Symphony No. 169: How Shared Leadership Created
Sustained Learning Gains at Baychester Academy

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Acknowledgements

Elements of Symphony No. 169

No one can whistle a symphony; it takes a whole orchestra to play it. – H.E. Luccock

Educators across New York City and the country are taking notice of Public School 169, Baychester Academy, a Bronx elementary school founded in 2009. The school has successfully demonstrated progress towards its mission of preparing each child with foundational tools necessary for success in middle school, high school and college—as evidenced by double-digit gains in English Language Arts (18 percentile points) and mathematics (12 percentile points). These gains were achieved steadily over the course of four years, while the school served a high-need population and expanded from grades PreK-2 to PreK-5.

- ♪ According to the 2016 NYC School Quality Guide, **the school has outperformed the district, city, and comparison groups in every category**—including overall gains in English language arts and math as well as closing the achievement gap for special education students and the city's lowest-performing students.

- ♪ According to the 2016 NYC School Survey Report, **parent and teacher perceptions of the school are more positive than citywide averages in nearly every category**, with 95% agreeing the school has rigorous instruction, 94% agreeing teachers are collaborative, and 94% agreeing the school leadership is effective.

Student Demographics

71% Black; 22% Latino; 2% Asian; 2% White

23% Special Needs

83% National School Lunch Program

School Information

Grades: PK-5

Enrollment: 416

Admissions: Zoned

Baychester Academy has also fulfilled its founding promise to strive towards educating the whole child academically, emotionally, and socially. **The school provides students with access to a broad range of arts offerings** (documented in this video clip) that include music, orchestra, visual arts, and dance. The school has also fostered a safe and supportive learning environment with strong parental partnerships and collaboration amongst educators.

These results are particularly impressive given that the gains were achieved at the same time schools were transitioning to Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments. Nationally, numbers of students demonstrating proficiency were typically declining and achievement gaps for low-income students were often worsening during the transition.[1]

How did Baychester do it? This case study describes key school practices that have driven success. These research-based practices focused on: 1) curriculum and instruction; 2) a positive behavior culture;

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[1] Peterson, P. E., Barrows, S., & Gift, T. (2016). After Common Core, states set rigorous standards. *Education Next*, *16*(3).

3) distributed and collective leadership; and 4) teacher learning.[2] First, the school concentrated intense energy on more ambitious instruction that was aligned to increasingly rigorous standards and provided students with materials and pedagogy that emphasized higher-order thinking skills and student ownership of learning.[3] Second, the school created a culture with values (and rituals to reinforce values) as well as supports to instill confidence and empower students to achieve at a high level.[4] Third, the principal distributed leadership among staff via teams and engaged them in collective decision making that spurred innovation and enabled buy-in.[5] Finally, the school invested substantially and continuously in job-embedded professional development that provided access to high-quality training with onsite follow-up coaching.[6]

Like a masterpiece symphony, **Baychester's success has been the result of both composition (the what) and orchestration (how they piece is conducted)**. The following sections of this case study detail the critical elements of Baychester's work as well as how the school's conductor—the principal—has led her staff in carrying out the work. Each section highlights core ideas that undergird Baychester's approach, including illustrative examples and links to artifacts. This endeavor was inspired by the NYCDOE District 11 Instructional Focus Collaborative (IFC) to improve practice across 50 schools. The purpose of this report is to: 1) provide background and resources that can enable other schools to achieve similar success and 2) for the school itself to build upon key foundational elements in service of continuous growth.

THE COMPOSITION

In a musical score, composers pay careful attention to the melody, countermelody, and tempo. They also ensure these musical elements interweave and blend together to create the desired impact. In Baychester Academy's symphony, the leadership team has similarly paid careful attention to a set of critical elements, including: curriculum and instruction, socio-emotional supports, and student culture. These issues are not addressed in isolation; they have been designed and implemented in ways that complement and reinforce one another.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction has been a primary focus at Baychester Academy. The school has utilized various curricula across subject areas and compiled resources from across those programs to create coherent, schoolwide curricula. The school's teaching philosophy is based on a student-centered approach that develops learner autonomy and independence by shifting the focus of instruction from

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[2] Bryk, A.S., Sebring, P.B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J.Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[3] Cawn, B., Ikemoto, G., & J. Grossman (2016). *Ambitious leadership: How principals lead schools to college and career readiness.* New York: New Leaders.

[4] Desravines, J., Aquino, J., & Fenton, B. (2016). *Breakthrough principals: A step-by-step guide to building stronger schools.* New York, NY: Jossey-Bass.

[5] Spillane, J. (2012). *Distributed leadership (Vol. 4).* John Wiley & Sons.

[6] Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher*. 33(8): 3-15.

the teacher to the student.[7] The school's philosophy also integrates the instructional shifts from previous standards[8]—with a focus on increasing rigor, fostering student independence and initiative, and differentiating instruction.

Core ideas:

- ♪ *Strategic curriculum mapping*. School leaders and the faculty have pulled from different resources to create a coherent schoolwide curriculum aligned to academic standards in each subject area. For example, the school upgraded its mathematics curricula multiple times. The school initially adopted a new curriculum to address the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS); then it moved to a new district-approved curriculum in accordance with central office guidelines; and ultimately, the school selected EngageNY (supplemented with the Problem of the Week—see page 5) in response to particular student needs identified by the faculty. (See a math timeline that school staff created to describe how the math program has incrementally evolved over the past eight years).

- ♪ *Careful attention to priority academic standards*. The staff also identify "power standards" as part of the curriculum mapping process. These are standards prioritized within the CCLS and for which data show have been a struggle for Baychester students in the past. For example, a priority mathematics standard involves students being able to draw fraction models on a number line. While the concept may have been covered, the staff might decide to address it in 10 lessons as opposed to the original four. They might also strategically change placement of the concept in the curriculum map to ensure mastery and retention.

- ♪ *Purposeful reading and writing programs.* The core reading program is Expeditionary Learning, (grades 3-5) and ReadyGen (grades K-2), with a focus on close reading, text analysis, team talk and writing response components. From the previous use of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, the school maintained a deep focus on guided reading, daily independent reading, conferencing and genre studies. In social studies, text sets and other resources from the New York City Department of Education's Common Core Library as well as from the New York State Education Department's EngageNY website are incorporated into the curriculum. Every year, the instructional team continues to refine a curriculum calendar, which outlines the scope and sequence.

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[7] Jones, L. (2007). *The student-centered classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
[8] For English language arts shifts, see http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-english-language-arts/. For math shifts, see http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-mathematics/.

THE PROBLEM OF THE WEEK: THE "OSTINATO" OF SYMPHONY NO. 169

In music, an ostinato is a motif or phrase that persistently repeats. It is similar to a chorus in a pop song, which conveys the main message or theme of the song. It's often more intense and therefore the most memorable element.

For Baychester Academy, the ostinato is its five-day protocol. In math, it is referred to as the "problem of the week," which is a consistent approach that the school uses to cultivate higher-order thinking skills to help students master content. The key to the success of the problem of the week is that it **starts with a challenging problem that matches the grade level rigor expectations**. These are generally multistep word problems selected (or crafted) to mirror the rigor required CCLS.

STEPS	ACTIVITY
1. Read and understand	Teacher models how to unpack the question and break problem into various components.
2. Model and do	Teams solve same task problem together.
3. Comparing teachers' model with rubric	Students analyze a problem that the teacher solved incorrectly.
4. Complete an exemplar	Team completes the same problem with different numbers.
5. Analyze and rate exemplar	All students individually complete the same problem with different numbers.

♪ On the first day, the teacher introduces the challenging problem. As a whole class, they discuss vocabulary and discuss questions such as, "Do I need to add or subtract?"; "Will my answer be more or less?"; "Will I need to use tools?"; "How many steps are there and what should I do first?". The teacher models a solution strategy, including checking the work and using a rubric to self-assess.

♪ On the second day, students work to solve the same problem in a small team, with a bonus if they can apply an alternative strategy to solve the problem. Students use conversation prompts to explain their thinking to each other and to the teacher. Team behaviors and roles are explicitly taught early but quickly become part of the culture since all students in the school engage in this routine every week starting in PreK.

♪ On the third day, students are presented with the problem solved incorrectly by "Mixed-Up Max" or "Confused Carl" (aka, the teacher). The purposes are to identify errors, practice using the rubric to assess work, and practice providing feedback to other students.

♪ On the fourth day, students independently solve the same problem with the numbers changed. Teachers sometimes differentiate the problems depending on the level of challenge students need. They also use this day to provide support to students who need extra help.

♪ The fifth day is an independent assessment that allows the teachers to determine exactly which students have mastered the underlying mathematical concept and where they need to provide additional support for specific students or related to particular misconceptions.

Grade level teams of teachers design the problem of the week together and then analyze data from the assessment together to collaboratively determine how to adjust instruction going forward (see example Grade 4 Math Problem of the Week lesson plan).

♪ *Common lesson structure*. The school developed a common lesson structure for all subject areas. It has been adapted in response to students' needs and aligned with materials from the school's current curriculum, EngageNY.

Lesson Structure

Reteach the previous lesson (10 minutes)
- An application problem is assigned to students who mastered the exit ticket from the previous day's lesson.
- Teacher re-teaches the concept or procedure to those who did not master the exit slip from the previous day.

Entrance Ticket (5 minutes)
- Exit ticket given to all students (do not review answers).

Mini-Lesson (5-10 minutes)
- Students who mastered work on exit ticket move on in groups &/or independently (e.g., problems set, games, activity).
- Teacher teaches mini-lesson to students who didn't master exit ticket then assigns independent practice &/or group work.

Group &/or Independent Practice (12-17 minutes)
- All students working in groups &/or independently.
- Problem assigned to check for understanding (a mid-point check).
- Students who master the problem move on with the problem set, or games, or activity; those who didn't are pulled for small group instruction with teacher teaching the concept/skill in a different way based on misconceptions evident in the student work.

Debrief (10 minutes)
- Teacher selects groups/individuals to share work with whole class, choosing an order that supports the teaching point of the lesson.

Exit Ticket (3 minutes)
- All students complete the exit ticket again.
- Use the results to decide who needs intensive instruction the following lesson.

♪ *Assessment*. Teachers analyze data from weekly English language arts and math performance tasks, the i-Ready electronic diagnostic, end of module reading and writing assessment tasks, mid-unit assessments, exemplars, exit tickets, on-demand writing, debriefings, and Fountas and Pinnell reading levels. Data is uploaded onto Google Docs so that everyone has access. Teachers work together during team planning time to identify patterns and adjust instruction.

♪ *Clear expectations*. Students know the criteria teachers will use to judge their assignments because they regularly consult rubrics that detail expectations for completed assignments. Rubrics are provided for math and writing—and they are readily visible in all classrooms from Kindergarten through fifth grade. The rubrics frequently accompany student work that is posted in the classroom and hallways.

♪ *Grade-level rigor, including higher-order questioning*. Faculty and administration are committed to ensuring that students have access to grade-level rigor, regardless of their current performance levels. The Problem of the Week is one example of how students are given assignments that match the rigor of their grade-level standards as well as scaffolds and supports to help them bridge any gaps. Another example is the five-day "Text Complexity" protocol, which helps students access texts at their grade level.

♪ *Student collaboration and discussion*. Students are explicitly taught how to support each other's learning. For example, "Math Talk" prompts are posted on the wall and available to students at their desks. For example, "I agree/disagree with you because …"; "What I heard you say was …"; and "How else can you solve it?". Students practice these questioning techniques and providing effective feedback routinely across grades and over time. Students similarly practice schoolwide protocols for using a rubric to provide each other with feedback on writing. As a result, they are less reliant on adults to support their learning and can individualize support for each other during frequent team time.

♪ *Differentiation*. Teachers constantly keep track of how individual students are progressing towards mastery. They make real time adjustments to their instructional strategies accordingly. In the words of one teacher, "If I'm looking at a class and I notice that 3 or 4 students are not moving past question #2, I pull them into a quick small group to provide them with additional strategies. We'll get some manipulatives out or I'll ask the para to sit with them while I work with a higher group." Paraprofessionals, who are woven into daily teaching and learning at Baychester Academy, are critical partners in providing differentiation.

Positive Behavior Culture

Baychester Academy has worked tirelessly to create a positive culture where students and adults feel respected and valued. This culture has been a focus for the school since its inception in 2009, starting with the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which is a proactive approach to creating supports that are primary (school-focused), secondary (classroom-focused), and tertiary (individual-focused).

With leadership from the school social worker and academic intervention team staff, the school has continued to build and refine its efforts to foster a positive behavior culture over time.

Core ideas:

- ♩ *Common values*. The staff worked together to identify core values for student and adult behavior. These values are codified in the acronym: ROCKS. The Baychester Academy Matrixes identify the PreK-2 and 3-5 grade behavioral expectations for each of the ROCKS across school settings: arrival/dismissal, hallways, classroom, cafeteria, and school yard.

R.O.C.K.S.
R — Respectful
O — Organized
C — Cooperative
K — Kind
S — Safe

- ♩ *Rituals to reinforce values*. The school reinforces the ROCKS by referencing them daily during announcements and explicitly focusing on one particular ROCKS element each month. The teachers also wrote a Baychester Academy ROCKS song, including music, that is played over the announcements every morning and which all students know by heart.

- ♩ *Incentives and celebration*. The school provides positive reinforcement by issuing "Eagle tickets" to students who exhibit behaviors aligned with the ROCKS. Classes who receive the most Eagle Tickets might be rewarded with an extra period of recess. Individual students who receive 100 Eagle Tickets might have lunch with the principal and receive a certificate and eagle key chain to display on their school bag. Their picture is also posted in the school bulletin. "BA ROCKS" assemblies are held each month to recognize the student in each class who best exemplifies ROCKS Behaviors.

The staff at Baychester Academy have put a set of programs and structures into place to intervene and/or de-escalate when necessary. All of these strategies are individualized, empathy-based, and utilize positive relationships as a foundation.

Key Intervention Programs:

- ♪ *Child Study Team*. The team meets each week to discuss students who may be having challenges with their academics and/or behavior. Members of the team include the school psychologist, social worker, special education teacher, administration, and academic intervention personnel. The members utilize Successful Practices for the Child Study Team, including drawing on each member's particular expertise area to support the teacher in identifying strategies to try for a six to eight-week period. After that period, the child study team revisits the child's plan to monitor progress and improve goals and strategies as needed.

- ♪ *Check-In/ Check-Out Program*. The social worker or academic intervention service (AIS) providers work with students to set behavioral goals. They utilize a protocol to check in with students in the morning to review the goal and provide encouragement. Each period, the teacher and student rate the student on a 0-2 scale and document the rating on a form. Regardless of whether the goal was met, the social worker or AIS provider checks out with the student at the end of the day and parents are asked to sign the form. If students reach their goal, they are rewarded with a prize (for lower grades) or an extra privilege (upper grades). Students typically work on their goals for up to 8 weeks, and are recognized for "graduating" in student assemblies when they consistently meet their goal(s).

- ♪ *School Wide Information System (SWIS)*. This is an in-house program in which the teachers fill out a form about a child's negative behavior, its triggers, and the end result. Data from these forms is logged into a system that enables staff to look for patterns, such as type of incident, time of day, or day of the week that will help mitigate the issue. The school analyzes this data quarterly and revises strategies accordingly.

IESCAPE De-Escalation Protocol from Life Space Crisis

I — Isolate
E — Explore the student's point of view
S — Summarize feelings and content
C — Connect behavior to feelings
A — Alternate behavior discussed
P — Plan and practice new behavior
E — Enter

- ♪ *STOPP Intervention*. Teachers have been trained in the STOPP program, which is an intervention system that helps children who are currently in, or who are approaching crisis. It includes "IESCAPE," which is an acronym outlining steps (see sidebar) to help staff de-escalate a potential crisis by validating students' feelings, listening, and helping the student to better manage situations that might prompt negative behaviors.
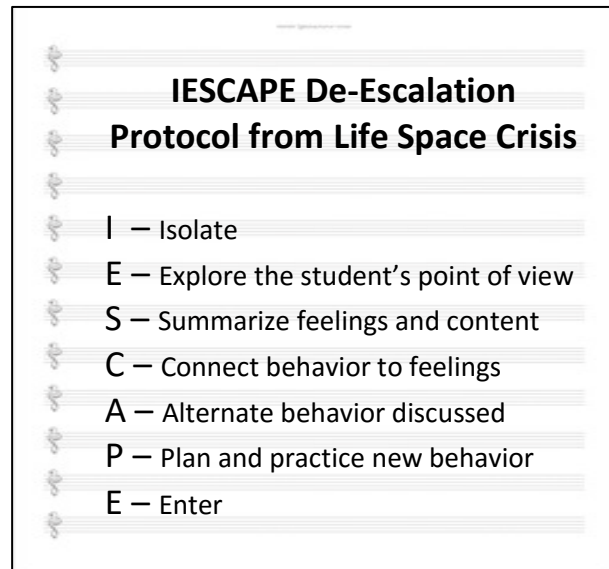
ORCESTRATION

How the musicians are organized and conducted is critical to the successful rendition of any masterpiece composition. Conducting includes setting the vision and guiding performers. It typically also involves engaging the community, selecting members, assigning roles, and attending to organizational matters, such as schedules. Similar to musical conductors, Baychester Academy's principal, assistant principals, and other school leaders have paid great attention to processes and strategies for leading staff in executing their plan and working together to continuously improve. These strategies have included hiring and onboarding staff, engaging the community, and organizing schedules. The most critical strategies—distributed leadership and teacher learning—are described in more detail below.

Distributed and Collective Leadership

In an orchestra, the leader of the first violin section, commonly called the concertmaster, also plays an important role in leading the musicians. In addition, each section of the orchestra typically has a "first chair" leader. Baychester Academy's conductor—the school principal—has created structures and an organizational culture that encourages a similar type of distributed leadership among her two assistant principals and several team leaders. As a result, teachers easily organize themselves for planning, implementation and reflection. They also contribute to collective school-wide decision making. In the words of one teacher, "[Our principal] gives everyone a leadership role. She really wants you to spread your wings and fly."

Core ideas:

- ♪ *Grade-level teams*. All classroom teachers are members of a 2 to 3-person grade-level team. They collaboratively align their scope and sequence to CCLS (and federal and state priorities) and design lessons that will help students achieve proficiency. This work includes reviewing data to identify and prioritize areas of need. Also, as teachers implement their lessons, they immediately share feedback on what worked or didn't work so that they can tweak implementation in real time.

> **DATA TEAM**
>
> A data team—comprised of seven staff members and co-chaired by an assistant principal and a teacher—meets monthly after school to examine schoolwide data. Each member of the team takes a lead role in analyzing a data set, ensuring teachers update data in Google Docs. They then share out one-page analyses with teachers and all providers. [see Data Team Roles and Responsibilities]. Data reviewed by the team comes from assessments for: iReady math and ELA; the weekly Problem of the Week; weekly Writing on Demand assignments; EngageNY math; and behavior data such as Eagle tickets.

- ♪ *School-wide teams*. Most members of the staff also serve on a school-wide team, such as the Data Review Team, School Leadership Team, Child Study Team, Safety Team, or Student Behavior Support Team. The school has codified the characteristics of effective teams in its Effective Team Rubric. These teams are designed to support improvements in teaching and learning as well as student services. At the same time, they enable staff to collaboratively support each other's learning and improved practice.

♪ *Opportunities to practice leadership*. The teams provide teachers with incremental opportunities to practice leadership. Teachers take turns setting the agenda and facilitating grade-level team meetings [see Grade Leader Goals]. The principal encourages teachers to apply for the Department of Education Model Teacher Program, which provides a $7,500 stipend in exchange for a teacher's willingness to take on additional responsibilities to support their peers. Paraprofessionals also have their own peer leaders who lead meetings every Monday and Tuesday to support other paras in developing their skills. Several staff members have received promotions over time. For example, one classroom teacher became a grade-level leader and was later promoted to assistant principal.

♪ *Collective decision making*. Teachers are encouraged to identify problems and suggest solutions. For example, teachers noticed that students' computational skills were strong, but they were struggling to understand what the problem was asking of them and identify appropriate strategies to solve the problem. The teachers decided to try different strategies first by chunking the word problems for targeted groups (kids at different levels). The new strategies led to higher performance and success for the teacher teams. As a result of this positive outcome, faculty committed to continuing to try new approaches and new modules from various curricula, which led to more wins for students and motivated more teacher teams to embrace innovative strategies. This commitment to innovation led a few teachers to pilot the EngageNY curriculum. Based on their success, the entire school ultimately decided to adopt EngageNY. According to one teacher, "We owned that decision. It wasn't the administration telling us to do it. It was our colleagues giving testimony. Everyone bought in and we helped each other figure it out."

Teacher Learning

Baychester Academy has invested heavily in teacher professional development. Typically, the principal tries to provide teachers with direct access to expert trainers—preferably having them provide training on the school site directly in teachers' classrooms and then providing follow-up coaching. As described above, the principal has also worked to create a trusting professional culture in which teachers actively learn from one another on an ongoing basis.

Core ideas:

♪ *Access to national organizations and experts*. Baychester Academy spends approximately $50K per year for experts to provide onsite training. For example, Carl Anderson—a leading expert on teaching writing for students—provided on-site training to teachers on conferencing as part of Writers Workshop. The school has also partnered with GenReady, the University of Washington, the Wallace Foundation, and IDEO.

♪ *District or city-provided training*. The principal encourages her staff to attend district or city-provided training. For example, the district provided a training on shifts in the Common Core standards that was very useful for staff. The school has also benefitted greatly from

participation in District 11's Instructional Focus Collaborative—in which 50 schools from across the district form teams comprised of administrators and teachers focused on teacher practice.

🎵 *Follow-up coaching*. Whether teachers receive training from external consultants or districts, the principal tries to make sure that teachers have access to individualized feedback from coaches as they strive to implement what they've learned in their own classrooms.

🎵 *Collaborative planning and reflection*. The team-based working environment at Baychester Academy provides extensive opportunities for teachers to learn together and provide each other with informal, real-time feedback.

Opportunities for teacher learning have allowed individual teachers to improve their skills while also fostering continuous organizational learning that has improved schoolwide practice.

LAST NOTES

This case study highlighted some core ideas that Baychester Academy staff attribute to their success. Much more is happening at Baychester that is not addressed in this document, but certainly contributes to the school's impact. Some other elements include an in-house, Google-based assessment data tracking system; teacher autonomy; specific teacher training initiatives; and a sharp focus on only a few initiatives at a time.

Baychester Academy's Symphony No. 169 is a work in progress. Despite substantial and sustained gains in student achievement, less than half of students are proficient (41% in English; 47% in math). While the school has outperformed the district, city, and comparison groups in every category—the administration and staff will not be satisfied until every single student is prepared for college, careers, and citizenship. Given its strong professional culture and school leadership, consistently high expectations for students, and commitment to supporting continuous professional growth for staff, the school is well positioned to build on its successful foundation and put all students on a path to success in school and in life.