

About *Just for the Kids—New York*

The goal of *Just for the Kids—New York* is to help schools learn from other schools that are performing well. On the national website, www.just4kids.org, visitors are able to easily view how any school in New York is doing on New York State Assessments and how other schools with similar or greater challenges compare. With 20 additional states taking part in the project, the national site also shows best practices that have been found across many states and schools over time and provides concrete examples of how these practices have been implemented across the country and in New York State.

To download a copy of this summary or the full report, or to order print copies, go to www.albany.edu/aire/kids

What Makes Middle Schools Work

A report on best practices in New York State middle schools. Part of *Just For the Kids—New York*.

2007 Kristen Campbell Wilcox with Janet I. Angelis

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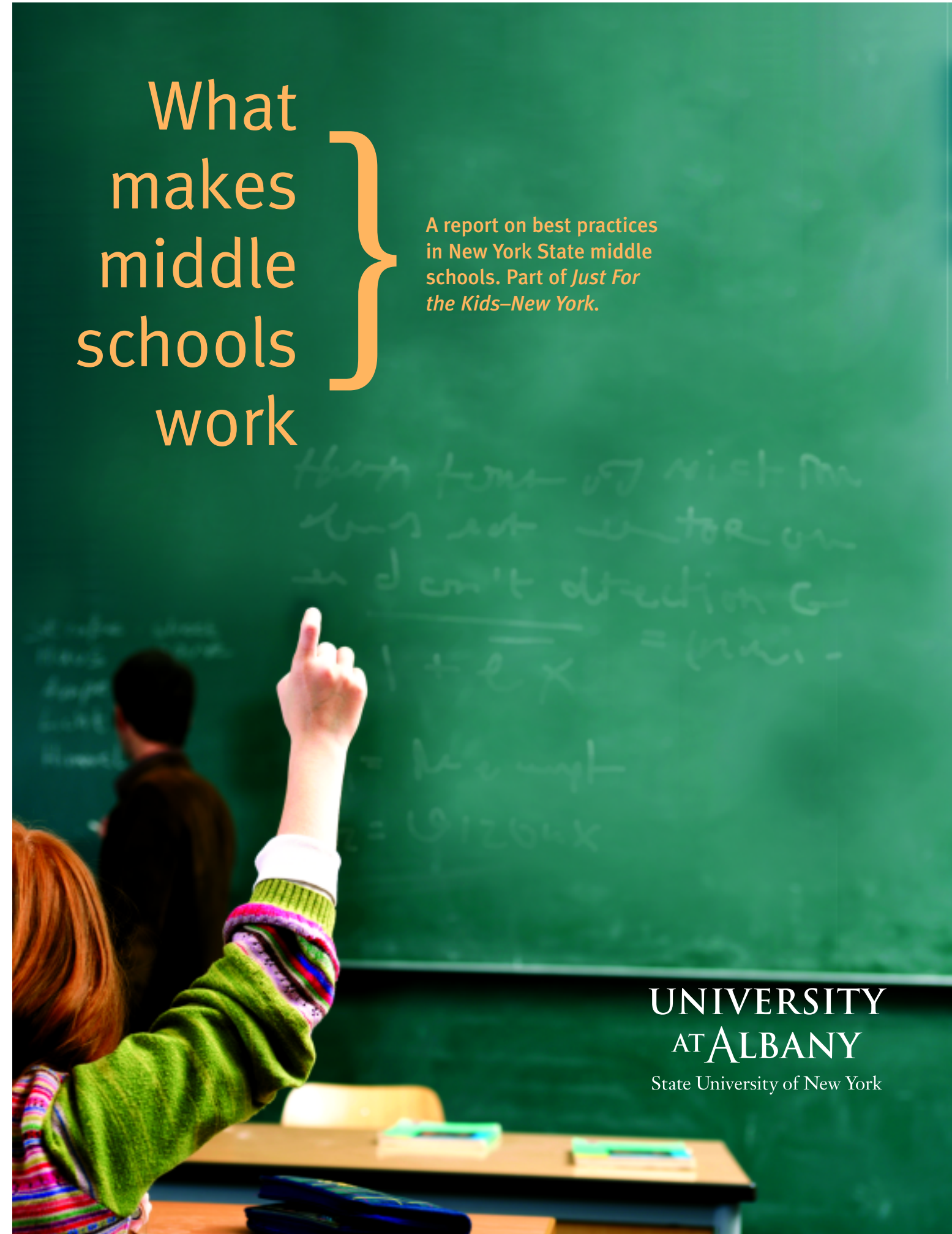
University at Albany School of Education, Albany Institute for Research in Education

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What makes middle schools work?

Researchers studied 10 of New York's higher-performing schools to get a better understanding of the factors that predict their success and to learn how those commonalities can be replicated in other schools across the state and the country. They found that in order to support their focus on academics, the studied schools consistently nurture a culture of trust that is shared mutually among administrators, teachers, students and parents.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study consisted of 16 New York schools: 10 consistently higher-performing schools compared with six schools serving similar populations but achieving only average results. Poverty levels in at least half of the higher-performing schools met or exceeded the state's average. Per pupil expenditures were close to the state average, and the schools represented a variety of sizes, communities, geographic regions and student populations. In this way, the study was able to look at schools that achieve, based on more than just resources and demographics. A complete report, along with case studies detailing findings and experiences at each school, is available online at www.albany.edu/aire/kids.

The 10 consistently higher-performing schools studied:

West Middle School, Binghamton
Holland Middle School, Holland

J. Taylor Finley Middle School, Huntington
Albert Leonard Middle School, New Rochelle
Niagara Middle School, Niagara Falls

Port Chester Middle School, Port Chester-Rye
Queensbury Middle School, Queensbury
John F. Kennedy Middle School, Utica

Vernon-Verona-Sherrill Middle School, Sherrill
Westbury Middle School, Westbury

KEY FINDINGS

Higher-performing schools build a culture of success by consistently maintaining these five common elements.



1 Trusting and respectful relationships

Relationships based on mutual trust and respect among administrators, teachers, students and parents are fundamental to all of the common elements in the findings. Nurturing these relationships provides the backbone for successful learning.

2 Students' social and emotional well-being

Higher-performing schools recognize that creating a sense of security for middle school students provides them with a support network and a connection to their school, removing significant barriers to learning.

3 Teamwork

Higher-performing schools establish a collaborative environment and organizational structure that support teamwork between and among teachers, school leaders and administrators. Groups of teachers, administrators, and specialists meet frequently and focus on specific instructional strategies and student performance within and across grades.

4 Evidence-based decision making

Sharing and using data from a variety of sources to make decisions is critical to helping schools achieve success. Data are frequently gathered, analyzed and used in decision making regarding the impacts of new programs, instructional practices and interventions.

5 Shared vision of mission and goals

When teachers and administrators build a vision of success and share goals, this leads to better communications, mutually agreed-upon expectations and more long-term success.

Higher performing middle schools