



SEWANHAKA CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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ELMONT MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL

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Testimony

"ESEA Reauthorization: Improving America's Secondary Schools"

John Capozzi, Principal

Thank you Chairman Harkin, Senator Enzi, and distinguished members of the committee. I am John Capozzi, Principal of Elmont Memorial High School. I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak to you about the strategies we use at Elmont Memorial High School to improve teacher effectiveness and provide our students with a rigorous education that prepares them for their post secondary goals.

Elmont Memorial High School is the largest of five schools in the Sewanhaka Central High School District with nearly 2000 students in grades 7 through 12. The demographics of our school are 77% African American, 13% Hispanic, 9% Asian and 1 % white. Our academic achievement and annual graduation rate of over 94% has dispelled the myth that children of color cannot be provided with an enriching, challenging and first rate education. I am often asked how Elmont Memorial does this. The driving force behind Elmont Memorial's success is our belief that all children can learn. Research clearly shows that the number one factor in student achievement is teacher effectiveness. We understand that our students' success is directly correlated to our highly effective and dedicated teachers. My primary role as the

principal is to serve as the instructional leader of the school and to provide support and supervision to the faculty.

The role of a principal has changed dramatically throughout the years. Today, principals are often required to be managers rather than instructional leaders. For student achievement to improve the principal's primary focus must remain on improving teacher effectiveness. Recently, there has been much discussion on developing teacher leaders in schools. At Elmont Memorial we utilize teacher leaders to turnkey successful instructional strategies at faculty workshops. Excellent teachers benefit from this plan. However, this alone will not help improve the instruction in the mediocre and poor teacher's classroom. Principals and school administrators must take the lead in helping teachers develop their pedagogical skills. In order for a principal to be an effective instructional leader, they must first be a master teacher. A master teacher analyzes data and differentiates instruction. A mediocre teacher simply examines data and reteaches the material. A poor teacher does not examine the data and continues on to the next topic. A master teacher develops lesson plans that are responsive to the different learners in their classroom. A mediocre teacher simply looks at content as the foundation of lesson planning. A poor teacher does not have the skill set to plan effectively. Principals must be well versed in pedagogy and be willing to work hands-on with their teachers to develop schools where excellent instruction is the standard.

At Elmont Memorial, three areas that have greatly contributed to our success are our rigorous observation process, our comprehensive professional development plan and our strong collaborative approach. The primary goal of our observation process is to improve classroom

instruction and student achievement. This process is a cooperative undertaking between the instructional supervisor and the teacher. As the principal and instructional leader of Elmont Memorial my role in the observation process is first and foremost, to be a teacher of teachers. At the start of every school year, we develop and implement a comprehensive professional development plan based on the needs of our teachers. Additionally, to enhance the social and academic growth of our students, we utilize interdisciplinary teams. Our teaming program provides our teachers with the daily opportunity to collaborate on instructional practices and to develop intervention plans to meet student needs.

Our success in identifying at-risk students and providing them with the necessary instructional support has greatly contributed to Elmont Memorial High School's high graduation rate. We have developed and implemented an **A.C.T.I.O.N.** Plan (Analysis, Collaboration, Teaching techniques, Instructional support, Opportunities for success, Needs of the students) that allows us to be proactive in identifying at-risk students. Once identified, individualized academic recovery plans are developed, implemented and monitored. Additionally, our pupil personnel counselors play a significant role in providing academic support to our students. By conducting an annual review of every student, counselors assist students in formulating goals for each school year and plan for their post secondary education. As a result, students are afforded an opportunity to experience academic success.

In 2009 New York State had 56% of African Americans and 55% of Hispanic students graduate from high school. At Elmont Memorial High School, 94% of African American and 95% of Hispanic students graduate. This demonstrates the power of teacher effectiveness to

positively impact student achievement. As a nation we must commit ourselves to providing all students with the highest quality education. It is my sincere hope that the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will not only raise standards for public education but also provide principals with the resources they need to develop and hone the skills of our most valuable educational resource: teachers.

Respectfully submitted,


John Capozzi
Principal