PERSISTENCE
TO GRADUATION

PREPARED FOR THE KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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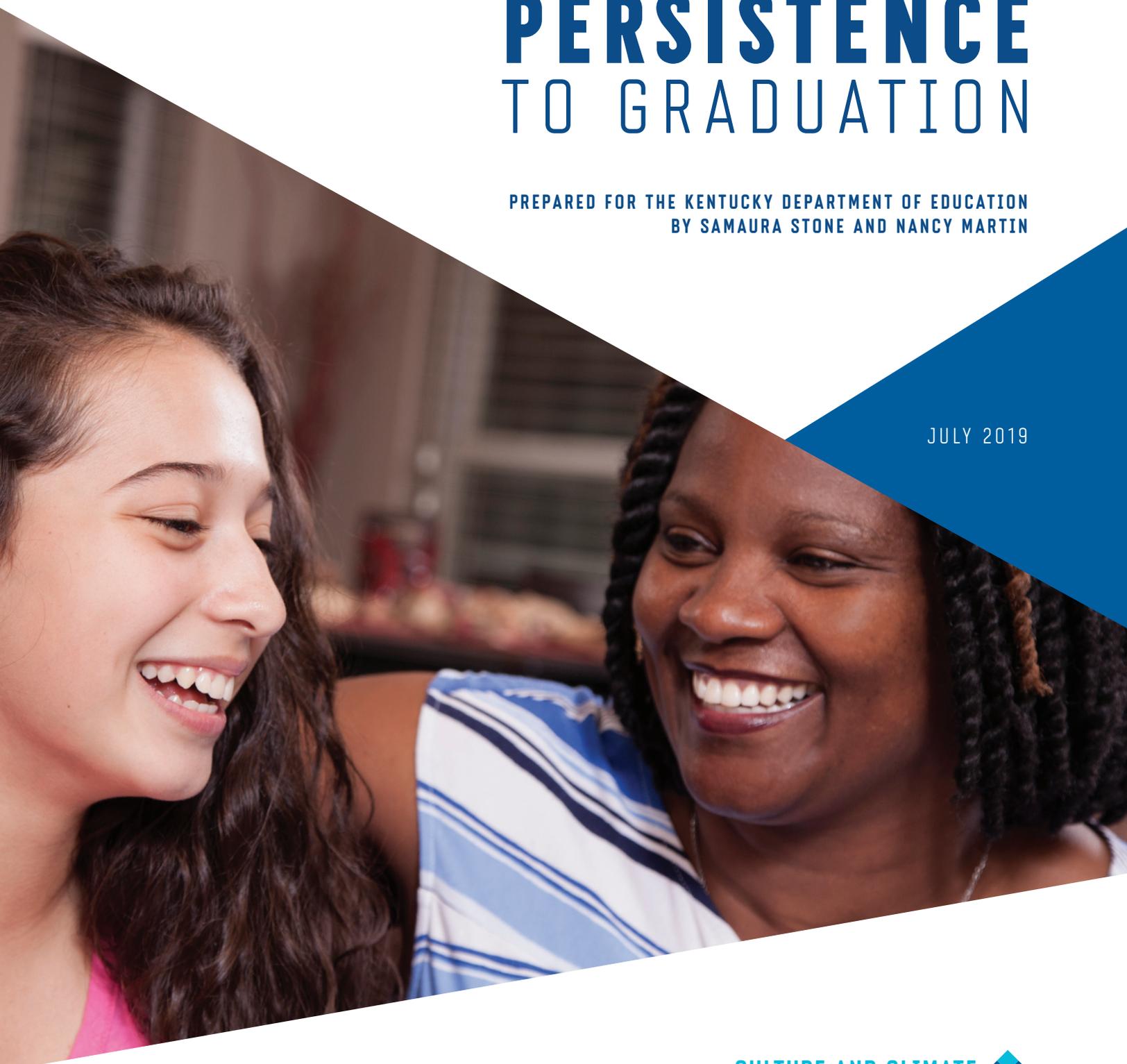
CULTURE AND CLIMATE

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OVERVIEW

A positive school culture and climate create the conditions necessary for successful teaching and learning to take place. In fact, both have been described as the ''heart and soul'' of a school and the foundation of learning. The National School Climate Center defines school climate as the ''quality and character of school life'' and identifies four major aspects: safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and environment (National School Climate Council, 2019). School Culture can be viewed as the various norms, traditions, behaviors and interactions between students and staff. Research documents positive climate and culture has a direct impact on graduation rates. A study of 276 Virginia high schools found a school climate characterized by lower rates of bullying and teasing was predictive of higher graduation rates four years later (Cornell, Gregory Huang, & Fan, 2013). Schools with high levels of bullying and teasing had dropout rates 29% above the state average, compared with schools with a low level of bullying and teasing, which had a dropout rate 28% below average. ''The association between school climate and graduation rates was just as strong as the association between student poverty and graduation rates.'' The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) explicitly recognizes the relationship between positive school climate and student learning and success, requiring states to include data related to school climate and safety in annual school report cards.

In Kentucky, school culture and climate are key elements to student success. School districts

and programs are very interested in how they can take steps to enhance both. One common way to improve school culture and climate is by measuring and evaluating data. Several Kentucky counties collect data through surveys to analyze and gain feedback on school culture and climate. For example, Jefferson County Public Schools started assessing their school culture and climate through the Comprehensive School Survey (CSS), launched during the 1997-1998 school year. The survey is conducted annually and includes feedback from staff, parents, and students in the fourth grade and above. Pulaski County Schools also conducts annual surveys with their staff, parents, and middle and high school students.

The Teaching, Empowerment, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Kentucky survey is a biennial survey that gathers input from teachers, counselors, principals, and other administrators in the areas of: Community Engagement and Support, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Managing Student Conduct, Use of Time, Professional Development, Facilities and Resources, Instructional Practices and Support and New Teacher Support. The test was first administered in 2011 and seeks to gain valuable information about perceptions of teaching, learning, and working conditions in schools. The most recent year, 2017, had a 91 percent response rate. A report from the New Teacher Center on TELL states that, ''two of the teacher-leadership areas that have the strongest relationship to

student achievement are: involvement in school improvement planning and establishing student-conduct policies'' (Ingersoll, Doughtery, & Sirindes, 2017).

For schools and districts that are unable to administer surveys due to staff capacity, funding, and other reasons, the U.S. Department of Education has prioritized improving school culture and climate by creating several tools and surveys that teachers, schools, and districts can download for free through the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.

KEY STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE CULTURE AND CLIMATE IN SCHOOLS

Kentucky schools and districts are working hard to continuously improve the culture and climate of their schools to meet the varied needs of students. *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program at East Carter Middle School, Sources of Strength at Butler High School, and Ramey-Estep High School* are featured in this practice brief as examples of how culture and climate can create an environment in which both students and teachers feel safe, respected, and valued. In this practice brief we document five key strategies and the associated practices in place for schools across the Commonwealth. These include:

STRATEGY 1: CREATING A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS

Schools and programs that have created a strong culture and climate focus on safety and inclusion by:

❑ Reinforcing positive student behavior by complimenting the strengths and individual contributions of all students to help them feel valued;

❑ Establishing clear classroom agreements, rituals, reward systems, and norms;

❑ Being proactive in monitoring and intervening when bullying or behavior problems arise;

❑ Working to implement restorative practices as an alternative approach to discipline, which allows students to gain a better understanding of how their actions impacted others; and

❑ Making a space for students to share, seek peer support, and unpack traumatic incidents with trained mental health professionals.

STRATEGY 2: ELEVATING STUDENT VOICE

Students, especially teenagers and young adults, want to feel a sense of belonging and that their voice and experiences matter. Schools and programs can incorporate student voice to establish a welcoming environment by:

❑ Allowing students the opportunity to join or create peer led groups, such as leadership councils or committees;

❑ Providing opportunities for students to connect their work to their passion, interests, and personal experiences; and

❑ Finding innovative ways to introduce art, poetry, and social-emotional learning to students to create powerful learning exchanges.

STRATEGY 3: INVOLVING PARENTS IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

Creating ways to establish a relationship with parents and/or guardians is critical. All parents want to know they are sending their kids to a school that is safe and supportive. Schools can involve parents in the following ways:

❑ Conduct surveys to solicit feedback from parents regarding their perception of school culture and climate;

❑ Develop a consistent and clear line of communication beyond parent-teacher conferences by making phone calls, sending emails, and mailing letters home to recognize positive behavior; and

❑ Create a welcoming environment for parents, this may include regular parent nights, workshops geared towards parents, or creating a physical space for parents to gather within the building.

STRATEGY 4: TRANSFORMING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY

According to Edutopia, the physical structure of a classroom can affect student morale and learning. Students' involvement in the process of creating a shared learning environment can empower them, develop community, and increase motivation. Buildings and schools can be transformed in the following ways:

❑ Display student art, hobbies, aspirations, and culture;

❑ Publicize student achievement that's inclusive of all students' strengths and talents;

❑ Allow students to help design their space; and

❑ Include words of affirmation, and encouragement.

Teachers and staff who are well-supported by school leadership and involved in key roles in decision making processes are more likely to have a positive impact on student success, which includes creating a strong culture and climate within the classroom. Teachers and staff can be included in these ways:

❑ Allow teachers and staff to be included in the development of a shared vision for the school or program, as well as ways to develop or strengthen their leadership skills;

❑ Provide teachers and staff with opportunities to be creative when creating or changing school culture and climate; and

❑ Encourage feedback and make changes based on their suggestions.

OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM AT EAST CARTER MIDDLE SCHOOL

EAST CARTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | GRAYSON, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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A recent study conducted by the national Olweus Bullying Prevention Program[1] (Olweus or OBPP) shows that 17 percent of all students reported having been bullied ''sometimes'' or more often. This number translates to about one in five students. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is an evidence-based, nationally recognized program that is credited with over 35 years of research. The program focuses on bullying, cyberbullying, and positive school climate. The program has been implemented successfully in schools around the country.

East Carter Middle School is one of several schools in Carter County that is implementing the program. The implementation of the Olweus program was started in response to multiple reports of bullying that were taking place at school. The program is a school-wide program that requires every student in middle school to participate. Carter County School District worked with the Kentucky Department of Education closely in the beginning to help bring the program to the school. East Carter Middle School is now in their fourth year of implementing the program. Every Monday during fourth period, the students receive a lesson. There are books that are provided for training and curriculum. The teachers all teach one session and receive a two-day training. The books and topics covered are based upon grade levels. *Class Meetings that Matter* are for the sixth graders; *More Class Meetings that Matter* are for seventh graders and *Cyberbullying* is for eighth graders. The lesson plans range from how to treat people, defining bullying, and interrupting bullying, and they advance with each grade and book. Core subject teachers and Special Ed teachers teach the curriculum which provides a common language throughout the school. All students fully understand what bullying is and, as a result, more students have been encouraged to stop bullying.

A survey conducted by Olweus during the first and third year of the program demonstrates the program is having a positive impact. Another survey will be administered once the entire group of sixth to eighth graders has completed the program. The survey results reflected that students felt better prepared to help stop bullying, and if they reported bullying, they felt teachers would be more supportive.

Below is a sampling of some of the survey results from Fall of 2015 and Fall of 2017, which demonstrates overall student perception of the school's culture is changing within the two-year period:

SURVEY QUESTIONS	FALL 2015	FALL 2017
How often do you see other students trying to put a stop to bullying?	Almost never: 40%	Almost never: 20%
How often in the past 2 months have you taken part in bullying another student?	I haven't bullied another student: 64%	I haven't bullied another student: 89%
How often in the past 2 months have you been bullied at school?	I haven't been bullied: 54%, I've been bullied 2 or 3 times in a month: 10%	I haven't been bullied: 70%, I've been bullied 2 or 3 times in a month: 4%

The school has also noticed students now have the tools to interrupt bullying when it occurs. Students are more vocal about identifying it and speaking up. Many students have reported feeling safe and not feeling alone because they know other students will help them. Also, many students previously seen as bullies were able to identify their behavior and make changes. As a result, teachers have reported the program has led to fewer disciplinary actions.

TYPE OF PROGRAM	Whole-school prevention program
POPULATION SERVED	559 middle school students
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT	The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has created a supportive and collegial environment for students and teachers. Overall, bullying has decreased, and students feel safer at school.
FUNDING SOURCE/S	Olweus Bullying Prevention Program was funded as a pilot supported by the school district. The Kentucky Department of Education paid for the books and provided training to East Carter Middle School at no cost. The program is sustainable, as the district only has to pay for the annual student surveys. Because the program is staff-led, the only additional cost to consider is the time it takes to train teachers.
CHALLENGES	• A major challenge was ensuring teachers provided the lessons at a set time. In the beginning the school allowed teachers to have the lesson at any time, and now it takes place for all students on the same day and time. • The programs requires a commitment of time and needs to be followed closely. Also, changing culture does not occur overnight and can be hard to measure.

SOURCES OF STRENGTH AT BUTLER HIGH SCHOOL
JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth and young adults in Kentucky and nationally. According to the [Kentucky Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), "15 percent of Kentucky high school students (one in seven) reported having seriously considered suicide within a 12-month period." In addition, 17.4 percent of Kentucky middle school students (nearly one in five) reported that they had seriously considered killing themselves at some point in their lives. In 2018, the Kentucky legislature passed HB 30, which required all "high school and middle school principals, guidance counselors, and teachers to fulfill one hour of high-quality (in-person, live streaming, or video recording) professional development training every other year to review suicide prevention." In years that training is not provided, all new hires must be provided with suicide prevention materials. In 2019, this bill was strengthened by SB1, The School Safety and Resiliency Act, to include definitions of school safety and school security; include development and implementation of a school safety coordinator training program; adopt a trauma-informed approach to education; specify membership on the Center for School Safety board of directors; require development of a school security risk assessment tool; and several additional changes focused on enhancing school safety.

Sources of Strength[2] is an international program model implemented in over 35 schools in the U.S. and Canada. In 2009, Sources of Strength was listed on the National Best Practices Registry by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) and The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). The Best Practices Registry (BPR) of SPRC lists interventions that have undergone rigorous evaluation and demonstrated positive outcomes. In 2011 Sources of Strength was listed on SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP). The program has been proven to increase peer leaders' connectedness to adults and strengthen school engagement. Students were four times more likely to refer a suicidal friend to an adult, and positive perception of adult support was increased in students with a history of suicidal thought.

The [Sources of Strength](#) program at Butler High School was created after Kentucky received a grant for suicide prevention due to the increasing rates of suicide among teens. Mary Wurst, the health teacher at Butler High School that volunteers her time to oversee the program, has been teaching for over 27 years. The first year she taught there was a suicide, and she says "It changed my life. I've grasped onto mental-emotional health programming since then."

Butler High School was asked to pilot the program and was the first in the state to implement Sources of Strength in 2015. The program serves 9th-12th graders and trains them as peer leaders. There are currently about 20-25 students that are peer leaders. The Sources of Strength Club meets every Monday and focuses on suicide prevention, drug addiction, and violence. One hundred and fifty students have been trained in the building, and 1700 students trained total. Students are asked to apply through a process that is led by Ms. Wurst. She reaches out to all teachers in the school to ask which students have leadership potential and personal experience. The model intends to engage students from all the different groups or "cliques" within a school setting. From there, the teachers make recommendations, and students are encouraged to apply. The program is comprised of 10 percent ninth graders, 20-25 percent tenth graders, and the rest are juniors and seniors. Peer leaders go back to their classes with a message of "strength, hope, help" that spreads throughout the entire school.

Sources of Strength plans and facilitates school-wide campaigns around resiliency and

empowerment skills that are all peer-led. There are only 10 adults in the club, so it is truly run by students. While Sources of Strength is a suicide prevention program, the teachers and students rarely use the word suicide unless they are training the students on Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), a common training to help recognize the signs of suicide that is used by professionals that are working in clinical settings. However, the students do not really think about the programs as a suicide prevention program, but as a way to build resiliency and overcome problems. In October 2018, a new class of student leaders completed training. Almost 60 students attended the training, and they were all eager to be selected as peer leaders. The initial peer training is a full school day and consists of mostly games, small group exercises, and sharing that is focused on the Eight Sources of Strength areas, which are: Mental Health, Family Support, Positive Friends, Mentors, Healthy Activities, Generosity, Spirituality, and Medical Access. Training continues throughout the year, and students meet every week to plan and talk about what they are observing in the school.

Since implementing Sources of Strength, the school social workers' caseloads have increased because more students feel comfortable going to them for help before a crisis occurs. This has led to Butler High School hiring a dedicated social worker to focus on group sessions to help students deal with issues, such as grief. It has boosted peer relationships, and school leaders have also noticed a change in the students' level of compassion for each other. Teachers have described the students as "really caring about their classmates," and students who

are struggling feel ''taken care of'' by other students because they help identify and reach out to students that appear to be isolated or lack peer support. The principal of the school strongly promotes the program and views it as a key piece of all the other work Butler High School does around climate and culture.

Students feel like Sources of Strength is a vital part of their school experience. As one explained, ''If we didn't have Sources of Strength here, I feel like some students would take advantage of others. Sources of Strength leaders stop that immediately.''

"THE IMPACT OF SOURCES OF STRENGTH IS GETTING KIDS TO ADVOCATE AND BE THERE FOR EACH OTHER. IT'S A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE OF THE OVERALL SCHOOL CULTURE. THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION ARE OFTEN FORGOTTEN, BUT SOURCES OF STRENGTH, PLUS ADDITIONAL NURSES AND SOCIAL WORKERS, ALL HELP KIDS LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER."

– PRINCIPAL, BUTLER HIGH SCHOOL

TYPE OF PROGRAM	Student led peer support program
POPULATION SERVED	1,683 students in grades 9-12
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT	Butler High School's Sources of Strength program has been featured by various local news outlets as a program that is changing the school culture and climate, ultimately preventing suicide and teen violence. Because the students are so passionate about it, they also refer students that are not at Butler High School to the program and tell teachers about their friends at other schools that are contemplating suicide or having a rough time. Teachers have been able to reach out to the counselors and principals at those schools to intervene before a crisis takes place.
FUNDING SOURCE/S	Started with $750 startup funds from a state suicide prevention grant. The PTA has given the program money, and the principal uses his account to support it as well. Teachers have stated it "does not take much to implement, just willingness from leadership."
CHALLENGES	▪ The program does not have access to enough national Sources of Strength certified trainers. ▪ There is a huge demand to train a large number of new student peer leaders and adults/teachers that would like to be trained, so they have to schedule multiple dates to get all students and adults trained.

RAMEY-ESTEP HIGH SCHOOL

BOYD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS | RUSH, KENTUCKY

KEY STRATEGIES HIGHLIGHTED:

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Ramey-Estep High School [3] is an A6 alternative education program and residential facility that serves state agency students that are struggling with academic, behavioral, social, and emotional challenges that have impacted their education. The school has been recognized regionally and nationally for their expertise in providing treatment services to youth and helping students return back to their home school, employment, or their next steps with the skills necessary to succeed. Unlike some residential facilities, the culture and climate at Ramey-Estep is immediately displayed upon entering the building. There are couches in the lobby and in various rooms throughout the school for meeting and socializing, which provides students and visitors with a greater sense of comfort. There are various pieces of inspirational art and quotes displayed, including, ''Your past is not your potential,'' and the sentence that all students must learn: ''Just for today, I will do my best not to do anything degrading to myself or any other person.'' These words are a constant reminder for students that they are in a new environment, one that is safe and provides them with new opportunities to learn and grow. There are currently 84 students, 60 young men and 24 young women between the ages of 12-18 in the program. The youth come to the program from all over Kentucky. The average stay for students is between 6-10 months, however some students are able to stay for one year to work on additional skills. Once students enter the program, they go through various stages of progression before they graduate, which includes: orientation and learning, lower progress, progress, and graduation. Each stage is about four to six weeks long but can be shorter or longer depending on the student's individual circumstances. Ramey-Estep High School establishes a comprehensive treatment plan for each student that is individualized to meet his or her needs. The education plan is reviewed weekly by the treatment team, comprised of a teacher assigned to the student and additional support staff. There is a constant collaboration between the education and treatment team, so staff consistently focus on both. Many of the students come to Ramey-Estep High School with low reading and math scores and have very few credits towards graduation. All teachers are highly qualified and are able to provide various approaches to help the students with credit recovery at a rapid, intensive pace. The students have responded well to Ramey-Estep High School's environment. Students always know how many credits they

have at all times and what they have to complete to earn credits. The teachers are also very committed to the students and their learning.

As part of developing a strong climate and culture, Ramey-Estep makes it possible for students to participate in different service projects throughout the year, as well as multiple activities, such as the Christmas celebration and arts and crafts, which are displayed throughout the building. Additionally, students are able to garden and publish their poetry. *The Circle*, currently in its eighth volume of the series, is a book of poetry featuring art and words by Ramey-Estep students. Poems published in the book include student letters to their loved ones, expressions of trauma and grief, and hopes and dreams for the future. The publication has served as a therapeutic outlet for the students to share and hear from their peers. There is a strong mutual respect between students and staff. As the staff explain, "many of the students have never had an opportunity to be kids. They have had to deal with abuse, neglect, and trauma." The staff shows a great deal of compassion for the students. The staff are supportive, but also set a high standard for each youth to achieve their individual goals. Upon exiting the program, Ms. Brewster, the principal, provides each student with her personal phone number and asks them to call her if they ever need anything. Many of the students have picked up the phone to call her with questions or just for reassurance once they returned to their community. During their transition and graduation, students are also provided with small printed note cards that say "Where the Heart Is, Creating a Sense of Belonging" on the front along with the sentence and affirmation they are required to learn. On the back of the card students are provided with their new school contact, email, location and phone number. Ramey-Estep High School also works with the community the students return to by performing outreach and traveling to various schools throughout Kentucky sharing positive stories of the youth. Ms. Brewster says, "I want the community to value and treasure the students once they return and remove any stigma that could impact their fresh start."

TYPE OF PROGRAM	Residential Facility and Alternative Education Program
POPULATION SERVED	Youth ages 12-18 with academic and behavioral needs
BENEFITS TO DISTRICT	Ramey-Estep High School benefits the district by providing intensive educational and emotional support to students in a small setting. Most students are able to flourish in the environment and return back to their district or schools with enough credits to graduate or be promoted to the next grade level.
FUNDING SOURCE/S	Funding is based on the number of students who attended the previous year. The Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC) provides a per-pupil rate. They also use funding from Title I, Part D Neglected and Delinquent Youth of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

CHALLENGES	▪ Funding is a major challenge for this program as they once had a large budget of $1.6 million and now the budget has declined to about $800,000.
	▪ Accelerated learning can be a barrier for some students, as the program used to allow students to stay with them for over one year, and now students are not able to stay past a one-year maximum, with most students graduating between 6-10 months. This is due to the juvenile justice reforms, SB 200 (2014), that limit the length of time students can be committed to a juvenile facility.

CONSIDERATIONS

The above descriptions provide examples of the many strategies programs and schools deploy to meet the varied needs of students. We encourage you to learn more about these programs and schools and to consider how your district, school, or classroom can incorporate new strategies to strengthen your support for students through culture and climate.

Education leaders and practitioners are encouraged to consider how they might implement some of the practices related to each of the five strategies highlighted in this brief. Many are no- or low-cost and can be tried on a small-scale to begin. All are worthy of consideration as examples of promising and effective practice across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

STRATEGY 1: CREATING A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❏ Has your school/district established various ways to recognize staff and teachers for their individual contributions that go beyond traditional recognition?

❏ Does your school/district have clear norms, rewards systems, and rituals that are well-known?

❏ Is there a specified person in your school/district that is responsible for improving school culture and climate by monitoring bullying and safety issues?

❏ Are there district or school-wide initiatives that address alternative approaches to discipline or restorative practices? If so, how can these approaches be strengthened?

❏ Does your district or school have enough trained mental health professionals? If not, what are some innovative ways you could utilize mental health professionals to reach more students?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❏ Have you implemented a standard and consistent way of acknowledging students for their individual strengths?

❏ Have you created classroom norms, rituals, and reward systems that all students identify with? If so, were students involved in creating them?

❏ Do you have the skills necessary to monitor and intervene when bullying or other safety issues occur within your classroom or program?

❏ Does your school offer alternatives to discipline through restorative practices? Do you use these approaches within your classroom?

❏ Is there time throughout the day that you could introduce students to topics such as bullying and depression? What resources and support would you need to feel comfortable having these discussions?

STRATEGY 2: ELEVATING STUDENT VOICE

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❑ Does your school or district have student-led peer groups and/or leadership councils where students are allowed to influence school policies and practices?

❑ Does your school or district create opportunities to elevate the voice, cultures, experiences, and passions of students?

❑ Is social-emotional learning a priority for your school or district? If not, how might you incorporate or introduce this form of developmental learning?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❑ Do students have an opportunity to lend their voice and ideas to activities and lessons?

❑ Do you assign projects or learning experiences that incorporate the passion, interests, culture, and experiences of your students and families?

❑ Do you feel like social-emotional learning is a critical aspect to youth development? If so, are there things you can do to prioritize this in your classroom?

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❑ Does your school or district conduct surveys involving feedback from parents? If so, how do you use these results to improve culture and climate?

❑ How are the voices of parents elevated throughout your school or district?

❑ Does your school or district host regular events for parents to create a welcoming environment?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❑ Do you provide opportunities for parents to share their feedback and ideas?

❑ Have you developed a clear and consistent way to communicate with parents?

❑ Do you see parents regularly in your school or classrooms? If not, what are some ways that you could increase parent engagement?

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❑ Are the teachers/staff in your school or district encouraged to decorate their classrooms or offices to create a welcoming environment for students?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❑ Does your classroom or space display the culture, aspirations, and strengths of your students?

STRATEGY 5: EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND STAFF TO BECOME LEADERS

FOR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEADERS:

❏ Are teachers and staff in your school or district included in developing a shared vision for the school or program?

❏ Do the teachers and staff in your school or district feel like they have the autonomy to make important decisions?

❏ Are the teachers in your school or district able to provide feedback? If so, do you make changes based on this feedback?

FOR EDUCATORS:

❏ Do you feel included in the vision for your school or program?

❏ Are you provided with the support you need to develop your leadership skills?

❏ Have you participated in surveys or offered feedback on ways to improve culture and climate?

REFERENCES

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ENDNOTES

1 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Melton, Jeanna. (2018, September 14) and site visit to East Carter Middle School. (2018, November 12).

2 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Wurst, Mary. (2018, September 14) and site visit to Butler High School. (2018, October 3).

3 Information for this case example obtained from telephone interview with Brewster, Elizabeith. (2018, September 6) and site visit to Ramey Estep High School. (2018, November 12).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Samaura Stone is a Senior Policy Associate at the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) in Washington, DC. She oversees AYPF's work focused on informing policymakers on ways to increase education and workforce outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice and foster care systems. Previously, Samaura was a Policy Analyst at the Aspen Institute where she worked with states on implementing a coordinated, systems-level approach to increase economic security for youth and families. She has also worked on education and youth policies for two U.S. Senators and with Portland Public Schools. Samaura brings more than a decade of passion and experience in the non-profit and government sectors, with a keen focus on elevating youth voice, improving equity, and aligning policy with practice

Nancy Martin draws on more than 20 years of experience in education and workforce development to help organizations document, perfect, and share their efforts to improve young people's lives. Nancy's specialties include building organizational and system capacity, facilitating learning across communities and systems for youth program quality improvement, documenting alternative pathways to high school graduation and postsecondary success, and conducting insightful and sensitive site visits. Previously, Nancy was Director of Capacity Building Initiatives at the National Youth Employment Coalition, where she oversaw NYEC's education and PEPNet quality standard initiatives to expand high-quality education and employment options for youth.