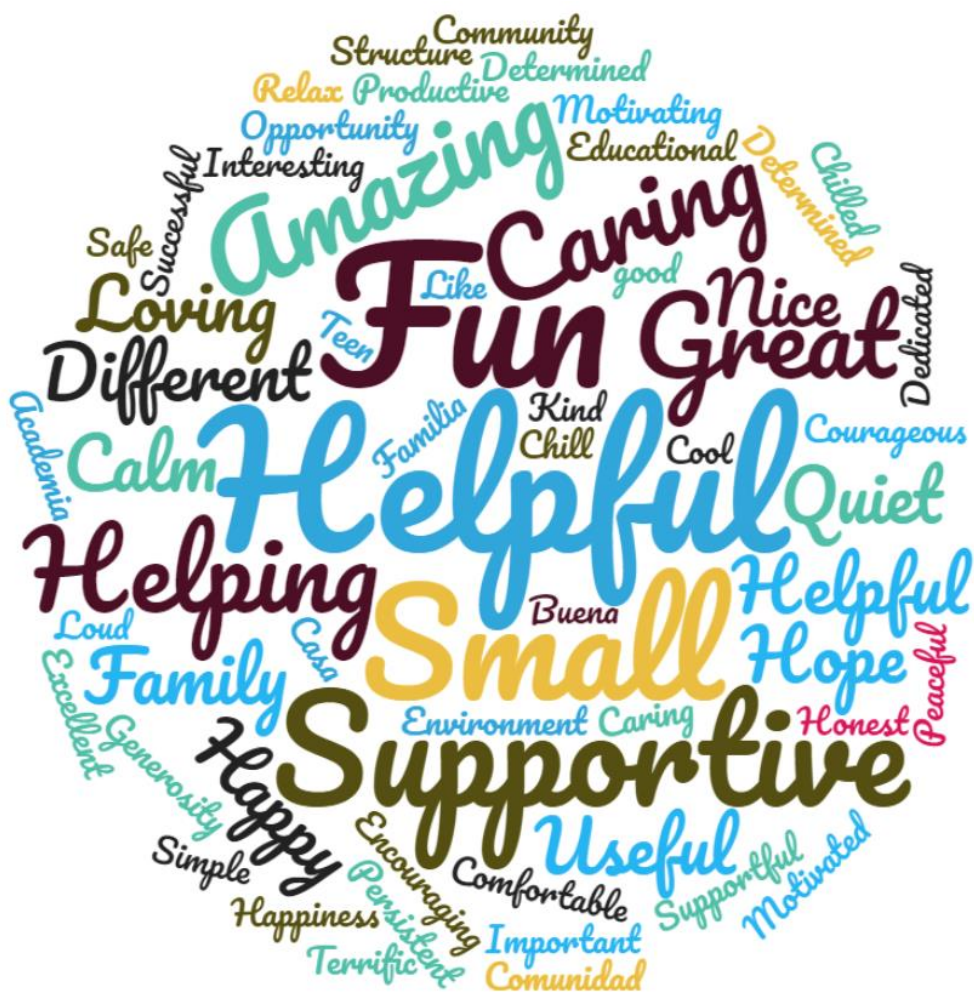


Nowell Leadership Academy

Qualitative Program Evaluation Report

July 2019



Prepared by a research team from the University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May and June of 2019, a team of seven researchers from the University of Rhode Island (URI) conducted an intensive qualitative evaluation of the Nowell Leadership Academy (NLA) which received a one out of five-star rating via the RIDE School Report Card. Our evaluation goal was to document NLA community perceptions of, and experiences with, the school. Rich and detailed qualitative data were collected from 117 NLA stakeholders through two methods. First, the team conducted 18 different focus groups with current students, alumni, family members, teachers and staff at both the Capital and Central Falls NLA campuses. The team also reached out to 48 students who were under-enrolled or not attending regularly via phone and completed a brief individual interview with 15 of them. The total number of people who participated in this evaluation included:

- 78 Students ([60] Current, [3] Alumni, [15] Non-Finishers/Non-Attendees)
- 21 Educators (Faculty [11]/Staff [10])
- 18 Family Members of Current or Former Students

The research team documented 12 emergent categories that summarize the experiences and perspectives of students, families, teachers, and staff at NLA. Those categories are detailed in this report and include: (1) Curriculum, (2) Opportunities to Prepare for Future Endeavors, (3) Motivation, (4) Pregnant and Parenting Mission, (5) Support, (6) Combining Schools, (7) Environment, (8) Communication, (9) Daily Schedule, (10) Transportation, (11) Health and Wellness, and (12) RIDE Report Card. Every section of the report summarizes a category (and relevant subcategories) and includes direct quotations to illuminate how each of the key NLA stakeholders feel about and/or experience NLA. For clarity and readability, this report is divided into sections that correspond to each of the 12 categories. However, it is important to note that there are many similarities, connections, and overlaps among the categories.

The research team was crafting this report as the findings from the Johns Hopkins University (2019) study of Providence Schools were released. Our findings are in stark contrast to that report which described Providence Public Schools as unsafe environments, replete with bullying and demoralized educators. All 117 NLA stakeholders painted a very different picture of NLA. They find the school to be a safe, bully-free environment where youth and their families are respected. Families and students describe NLA administrators and teachers as caring, supportive, helpful, and committed to seeing every student succeed. In fact, data from this qualitative evaluation show that NLA exemplifies what every school strives to be—an academically rigorous and respectful environment where students feel a sense of community, staffed with dedicated educators who individualize learning and wrap-around supports to foster student success.

NLA Strengths to Retain

- NLA enacts the espoused mission of serving “Rhode Island’s pregnant, parenting and underserved youth.” NLA does an excellent job creating an environment that combines pregnant and parenting students with vastly different other underserved groups. Students,

teachers, and families applauded the sense of community NLA has created with this unique mixture of students.

- Faculty and staff hold and enact a clear belief system that all students have talent, potential, and can succeed. Students and families noted how drastically different NLA was from other schools where pregnant, parenting, and underserved students were viewed as problems or failures versus youth with great potential. Students and families felt strongly supported both academically and holistically. This was done through texts from teachers and staff, home visits, home-school communication, advice, and willingness of teachers and staff to meet students' academic and non-academic needs. This dual academic and holistic support is a real asset that sets NLA apart from other high schools. Teachers and staff were consistently described as “going above and beyond.”
- Students and families reported that they felt part of a caring, trusting, bullying-free, and “family-like” NLA community where they were treated with respect. The positive school climate and teacher-student relationships seem to be among the top reasons why students are motivated to attend and graduate—despite life hurdles. This positive, safe, and welcoming school climate is in striking contrast to the findings of a recent study of Providence schools by Johns Hopkins University (2019) that found “School culture is broken, and safety is a daily concern for students and teachers” (Executive Summary, p. 2). When asked what three words they would use to describe NLA, students provided overwhelmingly positive descriptors such as: helpful (30), fun (13), supportive (9), small (8), caring (6), amazing (5), great (4), nice/kind (4), and understanding (3).
- There is an intentional focus on helping students transition out of high school through internships, college application support, resume writing, and other life skill workshops. NLA clearly wants to be more than a diploma granting institution. They respect students as emerging adults and provide knowledge and skill building opportunities to prepare them to be productive members of society.
- Faculty hold a deep commitment to crafting culturally relevant learning experiences. Most NLA educators reported specific efforts to adapt the Summit curricula to be more relevant to the lives of students via cultural inclusion. All teachers clearly cared deeply about their subjects, student learning, and making the curriculum relevant to all.

Possible Areas for Growth

- NLA may want to focus on professional development, teacher supports, and systems that help teachers and students balance a content mastery platform and seat time/attendance expectations. Teachers (and students) reported complex challenges of effectively providing individualized support to multiple students with very different skill levels and attendance patterns. One possible strategy is to reduce the number of different course preps for each teacher. A second is to utilize aides, AmeriCorps volunteers, and student teachers/interns from local colleges and universities.

- NLA may want to review the benefits of different start and end times. Students and families reported challenges of getting to school early (due to childcare, transportation issues, or sleep needs) while others noted the difficulty getting to a job by 4pm. Since few students reported finding value in Wednesday early dismissal as anything more than “free” time, it may be useful to consider a five-day schedule that begins later and ends earlier (e.g., 9:30am-2:30pm or 3pm.)
- Students, families, and teachers all described how the supports for pregnant and parenting students could be improved. They specifically identified on-site daycare, parenting classes, a clear plan for transitioning back to school from maternity leave and start and end times that are more suitable to life with children. First, NLA should offer permanent (and emergency) childcare to all student parents. NLA can creatively address the cost of childcare by: seeking grants, offering NLA students internships in childcare, and partnering, for example, with the [Community College of Rhode Island \(CCRI\)](#), [Salve Regina University](#), [RIC](#), and [URI](#) Early Childhood Education Programs to gain student interns to partially staff a childcare center. Given the mission of serving pregnant and parenting youth, this is an important area for growth. Second, NLA can enhance parenting education and skill development (via curriculum, workshops, field trips) for students. (See suggestions below for formalizing university and community partnerships).
- Students, families, and teachers noted NLA’s deep commitment to holistic support of students. However, participants described how many of these supports were based upon informal networks of, or situation-specific efforts by, a dedicated NLA teacher or administrator. Such person-centric support is a strength of NLA and should continue. However, as NLA grows, they may need to begin implementing more formalized *systems* to meet student needs regarding the toughest reported challenges such as: transportation, individualized learning, and meeting basic student needs (food, physical education, and parenting). NLA can develop (or strengthen current) partnerships with non-profit agencies ([AmeriCorps](#), [College Crusade](#), [College Visions](#), [SNAP Education](#), [Year Up](#), [RISLA](#)) and local colleges (e.g., URI, RIC, CCRI) in order to tap into education, human development and family studies, social work, nutrition, and kinesiology faculty expertise, volunteer interest, student labor (e.g., internships, student teaching), and community resources for curricular and workshop initiatives. NLA may consider hiring a full- or part-time staff member to coordinate the outreach, communication, legal agreements, supervision, etc. related to such partnerships.
- NLA may need to revisit student and staff concerns pertaining to combining campuses. First, NLA should make a new location easily accessible to the target population of students across Rhode Island. Second, if the current campuses combine, NLA should address the deeply rooted stereotypes students have about peers from the “other” campus. NLA might implement intentional community building activities prior to, and after the move in order to maintain the supportive, family-like, and bully free school environment currently reported by students at separate campuses. In-house teacher and staff led community building could be combined by more formal team building, for instance at the [URI challenge course](#).

EVALUATION METHODS

Program evaluation is a systemic collection of information about a program that is used to inform decisions toward improvements of the program (Greene, 1994; Patton, 2015). The goal of this program evaluation was to use qualitative methods (e.g., focus groups and interviews) to gain rich and detailed narratives from key stakeholders about NLA's strengths and areas for improvement. NLA is a Rhode Island public charter school with two campuses: a Capital Campus in Providence and a Central Campus in Central Falls. As of September 2018, 41 percent of its student population identified as pregnant or parenting. Half of its students are over the age of 18, and 71 percent are over-age and under-credited. Female students comprise 74 percent of the student population. Students who identify as Black comprise 32 percent of the student population and 61 percent of students identify as Hispanic.

Procedure

We began this intensive evaluation process by meeting several times with NLA administrators to define the purpose and scope of the evaluation and to craft plans for recruitment, collection, analysis, and reporting. The research team obtained approval from the University of Rhode Island's Institutional Review Board to conduct this evaluation (Reference # IRB1819-178).

This program evaluation included focus groups and individual phone interviews with several stakeholder groups of NLA, including: current students, teachers, staff, alumni, family members, and students who do not regularly attend school or did not graduate (referred to as non-finishers and non-attendees). Stakeholder groups were invited to participate in 45-minute to one-hour focus group or a 10-30-minute interview (in person or via phone) with the researchers.

Focus groups are useful for collecting qualitative data from various sub-groups of participants (Krueger, 2002). We held 18 different focus groups where stakeholders with similar characteristics were grouped together. For example, we held different focus groups for pregnant and parenting students, male students, alumni, Spanish-speaking families, English-speaking families, teachers, and administrators. We utilized an interpreter during focus groups with Spanish-speaking participants. By phone, we reached out to 48 students who no longer had a physical connection with NLA (e.g., non-finishers and non-attendees). Of the 48, 15 students participated in a phone interview. Before data were collected, all participants completed a written or verbal consent form in English or Spanish. Focus groups questions were reviewed by NLA administrators in advance. Protocol questions asked about stakeholder experiences and perceptions and can be found in Appendices A through F. In addition to qualitative data, we asked student participants closed-ended questions about whether or not they received what they needed to be successful students from teachers, staff, and significant others in their lives (e.g., family members and partners). Participants overwhelmingly answered "yes" to these questions. This quantitative data is detailed in Appendix H.

To glean a holistic picture and situate our work in context, we reviewed relevant documents, including: NLA documents (e.g. Program of Study, Student Handbook, Strategic Plan, and Graduation Requirements); NLA web materials; and Rhode Island Department of Education

(RIDE) materials (including the grant NLA received to conduct this evaluation). We also explored the Summit Curriculum platform, which is the primary curriculum tool used by NLA.

Data analysis included several steps that are typical in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). All conversations were audio recorded. Recordings were transcribed using a professional and confidential transcription service. Transcripts were reviewed several times by the research team to ensure the content was accurate. Researchers also kept memos during data collection and analysis to capture initial interpretations of the data (Patton, 2015). Researchers used three rounds of systematic coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015) to identify codes, clustered concepts, and categories as they emerged from the data. A final list of categories and subcategories are detailed in the findings section of this report.

Participants

For this evaluation, rich and detailed qualitative data were collected from 117 NLA stakeholders, including: 21 faculty and staff, 18 family members, and 78 students (current, alumni, non-attenders, and non-finishers). Demographic information and other information about participants were collected by the researchers or provided by NLA. Of the 60 current students who participated in focus groups, 29 were active students at the Central Campus in Central Falls and 31 at the Capital Campus in Providence. We held 18 different focus groups where stakeholders with similar characteristics were grouped together. For example, we held different focus groups for pregnant and parenting students, male students, alumni, Spanish-speaking families, English-speaking families, teachers, and administrators. We utilized an interpreter during focus groups with Spanish-speaking participants. By phone, we reached out to 48 students who no longer had a physical connection with NLA (e.g., non-finishers and non-attendees). Of the 48, 15 students participated in a phone interview.

Racial, ethnic, and sex demographic data were available for most participants. The majority of the total 78 student participants were female and students of color. Females comprised 74 percent (n=58) of student participants and males comprised 26 percent (n=20). See Figure 1. Eighty-one percent (n=63) of student participants were Latina/Latino, ten percent (n=8) were Black, six percent (n=5) were White, and three percent (n=2) identified as other racial minorities. See Figure 2. Forty-percent of student participants were either pregnant (n=5) or parenting (n=26). Sixty-four percent of student participants were over the age of 18 (n=50) and 36 percent were under the age of 18 (n=28).

The majority of teachers and staff identified as female and white. Seventy-six percent (n=16) of teachers and staff were female and 24 percent (n=5) were male. See Figure 3. Sixty-two percent (n=13) of teachers and staff identified as White, 19 percent (n=4) as other ethnicities, 14 percent (n=3) as Latina, and five percent (n=1) as Black. See Figure 4.

Family members from both campuses participated in focus groups. Seventy-eight percent (n=14) of the 18 family members were female and 22 percent (n=4) were male. See Figure 5. Seventy-two percent (n=13) were Latina or Latino, 11 percent (n=2) were Black, 11 percent (n=2) were White, and race or ethnicity information was not available for the remaining one participant. See Figure 6.

Additional information about participants can be found in Appendix G.

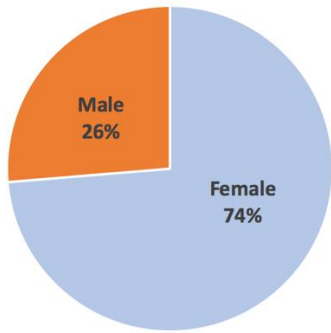


Figure 1: Sex of Student

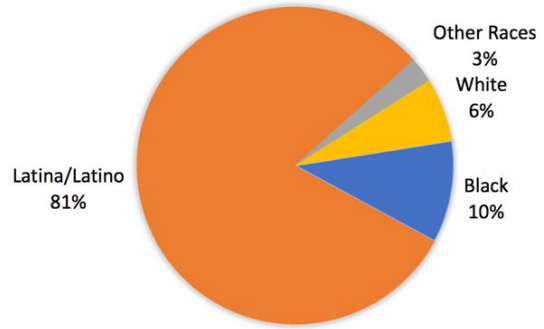


Figure 2: Race/Ethnicity of Students

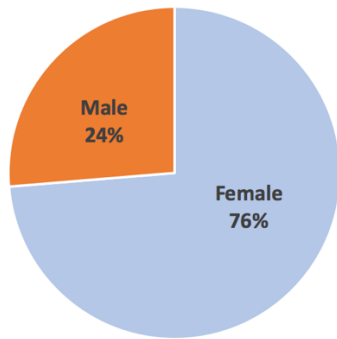


Figure 3: Sex of Teachers and Staff

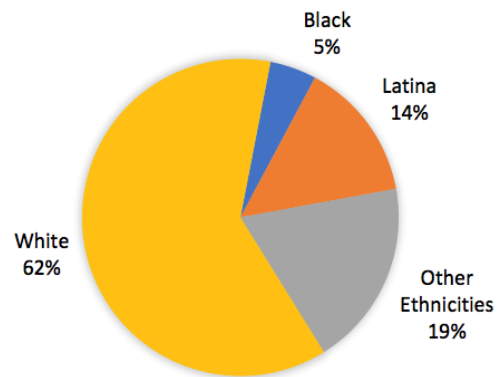


Figure 4: Race/Ethnicity of Teachers and Staff

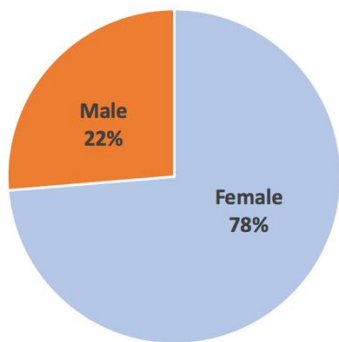


Figure 5: Sex of Family Members

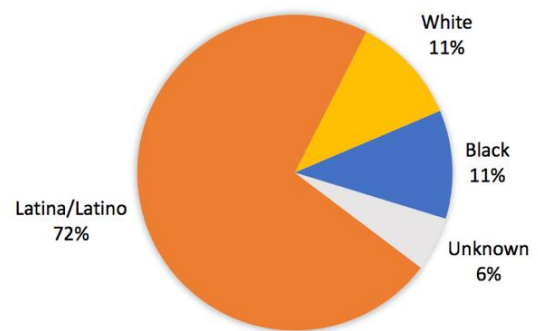


Figure 6: Race/Ethnicity of Family Members

FINDINGS

Through an intensive analysis of hundreds of pages of data from NLA students, teachers, staff, and families, the research team documented 12 emergent categories. Those categories include: (1) Curriculum, (2) Opportunities to Prepare for Future Endeavors, (3) Motivation, (4) Pregnant and Parenting Mission, (5) Support, (6) Combining Schools, (7) Environment, (8) Communication, (9) Daily Schedule, (10) Transportation, (11) Health and Wellness, and (12) RIDE Report Card. In the following pages, we summarize each of these categories, along with relevant sub-categories. Every section of this report includes direct quotations to illuminate how each of the key NLA stakeholders feel about and/or experience NLA. The categories are presented in no particular order of significance. All categories emerged from stakeholders as important to their NLA perceptions and experiences.

CURRICULUM

While this evaluation did not review the explicit curriculum for content or alignment to the Common Core State Standards, students, families, and staff described their experiences with, and feelings about, NLA curriculum. Students reported how individualized instruction supported their learning. Teachers also commented on the flexibility of the curriculum program but recognized that mastery learning often brought obstacles related to student attendance and demand for teacher time. The wide variation of skills that students demonstrate often presents challenges for teachers around differentiation and bridging gaps to grade level expectations. Teachers also reported needing to make modifications to the materials to include more culturally relevant learning experiences and materials. Responses related to the category of curriculum were clustered into four main sub-categories, including: (a) Flexibility and Individualization, (b) Cultural Relevance, (c) Rigor and Expectations, and (d) Electives and Extracurricular Activities.

Flexibility and Individualization

The flexibility and individualization of the Summit Curriculum was noted in this section, as it allows students to tailor their learning for their needs, both in time to master a skill and in location of where they complete the work. Students and teachers commented on the clear progressions in the program, yet the constant dichotomy of a mastery-based learning platform and accountability measures of seat-time attendance presents a struggle for teachers to align these disparate measures. In addition, the growing numbers of students who are supported with an Individualized Education Plan at NLA presents a challenge to ensure that the needs of all students are met. While structural-level support was not always apparent from the responses, the individualized staff support for all students was evident.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“Well if you have internet at home you can work on the computer. We all have the teachers numbers so you can call the teacher and ask about a focus area and they can be on the phone to help us.”

“Like she said, you thought it was easy, it's not that it's easier, it's just that you have that one on one with the teacher [at NLA]. So, them explaining it [content] to you is definitely easier. Because the amount of work you get is kind of same like in [other] high schools. It's still hard. But with the teachers helping you—helping you understand—it's much more easy to finish.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I think there is a certain level of flexibility in both the way the curriculum and everything else is set-up...the way the school is set-up and in the way we implement those things. I think that's a function of knowing the students individually really well. That we're able to make adjustments where we need to and when we need to.”

Teacher 1: “We do have kids that are reading at a third-grade level and kids who are reading at higher grade levels in the same class. You need to differentiate for different levels. You need to make it accessible to people who have missed a lot of school and people who are reading at a really low grade level. It's really hard.”

Teacher 2: Yes. It presents many new barriers like specialty [needs of just] one IEP kid. [We're getting increased] amount of [IEP] and behavioral kids.”

“Also, this thing about being able to come at the end of the quarter [and] spend three days working really hard and going there. He might require what's absolutely minimally required to pass for the quarter. That leads to a lot of absences in the other two months of the quarter. Somehow figuring out how to make it count for all of that being more relevant or more urgent in the necessity of passing. That's kind of a real structural flaw with the Summit platform.”

“Do we want to be mastery based or not? Because I think if we truly are mastery based, you're not supposed to count attendance and effort and all of that. It's just supposed to demonstrate what they are capable of.”

Family Perspectives:

“Senior project. So, making sure that she had someone to mentor her. [They made] sure that she had the references and all of the information, the research that she needed. [They were] checking in on her, [asking] ‘How you doing? Can I get you something? Do you need help? Did you know about this and that?’ So, it wasn't like, there you go, you know and on your own. They continued to guide her the entire time and kept checking in. ‘How are you doing with this? How far are you? Do you need help with this?’ I think they're awesome here.”

Cultural Relevance

Cultural relevance cannot be easily defined by a set of specific practices. Instead, it should be defined more broadly as behaviors of teaching and lesson design that allows access and engagement for *all* students to learn. In this definition, cultural differences among students

cannot be considered deficits. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) argue that cultural differences of students are not static, asserting that “people *live* culture” and caution making overgeneralizations of individuals. Ensuring that materials were student-centered, and reflected different cultural perspectives, was a priority for NLA teachers. Yet, there was also an awareness that more work was needed to ensure that the curriculum was relevant and engaging for all students at NLA. Students also commented on wanting to learn about events and people that related to their lived experiences.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“Because like government class for example; technically we don't have to have government as our education. We do technically need to learn about government but that's a really good thing to learn about because it helps us out in our future. It helps us learn about our rights. If we know our rights and we're ever getting violated, that's why I think teachers [at NLA] are good.”

Student 1: “Like I was saying, in my other school they was talking about World War II—old stuff, back in the day. [At NLA] they are talking about Donald Trump, about immigrants, about how they have immigrants in the federal [system] right here. Because they don't have no papers—that's what we are learning.”

Student 2: “I like it here because they are talking about newer stuff like what is happening around the world. [We are not only] talking about the past.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I think that we're given a lot of freedom to adapt to the curriculum to fit the needs of the students. I think that is a really good thing, because if you can find their interests, they'll take it and go with it. I think that the Summit platform that we use is useful because it could be in different places. The stuff that was originally on there is...not where they're at both level wise or interest wise.”

“I'll take out all the terribly antiquated writings of the old White men and antiquated language and I'll replace it with grade level readings that are more engaging and more relevant to today's times.”

“Let's talk about Rhode Island, how immigration is changing, who is helping, who is coming, who is leaving, why? What is the reason behind it? Then students can see their faces in history, like ‘Oh, it's me, it's my culture, it's my family.’ So those are the things that [curriculum] should be.”

“In my class I have picked books to read that I felt reflected the students and their experiences. There seems to be a higher engagement with books like *The Hate U Give* and *Long Way Down* and *The Poet X*. Angie Thomas who wrote *The Hate U Give* spoke in one of our award speeches about how when she was in high school, she never read a book in English that covered any topics that she encountered in her own real life. But in rap songs she would always find people speaking about things that she saw and felt and experienced in everyday life.”

Rigor and Expectations

Teachers and students reported that NLA had high expectations for all students. In addition, teachers commented on the balance of a clear definition of proficiency and how to support students who arrive at NLA without demonstrating an understanding of foundational skills in math and reading. When thinking about rigor and expectations, students commented on the clear expectations for progressing through the Summit platform as well as the criteria for the Capstone project. Clarity around mastery learning helps define learning expectations. However, the tension between defining mastery learning and attendance was evident. Families commented favorably about the support provided to meet the expectations of NLA.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“I thought it was going to be easy when I came here. But I mean, it's not as bad, I think it's better than a regular school.”

Student 1: “Never slack. Because they will make you pay for it.”

Facilitator: “What do you mean by that?”

Students 1: “It's not like every other high school, they didn't be like, ‘Yeah, we're just going to hold you back.’ Nowell's like, going to hold you back and you're going to come to summer school to try to finish that work that you didn't do.”

Student 2: “Because they want you to graduate.”

“That was actually helpful, Summit, because when the teacher was unavailable, you could go on Summit. They had study guides for you, videos, a whole lot of different options, different websites you'll be able to go on, and then they'll give you a test. They'll give you a little assessment first to see if you're ready for the test, and then they'll give you the test.”

“For example, in my other school, we had to do portfolios, we had to do community service, we had to do a lot of things to graduate, and here all we need is 20 credits to graduate. That's the reason I came here, because I knew I wasn't going to graduate over there.”

“If I have all my focus areas done, and all my credits done, and there's [no reason why] they're just giving me extra work. Instead of that [additional work], I could do an internship [or] take care of her kid (pointing to a peer) and she could finish up her affairs.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I think that another challenge is the intervention support. When kids come in multiple grade levels behind and lack foundational knowledge and skills, I think there is a challenge in trying to mediate that gap. And, it can be quite difficult because we're trying to teach grade level work, because we don't want to lower our expectations for students. But we're also trying to catch them up so that they can do the grade level work. So, these interventions that we need to put into place in order to mitigate this gap can be very challenging. Because there's a huge disparity too, in terms of needing to differentiate for different abilities within one [classroom] setting. We don't have multiple content teachers at one campus, so we're not tracking students. So, in [any] class, you could have any kind of disparity between students' abilities.”

“They assess their progress and identify areas of need and goals for the week. So, it's really kind of goal-oriented, helping our students to set goals that are smart. They're timely and measurable and something that can be achievable. We can measure them.”

“I think where we fall down is we have a population that from where I'm sitting, needs a lot of remedial and foundational work. It's (Summit) a program that is based on proving proficiency, but we also want to work that population through our program as quickly as possible, right?”

“I would like to see us develop some kind of a bridge program to help our students when they are out of school and to help our students when they are trying to come back into school. Almost all of the population that we serve are behind academically at least a year—whether they're pregnant or parenting or not. They all typically had a negative school experience in their previous school. I feel like our motto right now is to just drop them in and just be welcoming and supportive. And, I don't think that is purposeful enough to reintegrate them back into school.”

Family Perspectives:

“It was way better than she thought. She thought it would be hard, but they helped her.”

Electives and Extracurricular Activities

Students and staff mentioned increasing the opportunity to provide elective classes and activities outside of the Summit curricula. Some students were interested in participating in extracurricular offerings found in comprehensive high schools (e.g., prom, sports, computer science).

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“[I'd like] a computer room...To do Photoshop and programming and make your own games and stuff.”

“I expected a lot more. I thought the campus would be a lot bigger. I thought they would have certain programs, like debate team, or sports. I thought it would be like that. I expected after school programs. It would make people want to go to school more because they would have something to do after school.”

Student 1: “AS220 is very different”

Student 2: “It's an amazing opportunity that they give, because they allow us to mess around with beat making, songs creating, painting, Photoshop.”

Student 3: “Yes, and since we don't have like an art teacher, we go there every, one week out of the four quarters that we got.”

Student 4: “I find it really cool 'cause some of the kids who go, you'd never expect them to be as good as they are in some of the arts that are there, and it's really crazy, like.

Student 5: “Yeah. And you find out some quiet kids are just making ridiculous beats.”

Student 6: “And that's really like our whole school, our whole school got talent.”

Student 2: “They have good equipment there for us to use and it's free, they trust us and it's an amazing place.”

“I liked it, well loved it [here at NLA]...But, I left because [of the lack of] sports. I like to play basketball [and there are no sports here at NLA].”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I'm always struck by how much they did not feel comfortable in a large public school, yet they want the things like prom and student council. And, it reminds me that they are, in their heart, teens and they need that experience of being around other teens and diversity is strength, always...There is something very special about that mission of supporting two generations.”

“I think that there are certain members of the [new student] council that are proud to be on it. They are interested in it and that's keeping certain members coming [to school regularly].”

Recommendations

NLA has clearly made a commitment to ensure that all students have an opportunity to graduate high school. A recommendation would be to continue to define the expectations around attendance and mastery learning, as this tension surfaced in many comments. Expanding the offerings of electives and extracurricular activities might also increase attendance and engagement of the students. Some students may want more extracurricular options. However, NLA likely needs to continue to focus mostly on required academic credits so that their large population of under-credited students can graduate. NLA advisors may work with students on an individual basis to find local outlets (e.g., community sport leagues) where they can engage in extracurricular activities, should they desire to do so.

The NLA staff has made individual efforts to ensure that the curriculum is more culturally relevant, and a recommendation would be to align these efforts as a school while understanding

what students bring to a classroom is complex. Different family structures, languages, cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic resources bring a wealth of diverse information to the classroom that needs to be acknowledged from teachers (Hammerberg, 2004; Lenski, 2008; Luke, Dooley, & Woods, 2011; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2005; Moje, 2007). Fortunately, the powerful belief and expectation that all students are capable of learning and graduating at NLA was evident from all stakeholders. Moreover, NLA teachers are skilled educators who take the initiative to adapt the curriculum to be developmentally appropriate and culturally inclusive.

OPPORTUNITIES TO PREPARE FOR FUTURE ENDEAVORS

Students appreciated how the school helps them set up internships, write resumes, and apply for jobs. Their Capstone project was also helpful in connecting their school experiences to their future careers. Students also mentioned field trips to colleges, which has been a great resource for those wanting to attend college. Teachers and staff noted the importance of fostering life skills and connecting students to opportunities to apply for internships, job applications, and college. Teachers recognized those social networks do not always work out. Nonetheless, they were committed to helping students be successful after NLA. Teachers and staff also noted the challenge of asking low income students to participate in unpaid yet enriching life skill building experiences (e.g., internships). Although there is a clear long-term benefit to these opportunities, it could be challenging for working parents to find the time for them. Families recognized and appreciated the work the school does to give various career opportunities to their students.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“I was a math freak. I love math, I still do! I did [my Capstone project] on math and how math teachers are and where does math take [place] in the workplace. I did it at my mom's job. She's a receptionist and come to find out, she does a lot of math!”

Facilitator: “When you were talking earlier you said you were proud of [your Capstone] project and kept it.”

Student: “Yeah, I worked really hard on it, and it's a whole binder full.”

Student 1: “This school throws a lot of opportunities at you.”

Student 2: “I feel like the school helps you with that. Like if you don't know what you want to do, the school helps you.”

Student 1: “Yeah, it helps you figure it out”

Student 2: “Figure it out, or sometimes they'll be like, college is not for everybody, and they're really understanding. Because sometimes college isn't for everybody. And people need to understand.”

Student 2: “And honestly, it doesn't necessarily have to be paid. But helping one another.”

Student 1: “Yeah, or internships.”

Student 3: “To receive extra credits and stuff.”

Student 2: “It could be on your resume and stuff.”

“And Nowell, for me, they were like, ‘Hey, today's the day for college fair, let's go. We're going to have food...Bring your kids. Bring your family.’ I got to take my kids, because it's after school...I don't have a babysitter. So, I took them, I applied for FAFSA. And then they were making sure everybody has the option to go to college, has the option, to know everything that's on there...They had a couple of people...to get you enrolled and all that. They had them coming to school after hours, and they had food, everything there. So, I had my boyfriend and my baby over there, and I had the person helping me putting all that information in and everything...They told me, ‘Yeah, you will be considered. You will get a letter and all this other stuff, and you can go to college.’”

“The summer program, people came in and helped us. They walked us through the process of application and they waited until everybody submitted the application.”

Facilitator: “Anybody else thinking about an internship?”

Student 1: “I was thinking about doing the one...”

Facilitator: “Okay. For those of you who are not thinking about it, why not?”

Student 1: “‘Cause I want a real job.”

Student 2: “A paying job.”

Facilitator: “Okay. And you said the same thing? You want a paying job?”

Student 1: “A full time job.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I really am appreciating the support, and I hope that it grows pathways for students post-Nowell. The CNA program, the Teacher-Assistant program, other program certifications can be a target that our kids can reach on a stepping stone to life outside of Nowell.”

“I also feel like internships, when kids can't come to school—that's a big issue for student and attendance. It's the money. Students have to take care of their kids and their families. I feel like if we had more opportunities to pay our kids to do certain things, even at the school itself. That would be nice because they would be making money while getting their education. It's like: ‘Oh I can't come to school because I'm working.’ [Instead it would be] ‘I'm at school because I get paid to take care of my family.’ So, that's kind of nice. It's good for their future also, right?”

Teacher 1: “There are students who we have connected with certain people because they didn't have a mentor. Or, we look at their Capstone [internship] and they haven't followed-up with the mentor. They have to learn responsibility. So, we might talk to the student about it. At some point they have to take the initiative. They have to go, they have to call the mentor. So [we try to teach] the student, this is your responsibility now. Sometimes it doesn't [work out]. But, [we're teaching them] it's your responsibility.”

Teacher 2: “Of course, anytime any people interact, there's always an opportunity for it not to go well. And certainly, with young people there is a lot of trepidation about being in an adult circumstance or being in a professional setting. So, we try to support them...Young people, they have to learn some of those professional skills of showing up and being an advocate.”

Family Perspectives:

“So, for example they did a week which was painting. She loved painting and it's something that she'll probably want to pursue. [They have] another program where they can talk about experience in school and out of the school.”

Recommendations

The opportunities provided to students to prepare for their futures is a clear strength of NLA. Teachers, students, and family agree that the work the school does with career development is beneficial. While some students grumbled about the timing or work involved in the capstone, most also admitted it is a valuable learning experience. The families and students recognize and appreciate the connections the school helps them make.

MOTIVATION

Overall, we found that stakeholders described complex motivational factors related to student success. This category consists of two sub-categories: (a) Intrinsic and (b) Extrinsic Motivational Factors (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Intrinsic Motivational Factors

This subcategory refers to being motivated for the personal reward or internal satisfaction of reaching that goal. Within the subcategory of intrinsic motivation, students mentioned motivators such as wanting to be better as a person, wanting to support their family or children, and striving to achieve career goals. Students shared that they were motivated by the visualization of their achievements. Students also mentioned that it is their responsibility to succeed academically. They did not blame others, such as the school or parents, if they did not succeed academically. This sentiment was shared by teachers, staff, and family members. Teachers and staff try to motivate students intrinsically by making the curriculum relevant to students. However, teachers also mentioned that students sometimes lack intrinsic motivation to complete academic requirements. Some teachers attributed lack of motivation to the impact of being behind academically. Many parents commented that intrinsic motivation of the student is what really matters.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“Not to be what my family is motivates me.”

“I want to hurry up and get into my career, so I can provide for my child.”

“I feel everybody does as much as they could for us. I think they just help us as much as they can. And then they leave it to us to do more.”

“I was just motivated to keep going, to be honest. And then even when it got close to graduation day, we had this poster thing of where all the seniors were. So, a lot of us were at the bottom, but then you see all of us were moving up slowly.”

“If you don’t love what you do, it's not going to be work... You love going to [NLA] because it's not a regular school. The feeling of coming here [it is almost like] you're not going to school. It's like coming somewhere that everyone's going to appreciate you.”

Facilitator: “If you didn’t get the \$20 would you still come to class? “

Student 1: “Yeah (group confirmation with ‘yeahs’)”

Student 2: “To get the education.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“Because you have to find what different people value.”

“It’s really hard to catch up kids. So, if you missed a lot of school, you're going to be apathetic. It's going to be too much [and you feel like] you can't catch up. Or... I’m brought down [by less prepared peers] and this is going too slow and I'm not paying attention because I'm disengaged.”

Family Perspectives:

“I feel the teachers or the principal, they do the best they can. But, at the end of the day, the student has to make their own choices.”

Extrinsic Motivational Factors

Extrinsic motivation refers to motivation due to external rewards, such as receiving a prize. Extrinsic motivation was also garnered by the NLA practice of having students regularly set achievable goals. Students described a variety of extrinsic motivators, such as teachers and family members pushing them and receiving financial rewards. Students expressed that monetary incentives are important for daily or short-term achievements, but they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to make longer-term progress toward graduation. Teachers recognize their support and love of the students and how that pushes students, but also recognize the benefit of monetary incentives. Families discussed the importance of their role in motivating their children. Some shared they support their children by helping take care of their grandchildren. Some parents discussed their relationship with the school and how the school can work with them to help motivate the students in meaningful ways. They were also very aware and appreciative of the work the teachers do to motivate the students by caring for them and supporting them.

Student Perspectives:

“I have a lot of friends graduating college so that's a big motivator. Just see how good they're doing, it makes me wanna succeed too.”

“It's motivating, [when teachers say]: ‘I think you did really great this week.’ It's really nice.”

“If you come in for five days out of a week, the next week you're able to go out for lunch.”

Facilitator: “Do you mind that they [the teachers] contact you?”

Student 1: “No, because it kind of helps me. If I don't come to school for like a whole week, they text me and remind me, you need to start coming to school because you're falling behind and stuff like that.”

Student 2: “[Teacher] be on that! She would call me every morning [and ask] where are you? Okay, [Teacher], I'm already awake now, I'm coming, Jesus. Like, that's probably why I come to school most of the time, because she calls my phone and wakes me up, and then there's just no point in staying home, because I'm already awake.”

Student 3: “Exactly. I feel like them having our numbers isn't a bad thing. I know in some high schools you can't have your teachers' Facebook or anything, 'cause it's not allowed.”

“If you go for the week, at the end of the week before you leave school, they give you a gift card, like from CVS or from the gas station.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I think kids would say the same thing we're saying. Your voice matters here, and that's all you want to be, that you're seen and heard and valued. And, I think we all feel it and I think the kids feel it.”

“So, I know that the school also put into plan incentives and I know some of my students, they're like, ‘I can't miss a day, I can't miss a day because I want that gift card at the end of the school year.’ So, I think that that also works for some students.”

“We're responsible for mentoring students weekly, helping them set goals, overcome obstacles, helping them to interface with other teachers, identify the work they need to get done.”

Family Perspectives:

“And also, I feel that the parents got to do more to try to motivate the kids to come...It's between the parents and also the teacher. It's not all on the teachers. It's that combination of both, and we need to work together.”

“Yeah, she actually had more goals. She knew that with having kids she could complete tasks [and] go to college. And she could do it, because she did it. She had one child and was pregnant with her second one and she graduated. Now, she knows she could go to college with having two kids. I know she wouldn't have graduated if she stayed in [former school].”

“Like make sure that they come to school too and get involved...My daughter has been in other high schools. But, since she's here, every day I go, ‘Get up, because you're going to school. Get up and you go to school.’ And, while she's getting dressed, I'm getting my grandkid ready and I come and I drop them off.”

“They focus more on their homework. I've noticed that even, like, in regular school students just come and then they live their regular life. You never see them doing homework. You never see them really interested in these type of work that they do out here in Nowell. But, then once they're here, you can actually notice that their work is [better] and they're really interested in doing what they're doing at home. Like you can notice a lot that they're more focused from this school than in other schools.”

“Her science teacher gave her a lot of confidence and kept bragging about her and used her as an example in the classroom about how well she was prepared for class [and] doing the projects. She gave her a lot of encouragement. Her reading teacher helped her because she is dyslexic and showed her different tactics on how to not reverse the letters so much.”

“The way they do it is they're very concerned. They want to make sure that the kids come to school. If they're not coming, they call the mom, the parents. They are on top of them. They want to make sure that they come here to study. And, I'm very grateful in that part for the school, because I feel that if they would not pushing and motivating them, students probably wouldn't be able to reach their goal.”

“They (the school) can actually motivate us to motivate the kids.”

Recommendations

The combination of short-term, extrinsic motivators such as gift cards, in addition to the long-term impact of teacher encouragement, seem to have a profound positive effect on students. Family showed interest in finding more ways to collaborate with parents to help them motivate their children. Helping students set and reach daily short-term and long-term goals are also a motivational strategy to retain. Because many of the students mentioned long term goals (e.g., graduation) were ultimately met via intrinsic motivation, NLA may want to host professional development workshops for teachers and staff about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Talking with students regularly about the importance of finding intrinsic motivation could also have a positive impact on longer-term graduation rates.

PREGNANT AND PARENTING MISSION

In 2017, a total of 194,377 babies were born to women ages 15–19 years old (Center for Disease Control & Prevention, 2017). About 50 percent of teen mothers will earn a high school diploma by 22 years of age in comparison to 90 percent of high schoolers who are not mothers (Perper, Peterson & Manlove, 2010). The mission of NLA centers the success of pregnant and parenting students in its mission to “ensure that Rhode Island’s pregnant, parenting and underserved youth graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need to be prepared for success in college, career and family life.”

This category consists of two sub-categories: (a) Meeting the Needs of Pregnant and Parenting Students and (b) Inclusion of Other Underserved Students into the School Environment.

Meeting the Needs of Pregnant and Parenting Students

There is a deep commitment by NLA to create a welcoming and supportive environment for pregnant and parenting students. All participants described ways NLA supports pregnant and parenting students. However, this mission is not enacted as thoroughly as it could be for this population, and NLA can do more to support pregnant and parenting students. Students shared examples of NLA’s efforts to support their pregnant and parenting needs, such as access to breast pumps, clothes, books, diapers, and help finding daycare and transportation. Teachers and staff talked about the uniqueness of NLA providing a learning environment for pregnant and parenting students while also including students who are not pregnant and parenting. They also talked about NLA’s partnerships with external organizations including the non-profit Dunamis Synergy, which aims to “support young and expecting parents ages 15-25 years old on their educational and career aspirations while support their children for successful futures” (Dunamis Synergy, 2018). Families talked about the contrast between NLA and their children’s previous high schools, which were not supportive. They shared that NLA provided a safe space for their children. NLA also helped them plan for the future.

Students, staff, and teachers shared ideas for improving the experience for pregnant and parenting students. Pregnant and parenting students, and their families, identified on-site daycare, parenting classes, a clear plan for transitioning back to school from maternity leave, and start and end times that are more suitable to life with children. Of the students who were not attending school regularly, 1/3 named childcare as a major reason for their lack of attendance. Teachers and staff explained the delicate balance of supporting pregnant and parenting students, but not promoting teen pregnancy; the desire to include children without excluding non-parents; and the need to strengthen home to school reintegration. There are also external challenges, such as the inability of NLA to prioritize pregnant and parenting students within the lottery waitlist.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“So, what they do...it depends on the funding that they have. Sometimes they can just bring diapers and just put it there for everybody to take, gifts for the kids in Christmas.”

“They don't consider pregnant like bad here. For example, I was breastfeeding my son, and I was able to pump in the morning and the afternoon.”

Student 1: “They won't sit here and question you. If you say you have an appointment for the baby, they know you have an appointment for the baby.”

Student 2: “The teachers won't be like, ‘Oh, well you missed this. Well, here.’ They just be like, ‘Well, here's what you missed. Here's your work. You can bring it in tomorrow.’”

“I feel like I would add a program for moms to be with their kids and be with other moms.”

“Also, I feel like they should change timing, because it's too early in the morning and we've got to dress the kids, get them ready, you know, make sure that they have everything for daycare, then get us ready, be here by maybe 8:30 in the morning. It's hard.”

Student 1: “I don't get any [childcare] support from this school...and me coming here was to be for them to help me with parenting.”

Student 2: “You come here so that kids can get into daycare. But that was an issue. Because, at first, they said that they would give [daycare] spots to everybody. And then we came, and there's only four spots.”

Student 3: “Then, there was somebody with twins [who took two of the spots]”

Student 4: “There's no space in the daycare for my daughter.”

Student 5: “I have to pay daycare.”

Student 6: “No space for my daughter. It's full.”

Student 7: “For mine, it's also full. I need to pay.”

Student: “[If money was not a consideration,] honestly, I would say also add a daycare. Because this is a school for that. So probably [add] daycare.”

“I think they should have more space in daycare, because it's only for babies.

“At [another] high school they have a daycare for teachers' kids, and the students have classes with the kids. It's called child studies. And they do that, and then when they progress after learning with them. [Students at NLA do this for their] internships... right?”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I love the mission of the school, the opportunity that it gives to all these kids. They would not be able to make it in another school. I do love that Nowell gives them that opportunity.”

“[Dunamis] is there to support them in a lot of different ways. Helping them get into college, helping them get jobs, supporting them with their academics, and advocating for them.”

“We don't run parenting classes.”

“As pregnant and parenting and curriculum. We need to strengthen our home learning. Because one thing we have noticed is that if someone does go off on a maternity leave, or home learning is what we call it. They're not actually getting work accomplished because they're not really getting one on one support from staff.”

“If we had all the money in the world, we would need a childcare facility.”

Teacher 1: “Some of the things were like the mission focuses on pregnant and parenting, but those students can't necessarily move to the top of the list [for the lottery to come here].”

Teacher 2: “They get more weight in the lottery”

Teacher 5: “Yeah, they get credit... Yeah, their names are entered more times.”

Teacher 2: “So basically, we have the lottery on March 1st and every person who might have found out, they're pregnant or parenting, we write their name on the lottery three times. And that gives them three chances for their names to be picked from the lottery.”

Teacher 5: “I wish it could change. I don't know if it can.”

Interviewer 1: “What do you want it to be changed to?”

Teacher 5: “Pregnant and parenting moved up on the waitlist.”

Family Perspectives:

“So, the [other schools] are not going to go out of their way to try to help you succeed because odds are against you already. Where here [at NLA], it's been the total opposite. I think here they focus on mentally preparing [parenting students] and letting them know: ‘You're still worth it. You can still move on, you can still be better in life. Now you have a baby, this is not going to stop you. Now you're going to be better for your child.’ And I think here, they have done a great job supporting and building their self-esteem back up. Because out there, it was: ‘She's not going to make it—she's a teenager, she's pregnant, she's probably going to drop out.’ I think out there, it's always been negative. And here it's: ‘We got this. We're going to get through this together.’ And, I think that's what's different from here versus the other schools.”

“I'd get them a childcare center.”

“Right now, around here, daycares are very full at certain times of the year. [NLA] did recommend a daycare center for us, and we were able to get [my granddaughter] in. [But] if [my granddaughter] was sick, then obviously [my daughter] couldn't come in [to school] because your child gets sent home. I think they should offer a daycare here. It would make sense, because half the kids here have kids. And that right there would kill half their problems alone.”

Inclusion of Other Underserved Students in the School Environment

NLA's mission includes welcoming and supporting pregnant and parenting students *and* other underserved students. All participants perceived students who are not pregnant or parents as an important aspect of the community rather than a detractor from the pregnant and parenting mission.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

Facilitator: What's it like to interact with peers, some who aren't parents or pregnant?

Student: "I think it keeps us in the real world, if that makes sense, because we are parents. All we (as parents) tend to talk about is our children. Then, when I talk to her (pointing to a student without a child), we're not talking about my child all the time. We're talking about other things. It keeps us connected to knowing that there's other people who aren't going through the same thing as us."

Student 1: "Right before I started coming here, I was like, "Damn." Now...it's gonna be weird. I am gonna be seeing these girls pregnant [and] these guys with babies. I am like 'damn, I am not gonna have nothing in common with the people.' And then [I got here and] everybody's mad cool."

Student 2: "The whole place is a lot alike, there's no drama."

Student 3: "No drama."

Student 4: "I'm cool with it."

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

"I think it's such a nice...it is a learning experience for the students and all of us. It's like intersection of identities, right? I'm also a parent, and I'm also a Spanish speaker, and I'm also from Providence and I'm also ...So, it's all of those [identities intersecting at NLA]. I think one of the challenges that I know I face professionally is the sort of idea of individualizing and accommodating."

"There's a huge community for that. But, conversely, I don't think that we ostracize kids who aren't (pregnant or parenting). I think we do really good job of trying to be inclusive for all. And really trying to make this feel like, yes, it is a school for pregnant and parenting students, but we're here for you too."

"It gives a balance. It includes everybody. It doesn't stick our girls in school with nobody else because they're pregnant and parenting. They get a wider universe. It doesn't stigmatize them and it creates a more normal school setting...It's a nice balance of community, I think. We have "ELL" students, we have at risk students, we have a hodge-podge of different students."

Recommendations

Toward better supporting pregnant and parenting students, NLA might consider providing emergency and permanent on-site childcare to all pregnant and parenting students. To minimize costs, they might collaborate with local colleges with early childhood education programs (URI, RIC, and CCRI). Colleges may be able to provide teaching assistants or interns to support on-site childcare. NLA should continue its collaborations with external organizations (such as Dunamis) and seek additional opportunities for these types of partnerships. NLA should consider increasing programming and structured support for moms and parents. NLA can enhance the parenting education programs and skill development they offer through curriculum,

workshops, and field trips specifically for pregnant and parenting students. Students might also benefit from additional support within their peer community (e.g., mom groups, dad groups, pregnancy support groups) and more social activities (e.g., field trips, special events) where children are welcome.

SUPPORT

NLA is committed to providing holistic, individualized support for students and their families. This is evidenced in their many academic supports, wrap-around services, and the relationships developed between students, faculty, staff, and families. Students recognized that NLA faculty and staff “go above and beyond” expectations by offering not just academic, but holistic life support inside and outside of traditional school hours. This category consists of two sub-categories: (a) Academic Support and (b) Holistic Support

Academic Support

Students and families from NLA expressed gratitude for the individualized, one-on-one academic support they receive from the faculty and staff. Teachers worked to address unique learning situations of all NLA students. However, NLA may need more resources to facilitate the types of unique and individualized support that the student body needs.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“Just the other day actually, I've been slacking in math. And I have a lot of focus areas to do, but I feel comfortable with this one teacher. I go to her and I'm like, ‘Miss, I really don't know what I'm doing. I need help.’ So, it got to the point where she couldn't even help me because it was just hard [with other students needing her attention too]. So, she came and sat on her free period...It meant a lot because on her lunch break, on her free period, she came and helped me to make sure I succeeded to finish my work. Yeah, that meant a lot because it was really helpful. I finished way more work than I would have [without her support].”

“Something that they do to support us is this opportunity twice per semester, that the teacher actually goes to your house. And [the teachers] help you and they do understand that if you fall behind in something. Also, the Saturday school [is helpful].”

“If we do read stuff like that, she makes it fun. To get us engaged into it. The way she reads it is just, she makes it funny.”

“The second year I was here, my son was in the hospital...I was in school, but I fell behind on a lot of work and the teacher actually took time outta her day, went through the traffic after school, went to the hospital, brought me a computer, brought me work, brought me little toys he could play with...Even when I couldn't come this week, I didn't have my car, I didn't have whatever, they went to me and they brought things to me. They met with my mom. They made sure, you know, we was all good.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

Teacher 1: “Other school systems and other guidance counselors or other principals are saying [to struggling students]: ‘Oh, Nowell’s the island of misfits. So, we’re just going to have you sign up there.’ And we’re getting a lot of the students that nobody else wants, which is great because we’ll take them.”

Teacher 2: “Right”

Teacher 1: “And we’ll love them”

“And then when they get in the building some of our students also have huge obstacles to overcome. They’re multilingual learners, learning in a new language. They’re differently abled. They need extra help and supports.”

“As far as development, I’d say that like everywhere but maybe more here, they’re age doesn’t always correspond to their maturity level or development. So, we just meet them where they’re at.”

Family Perspectives:

“The teachers were great. The fact that if she had to take time out of school because of her condition, they were sympathetic. They would email the work to her. They followed up with her. They went above and beyond. And they also knew when to kick her in her ass when she needed to get that kick too.”

“So, what my daughter told me is that this school helps kids that have missed a year or hasn’t finished a year. So, that’s why my daughter came over [to NLA], because they help you to actually finish school.”

Facilitator: “What do you think NLA did for your daughter?”

Parent: “She used her dyslexia as an excuse. ‘Oh, well, I can’t do that, I’m dyslexic.’ And they told her ‘No, there’s a bazillion people out there that have dyslexia, and you got this!’ And now she’s getting it. She is still severely dyslexic...But, she’s got the encouragement to keep trying. And she reads phenomenal, unbelievable!”

Holistic Support

NLA faculty and staff strive to support students in and out of the school environment. They aim to help students thrive as parents and community members. Often NLA faculty and staff assist students with physical resources such as diapers and gift cards. In addition, they offer emotional and logistical support with their wrap-around services and strong student-teacher relationships. The actions of the NLA faculty and staff reflect deep levels of care and concern for the whole person. Another way that NLA conveys this is by respecting students and valuing their opinions and ideas.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“They also help like mentally, physically and financially.”

“Support. Not just with schoolwork, but also with how you're doing on day-to-day things. If you're not feeling A1 then they'll take the time to make sure that you're okay and ask what's going on you know. They care.”

“So, whoever doesn't have that support at home can definitely get that here.”

“I think the teachers, they're just so supportive. If you were not to have those type of people in your life as role models (you would not be as successful). You could look up to these people, talk to them, know they'll give you advice [based upon challenges] they went through. They just help you like no other people would.”

Facilitator: “What are your thoughts on maybe moving to a new school?”

Student 1: “They actually took us all on a trip to go check it out...”

Student 2: “Yeah...they wanted our opinion on it before they bought it.”

Student 3: “Which is another good thing the school does.”

Student 2: “Yeah, they care about what we think.”

Speaker 4: “They always ask the students before they make the final decision.”

Speaker 3: “They don't just make it.”

Facilitator: “And how does that make you feel?”

Multiple: “Good.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“We listen to them. We hear what they have to say and we really care about their whole [experience], not just their academics.”

“We really get to know the students. We know what each student needs. We know when they're not the way they should be. Or, they seem distressed. I think all of us read our students very well.”

“One thing we started implementing a few months ago was now we all have a case load of about five students...So, if a student isn't here, we're calling or texting them, and then writing notes into a shared doc”

“[Community Partners] come to us through a grant through housing in Providence. And it's wonderful because they come to us for a year. It's one of each site. And they do work with the kids that are pregnant or parenting. They can work with them until they're 24. So, whether they're at Nowell or not, and they're there to support them.

Family Perspectives:

“So, one thing that sticks in my head was when she gave birth the school nurse was messaging: ‘How's she doing? How's everything?’ They brought her a Wi-Fi box. They brought her a laptop. It wasn't: ‘You're on maternity leave, there you go.’ They followed through and asked: ‘How's everything going? How's the baby? How are you doing? Do you need help with this?’ They made it possible that she could still try to focus on her work—giving her the laptop and the Wi-Fi box, so that way she can continue. But, [they also encouraged her to] rest first. They cared about her and the baby. It wasn't just, schoolwork. They made sure she was okay. And, [if] you have time when the baby's sleeping and you can't sleep, you can do this [school work]. And I feel like for me, that was one of the things that I was like, ‘wow!’ you know? They're really messaging, they're really calling. They want to see how she's doing.”

Recommendations

Among the biggest strengths of NLA are the academic and holistic supports it provides to students. NLA is an excellent example of how schools and educators effectively care (Noddings, 1999) for students and foster success. Moreover, NLA educators treat students with respect and invite them to be involved in decision-making. Through these efforts NLA conveys the message that students are deeply valued. Data showed that students and families feel NLA teachers and staff consistently go “above and beyond” job duties to support academic and life success. This is an incredible strength to retain and capitalize upon.

COMBINING SCHOOLS

Researchers talked with all stakeholders about the idea of combining NLA campuses and moving to a new location. Students, teachers, and staff had varied opinions on the possibility of combining schools and moving locations. Students were primarily concerned about the social interactions between students from both campuses and the reduced individualized attention they might receive from a larger, combined school. Teachers and staff were more hopeful. They recognized the additional resources though could be gained from the efficiency of a single campus and the value of the NLA community unifying in one space. Teachers and staff did, however, express concern that the location might change the type of students NLA serves. Specifically, they shared worries about underserved students (namely students of color) in Central Fall and Providence might struggle to navigate transportation to another area of Rhode Island. Responses to this category clustered into three main sub-categories: (a) Physical Space and Resources, (b) Student Interactions and Stereotypes, and (c) Location.

Physical Space and Resources

The first sub-category centered on physical space and resources. The small physical layout of the current NLA campuses creates an intimate setting that allows for individualized learning and relationship building. However, students also noted there was often not enough space. Both students and families valued the small school setting in terms of enrollment but expressed an interest in more physical space. Stakeholders also noted the potential benefits that combining

schools would yield by increasing the amount of space and the resources available. Students, however, expressed concern about the implications of the number of students in a single building.

Students/Alumni Perspectives:

“We need bigger classrooms. It’s too small, like a box.”

“It’s so small. We’d have this group thing on Wednesdays. All the students from the whole school, we’d go. And, sometimes there wouldn’t be enough space because everybody would be here. We’d do fun stuff. We’d play games with each other, it would help us get along and stuff. [But, the space was] kind of tight.”

“And we joined (NLA) because we wanted to be in a small school. We didn’t want to be around too [many] people . . . I’m not being in a class with 15 kids. Now, I’m in a class with four kids, I barely can learn in that.”

Student 1: “They are going to have a lot more students, you know? There’s gonna be obviously a lot more teachers but there’s gonna be more students”

Student 2: “That one-on-one time [with the teachers] is not going to be the same.”

“The way we rent out the prom hall and everything. We would have a huge auditorium [at a new school and] we could easily make that into anything we want. So that would cut out a lot of costs, and...[NLA could use those cost savings to] provide better transportation.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“It’s one school and culturally it does feel like one school and school culture. So, I think it is a tremendous advantage to have everybody be on the same page and really establish what Nowell school culture is. You know what I mean? And establish some like a common identity in terms of what we do and how it gets done.”

“I think it would be beneficial because facility wise, it would be a bigger space and it would provide better classrooms. So, I think it would be positive.”

“There are some really good benefits [of moving to one campus]. Like having a full-time social worker and a mental health person is so needed. Having them [in one] place, and a safe space where students can go, and it’s not just someone hiding in the corner. Having that is so important in one space. There would be that...[and] you have the nurse there for them.”

“I do think that for us an organization, it is the best move. I think it is the best use of resources.”

“I would say that both campuses would benefit from a full-time mental health specialist instead of having to share the social worker. She's spread very thin. I think that the kids would benefit from having someone in the building every day with an assigned safe space, for those moments. Some of our kids have very [tough] stuff going on that impacts their education and we can't always serve them how we need to or support them as much as we need to. That kind of stinks.”

“I think it would be easier as an individual teacher to differentiate two courses, rather than to differentiate four. Because we each carry about four classes that are different. So, to really be able to take the time and prepare a lesson that could hit every level... and only be responsible for one other course and not three others. Moving to a new campus with more teachers I think would make me more able to do that—and do that effectively.”

Family Perspectives:

“I'd get them a bigger building, bigger lot.”

“It is tough because I do think that the reason why they have such a good thing—a good connection is because classes here are much smaller than in the public schools. So, the kids get more attention. But it would be nice to make this bigger so more kids can actually benefit.”

Student Interactions and Stereotypes

Students at both the Providence and Central Falls locations were wary about integrating with one another. They feared that bringing two schools together would create conflict, and potentially violence. Interestingly, however, students at both schools held the same negative stereotypes and assumptions about each other. Teachers seemed to be less concerned about the challenges of combining schools.

Student Perspectives:

Providence Student: “I like having the people here. People in the CF campus... they're just a different type of people. [Capital Campus students are] like a close family. Then, there's them (CF Students) that's just rowdy. I just feel like it will be more problems and stuff. Remember how I said they have no drama [on this campus]. I've heard that over there, there's always drama like every single day. So, I wonder how it would be if they were to mix it. But, if it was up to me, I wouldn't mix it.”

Central Falls Student 1: “The problem is with the other campuses is, it's not really just the [Capital Campus] kids, it's really the environment around them, and then the personal problems from outside that goes into school.”

Central Falls Student 2: “It's not a good area to live in. There's a lot of gangs and violence over there. So, that's what they're used to. So, it makes a mindset for them.”

Central Falls Student: “They're not bad. It's like they don't know how to act sometimes. [For instance], it's like, we go to the movies, right? For a field trip where the whole school went. And, everybody from our school was all quiet listening to the movie. You just hear them... their reactions, they're talking about things that happened in the movie like, "Oh lord!" I was like, "Damn.”

Central Falls Student 1: “[Those students at the other campus have] no discipline...That's what [teachers here] tell us... there's always a time and a place for you to joke around.”

Central Falls Student 2: “Honestly I feel like, if you have us right now...combine into one school, it'll probably be like some yelling and fighting. But, if it's just fresh new people coming in to that school, no matter, either side, it'd probably be fine.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I think after a month all the conflict would fall off. Everybody has been marinating all summer, ‘I can't believe she is going to be on my campus.’ [The students will] get that out of the way by November. Then, we can carry on with those that want to be safe and benefit from it. Because conflict with young people in school is never going to go away. To have that prevent you from taking a leap would be unfortunate.”

Teacher 1: “I don't know how much of that is because there is an antipathy between Providence on the one hand and everybody else on the other. Or, if it's just because we have two campuses. So, they are them and we're us.”

Teacher 2: “Yeah, there's a need to have that individualism.”

Speaker 1: “I think that first year, yeah. There would be real issues around it. But after that certainly three years in it would evaporate.”

Location

The potential location of the school in Warwick was largely identified as problematic due to the distance from where current students live. Teachers and staff felt the move could expand the reach of NLA statewide, but that may come at the cost of shifting focus away from serving minoritized communities in Providence and Central Falls.

Student Perspectives:

“I feel like it's too far, there's going to be too much traffic when we leave. Some people drive and work. And, what if you have an appointment? So, you have to go all the way to Woonsocket, or Pawtucket from Warwick. That's too far.”

“I'm going to need you to relax and not move us—not to Warwick—because then I really be dropping out. I ain't driving to [expletive] Warwick every day, are you crazy? I live all the way in Woonsocket.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I actually had been really excited about the idea of us moving specifically to Warwick and opening ourselves up to potentially more use state-wide. I think that there are a number of variables that are very scary. Some as simple as it would be like completely starting over again [as a school]. I think it would have some really drastic impact on the students that we are currently serving.”

“[The new location is in] Warwick, and even if we provide transportation, I'm really frightened we're going to lose the Black and Brown kids, and start attracting a whole different group. Everyone deserves help—but I think that's really sad if that happens.”

Recommendations

It is evident that members from all stakeholder groups recognize the need for more space. They also noted the potential benefits of combined resources on one campus. However, stakeholders were also worried about losing the benefits that came with a “small school” feel. We recommend that students from both campuses familiarize themselves with one another through intentional team-building and/or social programs prior to the merge and throughout the first combined school year. If a merger between the two campuses were to occur, the preferable location would be in or around the Providence/Central Falls area. This location would allow NLA students’ to get to school, manage their needs outside of school, and retain the mission of serving minoritized students. If a move to Warwick has been decided, NLA should develop a comprehensive plan for continuing to include minoritized populations from Providence and Central Falls who will face transportation and other issues due to distance. Further, efforts will have to be made in order to maintain the feel of a small school with a larger campus and student body.

ENVIRONMENT

The physical, social, cultural, and educational environment of NLA is exceptionally positive. The positive culture, climate and sense of community are among NLA’s greatest strengths. Students, families and teachers described how NLA feels like a family. All stakeholders expressed how “different” NLA is from other public schools. Students, teachers, and families believed that NLA is a more positive, supportive, student-centric school than other public schools. These overwhelmingly positive narratives are in striking contrast to the findings of a recent study of Providence schools by Johns Hopkins University (2019) that found widespread bullying, safety concerns, and demoralized teachers at schools throughout the city. The two sub-categories related to the environment are: (a) Culture, Climate, and Sense of Community and (b) “NLA is Different.”

Culture, Climate, and Sense of Community

Students consistently described NLA as a “family” and appreciated that their peers, teachers, and staff knew and cared about them. This sentiment was echoed by the teachers, staff, and family

members. Students, teachers, and staff also described the school as an environment with limited “drama” that was free of fighting and bullying.

Students/Alumni Perspectives:

Student 1: “We're so close. The school's so small so we all talk to each other either helpin' in class or just being bored and talkin' to each other. Just all friendly”

Student 2: “So, we're basically family.”

“Some people, they don't have the support at home—they don't have the mom, the siblings that they can count on. And a lot of our students here, we treat each other like family. We're not rude to each other. We're here for each other, like whatever you need. Even if I only talk to you for two days, you're my sis, period.”

“I think it's more of the fact that we all go through the same thing, different situation, but we all on the same side. So, there's no point of having to fight over anything. There's little head bumps. Like, people bump heads a little bit, but it's literally solved within the same day.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“Students, most of them, they feel safe here”

“Nowell is really welcoming. I'll pop into this building and 15 kids will come up and give me hugs and handshakes. But I think it's across the board. We have a senior who struggles to complete work every single day. When he walks in, he walks around and gives everybody handshakes, which is good. It makes, it makes you feel good.”

“I think the kids would say the same thing we're saying. Your voice matters here. And, that's all you want to be—you're seen and heard and valued. And, I think we all feel it and I think the kids feel it.”

“We're creating a community, I think.”

Family Perspectives:

“It's a judgement-free zone. You can be yourself. You don't have to change your appearance or change yourself, just so a teacher can like you or to actually help you out—because that's the way it is [at other schools]. Like, your appearance is everything in school and it's sad. It really is. This one is a good school.”

“I also wanted to mention that this is a community school, they don't do things on their own. Sometimes I've noticed, my daughter has told me that they have community meetings, and they do things as like one group in a big community. [Other schools are] judgmental—teachers judge students....and students judge each other. [At NLA] we're all one community and we all get along together and can relate.”

“So, as far as with my daughter, this was the first school that she actually felt like she belonged.”

“It's like a family here.”

“Let it be known that there is a school (NLA) that actually cares about students.”

“NLA is Different”

Members from all constituent groups noted how different NLA is from other schools. Students and family members described NLA as a much better fit for them than previous school(s)—specifically noting the smaller enrollment size and the level of support the students receive from staff and teachers. The students also appreciate the flexible schedule, credit recovery, and perceive NLA to be less punitive than their previous school(s). Teachers and staff also described NLA as unique because of the students they serve and their efforts to help students be successful.

Students/Alumni Perspectives:

“We don't get that with a lot of high schools, because high schools they have to focus on a big, 30 [person] class. And these classes are like four or five people. And it's like you know what you're learning.”

“If you started school late in other schools, they wouldn't be able to have it to where you would be able to make it up. But I came to this school late and I was still about to finish the quarter while working.”

“[The] schools that I've been through, they (teachers) show you they don't care about you, like, “Oh, I get paid.” But here they show you that they do care about you. They want you to push forward and stuff, 'cause even kids that are not even in the school, they come back and visit.”

Student 1: “[At NLA] you don't get in trouble for something stupid. If you get in trouble, there's probably a reason.”

Student 2: “They let you talk about what you did. You know what I'm saying?”

Student 1: “I got detention for reading a book (at that previous school)...I was done with my work, I was waiting for my partner to catch up, but I was reading the book.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I will say, in the ten years that I've been teaching, this is my favorite place I've ever taught.”

“I think the individualized attention that they get and the small class size really draws kids that have been chronically absent and part of the truancy system.”

“We're all about if you show up, we're going to get you there. All you've got to do is be here. It's funny, I tell the students I work with [that] 90 percent of the work is just you coming into the building. And ten percent is the rest.”

Family Perspectives:

“He did like coming in here. He feel[s] more comfortable with the teachers. He's seen that it was more support than [his other] High School had.”

Parent 1: “A public school does not call and find out how you're doing. They don't normally send work home or have it all organized. They do sometimes, but I could come here anytime and pick up her work. They would send special notes on the school work, what to do, where to find the help to do it. They were just very thorough, and they treated her like a mom, type of thing...They were [more] like a parental unit than a teacher—which is something you don't find in public school systems, for the most part.”

Parent 2: “It's tough as a dad to a teenage daughter that has a baby. But, overall, you know, I mean this school is definitely [better]...We've tried out like four different schools before she came here. And this is the one that was most understanding and best fit for her.”

Recommendations

The teachers, staff, and administration have done a wonderful job creating an environment that feels intimate, welcoming, and safe. NLA successfully develops a strong sense of community among students. Students and families find this supportive, family-like environment to be attractive and beneficial. The culture and sense of community that NLA fosters is a real asset—one that can be emulated by other public schools.

COMMUNICATION

With very few exceptions, there was agreement among the stakeholders that NLA is a community school that maintains strong external and internal communication. Students, parents, teachers, and staff reported their satisfaction with the type, frequency, and modes of communication between teachers and students as well as between the school and families. Students and families suggested improving advertising to communicate the existence of the school to the local community. Responses of participants could be classified into three sub-categories: (a) School Communications and Relationships with Families (b) Communications Among Teachers and Staff, and (c) Pre-Enrollment Perceptions of NLA.

School Communication and Relationship with Families

This sub-category explains how effectively NLA communicates with the families of its students. The responses showed a high level of satisfaction by all stakeholders with the ways staff and teachers include families in the school and contact them regularly through phone calls and home visits. This type of communication showed how much the staff and teachers care about the students and their success.

Student Perspectives:

“Well the Dean, he's very supportive of me. I haven't been here for like two months and... ever since I left he's always been asking about me, always been trying to check up on me, if I'm doing good.”

Student 1: “Every teacher here still asks, “Hey [student name] how's [your boyfriend's name]? How's he doing? How's he doing this way?” Even though he left [NLA to go to a different school] they still care about him.”

Student 2: “They really care, a lot. Like, if I don't come school for a couple of days they'll call or even go to my house sometimes.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I think one thing that Nowell does that the school that my children attend also does, is have an open-door policy. I can, at any time, call my son's school and say, ‘Hey, I want to come in and like sit in the classroom and watch what they do.’ I don't have time to do that. You know what I mean? But I could. And knowing that, makes a big difference. And I think it's the same. Like we had a student's mom there today pretty much for the whole day just hanging out.”

Family Perspectives:

“Well, I feel like if I need to speak to somebody, I know there's always someone I can speak to here [at NLA] regarding my child. It's easier for me to contact and speak to them. Whereas, we go to our regular high school, it's hard for you to contact the teacher— they have so many students, they have so many things going on. So, I feel it's a little bit harder [to communicate].”

“They actually call during school time and ask where is she, you know?”

“And you know, parents, obviously we got to work. But, they [are] flexible in the time...For me, it's very difficult because of my working hours...Usually when they do a parent meeting, they ask you what would be an hour convenient for you. It's the same way when they visit our home.”

“They're very welcoming every time they have something [events] at the school going on. I like when they welcome you and stuff. You don't see that in other schools.”

Communications Among Teachers and Staff

This section details how participants described interactions between teachers and staff. Teachers and staff communicated well and worked closely together. Daily communications among NLA staff and teachers allowed for the exchange of important information about students' needs and allowed for intensive, individualized support for students. Students expressed appreciation for the communication among teachers and staff.

Student Perspectives:

Student 1: “[Communications between NLA teachers and staff] let them all know what page we’re on. If the teachers [are] working together for one of us, they know how we work, you know? So, they fill in the blanks for each other.”

Facilitator: “So they share with each other how you're doing, so you don't have to talk to everybody individually?”

Multiple Students: “Yeah.”

Student 1: “And how they work as a community, you know?”

Student 2: “Together, it's not just all one person, they all work together.”

Facilitator: “So the teachers and the staff work together? And how does that help you?”

Student 2: “ Give us the best experience.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“And I would also add that we also communicate within the staff. So, if I know someone who needs something, I might send an email to the staff. Usually, we don't write the name of the students, we use like a code for the name of the student. But we would ask the staff if someone in need of clothing, this student needs this, does anyone have this size of clothing?”

“We are small and communicate regularly. Daily huddle, we’re a team.”

“And I think what we do here very well, too, is like we collaborate with each other. There's always going to be one or two people that we have a conversation with before we intervene in any situation with the kids.”

“We’re a small campus; we’re a small school so we can look at one another and basically communicate.”

Pre-Enrollment and Outsider Perceptions of NLA

Participants shared their perceptions of NLA and how those outside the NLA community perceive the school. Students and families mostly learned about NLA through friends or family members. Students chose NLA because they heard it was a supportive school where they could be successful. According to participants, outsider perceptions of NLA are that it is a school for girls who are pregnant, mothers, and/or students who have behavioral challenges. Family members felt that more communication and targeted advertising could improve the general awareness of the school and help reach more potential students.

Students/Alumni Perspectives:

Student 1: "I knew what it would be like because my cousin comes here. Yeah, that's why I came. And he told me...they help you more...That's the reason why I came."

Student 2: "Me too, my cousin comes here. So that's how I found out about the school. She told me I should come here. She thinks it would be good for me. And I was like, 'Why? And she was like because it's good'...[But then] I asked somebody about the school and he was like: 'That's a bunch of pregnant ladies in that school'... I swear to god, someone literally told me. I told him I was going to that school and he said: 'What are you pregnant?[men's laughter]. I wanted to smack him so bad bro, I was like really? Really?'"[People think NLA] is about teen parents...in reality, they mix between teen parents and push for students with behavioral issues who cannot go to other public schools because of their behavior."

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

"I mean kids come here because of the size. They absolutely say it. Last night, we had an enrollment meeting and I definitely heard that more than once, a couple of times, three maybe. Because they say they can't handle it [at other schools] and return. It's too big at other schools."

Family Perspectives:

"One of her distant cousins comes here. So, we knew that about it. But I never really paid any mind to it because you never think that your child's going to be a teen mum. So, then I was looking, I was googling, I was trying to find a good fit for her. And then my sister, who works for the state actually told me about this school. She told me to fill out applications. So, I had called and filled out an application and kept calling all last year. And that's how she got in."

"Yeah, and I feel like also, advertisement. Because let's be real, I didn't even hear nothing [about NLA]. I've been passing through that (pointing out the front window) street almost every day, never even known it was a high school, never even known nothing about it."

Recommendations

Communication is an NLA asset. NLA's efforts in these areas appear to directly support students success. Every stakeholder shared their support of type and level of school-home communication. The importance of families playing an active role in students' education has been well documented (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). School-home communication is "a process that exchanges information to develop consensus, coordinate action, fulfill stakeholder needs, and achieve effective learning goals" (Ho, Hung, & Chen, 2013, p. 106). Participants also expressed gratitude for the relationship between teachers and students and for the communication among the teachers and staff of NLA. NLA should maintain its effective communication methods with its students, family members, and among staff and teachers. Most students and

families heard about NLA through informal networks. Thus, families suggested NLA communicate (e.g., advertise) more in the local community—especially to pregnant and parenting teens. Given the waitlist to enroll in NLA, we are not sure NLA needs to follow these parental recommendations. However, since it was a consistent communication-related suggestion conveyed by families, we felt obligated to report it.

DAILY SCHEDULE

This theme encompasses the ability of NLA to accommodate the needs of the populations it serves: students who were challenged by the daily structures of other public schools and students who are pregnant and parenting. Students, families, staff and teachers explained how the current daily schedule helped students succeed and overcome the difficulties of their personal lives. However, others noted the need for scheduling changes. This category includes two sub-categories: (a) Flexibility and (b) Start/End Times of the School Day.

Flexibility

The flexibility of NLA’s daily schedule emerged as both a strength and a challenge. Overall, students found the flexibility to be helpful. Staff and teachers understood the value of flexibility for many students, but also pointed to the ways flexibility hindered some students’ academic progress. Flexibility helped some students attend school more regularly because it allowed them to meet the daily needs of their children (e.g., drop off a daycare) and get to their jobs on-time. However, flexibility provided some students the option to arrive late or miss days without good reason.

Student Perspectives:

“And most kids here work, so they make schedules that fit your working schedule.”

“I mean, I'm pregnant now but they allow me to miss a couple more days now... due to like being tired or being nauseous or something or having an appointment. They're just a little bit more lenient, I guess. ... Yeah. Like if I have an appointment, or if I don't feel good, then I'll text [my advisor] and I'll tell her. And, she'll just be like, ‘Alright, well just try to come in tomorrow.’”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“The flexibility is so good for helping all these different students. But then the flip side is: ‘I really want to help you, but you come in for two days. You can go on Summit and get a bunch of stuff done. I'm not sure if you're not getting that much from it.’”

“But I think one of the things that we run into, let's say a kid who has anxiety, we're like: ‘Oh, you only have to show up twice a week or three times a week. But they get into a groove where they don't have to go to school—and a kid with anxiety is going to choose to not go to school...I think a lot of times we are trying to help the student, but

sometimes we end up [being too flexible] instead of sticking with [requiring them to] just get here.”

“I think there is a certain level, some students come in with, just bad habits. Especially when you have students who are habitually absent or habitually late [and were also late at] prior school placements. It's difficult to separate ‘This is school, and I go late.’ You know what I mean?”

Start and End Times of the School Day

This section describes stakeholders opinions about the start and end times of the school day. NLA adapted its start and dismissal times to encourage students to attend every day. Responses revolved around students’ need to sleep and take care of their children. Students who have children expressed a desire to come to school later in the day because of the time it takes to get their children ready for the day and drop them off at daycare before coming to school. Some parents expressed wanting to get home at a time of day that allowed them to prepare dinner and spend time with their children. Other students showed interest in early dismissal due to job commitments. Participant responses may help NLA understand the reasons students are late to school or not attending regularly.

Student Perspectives:

“I originally came here because we used to have split days. I always had trouble getting up in the morning, so we had morning session and an afternoon session so that is the original reason I came.”

“Change the time. I don't know... A later time is better. I'm not a morning person. I can stay later in the afternoon.”

“You have to get not just yourself ready, you have to get your baby ready. Well, with me I come in at 9:30 every day.”

Facilitator: “What do you do after school on Wednesdays?”

Student: “Just go home.”

Student 1: “If I could leave school at three, I'd get to work by four. So, I guess it doesn't help that the timing we have to end school, it kind of interferes with my work.

Student 2: “Damn, it really does, because we get out at... literally 3:27 is the time. We end up leaving at around 3:30, [...catch the bus...]. So, imagine, you only have a half an hour to get dressed, take a bus to a job whatever you got to do to get to work.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“Because now like the students, they know they can come in at 10, they know they can come in 9:30, 10:15, 10:30 up to 12.”

Family Perspectives:

Speaker 1: “I think their day ending at 3:30 is kind of late too.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Because sometimes if we want them to get a job, it's hard because them getting out at 3:30, a lot of jobs they want you to roughly be there at 4. So, having to have time [to get to work]. So, I would say, shorter day”

Recommendations

There will never be a perfect schedule to meet all student needs. The majority of NLA students expressed being challenged by the start and end time of the day. Jacob, Rockoff, and Hamilton’s (2011) found that student performance declines if the school day starts too early in the morning. They reported that “even an hour later can boost performance at low cost” (p. 7). It is recommended that NLA continue to offer flexibility in the daily schedule. NLA might explore a later start time and earlier dismissal time, as well as a full five-day schedule.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation consistently presented itself as a challenge for students in ways that impede their ability to get to school regularly and on-time. While this topic was brought up by all stakeholders, it should be noted that transportation challenges were named as a major obstacle for nearly half of the non-attenders and non-finishers. For many students and families, transportation was unreliable. Some students had to get up extra early in order to take multiple buses. The bus passes and gas gift cards are helpful. However, students, administrators, and family members articulated the benefits of possibly having NLA-owned transportation options—particularly those that could also accommodate the students who also need to bring their children to daycare.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“They also offered us bus passes too. That’s how I took those bus rides, because they offered us the bus passes.”

“In my case, they pay for day care at Central Falls and also pay for transportation from Central Falls to here.”

“I think it's cool how they give us cash cards. Not all the schools give you money to get transportation back and forth.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“If we had a way to go pick up our kids and their babies...because they can't get on a yellow bus. I think we would have great attendance.”

Family Perspectives:

“I think [my daughter] missed three days because there was an issue with my car. But they also offered [to] pay for a cab and they also had gas gift cards. And, I'm thinking that they might've offered a bus pass as well. So, they always made it where the kids were always guaranteed to get here. But there was still three times that I couldn't get her here.”

Facilitator: “What, if anything, do you think Nowell could do to help your student come to school on a daily basis?”

Parent: “They could provide buses.”

Recommendations

Students regularly noted the benefit of the bus passes and gas cards and viewed them as incentives to attend school regularly. NLA-owned and/or operated transportation that could accommodate students and their children would be helpful. Given the wide geographical area in which students live, implementing multiple pick-up points around Providence, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, and Central Falls—particularly near major bus routes—would be helpful for students who rely on buses to attend school. Exploring ways to keep and potentially enhance multiple transportation options might yield positive outcomes.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Stakeholders shared concerns about opportunities to further the health and wellness of NLA students. Stakeholders expressed opinions about current lunch options, a desire for increased physical activity, and the struggle to get the recommended levels of sleep. The three sub-sections include: (a) Food, (b) Physical Education and Exercise, and (c) Sleep.

Food

Food emerged as a major sub-category. This sub-category primarily focused on the food choices offered during lunch at NLA and the Skipper Pass. Students, teachers, staff, and families of NLA students all felt the lunch options have declined in recent years. There were widespread complaints about the taste, portion sizes, food selections, and nutritional content of the food. All stakeholders expressed an interest in changing the food selection.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

“The lunch is like jail food. I don't like it. Nobody likes it.”

“We starve here.”

“It's so crazy, because during last year it's like, damn, yo where's the better food. Better food. You come this year, you're like, damn, I really miss the food from last year.”

Facilitator: “What would make [the food] better? What would you want?”

Student 1: “Flavor.”

Student 2: “Something that tastes better.”

“School lunch is nasty. I like to eat. We get to leave for lunch sometimes, but I don't understand because we can't bring it back. We don't have enough time to eat out. Everything is in walking distance, but it's not enough time.”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

Staff 1: “It's really bad.”

Staff 2: “So we don't eat it, so it's not number one on our list, but we hear about it. I used to eat it and I don't anymore. It's bad.”

“It tastes processed.”

Family Perspectives:

“Also, they have this thing where they can go out to lunch. Which is also pretty good because, let's be real, there's some picky people that just don't want to eat just anything. And, they can go for a break and a little walk, get their minds out—get them energized back again so they can come right back and continue doing their work.”

Physical Education and Exercise

The second health and wellness sub-category centered around the need for increased levels of physical activity. Participants described wanting space and time allotted for physical activity. An increase in physical activity can enhance academic performance, improve fitness levels, release built up energy, lower stress and anxiety, bring students together, and be a source of enjoyment during the day (Center for Disease Control & Prevention, 2018a; Piercy et al., 2018).

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

Student 1: “A gym where, after lunch, we can go shoot around or something, or... and just even have a gym class, too. We don't have a gym class. So that would be better.”

Facilitator: “Why is gym important?”

Student 2: “To get some exercise.”

Student 1: “Release the energy.”

Student 2: “Release the energy, yeah. We won't be bored staying in class all day.”

“We could have a health room and PE, we don't even have a gym. We need exercise.”

“I got mad energy. So, especially with this small environment, it makes my energy crazy. So, I feel like if we had a gym. It would be better.”

Student 1: “Because there's boys, specifically, there's boys that don't come to this school, and I know you guys see oh, this is the whole point, what can we do better to make people come to school? You guys need like a sport for these boys.”

Student 2: “Yeah, or gym class. Because boys really enjoy that.”

Student 3: “You know what you need, baseball.”

Student 1: “Maybe not technically gym class, well-”

Student 2: “Something.”

Student 1: “Something. Something to keep them active...”

Student 3: “Basketball”

Student 1: “for them to come, oh, I can't wait to go to school because then I have this class”

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“I would have a gym. I think the kids need to channel some of the energy that they have. And, by not having that facility, they can't channel that energy in a healthy way—at least physically.”

“[They need] somewhere to go outside. And, I think for the girls especially, they need some type of exercise because these girls, they've just had babies, the postpartum, all these things.”

Family Perspectives:

“There's a lot of students that like sports. I feel they might enjoy it more.”

“You can't just be in a classroom all day. You have to get them energetic and do stuff.”

Sleep

Teens should get an average of nine hours of sleep per night to feel well-rested (Center for Disease Control & Prevention, 2018b; Tarokh, Saletin, & Carskadon, 2016). Teachers, staff, and families did not identify sleep as a concern. However, several students shared stories about being tired and struggling to get to school on time because of their sleep habits or individual situations.

Student/Alumni Perspectives:

Student 1: “It's hard to wake up early.”

Student 2: “I've tried so hard to wake up early, but I just can't.”

Interviewer: “What are the things that you overcome every day to be here?”

Student 1: “Getting out of bed.”

Student 2: “Put on alarm twice.”

“I'm coming to school tired”

Student 1: “I can't fall asleep at night. I'll be up until like three, four and I'll fall asleep and then I'll wake up for a second to shut off my alarm and ...”

Student 2: “Oh, I hear the alarm”

Student 1: “I'll go to get up and my light just goes bump and by the time I get up, I'm like: ‘Oh shit it's 11 o'clock. I get up, start getting dressed, and run out the door to school.’”

Student 2: “For real.”

Recommendations

There were several recommendations provided by stakeholders to remedy the complaints about food. Stakeholders suggested changing the food provider, offering a selection of culturally relevant foods, allowing students to take food back to campus from outside locations, or utilizing the kitchen equipment available. Opportunities for physical activity should be accessible and included in the formal or informal curriculum. Participants from all stakeholder groups supported adding opportunities for physical activity at NLA. In addition, physical activity could be used as a form of extrinsic motivation or reward. Unlike physical activity levels, NLA cannot directly impact sleep habits. Suggestions from students included a later start time. If that is not possible, teaching students about the importance of sleep and tips to get a healthy amount of sleep would be beneficial.

RIDE REPORT CARD

NLA received a “one-star” rating from RIDE for the 2017-18 school year. With a four-year graduation rate of 21 percent, NLA was identified as a school that needed comprehensive support and improvement. The same metrics used by RIDE to evaluate the typical high school are used to evaluate NLA. However, NLA students face unique challenges and embody success in ways that are not considered by RIDE’s current metrics. For instance, a vast majority of NLA students *arrive* at NLA significantly behind—71% are overage and under-credited. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides a new opportunity for states and districts to redefine school success, with hopes that a more “holistic approach” will create equitable learning opportunities for all children (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). ESSA provides an opportunity to utilize the growing research to support adolescent learners (Alexander & Fox, 2011). The policies of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) pressed secondary schools for accountability, yet “cultural considerations” were often absent from curricular and instructional approaches (Rueda, 2011, p. 87). Despite the ESSA promise for more flexibility, the stress of using standardized measures of accountability was evident from NLA teachers and staff.

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

“And in terms of like the politics. When you have a small school full of people who really care about the kids, and you know, kids *are* making changes—however slow it might be, you know what I mean? As slow as the process may be, the intentions behind it are strong enough to where we shouldn't be losing funding...The charter could be pulled any minute. You know what I'm saying? The numbers data has more weight than the narrative data. So, you know, there's something to be said in that.”

“And our survey works data too, that shows us [positively] in terms of [other] schools. [In regard to our statistics] our culture, staff satisfaction, student satisfaction, students feeling safe in the school, our numbers are like killing other schools.”

“Those are not easy conversations to have with the Rhode Island Department of Education. But I think that, for schools like Nowell that offer something very unique to students who have been failed by a public school system, our existence is always going to be something we have to fight for dearly. It's like a double-edged sword to our kids. They're not only spun out of these other places, but then they're denied access to the places (like NLA—if closed) that do serve them. So, I think that rating system is something I would really like to see our administration take on.”

NLA serves a unique population of students that often did not experience success in typical high schools. Last year, 71% of students were over age and under-credited. NLA to other schools (where fewer under-credited students) and rating them largely on graduation rates is an unfair comparison because context matters. In fact, students, families and teachers expressed that NLA welcomes them while other public schools pushed them out. Moreover, stakeholders shared stories of their daily obstacles to attend school which serve as rich context to one-dimensional metrics like graduation rates. These challenges speak to the uniqueness of the daily lives of NLA students. They also help illuminate the success of NLA in helping students to thrive and overcome their challenges.

Teacher/Staff Perspectives:

[It's just really hard for me] to have conversations devoid of context. It's really difficult to take a student who just had a good night sleep. His mom made him pancakes. His dad drove him to school in an air-conditioned Beemer. He's on time and he's arrived in a class where all of his fellow classmates did their homework. Then, you compare that with a kid who has four younger siblings to take care of and is pregnant and has to interpret for parents and doesn't have easy transportation. Nobody is checking for them if they're coming in at 8 am. That's not the same job. Having a class with one student and another student. That's not the same job.”

Teacher 1: “I think one of the biggest issues is around standards, like the test scores, absenteeism, and all of those different issues our kids will come with. A student might fall below the benchmark and get like a 60 percent attendance or 50 percent attendance. But when you look at last year, they might have never attended at all.”

Teacher 2: “Right, so that is the [positive] change.”

Teacher 1: “Which is like a tremendous growth. And, you look at somebody improving 50 percent from one year to the next. That shows tremendous growth. That shows like a complete shift in terms of what they do as a norm. So, the problem is we don't [count or value individual-level] data on the students in terms of those numbers.”

“And many of our students have experienced a lot of frustration and failure in other settings. So, to believe that this is going to be different, or to believe that you should suspend an income for your family or your child to come to school every day—those are considerations that our students face that perhaps, other students in other communities don't.”

Teacher 1: “There's something to be said with a small school in a small community that has one success story and how that changes the trajectory for like multiple people—possibly generations.”

Teacher 2: “I just would like to find a way to communicate that if we weren't here, a lot of kids would be lost to death seriously—or be on the street.”

Family Perspectives:

“When she was in the other school before this, instead of calling to try to help her out, they would always complain: ‘Oh, she did this, she's not doing this.’ You know? And, I had a couple meetings with the staff and the principal and it was more like: ‘Either you want to be here or you don't.’ They were not trying [to support her by saying] ‘Well we could work on this [or] we could work on that to make it better.’ They were just like, if you don't want to be here then bye. And sometimes that's not what some children need because they think they're being pushed out. Especially for teachers and principals and people that are supposed to be helping you for your future. You know what I mean? Over here (at NLA) however, if there's ever a problem, they would want to fix it, they want to work with her and see what's the best way to get it done.”

Student Outcomes and Changes in Behavior

Although not always considered to determine school effectiveness, students and families mentioned how NLA fostered important student outcomes and positive behavioral change. Students and parents discussed a multitude of personal achievements and changes that resulted from attending NLA. The students mainly talked about the academic-related changes like increased attendance, credit completion, and graduation. Families identified changes in their student's behavior and attitudes toward school.

Students/Alumni Perspectives:

“Nowell was helpful to me, because in my previous high schools, I was always getting kicked out and always got in trouble. Once I got to Nowell, they really got to know me and helped me and pushed me to do better. And actually, they helped me graduate a year early. I was supposed to graduate this year and I graduated last year.”

“I remember, I was being to (previous school) and I was late every day. Actually, I hardly ever went to school...I can like play every so often, but I come to school. There's a reason for that because I like being here. The environment itself helps a lot.”

Family Perspectives:

“She didn't want to go to school anymore. She had to ask for the elevator key if she couldn't walk, because she was having severe pain with him [while pregnant]. She actually found this school, I didn't even know the school existed. She found it, she applied to it, got accepted, we had the interview, and she was in school next week. Her grades went from C, C-Minus, straight to A's. She loved it here.”

“It's a school that has been concerned about my daughter...If it wouldn't have been for this school, probably my daughter would never have graduated or finished high school—because my daughter already had missed two years of school in other schools... Here, they help them a lot and motivate them a lot for them to grow.”

“She was like beefing in all the other schools. You know? [She was] troubled, young, stupid, all that [expletive]...So [her previous school] told her about Nowell and all that extra stuff. She got accepted and she became a whole new person—straight As and all that!”

Recommendations

With the changes in ESSA, it is critical that educators comprehensively examine what works in schools. While there are similarities to NCLB, states are now offered flexibility in designing the types of assessments they use. As noted throughout this report, NLA has many strengths that seem to carry far less weight in the Rhode Island school accountability measures. Critiques of the evaluation metrics used in Rhode Island can prompt conversations about the ways schools, like NLA, also need to report on other measures that indicate school quality. Those measures might include climate, safety, individual student-level improvements/gains, and student engagement—which is a growing concern amongst educators and policy makers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). As our data suggest, there were tangible, yet hard to measure improvements in student outcomes and behaviors once students arrived at NLA. If accountability measures captured these additional factors, we believe that NLA would be viewed as a highly effective school instead of an underperforming one.

LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations to this report. First, we had a very high participation rate from current students, teachers, and staff. However, participation rates were lower for families and students who were non-finishers or non-attendees. The research team did not have access to family contact information and relied on the school to publicize the focus groups. They reached out multiple times via email and phone. Even though we scheduled family focus groups on both campuses on Saturday afternoon and Wednesday evening to accommodate families, only 18 family members participated in the study. The low response rate (15/48) from students who were not regularly in touch (non-finishers or non-attendees) is also concern. Many phone numbers for these students were out of service and very few of these students returned messages left by the research team inviting them to participate in the evaluation.

As is the case with all qualitative research, we provide quotes that best exemplify the sentiments of all, or a vast majority of, the participants. That means, if one or two participants expressed a differing opinion or unique experience, they are not reflected in this report. However, we used rigorous qualitative methods to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of these findings (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014) and are confident that the conclusions shared are an accurate representation of stakeholder sentiments.

A concern that may emerge from readers is the overwhelmingly positive data shared in this report. As is evident in the protocols (See Appendices A-F), numerous research questions asked stakeholders about areas for growth or improvement. We also asked neutral questions to allow for both positive and negative responses (e.g., “Use three words to describe Nowell; Do you get what you need to succeed?”). Moreover, as the team began to hear mostly positive responses during the first few focus groups, we added more probing (e.g., “Anyone else have a challenge or concern to share?”) to ensure we were collecting both positive and negative responses. Despite these efforts, participants nearly always had praise for NLA and responded to those probes with comments such as: “I can’t think of anything else they could do better.” Interestingly, this was true for all participants—including non-attenders, non-finishers, and their parents—who we thought might have more critical feedback. This overwhelmingly positive evaluation data may be the result of self-selection of participants. It is possible that individuals with deeply negative opinions chose not to participate. However, in our more than 20 years of experience conducting educational research and evaluation, we must note that it would be quite rare to obtain such overwhelmingly positive *and consistent* evaluation results from 117 participants if there were truly significant (but hidden) problems or issues.

CONCLUSION

Our team of seven researchers were invited to conduct a qualitative evaluation of student, family, and educator experiences with, and perceptions of, NLA. Effective qualitative research offers rich detail that can complement statistics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015) and thus, offer a holistic understanding of a topic or setting. As such, qualitative evaluations like this are ideal when used in combination with intensive curricular review and quantitative analysis of statistical information (e.g., grades, attendance, test scores, credits earned, graduation). This qualitative report offers a partial, yet important, view of the Nowell Leadership Academy. Data from 117 stakeholders provide rich detail about NLA stakeholder experiences with, and perspectives about: (1) Curriculum, (2) Opportunities to Prepare for Future Endeavors, (3) Motivation, (4) Pregnant and Parenting Mission, (5) Support, (6) Combining Schools, (7) Environment, (8) Communication, (9) Daily Schedule, (10) Transportation, (11) Health and Wellness, and (12) RIDE Report Card. Detailed participant narratives offer insight into the many strengths of NLA. Students, families, and educators also offered a few areas where improvements could be made.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Focus Group/Interview Questions for Current Students

Introduction

Intro of Facilitator (s)

About today: Thank you for being here today to share your experiences with Nowell. Your ideas and feedback will help improve Nowell.

Consent forms—explain, collect signatures, provide copies. *Review processes for over 18 and under 18 years of age.*

Half sheets—explain and collect

Ground rules:

1. One person speaks at a time
2. No experience is wrong. It is ok for people to disagree or have different experiences. You should only speak for yourself.
3. This is a not a debate.
4. What we learn will be shared with Nowell staff. We will never use your real name.
5. We cannot guarantee confidentiality, but we ask all of you to keep confidential what is said in this room.

Questions

1. If you could use three words to describe Nowell, what would those be? (review half sheets)
2. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from classroom teachers? Yes/No Please explain
3. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from other staff at Nowell? Yes/No Please explain
4. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from significant others (family, partners, others in your life)? Yes/No Please explain
5. What do you consider Nowell's top 3 strengths?
6. What were you hoping for when you applied for/or enrolled at Nowell? Were those hopes or expectations met? How? Can you give a specific example?
7. What are the daily obstacles you overcome to be here? How do you overcome them?
8. When you think about finding the strength to overcome daily obstacles, where do you find it?
9. Where do you find your biggest support? (Probe: At Nowell)
10. What is it like to interact with other Nowell students? Nowell teachers? Administrators?
11. How is Nowell different from other schools you've been to?
12. When you think about your future, what do you see yourself doing? How can Nowell help you achieve it?
13. In your opinion, what, if anything, could Nowell do to keep you in school regularly and to graduate?
14. If money was not an issue, what one thing would you do/change/add to Nowell? Why?
15. What advice would you give to other students who are starting at Nowell and who are similar to you (e.g., pregnant, parenting, etc.)?

16. Is there anything you want to share that we did not get to? Did we miss anything in our questions that is important to your experience at Nowell?

Appendix B: Focus Group/Interview Questions for Teachers

Introduction

Intro of Facilitator (s)

About today: Thank you for being here today to share your experiences with Nowell. Your ideas and feedback will help improve Nowell.

Consent forms—explain, collect signatures, provide copies.

Ground rules:

1. One person speaks at a time
2. No experience is wrong. It is ok for people to disagree or have different experiences. You should only speak for yourself.
3. This is a not a debate.
4. What we learn will be shared with Nowell staff. We will never use your real name.
5. We cannot guarantee confidentiality, but we ask all of you to keep confidential what is said in this room.

Questions

1. What do you consider Nowell's top 3 strengths?
2. What strategies do you specifically use to keep students engaged? To support students?
3. What are the biggest challenges you see in meeting students' needs?
4. How are the non-parents integrated into Nowell? How do you meet their needs since they are not central to your mission?
5. How do you deliver curriculum in a way that meets everyone's needs—especially considering some students are not here consistently?
6. How do you balance state standards with individualized curricular delivery?
7. How prepared do you feel for teaching this population effectively? What do you need to be more effective?
8. What do you need from the administration to be more successful?
9. In your opinion, why do some students persist while others do not?
10. In your opinion, what does Nowell do effectively to keep students in school and graduating on time? What could Nowell do better?
11. If money was not an issue, what one thing would you would do/change/add to Nowell? Why?
12. Is there anything you want to share that we did not get to? Did we miss anything in our questions that is important to your experience at Nowell?

Appendix C: Focus Group/Interview Questions for Staff/Administrators

Introduction

Intro of Facilitator (s)

About today: Thank you for being here today to share your experiences with Nowell. Your ideas and feedback will help improve Nowell.

Consent forms—explain, collect signatures, provide copies.

Ground rules:

1. One person speaks at a time
2. No experience is wrong. It is ok for people to disagree or have different experiences. You should only speak for yourself.
3. This is a not a debate.
4. What we learn will be shared with Nowell staff. We will never use your real name.
5. We cannot guarantee confidentiality, but we ask all of you to keep confidential what is said in this room.

Questions

1. What do you consider Nowell's top 3 strengths?
2. How does Nowell meet the various needs of different populations (pregnant, parenting, mothers, fathers, non- parents who selected Nowell, etc.)? What various forms of support does Nowell you provide? How does Nowell support students who come from varying levels of community/family support?
3. How are the non-parent students integrated into Nowell? How do you meet their needs since they are not central to your mission?
4. How, if at all, does Nowell vary supports for different developmental needs (18-21) of students?
5. What are your values as a school? How do you enact these values?
6. When you get negative feedback from constituents/stakeholders, how do you respond?
7. What are the biggest strengths of Nowell?
8. What are the biggest struggles of Nowell?
9. If you were to have a conversation with politicians and RIDE folks, what reasons would you give for "underperformance?"
10. How, if at all, are "adult influencers" integrated into the Nowell community and curriculum?
11. If money was not an issue, what one thing would you do/change/add to Nowell? Why?
12. Is there anything you want to share that we did not get to? Did we miss anything in our questions that is important to your experience at Nowell?

Appendix D: Focus Group/Interview Questions for Alumni

Introduction

Intro of Facilitator (s)

About today: Thank you for being here today to share your experiences with Nowell. Your ideas and feedback will help improve Nowell.

Consent forms—explain, collect signatures, provide copies.

Ground rules:

1. One person speaks at a time
2. No experience is wrong. It is ok for people to disagree or have different experiences. You should only speak for yourself.
3. This is a not a debate.
4. What we learn will be shared with Nowell staff. We will never use your real name.
5. We cannot guarantee confidentiality, but we ask all of you to keep confidential what is said in this room.

Questions

1. What do you consider Nowell's top 3 strengths?
2. How did you learn about Nowell?
3. Why did you choose Nowell?
4. Was your experience at Nowell what you thought it would be? Can you give a specific example?
5. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from classroom teachers? Yes/No Please explain
6. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from other staff at Nowell? Yes/No Please explain
7. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from significant others (family, partners, others in your life)? Yes/No Please explain
8. In what ways did Nowell meet your expectations? In what ways did it not meet your expectations?
9. What are the daily obstacles you overcame to graduate? In your opinion, what specifically did Nowell do to help you be successful, graduate?
10. Was there a time you considered dropping out? What made you come back?
11. In your opinion, what, if anything, could Nowell do to keep students in school regularly and to graduate?
12. If money was not an issue, what one thing would you do/change/add to Nowell? Why?
13. What advice would you give to students who are starting at Nowell and who are similar to you (e.g., pregnant, parenting, etc.)?
14. Is there anything you want to share that we did not get to? Did we miss anything in our questions that is important to your experience at Nowell?

Appendix E: Focus Group/Interview Questions for Adult Influencers (Parents, Grandparents, Guardians, etc. of Nowell Students)

Introduction

Intro of Facilitator (s)

About today: Thank you for being here today to share your experiences with Nowell. Your ideas and feedback will help improve Nowell.

Consent forms—explain, collect signatures, provide copies.

Ground rules:

1. One person speaks at a time
2. No experience is wrong. It is ok for people to disagree or have different experiences. You should only speak for yourself.
3. This is a not a debate.
4. What we learn will be shared with Nowell staff. We will never use your real name.
5. We cannot guarantee confidentiality, but we ask all of you to keep confidential what is said in this room.

Questions

1. What do you consider Nowell's top 3 strengths?
2. In your opinion, what could Nowell do to keep students in school and graduate?
3. What school did your student attend prior to Nowell? How is Nowell different or similar to that school? Has your student's attitude or behavior been different since they've been at Nowell?
4. How did you learn about Nowell?
5. Why did you and your student choose Nowell?
6. Do you and your student get what you need from Nowell to be successful? Yes/No
Please explain
7. How do teachers help your student?
8. How does the principal, dean of students, or other staff support your student?
9. How do you get information from Nowell about how your student is doing? How do you get information about the events are happening? Is there a better way to communicate with you?
10. In your opinion, what, if anything, could Nowell do to help your student make it to school every day?
11. Are there any forms of support you'd like from Nowell?
12. If money was not an issue, what one thing would you do/change/add to Nowell? Why?
13. Is there anything you want to share that we did not get to? Did we miss anything in our questions that is important to your experience at Nowell?

Appendix F: Focus Group/Interview Questions for Non-Finishers and Non-Attendees

Introduction

Intro of Facilitator (s)

About today: Thank you for being here today to share your experiences with Nowell. Your ideas and feedback will help improve Nowell.

Consent forms—explain, collect signatures, provide copies (review verbal consent process when doing a telephone interview)

Ground rules:

1. One person speaks at a time
2. No experience is wrong. It is ok for people to disagree or have different experiences. You should only speak for yourself.
3. This is a not a debate.
4. What we learn will be shared with Nowell staff. We will never use your real name.
5. We cannot guarantee confidentiality, but we ask all of you to keep confidential what is said in this room.

Questions

1. If you could use three words to describe Nowell, what would those be?
2. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from classroom teachers? Yes/No Please explain
3. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from other staff at Nowell? Yes/No Please explain
4. Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from significant others (family, partners, others in your life)? Yes/No Please explain
5. How did you learn about Nowell?
6. Why did you choose Nowell?
7. Is your experience at Nowell what you thought it would be? Can you give a specific example?
8. What do you consider Nowell's top 3 strengths? Areas for improvement?
9. What is happening in your life that keeps you from coming to Nowell every day?
10. (Probe for work, family obligations, medical)
11. What are the daily obstacles you overcome to be here? How do you overcome them?
12. When you think about finding the motivation to overcome daily obstacles, where do you find it?
13. Where do you find your biggest support? (Probe: At Nowell)
14. In your opinion, what, if anything, could Nowell do to help you make it to school every day?
15. In your opinion, what, if anything, could Nowell do to keep you in school regularly and to graduate?
16. Is there anything you want to share that we did not get to? Did we miss anything in our questions that is important to your experience at Nowell?

Appendix G: Additional Information about Focus Group Participants

Stakeholder Group	Total Focus Group Participants	Capital Campus	Central Campus	Both Campuses	Utilized Interpreter and Spanish Documents
Current Students	60	31	29	N/A	9
Alumni	3	1	2	N/A	0
Non-Attendees/Non-Finishers	15	9	6	N/A	0
Teachers	11	4	5	2	0
Staff	10	3	3	4	0
Family Members	18	13	5	N/A	6
Total	117	61	50	6	15

Appendix H: Quantitative Data from Focus Group Questions

Question	Yes	No	Sometimes	No Response
Current Students (n=60)				
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from classroom teachers?	59	0	1	0
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from other staff at Nowell?	58	2	0	0
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from significant others (family, partners, others in your life)?	53	3	2	2
Non-Finishers and Non-Attendees (n=15)				
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from classroom teachers?	14	0	1	0
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from other staff at Nowell?	14	1	0	0
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from significant others (family, partners, others in your life)?	14	1	0	0
Alumni (n=3)				
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from classroom teachers?	3	0	0	0
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from other staff at Nowell?	3	0	0	0
Do you get what you need to succeed as a student, from significant others (family, partners, others in your life)?	3	0	0	0