taking attendance, morning announcements over the school PA and the general restlessness of the class back from their weekend. He had spent the weekend working double shifts at the local convenience store as well as going to several parties. His research paper was due today and he hadn’t gotten it done over the weekend. Research paper; what a joke! Mr. Richards rarely read anything closely. He just looked to see if you put in the facts that were in the textbook and linked to the state standards posted on the wall. Plus, the chalkboard had the list of dates and facts from his lectures. Jamaal, took out his pen and notebook and over the next 10 minutes quickly wrote two pages on the origins of World War II, taking the terms and dates from the board and transposing them into sentences. He even included two sentences where he asked rhetorically whether the Iraq war and public opinion after 9-11 was like public opinion for WWII after Pearl Harbor. Mr. Richards was a sucker for anyone who put their own questions into his boring assignments. It was always good for a couple of extra check marks in the margins with his red pen. Jamaal, didn’t even read over the paper for spelling mistakes, but signed his name on the top and was done even before Mr. Richards looked up from his paperwork. Since so few students made even this much effort, two pages will look like a real paper to Mr. Richards and he’ll probably get between a B and an A-. That grade meant little to Jamaal who simply couldn’t wait for this semester to be over and be done with Mr. Richards. He used to like studying history when he was in middle school, but Mr. Richards was in love with his own voice. He loved to hear himself talk, and as long as you weren’t loud while he was talking or made him look bad passing his class was easy. But that didn’t make the class any more enjoyable. It was still a bore to be there, and for two full periods, no less.

Get the grades, pass the tests and don’t make waves. That is the gist of the school game that most of us know from our own days in school. The students we spoke to described a range of classrooms and teachers, some of whom were so enthusiastic about their content area that it was contagious. Other teachers were described as caring individuals who did their best to help students meet the requirements of their courses and guided instruction with respect to the upcoming exams. However, the bulk of what we heard were descriptions of teachers who did not engage students in subject area content, and whose classrooms served as examples of “playing the school game” in a way that did little to

inspire students. In too many of their classes, students explained that they just wanted to be finished and done with them. Often we heard students talk about how their teachers equated achievement with classroom behavior. In this sense, not questioning the teacher's authority, keeping quiet in class, and generally accepting the role of a passive student resulted in good grades, as the following quotes illustrate:

School is a game you learn how to play. Like, my grades are good, but it's not because I learned a lot and I did so well on the test. It's because . . . I'm not rude to teachers, so they're just grateful for that, so they give me a good grade.

This is what I see: If you come to class and you just are quiet and you stay to yourself, even if you do your work sometimes as opposed to somebody that's more vocal, but they do work all the time, you're going to get a higher grade than them . . . just for the fact that you're like quiet or you just sit in the corner to yourself.

In our study, students also recognized that their work in school and in different individual teachers' classrooms had their own rules for success, not all of which seemed particularly fair or based on objective conditions. Certain teachers, and these were largely the ones whom students thought little of, engendered this kind of facile approach to "good work;" that is, give them what they wanted whether or not you cared about it. A few notable teachers had their own wildly inappropriate rules as one young woman told us, "One teacher, he gave you an A if he thought you were cute. And if you weren't he gave you an F. That was our physical science teacher."

Many of the students in our study talked about "good work" as a kind of classroom performance they learned how to do in order to get out of school. In these conversations, "good work" seemed to be equated primarily with compliance and as a kind of exercise guided by external measures that held little meaning for the students themselves, aside from the role it played in helping them pass courses and graduate, or simply get by. In these discussions, the frustration that students felt towards classroom lessons and activities they determined unchallenging and without any discernible purpose, was evident.

While most students spoke about attending college as a goal they aspired towards, and as a goal their schools held for all students, there were questions raised by some students about whether their schools were just "talking the talk" of academic achievement for all students. One student recognized this discrepancy in content of courses provided to students in different tracks, "[this school] has courses that are tough and you're on a college level but that's mainly for honors students. Regular classes, there's not much going on." Another student questioned his school's commitment to preparing students for college by commenting on the overwhelming presence of military recruiters, yet the absence of college recruiters and other types of college-preparation support at his school. "[This school] has more faith in us making it in the Army than college. And there is no kind of support around us that shows that they believe in us as far as going to college." In these conversations, students recognized that some students in their schools were being provided the tools to "play the game" better than others, and other students looked at

more obvious signs as indicators of whether their schools had the intention of moving them into academics after high school at all.

Students' conversations around the New York Regents and the New Jersey HSPA exams gave further weight to this understanding of "good work," and indeed schooling in general, as a game focused more on performance, rather than on authentic retention of knowledge. When test results are used to provide give classroom teachers with important information on how well individual students are learning and offer feedback to the teachers themselves on their teaching methods and curriculum materials, testing has more meaning and purpose. According to the students in our study, rarely were the results from their test scores incorporated into recognizable changes in pedagogy or instructional practices; they just did not see it. New Jersey students even spoke about not receiving their HSPA exam scores until the summer months, when school was out and they had moved on from their 11th grade teachers. The following quotes are from two New York students regarding the Regents exams:

[student 1] *All you get back is a score. You don't know what you did good on or what you didn't do good. It's like, OK, I got this score, but I don't know what I got right or what I got wrong.*

[student 2] *And if you fail, you don't know in what.*

While the goal of using testing to help guide and calibrate instruction is a laudable and important goal, it was not terribly evident to the students in our study. In such an environment, it is not surprising to learn that students found little value in these exams. Most students preferred to cite their coursework as a better measure of their scholastic abilities and accomplishments. When the primary purpose of test scores is to rank and sort students, and potentially deny them a diploma, rather than to be used as a teaching tool to guide instruction, this colors students' perceptions of these exams.

In response to the survey statement, *'It's important to me to do well on the Regents or HSPA exams,'* virtually 100% of students said they either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with that statement, and yet when talking in the focus groups about the actual test they shared their ambivalence and doubts. *"I did it. I didn't want to fail it, but I really didn't care."* This statement sums up much of what we heard from these students about their respective state exams. "Boring" and "easy" were also adjectives they frequently used. There were a number of students who said that they felt some stress and anxiety, with their graduation at stake if they failed, but more often these students described the state exams as a waste of their time and objected strongly to any inference that they were a reflection of what they knew or how they thought. The honors students went so far as to complain that it was an insult to their intelligence.

Many students associated their motivation to do well in school with their imagined future, be it to graduate, go to college, get money or have a career. These students all recognized that they needed to finish high school because, as one put it, *"without a diploma you don't get nothing, that's where everything begins."* When we asked what it would mean

to graduate, we heard repeatedly simple declarations such as “*everything;*” and “*I just want to be done with high school.*” These comments come from students who like their school, attend classes, and who think they are getting a good education and want to be challenged further. Although it is clear that students are motivated to finish high school because they are driven by the prospect of graduation as the long-anticipated entry into their own independent adult lives, it is important to note that in large part, students want to finish high school because they find it boring and/or uninspiring.

For many of the students we spoke with, the negative aspects of life without a high school diploma served as stark motivators for them to, if not excel in, at least complete high school. These students do not need to read the commissioned reports because it is all around their own world(s). “*A lot of kids drop out of school by the time they get to the 12th grade ... How far can anyone go? Being in the street you got two options, jail or death. You pick the option. You know there is more to life.*” Despite their insight into the future, these students also were pragmatic and speculated what it was about high school that was worthwhile in the here and now and many students expressed ambivalence about the utility of what they were learning. One young woman reflected on it this way. “*When I’m in school I say, like, I really need to do this because what am I going to do later on [in the future]? But it’s like you think about it at the time, but then I look at my mother. I ask her a question about math and she will say, ‘Oh, I forgot about that years ago.’ So why am I studying it now? Am I going to forget it in a couple of years?... You think yes and then you think no; you really don’t know. You’re confused on what to do.*”

We also learned from students in New York schools that because of the ‘high stakes’ of the Regents exams, some teachers determined final grades in their courses based solely on students’ Regents scores. Students told us they had calculated choices to make in particular these classes: do the required coursework or rely on the Regents exams? These choices existed because the students learned that particular teachers, even if they failed their course, would give them a passing mark providing their Regents score was high enough. This seemed like an example of how the presence of standardized testing actually contributed to a less-rigorous learning experience, if students were shunning classroom work only to place their bets on passing the Regents exams.

A number of the students in AP classes we spoke with also described the game-playing in a more conventionally positive sense, one in which they saw the links between their time in high school and where they were headed. These students, tracked for success, saw the game as a socially acceptable route to Higher Education and the social capital that accompanied it and even enjoyed playing and feeling competitive about it with one another. Students who were not taking advanced courses saw the game more as a monotonous exercise, quite possibly due to the absence of anything more substantive or rigorous in their courses and with their teachers.

Lastly, parental advice also factored into this understanding of ‘good work,’ with students describing the encouragement they received from their parents to stay focused on their goal of graduating and advising them to avoid conflict and not be sidetracked by less than perfect learning environments. As one student remembered, his father told him, “*It don’t*

matter how bad the school is. It's just that you matter, and if you're the one who want [sic] to graduate. You are the one that has to be responsible for whatever happens to your grades. ...So it really don't [sic] matter about the school, it matters about your efforts." It is important to note that we heard these sorts of comments primarily from students of color in schools that served a lower socio-economic population. We understood these types of comments to be rooted in a deeper understanding these parents had about the inherent inequities their students were facing, the larger 'game' that they were in, and would continue to face in the future. In this sense, parents were providing their children with an important life lesson: to persevere, regardless of the circumstances.

B) Good Work as "How it Feels to Me"

...There are like two kinds of A's. You get one A and you just say, "Ha. I got an A." And you just put it in your book bag or something. And the other kind where you, like, get an A and then smile and look through the paper, even though you know what it says and everything.

One thing that most all the students in our study made clear to us was that they wanted their high school experience to mean something to them; that learning should engage them and carry with it some sort of relevance, if not in the here-and-now at least in the foreseeable future. This search for meaning was expressed in their assessments of their work and how it made them feel. When students found something that they cared about and/or someone who cared about them mastering the content, they put considerable effort and dedication into what ultimately became their "good work." Students identified these particular classes as meaningful and important to them when they were able to see the work itself as being rooted in some relevant way to the larger world. Students described teachers in these classes as "challenging" and "engaging" when they "*motivated*" students "*beyond the curriculum,*" when they were passionate and knowledgeable about their subject matter, and when they helped students not only understand the course material but made it relevant and connected to the world outside the classroom. When students could see how the content of a subject connected to a profession (e.g. chemistry and alternative energy sources for powering cars, or how in-class presentations and public speaking prepared them for job interviews), it made them feel like learning the academic skills made a certain practical sense.

Additionally, for a number of them, it was their own feelings associated with the process--"how hard I worked"--and not necessarily the external appraisal in the form of a grade or test score that determined for them whether it was "good work." Some students reflected on how appraisals of their work had changed over time and now were clearly centered on their own criteria, as in this exchange between two students who looked back over their high school careers:

Well, in the 9th grade, my opinion of my work was mostly external, based on what did other people think, like my teachers. But now I depend, I only view my work based on my own opinion. If I think I did good work and the teacher says, it was

bad, good, bad, I don't really care at all, because if I'm satisfied with my work that's all the matters to me.

When I was in 9th grade I was putting my whole effort into it. And now I see that you can get by on teachers. At the same time, I know that I still have to work hard. So sometimes you slack and sometimes you work extra hard. And in the 9th grade you weren't thinking about that, you were [only] thinking about the work you had to do.

Students also recognized “good work” as working to the best of their ability. *“You feel much better when you know you did something. You know you learned that or you know the subject or you know what's going on in the class, like you're not lost anywhere. You know you learned something.”* Their self-assessment extended to occasions when they put forth the effort but also when they didn't and yet still got a high grade. *“It's a hollow sense of satisfaction,”* one young man told us, *“because I know I got a good grade but it didn't come from anywhere.”* It was in these discussions, we began to understand that another facet of students' definition of “good work” was a personal feeling students had when they put effort and interest into a task. Even as they knew that some of their school experience was little more than a game, they recognized when it was not and that often was found in how it made them feel, as the comments from this student highlight: *“... You know you're passing this class for a reason, because you put the effort to it. When you just sitting in the class and you just doing the work and you know you're not doing it to your full ability and you're just chilling in and you still pass the class with high grades, you just feel like, “Well, I guess I don't need to do nothing, I can just show up every day.”*

These feeling were not reserved only to in-class experiences, but also the state exams, as students in both states overwhelmingly expressed ambivalence about the relevance associated with these exams. One student explained her motivation do well on these exams as: *“Like you don't pass the Regents, you can't get into a good college. You don't pass the Regents, you won't graduate.”* Another admitted he was not particularly motivated. *“...I'm getting out of here, I'm good. I don't aim for 80. Because, to me, passing is passing. I don't care about being on the honor role, because I don't like the attention. I just like my 65s and that's it.”* What relevance students derived from the exams were the benefits associated with passing them, but beyond that, students did not see any value added to their education worth mentioning. Not unlike their sense about high school in general, the Regents and HSPA exams were something that they had to get through. Apart from a few isolated teachers who enlisted students in an overall preparation for these exams and supported and encouraged them along the way, our overall sense was how little knowledge and understanding students had when it came to the meaning behind state exit exams and to assessments, both formative and summative. We wonder what impact, if any, it might have to discuss openly with students the purposes behind these exams, what they measure and don't measure and why schools and districts employ them. It is quite possible that because teachers do not necessarily understand the answers to these questions, or fail to see the utility themselves, they avoid or abbreviate such discussions with students.

Few students' perspectives on these exit exams signaled that there were elements of rigor associated with them. Additionally, their objections to the measurements they conferred, both real and imagined, underscored the absence of relevance that accompanied the exams; apart from their gate-keeping purpose. Relevance is an interesting concept for schools, especially in light of the trend towards standardization and one that is getting more attention as a component of high school reform models (Goldwasser & Bach, 2007). We see it cutting both ways. Significant relevance in course content and pedagogy can stimulate students' sense of "good work" as something they generate from within because their interests are being well-served. However, the absence of relevance can serve to underscore that "good work" is little more than playing the school game that sometimes feels rigged and/or phony, but certainly requires less personal investment than it would if students felt that their curricula was more consonant with who they were and where they were going. Certainly this double-edge captures much of their feelings about their states' exit exams.

One final point within this criterion of "good work" as how it made students feel has to do with ways these students talked about the different ways they engaged in work outside of school. All the students we spoke with had some area of their lives where they felt they were doing good work that was relevant and meaningful to them – be it art, sports, childcare, or even braiding hair. These were areas in their lives where they freely and willingly gave time and effort to developing their particular skills and where they saw their talents as having a purpose. While making school coursework relevant to students can be difficult, particularly within a framework of state-established standards that often tends to decontextualize knowledge in order to make it testable, we believe understanding a topic's relevance is necessary not only for student engagement, but also for actual knowledge retention. Teachers and schools would do well to build upon students' sense of competence outside of school and use their experiences as a means to better understand what is relevant to students and how to incorporate aspects of that so as to better engage students with the work inside school.

C) Good Work is Relational

Vignette Two: When is a 'B' is worth more than an 'A'?

Science classes had always come easy and been fun for Theresa. She had wanted to be a veterinarian for years and anything that gave her more knowledge about the animal world, she soaked up like a sponge. Evolutionary biology, genetics, even earth science, she took all these courses and scored 90s on the tests. The readings felt like stories to her and she followed their plots and character development as effortlessly as if she were reading a novel. It just seemed like all the facts were in neat and tidy places in her head and she could grab onto them whenever she needed to. Then there was physics. Mrs. Shankar's class was the hardest class in all her 11 years in school. While biologic science felt real and its theories made sense, so much of physics seemed hopelessly abstract. She couldn't quite grasp the concepts and this was reflected time and again in her quiz scores. The proofs in the formulas seemed to require not just a different kind of logic than she was used to but almost a kind of faith in the unknown universe, so different than the biologic world she felt at home in. Her parents didn't understand how she could do so well in her other classes but not in this one. She did not have a good explanation for them either. Despite these feelings, Theresa continued to try. Mrs. Shankar offered after-school tutoring and, even

though she knew that she would miss her bus and not get home to help make dinner until after 6 pm, Theresa stayed late Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday for extra help. She had a mid-term coming up on Friday that was 25% of her grade. Fridays' test came and Theresa struggled with it as she had with all the previous ones. She left school for the weekend thinking that once again she had blown it. However, next week when Mrs. Shankar returned the exams, Theresa saw that she had earned a B- and the words, "*Theresa, you have really grown and worked hard and it shows. Very well done!*" She felt elated. She carried the test around in her book bag for the whole week and every so often pulled it out to read Mrs. Shankar's comments and revisit her answers. The high grades in biology had been a source of great pride for her parents, and so they could not understand how she was having so much trouble just passing another science course. Earning a B+ in Mrs. Shankar's class meant something special to Theresa that was hard to describe to other people. Many times she felt like crying and quitting, that she just wasn't smart enough to take physics. But this B- meant that she was smarter and that she could do what frequently felt impossible. Mrs. Shankar recognized it and said so on paper, and now Theresa was starting to believe it as well.

Students talked frequently about adults in their lives – teachers mostly but also parents and other family members – who inspired, challenged and generally pushed them to do more and become more. These teachers were always described with affection and/or respect, and, in the case of teachers, as something that students wished there were more of. When pushed, challenged or otherwise inspired, students said they stepped up and accomplished more, which pleased them. Students also said they wished that they were challenged and pushed more often and by more teachers (and by extension the curriculum). "*In her class, you know that you have to pay attention. And she challenges you, too, with the work. Like every day we always do work, so if you miss one day you have to go back, like it's obligated that you have to go back, because the next day it won't make any sense to you. And that's good about it. And she, like, is not boring. Like she makes it interesting.*"

In addition to individuals, students also spoke of the kinds of things that truly interested them (e.g. music, art, auto mechanics, sports) and how their involvement in them, both inside and outside of school contributed to their ideas around "good work." "Good work as relational" is associated both with people and with activities. "Good work," in this regard, was seen by students' desire to continue developing skills and abilities when they received encouragement and support for acquiring them and that, in turn, motivated them to want (to do) more. As we outlined above, these categories operate interactively and simultaneously and may be used by students to describe their own sense of "good work." In some classrooms, all that students feel they can do is to play the game whereas in others, learning and the accompanying work is highly personal and is connected intrinsically to how students feel, as well as extrinsically to their relationships with individual teachers.

Our conversations with the students about this kind of 'good work' were quite animated and they had very clear ideas about how and what they were being taught in their classes. When students told us that "*I didn't feel I was learning the way I needed to learn,*" or that long-time teachers need to "*[refresh] themselves and really [get] involved in what they teach,*" or "*the teachers, some of them are concerned with test scores, while some of them actually want you to gain and retain information,*" their comments indicated some level of awareness of their needs as learners. While we heard more examples from students in

honors classes about teachers' written comments, all students said that type of constructive feedback they received was important to them. *"They say something unique to that person about, like, 'Well on your paper, I really liked how you did this.' Or, 'You could have done this a little more.' And that shows they took the time to actually read and care about it, which makes you feel like they are actually reading and caring about what you are doing."*

Students also had some specific ideas about how teachers helped them to do their best work. *"I like it when teachers tell me when something is wrong and they show me what I can do to improve, or teach me different techniques instead of saying, 'Oh, well, you didn't know what you were doing.'" According to many students, offering more than surface-level comments on their work and/or teachers who made themselves available to students individually if they needed extra help was what students understood to be "good teaching." And students reported not only wanting, but needing substantive feedback on their work in order to excel in their classes.*

Overall, students seemed to genuinely appreciate being made to work hard in their courses. There was a degree of energy and pride with which students spoke about being put to a challenge and then meeting that challenge. An interesting gap, however, appeared in our survey data. While over 90% of students said that it was important to do well in school, only 60% claimed that they did their best on a regular basis. We perceive this discrepancy as potentially reflecting student engagement in their studies. In discussions about their courses, students admitted being challenged and engaged in only a few, and for some students not at all. As in our earlier discussion of playing the school game, students talked about going through the motions in school – about doing what was asked of them just to get a particular grade and pass a course. But students also told us that they wished that more teachers would care and push them to stay motivated to perform their best. One student described the little things that an individual teacher did that inspired her to do her best. *"One time my teacher, he called to remind me over spring break to do an extra-credit project to bring my grade up. That was a good incentive because I knew he actually cared about my grade to think about me during spring break and call my house to remind me. Just the fact that he reminded me, it made me want to try harder in his class."* Another student, a recent immigrant and English language learner talked about how gaining academic competence inspired him to want to do more: *"I like the fact that I'm the second [ranked] person in my class, and I just had two and a half years here. And that motivates me. I want to keep being the best. I want to keep doing the best I can. And when people say, 'Oh my god! You're only two years here? Look at your English. How'd you learn so fast? Look at your grades turned out so great.' And that's another thing that makes me want to do better."* This notion of success breeding success was powerful for these students. When they saw themselves as confident and able to excel at something, their drive to continue with mastery was often quite strong. When it was not, there was tension and doubt.

It is perhaps not surprising that students spoke about their teachers as a mix of individuals, some of whom challenged them and were strong motivators as well as ones who were unsupportive, not engaging, and some who, even if they were likeable, had

little control over their classrooms. Perhaps because of their scarcity, those teachers with whom students enjoyed good relationships left strong impressions in students' minds. One student offered an example of the interpersonal qualities he appreciated.

“Like some teachers, they’ll see something wrong, they notice. Once Mr. Johnson noticed that it was something like in my work. He’s like, ‘You’re going down, what’s wrong?’ Like they notice a certain insight in you, so it’s not so much being a friend, it’s just being there for you. And it’s true, they grow accustomed to you and they get that connection. And they just do it to help.”

Not all our data illustrate positive relations with adults. Some students, especially the seniors we spoke with in New York, were highly concerned about how their “good work” got them only so far on their way into college and they spoke of the difficulties they had in navigating their way:

We don’t have enough guidance counselors to help students with their college applications. When you do find the guidance counselor, it’s like her priorities over ours. You’re a teacher, I believe your priority is supposed to be students first, I’m guessing. But it’s like, ‘No, I’m first going to eat my lunch and do my class work and things like that. And then, after I’m done and I’m all prepared and everything, I’ll come and get you.’

Students had much to say about the importance of support – whether from teachers or administrators or other academic staff in their school (as well as from their families) and the effect this support had on their sense of belonging and the sense of potential they had for themselves. Lack of teacher support and/or low teacher expectations, while sometimes working as motivators, most often were talked about by students as struggles that made them question their presence and perseverance in school entirely. As one student put it, *“there’s a lot of stuff teachers throw at your face. Like some days, I just want to quit. That’s it! I’m not coming to school no more! I just want to give up.”*

One of the more telling, if not upsetting, contradictions we found in our survey data involved students' aspirations for their level of post-high school education versus their teachers' beliefs about the level of education their students would achieve. Overwhelmingly, our survey data showed that students held much higher aspirations for themselves than did their teachers. More than 80 percent of students indicated that they planned on getting a college or graduate degree, whereas more than 50 percent of the teachers surveyed believed less than half of their students would enroll, let alone complete college. While it is possible that teachers' responses held a more accurate appraisal of what was involved in college work and the attainment of degrees, the gap between students' and teachers' view of the future is worthy of further investigation. In an environment that is shifting towards providing a curriculum that prepares all students for college, this variance in beliefs about students' future is a potentially large gap to bridge and says some things are the relational aspects of students producing “good work.”

A most interesting divergence in our data came from questions about family involvement. When we surveyed teachers, they named families' lack of participation and interest in their school as major obstacles to the quality of education students received. They

believed that parents by and large looked at students' grades to ascertain how they are doing. More personal interactions such as in-school meetings, telephone calls, or face-to-face conversations with parents were hardly mentioned as ways teachers communicated with their students' families. In comparison, we heard students talk at length about the roles their families played in their education. Although they admitted that their parents rarely showed up at school, in no way was this an indicator of their non-involvement. Some students did acknowledge that the amount of time that their parents spent working prevented direct involvement with their school. In these instances, students said their parents generally deferred to the authority of the teachers and school officials to manage and monitor what occurred in school. However, it is important to underscore that the lack of direct participation with the school was, in these students' views, not the same as a disinterest in their education. Family members were cited repeatedly as key motivating forces in students' lives and demonstrated another example of the way "good work" as being relational. Doing well in school was an important way these students showed respect and honor to their parents for the sacrifices they made and for the expectations they held. As one student commented about his father, *"I want to measure up to him and follow in his footsteps. And so that motivates me every day to be good in school."* A number of students were proud that they would be either the first or among the first in their families to graduate high school and/or attend college, and what that meant to their parents contributed to students' motivation to succeed.

A common problem in high schools is the perception that parents are not involved and care less about their children's education than when the students were younger. Our evidence shows that the relationships with family and their interest in school success remain strong and play an important role in how students understand the relevance of their high school experience. High schools could expand their concepts of parental involvement were they to invite students to participate in developing new strategies for better engaging families.

Conclusion and Implications

If we want students to become more responsible for their own learning, and to leave high school confident and prepared for what follows, it makes sense to listen to what learning means to them and to factor it into both policy and practical decisions made in their benefit. High school students' voices and views should be integrated into discussions about high school reform. How could it hurt? Inclusion should mean a broader representation and a more diverse student body than just those individuals from student councils and other traditional sources of participation in school affairs. When administrators and teachers take the time to listen carefully to what their students have to say about "good work" it may help them re-conceptualize their approach to curriculum and instruction. Students, as we all know, come to school already interested and experienced in many different things. They also have dreams and ambitions to become skilled, knowledgeable and competent in different areas. Others are looking to discover what those areas might be for them. Often these interests and ambitions are reflections of the "good work" that they are engaged in outside of school but they need help,

encouragement and support in learning how best to make connections and bridges between their own experiences with “good work” outside of school and what is required of them to succeed inside school. Listening to them and helping make these connections seems like a good beginning.

As we see it, the danger for future discussions and implementations of high school reform is that many students like the ones we spoke with expressed a view that they understood and responded one way to teachers whom they knew they could finesse or even con and another way to those whom they respected and were motivated by their relationship to perform. These feelings were shared across our sample, be they students from honors and AP to regular classes, from small schools to particular reform models to old fashioned comprehensive high schools. The grades students obtained from these different approaches to work were strong examples of what we mean by the difference between an ‘A’ and an ‘A’. The problem, as we heard it, was that students felt that there were too few teachers whom they really respected, and too many classes where they could skate by. This contributed to their understanding of what “good work” in high school looked and felt like to them. Having sized up the educational landscape and perceived that this was basically as good as it gets, the students in our study seemed resigned to the fact that high school was largely boring, uninspiring and something they simply needed to get through, rather than a significant learning experience in and of itself. Whatever real engagement with learning real things with substantive meaning existed, they believed it awaited them beyond high school, as it certainly was not a notable feature of their schools. We find this particularly troubling since most students, certainly those not in the advanced tracks, did not make a connection between the quality of their high school education and its preparation for college and the world of work. Once again, students’ perspectives were a variation on a well-trodden theme of ‘wait until you’re older,’ only this time it extended for four years. We imagine the kind of patience these students must have to exhibit knowing early in their careers that most of their teaching and learning relationships will be lacking in the fundamental aspects that would help them really profit from their time in school.

However, these students were not simply complaining and/or critiquing their school for us, they also offered their own suggestions for improvement. Given the opportunity to talk freely, students emphasized that they wanted their experience to mean more than it did. This came across in their desire to be more academically challenged, to have a more engaging curriculum that was better linked to relevant issues in their immediate and imagined personal, intellectual and future lives, and to have relationships with teachers that included more individual attention and feedback on their work, especially written feedback. On this last point, it was the level of detail that was, to them, far more important than the letter or numeric grades assigned to their work. We see this as an illustration of how there can be and is a difference between an ‘A’ and an ‘A’. These overall requests and recommendations by students struck us as relatively basic and not too demanding to implement.

It seems highly questionable to us that, with series of district, state and national tides ebbing and flowing around judgments of the worth of high school education via increased

standardized measurements, exit exams and minimum graduation requirements, schools will be persuaded to take seriously the requests from students like these on how to reform their schools. It is not our contention that this small study has definitive answers to the persistent problems of high school reform. However, our findings are remarkably similar to a recent and massive national survey of students (National Governors' Association, 2005) as well as findings from a national study on the perspectives of high dropouts (Bridgeland, DiIulio & Morison, 2006) and the most recent NAEP study on high school graduate transcripts (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2007). What we are saying is that before we embark on yet another predictable round of blue-ribbon commissioned reports, the inevitable stories in the press about the failure of urban schools, and the latest proposals and multi-million dollar investments to reshape high schools yet again, perhaps students themselves should be allowed a genuine voice in the direction and design of new reforms. Whether one considers theirs the perspective of the consumer, the stakeholder, or the future citizens, workers, and leaders of the nation, students have something to contribute about the structure and implementation of their own education. Perhaps, instead of simply imposing another plan from a series of adult experts, go to the source and draw upon the on-the-ground knowledge from those who experience the impact of theory into practice on a daily basis and listen to what they have to say about what works and doesn't work for them. It certainly would not set progress any further back than it appears to be at present, and it might actually make a difference.

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Appendix A

School Name (pseudonyms)	School Size	Location	Ethnicity Breakdown	Free and Reduced Lunch*	Academic Data 2004-05 HSPA or 2005-06 Regents data
Blue Mountain	430	Urban	2% Asian 61% H 34% AA 2% W	84%	37% Math A 61% Eng
Fish Creek	430	Urban	1.1% Asian 61.1% H 36.1% AA 1.7% C	93%	35% Math A 39% Eng
Ford	1484	Urban Fringe	11% Asian 11% H 49% AA, 29% C	27%	83% P/A LA 74% P/A Math
Forest Hills	430	Urban	2% Asian 67% H 30% B 1% W	84%	35% Math A 44% Eng
Kennedy	2336	Urban	1% Asian, 27% H, 69% AA, 3% C	40%	52% P/A LA 32% P/A math
Long View	430	Urban	55% H 43% B 1% W 1% Un	92%	51% Math A 33% Eng
Polk	2137	Urban Fringe	22% Asian, 9% H, 33% AA, 35% C	12%	87% P/A LA, 78% P/A Math
Treetop	430	Urban	2% Asian 58% H 37% AA 2% W	75%	39% Math A 58% Eng
Truman	1375	Urban Fringe	8% Asian, 17% H, 46% AA, 28% C	8%	81% P/A LA, 71% P/A math

HSPA scores are reported as aggregate totals of P (passing)/A (advanced).

Source for all this data: www.publicschoolreview.com.