



**SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES**

**OFFICE OF SCHOOL REDESIGN**  
**THE OFFICE OF PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT**  
**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

## **FRAMEWORK FOR SLCs IN NYC**

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Portfolio Development  
**OFFICE OF SCHOOL REDESIGN**

## **WHAT ARE SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (SLCs)?**

A Small Learning Community is an environment in which a core group of teachers and other adults within a school know the needs, interests, and aspirations of each student well, closely monitor his or her progress, and provide the academic and other support he or she needs to succeed. SLC teachers plan together and the curriculum in each SLC is structured around a theme or unifying principle to add relevance to academic subjects. There is one Principal for the school, with each SLC led by an Assistant Principal. SLC schools are supported by the Office of School Redesign under the Office of Portfolio Development.

## **THE OFFICE OF SCHOOL REDESIGN**

- Standardizes the framework for Small Learning Communities and creates clear interim benchmarks to measure school progress for both high schools and middle schools (see SLC Implementation Rubric).
- Provides leadership and instructional professional development to current and potential SLC schools, as well as technical assistance in areas such as programming, space planning, and branding.
- Develops a SLC pipeline of schools interested and willing to do the difficult work necessary for transformative change – assesses readiness and provides support to school teams.
- Serves as a liaison to intermediaries – both for securing additional funding to support schools, as well as to ensure that support is ongoing, consistent, effective, and aligned to the elements of the *Framework*.
- Works with DOE offices to drive policy change that supports SLC work.

## **A PORTFOLIO OF SCHOOLS**

In addition to continuing to support middle and high schools that are functioning well in New York City, the Department of Education's secondary school reform strategy includes redesigning a number of large secondary schools into Small Learning Communities (SLCs) and replacing the lowest performing schools with new, small schools. These reform efforts share a common set of principles and characteristics aligned with the DOE's *Children First* mission of creating a system of effective schools that culminates in the "awarding of a high school diploma to all students that represents the rigorous preparation and mastery of skills and knowledge essential for leading productive adult lives in the 21st century world of education, the workplace, and as citizens of a diverse democracy."



### **SLC THEORY OF CHANGE:**

By reorganizing according to the *Framework for SLCs in NYC*, secondary schools create clear lines of empowerment and accountability, where the collaborative work of facilitative leaders and defined teacher teams results in a culture of personalization for students, improved cross-curricular teaching, and significant improvements in student achievement and college readiness.

## **FOUR CORE ELEMENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK FOR SLC IN NYC:**

- 1. FACILITATIVE & DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP**
- 2. DEDICATED TEACHING, LEARNING, & SUPPORT TEAMS**
- 3. A DATA DRIVEN SYSTEM OF ACCOUNTABILITY**
- 4. RIGOROUS CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR ALL STUDENTS, CENTERED ON A UNIFYING FOCUS**



*“The SLC movement has benefited me because the teachers and classes are more focused on my major and academic class teachers can use examples that relate specifically to my major. This makes learning and the understanding of different topics much easier and fun.”*

**Robin Cunji, Student**

School of Entrepreneurial Studies

Queens Vocational and Technical High School

*“One of the best things about the Small Learning Communities is that students receive individual attention. This is because each SLC has its own Teachers, SLC Directors, SLC Coordinators, Attendance teachers, and Guidance Counselors.”*

**Eddie Holmes, Attendance Teacher**

9th Grade Academy

DeWitt Clinton High School

*“The SLC has created a community where both teachers and students are focused on making education “real.””*

**Jeanette Newman, Assistant Principal**

Queens Vocational and Technical High School

*“I love having the opportunity to plan cross-curriculum and SLC based activities with teachers of other subjects.”*

**Howard Stern, Teacher**

Science and Humanities SLC

DeWitt Clinton High School

*“Nothing takes the place of good instruction. However, we all have a need to belong and SLC allows students to be a part of a community with a common focus.”*

**Craig Shapiro, Principal**

Grace Dodge High School

## **ELEMENT #1 FACILITATIVE & DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

### **HOW WE DEFINE THIS ELEMENT:**

- The Principal is responsible for ensuring that the collective vision of the whole school is kept at the forefront of the work. As such, the Principal establishes a common framework of high expectations and accountability. Supervisors and all staff are empowered to work towards common goals, within and across SLCs.
- The Principal establishes a culture of empowerment and accountability. As a result, SLC Leadership Teams are involved in the decisions about the use of SLC budget and resources, assessing the effectiveness of the framework, scheduling, and hiring of staff.
- Within each SLC, assistant principals and teacher leaders work together to provide ongoing and consistent feedback to teachers – all focused on improving instruction and measurable outcomes for students, as reported in the Quality Review and Progress Reports.
- Assistant principals and teacher leaders promote collaboration and the opportunity for teachers to meet, plan, and learn together within each SLC.

## **ELEMENT # 2 DEDICATED TEACHING, LEARNING, & SUPPORT TEAMS**

### **HOW WE DEFINE THIS ELEMENT:**

- Groups of students range from 250-450 students per SLC, and include English Language Learners and students with special needs.
- Students in 9th and 10th grade / 6th and 7th grade spend close to 100% of their time in their SLC, and a minimum of 75% in the upper grades, depending on electives and other specialized classes. Teachers spend at least 75% of their time in their SLC.
- Teachers work collaboratively across and within subject areas and SLCs, with a primary focus on working with colleagues who share the same students.
- SLC Teams (teachers, guidance counselors, and support staff) participate in professional development and training on the effective use of common planning time. Within each SLC, teams engage in common planning time and collaboration for a minimum of two hours per week.
- The principal collaborates with SLC leaders and the UFT to develop a process that leads to the effective use of staff capacity to ensure student achievement.
- SLC Teams monitor academic progress, assist with career and college planning, and provide assistance and support for social and behavioral progress. Every student has a significant and ongoing adult connection in the SLC and there is a clear strategy for personalization in every SLC.
- Within each SLC, teachers, students, and parents engage in ongoing communication about student achievement and progress.
- Every SLC has a clear strategy for parent involvement and community partnerships.



*“The Small Learning Communities reform initiative at Queens Vocational and Technical High School has played a major role in improving school tone and increasing student passing rates in their classes and on standardized exams over the past three years. Fewer students are repeating the 9th grade and more of our students in the upper grades are successfully meeting their Regents and other graduation requirements.”*

**Magdalen Radovich, Director**

9th Grade School of Exploration and Discovery  
Queens Vocational and Technical High School

*“One of the greatest advantages of being part of SLCs is that parents are part of SLCs and you have the opportunity to meet parents individually. No one is overlooked.”*

**Aurora Hernandez, Parent Coordinator**

DeWitt Clinton High School

*“The smaller learning community is better because there is more communication between students and teachers and also between classmates. The teachers know us better and are aware of how we are doing in other classes, so they are able to put more effort into teaching us what we need to know. Students get along better because we know each other and share the same interests.”*

**Samantha Musco/Luisa Rodriguez, Students**

Professional Beauty Care  
Grace Dodge High School

*“The SLC transformation has been the single most effective strategy for increasing relevance between CTE and Academic courses and rigor across all content areas. Interdisciplinary faculty teams meet to discuss students and the effective strategies used to reach them. The teams utilize their common planning time to do just that - plan lessons, interdisciplinary projects, and tutoring schedules which will benefit students they all share.”*

**Denise Vittor, Principal**

Queens Vocational and Technical HS

## **ELEMENT #3**

# **A DATA DRIVEN SYSTEM OF ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **HOW WE DEFINE THIS ELEMENT:**

- SLC teams engage in ongoing professional development to hone their skills on using data to improve instruction.
- SLC teams of teachers meet regularly to analyze student work for evidence of progress, mastery of standards, and effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies.
- Diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments are used to drive reflection and the process for improvement of instructional planning and academic interventions.
- Every SLC has its own inquiry team. The school's data specialist supports the work of the inquiry teams - providing baseline and historical student data, disaggregated data on student achievement, cohort information, updates on academic interventions, etc.
- Using the ARIS system, SLC data is disaggregated and reviewed by the principal, APs, and teacher leaders to ascertain strengths and weaknesses of each SLC and to make appropriate adjustments in programming and staffing to improve student progress.

## **ELEMENT #4**

# **RIGOROUS CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR ALL STUDENTS, CENTERED ON A UNIFYING FOCUS**

### **HOW WE DEFINE THIS ELEMENT:**

- The goal of all Small Learning Communities is to improve teaching, learning, and student outcomes. A rigorous, coherent curriculum should reinforce SLC objectives. The coherence is provided by theme or other unifying principles that serve as a vehicle for teachers to plan together and to encourage connections within and across content areas.
- Planning for post-secondary education for all students, including students with special needs and English Language Learners, is clearly defined and is the responsibility of each SLC team. Tracking is eliminated.
- All students have access to college preparatory courses including pre-AP, AP, IB (and in middle schools, Regents opportunities), and the appropriate supports for them to be successful. In some cases, these courses are offered across SLCs, but are rooted in course work offered in every SLC.
- There is ongoing professional development for teachers and administrators to support effective teaching, student engagement, and assessment practices.
- The support of intermediaries and other school support organizations is aligned to the goal of rigorous and relevant theme based curriculum for all students, and there are ongoing conversations among all parties.
- Every SLC has a clear strategy and assessment process for moving Level I and II students to grade level performance.

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*“The SLCs provide a very clear structure and this ensures the school runs very well, students are well known by the staff in the SLCs and there is a good climate for learning throughout the school as a whole.”*

**From DeWitt Clinton’s  
Well-Developed Quality Review Report**

Joel I. Klein  
Chancellor



Garth Harries  
Chief Portfolio Officer  
Office of Portfolio Development