

I have known Dr. Dennis O'Hara for sixteen years. I met Dr. O'Hara when I was a senior in high school and he was my assistant principal. Even as a young student, it was readily apparent to me that Dr. O'Hara was dedicated, caring, compassionate, and fair. Since that time, I have known and worked with Dr. O'Hara as Principal of Oyster Bay High School, and now as Superintendent of the Hauppauge School District, where I also work. Dr. Dennis O'Hara is a professional and a person of the very highest caliber and it is my honor to nominate him for the Effie Jones Humanitarian Award.

Dr. Dennis O'Hara organizes and facilitates networks and enterprises to ensure equity and access for women and minorities in education.

A number of years ago, I had just completed my school counseling internship at Oyster Bay High School where Dr. O'Hara served as principal when I received a call on my cell phone from Dr. O'Hara. He explained that he had been invited to deliver a presentation at the College Summit National Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. As an invited speaker, College Summit would cover travel expenses and had secured hotel rooms for Dr. O'Hara and his co-presenter. Dr. O'Hara went on to explain that he had convinced his co-presenter, a male colleague, to share a hotel room so that he could offer the room to me and a female ENL teacher from his school. The conversation went something like this: "I was reviewing the conference program and I think it would be really beneficial for you to attend. If you can get a plane ticket, the rest will be taken care of. We would love to have you join us." I attended that conference, thanks to Dr. O'Hara's generosity and it marked the beginning of what has been a highly-productive conference attendance and presentation partnership that has brought us to many states, generated great notes, fueled meaningful conversations, and sparked trajectory-changing work in our schools.

There are many more examples of opportunities Dr. O'Hara facilitated for myself and other women. After working as a school counselor for a number of years, Dr. O'Hara urged me to pursue my administrative certification. When I applied to earn a Master's in Educational Leadership in pursuit of that goal, Dr. O'Hara wrote me a recommendation and helped me with the application. But his support did not stop there. He remained in regular contact with me throughout the program, asking what I was reading, what kind of assignments I was completing, and perhaps most importantly, "Can I help you in anyway?" Breaking into the counseling director world in our region is not easy. Being male and having gray hair seem to be prerequisites. I had neither, but I did have Dr. O'Hara advocating for me and encouraging me. "You do great work with your caseload, Carolyn. As a director, you could influence so many more students."

Years later, Dr. O'Hara urged me to return to school again to pursue a doctoral degree in education. It was with Dr. O'Hara's encouragement that I applied to doctoral programs outside our region. He spoke so highly of his experience in the doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania. Although I had no idea how I would complete such a program (if I could even get in), it was the confidence from Dr. O'Hara that gave me the will to even apply. When I was accepted to the program at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, it was Dr. O'Hara who told me I could do it – that 54 roundtrip flights and weekends in Tennessee would be worth it. It may sound crazy, but he could not have been more right. In just six short months I will earn my doctoral degree. And when I walk across the stage at my graduation from Vanderbilt

University's Peabody College of Education, a piece of that diploma will belong to Dr. O'Hara. Over the course of the past three years of papers, readings, and exams there were many times I doubted myself, but he never did.

Dr. Dennis O'Hara provides leadership development through coaching, mentoring, modeling and networking.

Dr. O'Hara and I have collaborated on two scholarly articles. The first was ethnographic in nature and described college-access initiatives in our two respective schools. The second article presented best practices in hiring school counselors, psychologists, and social workers. In the case of both articles, Dr. O'Hara did not need a co-author. He certainly did not need a co-author with only a few years of experience in school administration. Dr. O'Hara possesses more than 25 years in the field of education. He has served as an exemplary teacher of science, science department chairperson, assistant principal, principal, and now superintendent. Dr. O'Hara could write books, let alone articles! But here I stand with my name in the byline on two peer-reviewed articles. As if that's not enough, my name appears next to Dr. Dennis O'Hara's.

Last year I received a scholarship from the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS). The award was presented at the fall conference, which was attended by over 600 superintendents from throughout New York State. As an award recipient, I was invited to attend all events at the fall conference. When you attend a superintendent's conference, you realize pretty quickly during breaks that the line for the men's room is significantly longer than the line for the ladies' room. Suffice to say, the profession is dominated by men. It was an incredible opportunity, but as a young assistant principal, I could have felt terribly out of place at this three-day event. I say "could have" because I did not. And Dr. O'Hara is the reason I did not. Although I was not working for Dr. O'Hara at the time, he truly shepherded me through the conference, introducing me to people everywhere we went, creating space for me, and to my embarrassment at times, extolling praise on my behalf to anyone who would listen. Not only did Dr. O'Hara take care of me at the conference, he tweeted and wrote a Facebook post about me receiving the award and wrote a press release that prompted a major newspaper in our region to write an article on my behalf. I walked away from the event with far more than a scholarship thanks to Dr. O'Hara.

Dr. Dennis O'Hara shares generously of his own knowledge, skills and resources to promote women and minorities in education and to address equity issues among children.

When I entered the field of school counseling, school enrollment was in decline; school budgets were tight and many districts were excessing school counselors. At the same time, enrollment in local graduate counselor preparation programs increased. To say there were very few school counselor positions available would be an understatement. As each position became available, I would inform Dr. O'Hara and he would call anyone he knew in that school district to advocate on my behalf. I don't recall the details of every interview I went on. What I will never forget is that Dr. O'Hara debriefed every interview experience with me and helped me prepare for the next. At many times, I felt uncertain that I would ever land a permanent position, but I knew that I would have to be the one to throw in the towel. Simply put, Dr. Dennis O'Hara was never going to give up on me. The picture on the right is of Dr. O'Hara holding a sign that reads, "THIS IS IMPORTANT! With the right effort, you can do it. I will not give up on you!" Dr. O'Hara gives these signs to teachers in his school district when they complete the Research for Better Teaching (RBT) course, which focuses on skillful teaching and is grounded in the belief of a growth mindset. This evidence-based professional development is an initiative and an investment in teachers that Dr. O'Hara brought to the Hauppauge School District. RBT emphasizes the belief that all children can learn and that they deserve access to the most rigorous instruction they can handle. This is one of many initiatives Dr. O'Hara has led in an effort to address equity issues among children.



During the eight months it took me to secure a probationary position as a school counselor, Dr. O'Hara did everything in his power to create a home for me at Oyster Bay High School, where he was Principal at the time. I substitute taught, chaperoned, proctored, and tutored. On days when there were not any earning opportunities, I showed up anyway and helped out wherever I could. I called it my extended internship, and truth be told, I learned more in those humbling eight months than I could have in any graduate course. Dr. O'Hara did far more than create a place for me to show up to each day, he worked tirelessly to create meaningful projects for me to work on. These projects grew to opportunities that helped me to eventually land a job. And once I got there, they served as a foundation that facilitated great work for students. It was during this time that Dr. O'Hara began work on creating the Oyster Bay College Awareness Program. The program takes eighth graders on a three-day trip to visit three college campuses in Philadelphia. When asked about the inspiration for the trip, Dr. O'Hara stated, "While at Penn I learned that the role of educators is to change the life trajectories of their students. The 'College Weekend' is designed to generate for students a vivid image of what college can be. It is deliberately intended to help students see the infinite opportunities that are created as a result of enrolling in and completing college." Dr. O'Hara knew that less than 20 percent of the nation's eighth graders were on track to be academically prepared for college. It was important for him to prove that statistic wrong at Oyster Bay High School. Bringing students to visit colleges before the high school transcript clock started to tick motivated students to pursue more challenging coursework. The eighth-grade college awareness weekend was followed by a college awareness trip for tenth

graders that included visits to twelve colleges as far south as North Carolina. News coverage of this life-trajectory-changing program is attached. Dr. O'Hara, this program, and its impact have been recognized by the College Board and the New York State School Boards Association. Most importantly, evidence of this program's impact can be seen in the college-going rates of Oyster Bay High School graduates, which have reached 100 percent and have not budged below 97 percent since the program's inception.

Thanks to my exposure to the creation of the Oyster Bay college awareness program, I did eventually obtain a probationary school counseling position. And when I did, I created a similar program in my new school. As a result of Dr. O'Hara's work, students in two schools were on the receiving end of great college access opportunities. Dr. O'Hara is a force multiplier. Because he is so unconcerned by credit and accolades, he has the ability to mobilize others to do impactful work.

When I was preparing for my first interview for a position as a school administrator, I remarked to Dr. O'Hara that I was feeling anxious. What types of questions might they ask? How could I appear ready when I had no administrative experience? This phone call took place on a Friday and the interview was scheduled for Monday. Dr. O'Hara reassured me and then he said, "I wish we had more time. My weekend is pretty packed, but, you know what, I'm going to be on a lacrosse field with my son all day tomorrow. If you want to meet me, we could practice some interview questions." Dr. O'Hara spent hours with me that Saturday. He generated questions he thought I might encounter and helped me prepare responses. I didn't get that position, but he helped me prepare for my next interview, and the one after that.

Dr. Dennis O'Hara promotes innovative structures to achieve goals of equity and excellence.

As evidenced by earlier responses, letters, and news clippings, Dr. O'Hara has dedicated his career to increasing opportunities for students, specifically through the creation of a college-going culture. All college awareness trips were sustained through fundraising efforts. No student was ever left behind due to inability to pay. No student was ever left behind because they were not deemed "college bound." It is important to note that these initiatives are not in "name only." Rather, they are significant and substantive. Bringing students to see college campuses was an important part of the puzzle, but Dr. O'Hara did far more than that. He de-tracked many courses at Oyster Bay High School in an effort to remove barriers and increase enrollment in Advanced Placement courses.

As a Principal, Dr. O'Hara created programs to promote equity and excellence. In his new district, as Superintendent, Dr. O'Hara mobilizes and empowers educators to do that same meaningful work. Within his first year as Superintendent, Dr. O'Hara created a position to oversee k-12 school counseling, college counseling, education of homeless students, and the use of data to inform instruction. Thanks to Dr. O'Hara, I was appointed into this position, Assistant to the Superintendent for Educational Services and Student Outcomes, as of July 1, 2017. I went from being a high school assistant principal, to working in central office. Dr. O'Hara quite literally created a seat for me at the dais for Board of Education meetings and executive sessions. This type of career move is unheard of, and I am learning and doing more than I ever could have

imagined this time a year ago. Together, we are working to increase opportunities for students in our school district. In just a few short months, we have already seen a dramatic increase in the number of students applying to college, and more specifically applying early action/decision and to more selective and geographically diverse colleges. We have worked to create connections for our students to be exposed to internships and career information, to remove a barrier to college and offering the ACT to every eleventh-grade student on a school day. We are working on plans for year-round schooling. We're making progress, but we are not quite there yet. As Dr. O'Hara always reminds me, "If better is possible, good is not enough."

Dr. O'Hara encourages others to become AASA members.

Dr. O'Hara is an active member of the AASA. He is also active in the New York State Council of School Superintendents. Additionally, Dr. O'Hara collaborates with his fellow superintendents from Long Island and Suffolk County. Dr. O'Hara is a strong supporter of the NYSCOSS Women's Initiative, which works to address the gender gap in the superintendency. In fact, in July just after I started in the District, Dr. O'Hara sent myself, our Assistant Superintendent for Business, and our District Clerk to the NYSCOSS Women in Leadership Conference. Shortly after that event, our District Clerk secured a position as a School Business Official.

Dr. Dennis O'Hara is the human common denominator to every professional advancement I have been able to make. A mentor who sees opportunities for others is incredibly valuable. But Dr. O'Hara does more than notice opportunities, he creates them. For Dr. O'Hara, helping others is like converting oxygen into carbon dioxide. It's just what he does. The really amazing thing is that he does it so incredibly well. Dr. O'Hara is ivy-league educated, but incredibly humble. He is so very bright, and yet, extremely approachable. He is a capacity-builder and a gap-closer – for both students and adults. Dr. O'Hara is an educator of substance and sincerity. I have watched Dr. O'Hara make tough decisions. His integrity is so powerful that regardless of the personal cost or the fall out, he will always land on the side of justice and fairness. Brave is an understatement to describe Dr. O'Hara.

Dr. Dennis O'Hara changed my life, and I am hardly the only one. To know Dr. Dennis O'Hara is to be enriched, to be valued, and to matter. I hope you will give his nomination the serious consideration it deserves.

Respectfully,



Carolyn J. Probst
Assistant to the Superintendent for
Educational Services and Student Outcomes



BELLMORE-MERRICK CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
MERRICK AVENUE MIDDLE SCHOOL
1870 MERRICK AVENUE, MERRICK, NEW YORK 11566
516.992.1200 OFFICE / 516.867.6391 FAX



ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Taryn M. Johnson
Principal

Richard Aceste
Katelyn Dunn
Assistant Principals

John DeTommaso
Superintendent of Schools

November 6, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

Leadership is not only the ability to be a change agent, it is also the ability to inspire and support others as they pursue their own goals. It takes an amazing leader to be able to accomplish this. It is exactly this quality that inspires me to voice my support for Dr. Dennis P. O'Hara as a nominee for the Dr. Effie H. Jones Humanitarian Award.

Dr. O'Hara understood the value of hiring a woman of color in a leadership role at Oyster Bay High School. It was a very memorable day in the Spring of 2007 when I walked in to a conference room to be interviewed by him and a team of central administrators. His commitment to excellence for ALL students was evident. A charismatic and passionate leader, Dr. O'Hara embodied the qualities of an administrator who was a visionary and was not silent in his quest to eliminate the inequities that often exist in schools. We worked collaboratively to develop programs and practices that allowed students to be successful regardless of race, socio-economics, or immigration status. The culture in Oyster High School made a formidable shift and student success became a constant in the academic discourse.

As Dr. O'Hara's assistant principal, I was allowed the proverbial seat at the table. He wanted to hear my voice. To him, my contribution was valuable. He supported me in ways that allowed me to be creative and to grow personally and professionally. It was Dr. O'Hara who encouraged me to pursue my doctoral studies at the University of Pennsylvania. It was Dr. O'Hara who I called, in tears, after my first class when I thought that this was something I could NOT do. It was Dr. O'Hara who supported me and helped me see it through.

It is easy for a school to emulate the social inequities that we see in our everyday world. What is challenging is to face those inequities head-on, create opportunities for people of color, and strive to build a culture that defies inequity. Dr. O'Hara is a trailblazer, a trajectory changer, and a role model for leadership that disrupts inequity and changes lives.

Taryn M. Johnson, Ed.D.
Principal

Scan for more information!





HAUPPAUGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FOREST BROOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

299 Lilac Lane

P.O. Box 6006

Hauppauge, New York 11788

KRISTEN REINGOLD
Principal

November 6, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pride that I recommend Dr. Dennis O'Hara for the 2018 Dr. Effie H. Jones Humanitarian Award. Dr. O'Hara is the Superintendent of the Hauppauge School District, where I have the pleasure of being one of his principals. Last year during Dr. O'Hara's first year in Hauppauge, we met several times at his request, to discuss my future plans. Dr. O'Hara strongly encouraged me to research various Ed.D. programs and advance my education. After much reflection, I heeded his advice and this past September started my own journey. Dr. O'Hara regularly checks in with me regarding my studies, topics of discussions and how to apply it to my current work as a building administrator. He has taken on the role of coach and mentor and continually pushes me to keep moving forward.

Dr. O'Hara's motto of children first, pure intentions and best effort permeates all that he embodies. He has committed to taking the good work that we do in Hauppauge and making it better. District wide book chats occur regularly for all staff members, all with the goal to improve our practices for students. Dr. O'Hara is a fine model of a superintendent with an innate ability to lead, motivate and educate. If you have any questions or require additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Kristen Reingold
Principal

Oyster Bay High School
150 E. Main St.
Oyster Bay, NY 11771

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to nominate Dr. Dennis O'Hara, an extraordinary education leader and mentor, for your 2017-18 Dr. Effie H. Jones Humanitarian Award. For more than a decade, Dr. O'Hara was the principal at Oyster Bay High School where I was one of his curriculum specialists and later assistant principals. I can attest that Dr. O'Hara was known by students, parents, faculty and the community members he served for being dedicated, passionate, and compassionate. Dennis O'Hara was a gifted principal who led from the heart and put students at the forefront of each decision he made while he was as our school leader.

Dr. O'Hara made countless contributions to our diverse high school and to the lives of his students; his most significant contribution to our school community was the creation of our college awareness program. Under his leadership, Oyster Bay High School developed a unique college-ready continuum for students in grades seven through twelve. The college tours, the brainchild of Dr. O'Hara, are still the highlight of the college awareness program. In 2009, Dr. O'Hara and his team took almost the entire eighth grade class on the school's inaugural college awareness trip. Since then, every year, our eighth grade and tenth grade students participate in overnight college tours. Our middle level students meet admissions officers at four to five colleges in the Philadelphia area and our sophomores tour about ten colleges in the mid-Atlantic states.

Dr. O'Hara always insisted that all students who were interested in attending the college tours do so regardless of their ability to pay. In addition to the numerous local fundraisers he spearheaded to offset the cost of the tours for the twenty percent of our student body on free and reduced-price lunch, he was able to secure grants from a federal agency for our economically disadvantaged students. Additionally, Dr. O'Hara always made time to speak with students and their parents about the merits of the program. After briefly speaking to an 8th grade youngster, Dr. O'Hara said to me, "She has to go on the trip...she'll be the first to go to college in her family." Dr. O'Hara's philosophy has been that if eighth graders have early exposure to college campuses that they will have a sense of the possible; Dr. O'Hara regularly talks of our power as educators to change our students' life trajectories.

Dr. O'Hara has also had a profound impact on the adults who have worked with him. As his deputy, I benefitted from his expertise, guidance, and mentoring. He was instrumental in encouraging me to run for my home district's board of education and when I was elected to office, I had the opportunity to attend the New York State School Board (NYSSBA)'s annual convention in New York City. That year Dr. O'Hara's session, "A Continuum Approach to Creating and Sustaining a College-Going Culture," was featured in NYSSBA's *OnBoard* Newsletter (vol. 15, no. 18) on November 3, 2014. When I contemplated pursuing a doctoral degree, Dr. O'Hara was an important resource and example to me. I am currently in my third year of doctoral coursework and I remain grateful to Dr. O'Hara for supporting my academic interests. Professionally, he continues to encourage me to look for opportunities to become a principal myself and connect me with members of his network. As sad as I was to see Dr. O'Hara leave Oyster Bay a year and half ago, I was thrilled to see him fulfill his dream of becoming a superintendent at Hauppauge Public Schools. He left a powerful legacy at our high school and an indelible positive mark on my professional and academic life as well. I wholeheartedly recommend Dr. Dennis O'Hara for this recognition and award. Please do not hesitate to contact me at lgonzalez@obenschools.org if I can be of further assistance.

Very sincerely yours,



Lara Gonzalez

Letter of support on behalf of Dr. Dennis O'Hara

Working with Dr. O'Hara has been a wonderful journey. I use the word journey because Dr. O'Hara motivates his staff to be better educators, but most importantly better people. He inspires his staff to think outside of the box and always do what is best for children. He leads by example; he leads with kindness and empathy. His relationship with students and staff is one of respect and admiration.

At faculty meetings Dr. O'Hara not only shares valuable teaching points and pedagogy, he also sparks a desire within his staff to want more for children, to push them, to show them their potential. His words from a past professional development still remain with me today where he shared excerpts from *The Last Lecture*: "I will take an earnest person over a hip person every day, because hip is short-term, earnest is long-term.... Wait long enough and people will surprise and impress." He is an advocate for children. Through his enthusiasm in reciting Mr. Pausch's words I was moved to incorporate *The Last Lecture* in my curriculum.

As a first generation American, high school graduate, college graduate, and educator, Dr. O'Hara has always been my greatest cheerleader. While I am a teacher of English, Dr. O'Hara provided me with opportunities to work with English Language Learners and to fight for equity in education (a cause that is near and dear to my heart). When I was initially considered for the position eleven years ago, Dr. O'Hara advocated on my behalf. The Department Chair was considering another applicant that had greater teaching experience, but Dr. O'Hara recognized the value and importance in hiring someone who was trilingual (fluent in both Portuguese and Spanish) and the impact that would have on students. Upon examining his current staff at the time, Dr. O'Hara recognized the fact that the English Language Learners needed to have strong female mentors. Although I have been fortunate enough to teach accelerated courses such as Advanced Placement Literature and Composition, throughout my time teaching the course I was bothered by the fact that there were very few minority students enrolled. I brought my concerns to Dr. O'Hara and he fully supported my recommendation to drop the current policy that required students to have a 90 average and teacher recommendation if they wished to enroll. He helped me to create a welcoming environment in which students feel challenged but always supported. Along with the Counseling Center, we also decided that I would visit all classes to publicize the course, not just seek out honors students. Upon doing so we quickly discovered that minority students weren't enrolling in the class because they didn't even know it was a possibility. English Language Learners now felt comfortable doing so because they knew they had the support of an educator who shared their same journey, and could assist them in Spanish. This is all thanks to Dr. O'Hara's support.

He has also provided greater equity by creating a program that has opened the door for many children to attend college, through the college awareness program where he takes eighth and tenth graders to visit a number of universities on the East Coast. Through these trips he shows students that with grit and effective effort anything is possible.

While Dr. O'Hara no longer serves as principal of Oyster Bay High School, as he has taken the next step in his career as Superintendent of Happaug Public Schools, his impact still resides in our community. It is my pleasure to have worked with a leader such as Dr. O'Hara.

Sincerely,
Lydia Gomes Brady
Teacher of English
Oyster Bay High School

From the Field:

College - We Want In!

By Carolyn Probst, and Dennis P. O'Hara, Ed.D.

Most people reading this article had the privilege of attending college and understand its value. However, for too many of our students, this is not the case. According to the Economic Policy Institute, "Americans with four-year college degrees made 98 percent more an hour on average in 2013 than people without a degree. That's up from 89 percent five years earlier, 85 percent a decade earlier and 64 percent in the early 1980s" (Leonhardt, 2014, par. 4). And yet, in 2013 the research indicated that low-income students pursue college at a considerably lower rate than their higher income peers (Hoxby & Avery, 2013).

The Value of Early Engagement

How do school leaders help students and parents, especially those from low-income families, understand the value of a college education? Engaging students and families early and often and using a continuum of strategies enables school leaders to close aspiration gaps, thus creating and sustaining a college-going culture for all students.

Typically, college counseling initiatives begin in the middle of eleventh grade. Waiting until this late stage in a student's academic career guarantees missed opportunities. For students who do not see themselves in college, or who are unaware of the significance of their early academic work, the eve of senior year is simply too late. According to ACT (2008), "...the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school" (p. 2). In response to these conditions, school leaders in Oyster Bay and Westhampton Beach High Schools, (Long Island, New York), have created programs for students that jump-start college awareness beginning in eighth grade.

Igniting Excitement

New York Times bestselling author Daniel Coyle (2009) refers to the term "ignition" in his book *The Talent Code*. Coyle explains that ignition is a process that creates and sustains motivation and supplies energy over time (p. 97). In his book, Coyle refers to Gary McPherson, an Australian music psychologist. In reference to successful musicians and music students, McPherson said, "It's all about

the perception of self. At some point early on they had a crystallizing experience that brings the idea to the fore, that says, I am a musician" (p. 104). For students from low-income families, the idea of college can seem unattainable. It is difficult to want something that seems off limits - something no one in families has ever seen. We needed to provide our students with a crystallizing experience that made them say, "I am going to college!"

We came....We saw....We'll be back!

In Oyster Bay High School, the first step in igniting a passion for college among all students is the eighth-grade college awareness trip. Eighth-grade students, along with their teachers and administrators, spend a three-day-weekend traveling to four colleges in and around Philadelphia. Schools such as the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, Lehigh University, Muhlenberg College, Villanova University, Ursinus College, and Cabrini College provide students with admissions information sessions and guided campus tours.

This trip begins early on a Friday morning. Students travel via coach bus three hours to Philadelphia. In addition to the college tours and information sessions, the days are filled with fun and exciting activities such as the Franklin Institute, IMAX movie theaters, collegiate athletic events, bowling, roller blading, pizza parties, and of course, enjoying famous Philadelphia cheese steaks. Teachers, administrators and students participate in fundraising activities as a way of generating excitement and ensuring all students participate in the weekend trip regardless of family income or socioeconomic status.

What happens on the trip is certainly informative, but more importantly it is transformative. Former Oyster Bay High School Assistant Principal, Taryn Johnson, said of the trips, "Students get a piece of the college process to motivate them for the future. The child you put on the bus the morning that you are leaving is different than the child who gets off the bus when you return."

Many of our students will be the first in their families to attend college and they return home with knowledge about the college admissions process that rivals that of most college-educated adults. While visiting with admissions repre-

sentatives, students learn the components of the holistic application review process. They learn about minimum grade requirements, recommended courses, the importance of community involvement, the various admissions policies, the importance of SAT and ACT scores, and the need to challenge themselves with the most rigorous courses available. Most importantly, students learn they belong and they suddenly envision their future selves on these campuses.

Sustaining the Excitement and Creating the Culture

Bringing students to visit college campuses transforms students and creates excitement, yet, creating and sustaining a college-going culture requires much more. A continuum approach is necessary to create equity and promote access. The chart below contains a list of the many programs, activities, and supports provided to students and families in each grade level.

Not all initiatives fit neatly into a specific grade level, yet are equally important. Among them is the creation of a college omnipresence. This is accomplished in a variety of ways including the display of college pennants in and around the school building, a display announcing the colleges that faculty members attended, and calendar days on which faculty members proudly wear their own college

apparel. In addition, as twelfth-grade students announce their college choice, the Honor Society decorates each student's locker in the motif of his or her future college. May 1st of each year is known as "I Declare" Day. Seniors wear the apparel of their chosen college, receive an éclair from the Counseling Department and have a pennant that bears their name and the name of their college displayed above the entrance of the Counseling Center for the remainder of the year.

Students Ask for More

Following a successful and passion-igniting eighth-grade college weekend, students were eager to visit more college campuses. This led to the creation of a five-day, eleven-college trip for tenth-grade students at Oyster Bay High School. Much like their experience in eighth grade, students are provided the rare opportunity to travel with their classmates to visit colleges in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Students see a combination of large and small, public and private, rural, suburban, and urban campuses as well as schools that represent a range of selectivity. These trips have become highly anticipated annual events for students and their families. As a staple in our school culture, the trips have demystified the college search and application processes.

8 th Grade	9 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8th Grade College Trip College Awareness Night College Day Trips Family and Consumer Science College Awareness Project Hispanic College Night Regents Algebra for all students (high school credit course) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Day Trips ReadiStep for all students ACT Aspire for all students Individual College Counselor conferences Hispanic College Night AP Biology College Introduction Night Financial Aid Night 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5-Day College Tour PSAT for all students PSAT Night (results and explanation) Individual College Counselor conferences Hispanic College Night College Panel Night Financial Aid Night 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Day and Overnight Trips PSAT for all students PSAT Night (results and explanation) In-school ACT (weekday, during school hours) Hispanic College Night Junior Family Night Individual College Counselor Conferences Junior Seminar Mini College Fairs College representative visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essay Writing for College Course College Application Night Financial Aid Night On-site Applications Senior Assembly: Transitioning to College Hispanic College Night In-school ACT (weekday, during school hours) "I Declare" Day

Scalability

Although the programs at Oyster Bay High School and Westhampton Beach High School have components in common, they are not identical. Leaders in any school, regardless of population size, demographics, and geographic location can incorporate many of these strategies en route to creating and sustaining a college-going culture that closes aspiration gaps and makes college accessible to all students.

Community Support

Parental and community support for these programs is widespread and is a significant proponent of the program's success. Parents often report that traveling to visit colleges is cost prohibitive due to travel expenses and missed time at work, but the college visit program makes it possible. Additionally, parents share that when they are able to take their sons and daughters to visit colleges, the process is much more efficient since they do not waste time and resources traveling to campuses that do not fit their children's preferences. The benefits of these programs are evident in the comments we receive from parents.

- "Stephen came home from the trip with a completely new perspective on the importance of getting a good education. He has already started to take more initiative with his school work now that he has been exposed to collegiate life. Honestly, I wish I had the opportunity when I was in high school."
- "I wanted to thank you for giving my children, Kyle and Kelly a wonderful eighth grade trip. I agree with Oyster Bay's philosophy that exposing children to colleges at an early age is both inspiring and motivating. You provided my children with an educational experience in an entertaining and exciting fashion. When my children arrived home from the trip they were filled with enthusiasm and joy about their experience. When reviewing the itinerary I commented that the staff must have been exhausted because they were so busy. Kyle and Kelly both responded that the staff was just as "pumped" as the kids. They explained that the adults were smiling and laughing the whole time, which made the trip extra fun."
- "I was skeptical at first when I heard about a college trip for 9th graders. I thought, what's next, SAT prep for pre-schoolers? Well, I'm definitely a believer now. This trip was the perfect motivation for our daughter. Dinner conversation for the past three nights has been a healthy discussion of colleges and careers. We're excited! Thank you!!"
- "No one in our family has ever gone to college. This trip was truly the opportunity of a lifetime for Joshua. We are so grateful."
- Jack came home so "college positive" from his trip. Things I've never heard from Jack before like, "I have to step

it up with my studies" was one. Everyone has a life changing experience, this may be it for Jack! Thanking you and your staff for your time devoted to my son.

Student Growth

Changes in students are observable both empirically and anecdotally. For example, college-attendance rates at both schools have increased. Both schools have also experienced increased enrollment in honors and Advanced Placement courses, with a corresponding increase in AP exams. First generation students of both schools are not only approaching the application process with confidence, they are enrolling in college. Students are receiving better financial aid packages from more selective colleges. More students are applying to and enrolling in geographically diverse colleges. Student involvement in extracurricular clubs and activities has increased. Students and their parents have become savvy consumers of higher education. Rather than being passive participants, students and parents are now active and engaged in preparation for the post-secondary lives. On a college visit, it is not uncommon to witness a student inquire about the benefits of applying early decision, the college's four year graduation rate, sophomore retention rate, merit and athletic scholarship opportunities, faculty to student ratio, percentage of students who receive financial aid, or study abroad opportunities. In addition, college apparel abounds in both high schools, thus further propagating a college omnipresence and sustaining a college-going culture for all students.

Using a continuum approach, our schools have closed aspiration gaps, and in the process, closed achievement gaps, thus creating a college-going culture for all students.

References

- ACT (2008). *The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students are on Target for College and Career Readiness Before High School*. Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/ForgottenMiddle.pdf>.
- Coyle, D. (2009). *The Talent Code*. Bantam Dell, New York, NY.
- Hoxby, C. & Avery, C. (2013). The Missing "One-Offs": The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving, Low-Income Students. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*. Spring 2013. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Projects/BPEA/Spring%202013/2013a_hoxby.pdf.
- Leonhardt, D. (2014, May 27). Is College Worth It? Clearly, New Data Say. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/upshot/is-college-worth-it-clearly-new-data-say.html?_r=0&abt=0002&abg=1.
- Carolyn Probst is an Assistant Principal at Westhampton Beach High School, on Long Island, in New York.
- Dennis P. O'Hara, Ed.D., is the Principal of Oyster Bay High School, on Long Island, in New York.

A Competency-Based Approach to Hiring School Counselors, Psychologists and Social Workers

By Dennis P. O'Hara, Ed.D., and Carolyn J. Probst

*For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf,
and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.*
-Rudyard Kipling

Hiring decisions offer an immense opportunity for school leaders to influence the trajectory of their organizations in the immediate and long-term. However, very few school administrators have appropriate training, if any at all, in how to select the best candidates. Effective hiring for school counselors, psychologists, and social workers presents further unique challenges including the fact that these positions do not open as frequently as classroom teaching positions, administrators are less likely to have worked in one of these roles, and the required competencies are often less tangible than knowledge of content and pedagogy.

Why Are Hiring Decisions So Important?

Hiring people is not difficult. Who among us has not shared stories of receiving hundreds of resumes for one teaching or counseling position? The challenge and opportunity lie in making great decisions and hiring the best people. Most are familiar with the expression, "You're only as strong as your weakest link." When considering the importance of hiring the best candidate, we prefer to conjure the image of Rudyard Kipling's *Law of the Jungle* in which he says, "For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack." People represent an organization's greatest asset. The strength of any organization lies in its people, those who are bright, passionate, insightful, and committed to closing aspiration gaps and changing students' life trajectories.

Conversely, in *The Skillful Leader II: Confronting Conditions that Undermine Learning*, Platt et al. (2008) state, "The cost of hiring the wrong candidate can be higher in terms of supplementary training, wasted salary, adverse public relations, and lost productivity than the cost of more extensive recruitment. Clear standards and procedures must be set for recruiting and hiring promising new teachers if we are to build and sustain cultures of excellence" (p. 279).

Why is it Difficult to Make Great Hiring Decisions?

In what he describes as the great paradox, Claudio Fernandez Araoz (2007) says, "Great people decisions lie behind individual success, and ultimately, behind organizational success" (p. 21). And yet, the path to effective hiring is replete with challenges. For example, although we often receive numerous applications, as Araoz (2007) explained, there are only a small number of exceptional performers. An exceptional person is one who can make a tremendous difference for an organization. The difficulty is that upon initial impression, the differences between a typical person and an exceptional person may not be obvious.

In addition, assessing applicants for complex positions, such as counseling, is much more difficult than many realize. Effective counselors must possess a unique blend of the "hard" and "soft" skills. Hard skills represent the knowledge base, intelligence, and experience while soft skills refer to personality, emotional intelligence, self awareness, and capacity to empathize. Identifying these qualities, and to what degree each applicant possesses them, proves difficult considering few interviewers have undergone training and fewer still possess these qualities in the right balance themselves.

Acknowledging Barriers to Great Decisions

Each of us enters a hiring process with biases, both conscious and subconscious. If these biases are not uncovered and acknowledged, they can have dire consequences with regard to the ultimate hiring decision. Perhaps, the first bias that must be acknowledged is our own overestimation of our ability to choose great candidates. Too often, candidates are deemed exceptional for reasons that do not guarantee exceptional performance, such as educational background, appearance, speaking skills, or employment history.

We are reminded of another barrier in Jerry Harvey's (1988) "*The Abilene Paradox*." In *The Paradox*, Harvey describes a visit among a husband and wife and her parents.

The story opens on a 104 degree afternoon in Coleman, Texas. When one member of the group suggests a ride to Abilene, Texas, the others happily agree, only to later learn that none of the four actually wanted to go to Abilene. *The Abilene Paradox* teaches us that a group of people can collectively agree on a decision or course of action that is contrary to the beliefs or desires of some or all members of the group. This tendency presents yet another barrier to making great hiring decisions because individuals sacrifice their convictions in favor of what they think the group believes.

Although not an exhaustive list, the barriers discussed above are perhaps the most pervasive and influential. Much attention and effort must be focused on addressing these barriers and identifying others prior to beginning any hiring process.

A Competency-Based Approach

To clear the barriers, we recommend a competency-based approach to hiring. Araoz defines competencies as, "...behaviors that outstanding performers use more frequently and more consistently than typical performers" (p. 127). Our definition of a competency-based approach to hiring is one that requires an understanding of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personality traits needed for success in a given role. What exactly are the competencies required when hiring school counselors, psychologists and social workers? Should your new counselor, psychologist, or social worker be:

- A. The Believer
- B. The Innovator
- C. The Ever-Evolving Expert
- D. The Bridge

A competency-based approach to hiring will reveal the correct answer is, and the top performer will be, "E, All of the above." We have identified four overarching competencies required of school counselors, psychologists and social workers.

- A. The Believer - A believer knows that every part of a student's high school experience is preparing him or her for life beyond high school and a believer never takes his or her mind off that importance. The volume of work required in counseling is tremendous. Staying up to date on new information, working with students at all levels and at all stages of progress is both time and labor intensive. The only way to sustain this level of effort is to actually believe that the efforts matter.
- B. The Innovator - Innovation is critical. A counselor, social worker or psychologist who can carry out ideas is common; one who can generate meaningful ideas and creative solutions is harder

to come by. The landscape in education is changing faster than ever. Innovation will be the only way to continue to accomplish the level of work that is required, especially in this age of limited budgets and diminishing resources.

- C. The Ever-Evolving Expert - Counseling, more than many other fields, requires a vast amount of content knowledge. Possessing a body of knowledge is essential, but not sufficient. The landscape is so dynamic that information is outdated the moment it is received. Counselors, of all types, work in challenging and dynamic environments and face a myriad of situations. Constant reading, conferences, and networking are the only ways to truly stay current.
- D. The Bridge - The Bridge represents the nexus between the hard and soft traits. The greatest bridges are strong, but approachable. The Bridge can employ the emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and empathy, as well as knowledge-base, experience, and intelligence. A good bridge serves to connect people, to bring the team together in work toward a common goal. A believer, an innovator, and/or an expert can add results; an effective bridge can multiply them.

Skillful Recruiter Recommendations

Platt et al. (2008) share with us ways to improve hiring decisions. They tell us, "The ability to hire and retain the right people is a key characteristic of a high-performing organization" (p. 279). Essentially, the right person strengthens your organization and enables you to make unbridled progress, while the wrong person makes growth and advancement impossible.

We recommend the following practices as a means of making the best possible hiring decisions:

- As a group activity, before interviews commence, identify the necessary competencies.
- Identify and address potential biases among interviewers.
- Take the group to Abilene, but bring them back by explaining the pitfalls of groupthink and then embolden committee members to share their opinions openly and freely.
- Design and select interview questions that provide applicants every opportunity to demonstrate they possess the necessary competencies. Sample competencies and questions, in no particular order, include:
 - Seek to determine if the applicant is persistent by asking him/her to recount a time when he/

she was initially unsuccessful at an important task and tell what he/she did to improve (Platt et al., 2008, p. 290).

- Assess the applicant's ability to collaborate by asking him/her to share a time he/she has been part of a team other than an athletic team. Ask the candidate what role he/she played and what we can expect from his/her participation in our department or school (Platt et al., 2008, p. 290).
- Determine the candidate's enthusiasm for continuous learning by asking him/her to share the two most recent books he/she has read in his/her content area and how they influenced his/her thinking (Platt et al., 2008, p. 290).
- Observe candidates in action with real students. Demonstration counseling sessions are an effective mechanism to assess the necessary hard and soft skills required of school counselors, psychologists and social workers. Use this opportunity to judge:
 - How does the candidate establish rapport with students?
 - Does the candidate engage all students in a group setting?
 - What assessment strategies does the candidate use to determine student needs?
 - How does the candidate handle students who are reluctant or non-participatory?
 - Does the candidate practice wait-time after asking a question of the student and does he/she process the student's contribution before responding?
 - How does the candidate encourage students to make authentic contributions?
 - Does the candidate foster interactions beyond the superficial?
- Require candidates to submit a writing sample in which they reflect upon the demonstration counseling session.
- In a consistent method, solicit feedback from students regarding the candidates.
- When checking references, be extremely diligent and avoid the confirmation trap. Most employers make the mistake of conducting reference checks with an eye toward confirming their positive feelings about an applicant. Araoz says, "At this dangerous

stage, the problem becomes compounded when we begin to seek confirmatory information for what we believe to be true, while turning our eyes away from any evidence that might contradict our newly embraced conclusions" (p. 72). Find disconfirmatory information at this stage – or take the risk of finding it later when the costs are much greater.

- When you don't get it right, admit it and work to fix it. Araoz recounted an interview with Howard Stevenson of Harvard University who said, "You never fire people early enough" (p. 112). Araoz continued, "In other words, rather than acting honestly, we stall, dissemble, and prevaricate" (p. 112). Acknowledge your mistake and act on it immediately in order to prevent further damage to your organization.

Conclusion

Like Kipling's wolf and its pack, our organizations can only be as strong as the people we hire. Every professional hired in a school possesses the ability to influence students' life trajectories. Araoz says, "No other decisions are so long-lasting in their consequences or so difficult to unmake" (p. 36). These long-lasting decisions can have the effect of sending students' life trajectories off the chart or flattening them. A competency-based approach to recruiting and hiring school counselors, psychologists and social workers will undoubtedly strengthen your organization and surely close aspiration gaps among students, and send their life trajectories soaring.

References

- Araoz, C. F. (2007). *Great People Decisions*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Harvey, J. (1988). *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Kipling, R. (1894). *The Jungle Books*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Platt, A. D., Tripp, C. E., Fraser, R. G., Warnock, J. R., Curtis, R. E. (2008). *The Skillful Leader II: Confronting Conditions that Undermine Learning*. Acton, MA: Research for Better Teaching.
- Dennis P. O'Hara, Ed.D., is the Principal of Oyster Bay High School, on Long Island, in New York.
- Carolyn J. Probst is a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University, and an Assistant Principal at Westhampton Beach High School, on Long Island, in New York.

Oyster Bay officials describe steps to building a college-going culture

By Gayle Simidian
RESEARCH ANALYST

Can dunking a principal or duct-taping him to a wall be part of building a college-going school culture? Yes, according to Dennis O'Hara, principal of Oyster Bay High School in the Oyster Bay-East Norwich school district in Suffolk County.

Both activities raised money to send high school students on college visits.

O'Hara and other district officials delivered a presentation titled, "A Continuum Approach to Creating and Sustaining a College-Going Culture," at Convention.

The district also raises money for college visits through donations from churches and restaurants and receives funding from the New York State Higher Education Services Corporation.

O'Hara said the value of visiting campuses became clear to him after he took his sons to the University of North Carolina (UNC) and other colleges. On a visit to a smaller college, his middle-school-aged said, "Is this it, Dad?" He then turned to his friend and said, "You

should see the bookstore at UNC." O'Hara realized that students who visit colleges can make better decisions about what school is right for them.

While the school district is home to many wealthy families who can afford road trips to colleges, 14 percent of the high school's students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

Programming at Oyster Bay High School that promotes a college-going culture includes:

- Hispanic College Night – a college night conducted entirely in Spanish.
- A college weekend for eighth-graders that includes visits to three colleges in Pennsylvania.
- 12 college campus visits for 10th-graders.
- PSAT for all 10th- and 11th-graders.
- An assembly for 12th-graders about the transition to college.

O'Hara said this programming "is not creating stress, but demystifying the college experience for students."



Dennis O'Hara, principal of Oyster Bay High School, has been taped to a wall by students as part of fundraisers for college visits. ❖ Photo courtesy of Oyster Bay-East Norwich Central School District

BECOME A TCPN MEMBER AND START SAVING TIME AND MONEY TODAY.

Leverage the Purchasing Power of more than 37,000 actively engaged governmental entities.

- No Participation Fees
- Registration is Fast and Free
- Contracts Publicly Solicited By A Lead Governmental Agency

CONTRACT CATEGORIES INCLUDE:

Athletic • Automotive Parts • Equipment Rental • Facilities • Flooring • Food Equipment
Furniture • HVAC • Janitorial Maintenance & Operations • Managed Print • Office Supplies
Playground Equipment • Roofing • School Supplies • Technology

REGISTER TODAY

1. Go to tcpn.org
2. Click the sign up button on the top right hand side of the screen
3. Complete the requested information
4. Submit

We make cooperative purchasing as simple as possible, yet our compliant process provides the legally required competition for contracts. We'll do the work, you save the time and money.

www.tcpn.org

TCPN_{NY}
The Cooperative Purchasing Network

Welcome, **Guest!**[Sign In](#) | [Register](#)[Click here to upload your news, photos, videos & events](#)[Home](#)[Classifieds](#)[Coupons](#)[Contests](#)[Subscribe](#)[FINDitLI.com](#)

OYSTER BAY GUARDIAN

Partly Cloudy, 54°

March 7, 2016

SEARCH [Advanced Search](#)[Top Stories](#)[News](#)[Opinions](#)[Sports](#)[Schools](#)[Lifestyles](#)[Photos & Video](#)[Experts](#)[Oyster Festival Guide](#)

February 26, 2016

[SHARE](#) [Sign up for our News Blasts](#)

Principal believes college visits seal the deal



PHOTO COURTESY OF DENNIS O'HARA

Oyster Bay High School tenth-grade students visited High Point University in North Carolina with their principal, Dennis O'Hara.

By Laura Lane1 2 3 4 [Next page >](#)

Some would say that Oyster Bay High School principal Dennis O'Hara is a bit of a dreamer — college for every student? Come on. But O'Hara genuinely believes that every student at his high school can go to college. It's all a process, he says, and kids need guidance.

"I felt like the students weren't aware enough about how important their course selections were even in the eighth grade," he explained. "Eleventh grade is not the important grade, like they say. Every grade is."

Working hard and achieving good grades is important, as are community service and extra-curricular activities. But all of that doesn't help a student decide where to go to college or even if they can go.

Teenagers need to actually see the colleges, O'Hara says, by walking around the campus, watching a college team practice, even going to the cafeteria and sampling the food. "If kids are in the college environment they can see themselves in a college environment," he declared.

So along with encouraging his teachers and guidance counselors to help students select college-worthy courses, O'Hara decided to do something himself. Since 2009 he's been taking students on field trips to colleges. In the spring he traditionally takes over 100 eighth-graders to colleges in the Philadelphia area and in January, tenth-graders travel throughout the east coast to a variety of colleges. The trips have been a success in encouraging students to apply for college, he says, and popular.

That this is working doesn't surprise O'Hara. He's been trying out his method to encourage college enrollment for years, beginning with his four sons.

"When my boys were kids and we went on a family trip I'd take them to a nearby college, tell them you needed good grades to go there, and we'd walk around the campus," O'Hara said. "We'd go to

Find yearbook photos from:

1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
1941	1951	1961	1971	1981
1942	1952	1962	1972	1982
1943	1953	1963	1973	1983
1944	1954	1964	1974	1984
1945	1955	1965	1975	1985
1946	1956	1966	1976	1986
1947	1957	1967	1977	1987
1948	1958	1968	1978	1988
1949	1959	1969	1979	1989

[Start now >](#)

the library and I'd point out that the college kids were studying. Then we'd go see if we could watch the wrestling team practice. The last stop was the bookstore for a souvenir."

Before coming to Oyster Bay schools, O'Hara was a science teacher at Miller Place High School, and the school's wrestling coach. He'd take his team to colleges to watch college wrestlers, hoping it would encourage them to apply for college. "I chartered a bus on my own and brought 30 something kids to Annapolis and watched wrestling," O'Hara said. "I did this for my wrestlers because when I went to see Penn State wrestlers I thought maybe if I had been there to see them while I was in high school I might have worked harder in school."

When he came to Oyster Bay High School he decided to expand his college fieldtrip idea. Oyster Bay's college tour includes three days of college visits for eighth-graders and 13 days for 10th-graders. The trips are tailored for every student, from those who excel to students who are struggling. The colleges range in competitiveness, from a school that generally leans toward accepting honor students to those who take B students.

These college trips are very important to O'Hara. Preparations begin months in advance and always include the viewing of a college athletic event. O'Hara works hard to make the trips educational, life altering and also fun.

The recreational events vary. O'Hara said the trips have included rollerblading, concerts and sporting events. On the last trip, students attended a Washington Capitals ice hockey game, went to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and saw the play *Shear Madness*.

The 10th-grade trip did not present any problems, but there were some challenges initially when O'Hara tried to organize college visits for the eighth-graders. "Many colleges rejected my idea, but not University of Pennsylvania," he said, adding that he achieved his doctorate at the college. "Once they opened the door to us I could tell the other schools would open theirs too and they did."

Another challenge was convincing some students who didn't believe they would ever be able to attend college to go on the trips. College would be financially impossible, they told O'Hara. "Many of the students at our school come from families where parents never went to college," he explained. "So these kids think they could never go to college."

They learn on the trips how they can go, who offers the best financial aid, what they need to do to be admitted and what the benefits of attending and completing college would be for them.

"On these trips we change a student's life trajectory and what will happen for every generation after them," O'Brien said. "They will make college happen for their own children."

The cost of the college fieldtrip is \$400 for the eighth-grade trip and \$700 for tenth-graders. It is not district funded. O'Hara has set up a way for the kids to earn the trip. They have an opportunity to sell \$1 raffle tickets for great prizes like a time-share in Orlando, and a stay at a lake house in upstate New York.

"Every student gets raffles in September and sell them till the middle of December," O'Hara explained. "We also help the kids who can't afford the trip by donating from the students who sell more raffles than they need. We also get donations, like from Christ Church, the chamber and we've gotten grants in the past, too."

O'Hara recently took the 10th-graders to visit 10 colleges, including College of William and Mary, Wesley College and University of Virginia. He mixes up the types of colleges on both trips, from large colleges and universities to smaller more intimate colleges like McDaniel College. At every college the teens get a college tour or an admission presentation — sometimes both.

"The kids find out quickly if they like the feel of the tiny liberal arts college or the large university," said O'Hara, adding that had they not visited they wouldn't have known. "Now their parents don't have to waste their time going to large cities if their child doesn't like the city — saves the parents time and money."

Often Oyster Bay High School alumni serve as tour guides. "We had four this year," he said. "They tell the students about their college experience and make suggestions as to what they need to do to get into the college. It makes the experience more real and personal for the kids."

How does O'Hara know that he's been successful in encouraging students to go to college? "There are five kids at George Washington University from OBHS and the first time they saw the school was on the 10th-grade college trip," he said. "There are three freshmen right now at Chapel Hill and they went there for the first time with us, too."

The kid who had a cop for a dad who went to college at night, and a mother that was a nurse has made good, O'Hara believes. "I have 760 kids here at Oyster Bay High School. I treat them like my own and would like them to have a better life than I had," he said. "My parents wanted me to go to college but didn't know how to advise me. Helping this way is unbelievably fulfilling for me."

College Awareness Presentation is a Highlight of the NYSSBA Convention in Manhattan



Oyster Bay High School Principal **Dr. Dennis O'Hara**, Merrick Avenue Middle School Principal Taryn Johnson, and Westhampton Beach High School Assistant Principal Carolyn Probst, presented at the New York State School Board Association's (NYSSBA) 95th Annual Convention and Education Expo at the Sheraton Hotel in Manhattan on October 26, 2014. Although Ms. Johnson is now a principal, she was the Assistant Principal at Oyster Bay High School and was instrumental in the development and implementation of the College Awareness Program.

Their presentation was called "A



Graduate School of Education
Penn GSE

Mid Career Network News
October 12, 2014

Issue 10 Volume V

In This Issue

- [Program Announcements and Accomplishments](#)
- [Opportunities](#)
- [Quick Links](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Network Accomplishments

Congrats to Taryn Johnson (Cohort 12) who is now the Principal of Merrick Avenue Middle School in the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District (Long Island, NY). She is also presenting at two upcoming conferences (see below).



Continuum Approach to Creating and Sustaining a College-Going Culture" and was described as "a program crafted by Oyster Bay High School that begins in the eighth grade and follows students throughout their high school careers. Using a combination of AP course offerings, PSAT for all tenth-graders, college essay courses, and trips to college campuses in grades eight and 10, we have built an experiential continuum that motivates students to pave a college pathway beginning in ninth grade. In this session, participants will develop techniques for igniting and encouraging students' early interest in college and career. Participants will draft a list of best practices that will allow them to create a college-going continuum at their own schools."

Since 2003, Dr. O'Hara has been principal at Oyster Bay High School. Dr. O'Hara's primary focus has been on encouraging students to graduate high school and pursue higher learning. During his tenure as principal at Oyster Bay High School, graduation and college-going rates have increased among all sub-groups. Oyster Bay High School has been ranked among the top 2% of all high schools in the country by U.S. News and World Report, Newsweek magazine, and the Washington Post.

As Christopher Weber, Library Media Specialist at Oyster Bay High School puts it, "Dr. O'Hara has made it his mission as principal to instill in his students the belief that anyone can and should attend college." To this end, he has designed and championed two unique college visitation trips. **Each January, 10th grade students go on a five day trip south, and visit colleges and**

Share your updates
Program News

Articles of Interest

Natl Principals Month & #CE14 kick-off with FIVE Twitterchats for school leaders. View the video and link to live chats on the [MC Innovations Lab site](#).



Tune into to Twitter hashtag #cpechat (Connected Principals Chat) each Thursday night in October at 8PM EDT / 5PM PST. The first two have been archived. The topics were: [How Can Principal Best Support Technology Integration in their Schools?](#) and [Constructive Teacher Evaluations](#).

Congrats to Susan Feibelman (Cohort 9) who was recently highlighted by SAIS for her work regarding women and school leadership in independent schools! She will be co-presenting a session entitled, "School Leadership: The Role Gender Plays" at the upcoming SAIS Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on October 20th.



Taryn Johnson (Cohort 12) and Dennis O'Hara (Cohort 2) will be presenting at two upcoming conferences:

- The New York State School Board Association Conference on October 26th - The presentation topic will be The School District's Financial Commitment to College and Career Readiness.
- The national conference for College Board in Las Vegas, Nevada, on October 29th - The presentation topic will be Crafting the Continuum: School District's Commitment to College and Career Readiness for Students in Underrepresented Groups.



Congrats to Annie McKee who recently accepted a Mosaic Woman Leadership award at the Diversity Women's Business Leadership Conference! Congrats Annie! View the press release, and more information about the award, [here](#).

Click on any picture below to see the presentation



A Continuum Approach to Creating and Sustaining a College-Going Culture



NYSSBA
105th ANNUAL
CONVENTION & EDUCATION EXPO
NEW YORK CITY
OCTOBER 26 - 28, 2014

Introductions

Taryn Johnson, Merrick Avenue Middle School

universities in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. In the spring, 8th grade students participate in a 3 day trip to Philadelphia where they visit local colleges. Dr. O'Hara leads these trips himself, and collaborates with campus admissions officers who give a presentation and a tour to the students. These trips, made possible by hours of fund raising and planning, provide an opportunity for students who may not otherwise be able to visit colleges to experience some of the East Coast's leading campuses.

Particularly for the 8th graders, this early introduction to the college admission process can be pivotal in instilling a desire to succeed in high school in order to attend the college of their choice. Dr. O'Hara has been successful in ensuring that college-going culture permeates Oyster Bay High School. These tours, along with many other initiatives, have encouraged students to challenge themselves in and out of the classroom, and to work diligently toward their college dreams.

The first group of OBHS students to do both trips (grade 8 and grade 10) is now in their sophomore year in college.

The first group to ever do the trip in grade 10, are now juniors in college. Dr. O'Hara and his team are excited to see the data as the beneficiaries of these trips begin to graduate from college. They look forward to seeing the completion rates of these college students and, as always, are keen to hear the success stories as these OBHS Alumni enter the working world.

At the end of the presentation, a Superintendent from an upstate New

Dennis O'Hara, Ed.D., Oyster Bay High School
Carolyn Probst, Westhampton Beach High School



Follow our PLN on Twitter at #CreateInspireSustain

Session Resources



A Continuum Approach for Creating and Sustaining a College-Going Culture

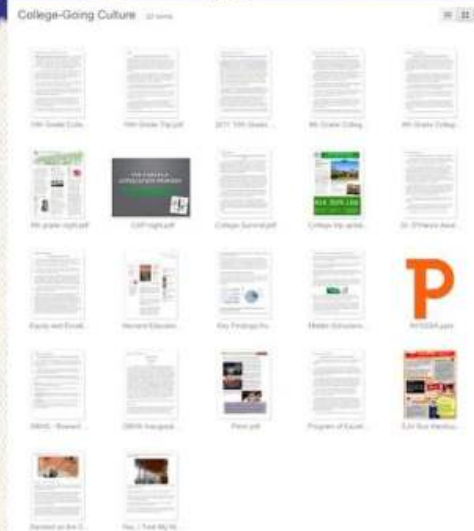
Presenters:

Taryn Johnson, Principal, Marick Avenue H.S., 516-592-1210
Dennis O'Hara, Ed.D., Principal, Oyster Bay H.S., 516-424-6225
Carolyn Probst, Asst. Principal, Westhampton Beach H.S., 631-288-3600

A Continuum Approach for Creating and Sustaining a College-Going Culture



Scan this QR Code to access all session handouts.



Demographics: Oyster Bay HS

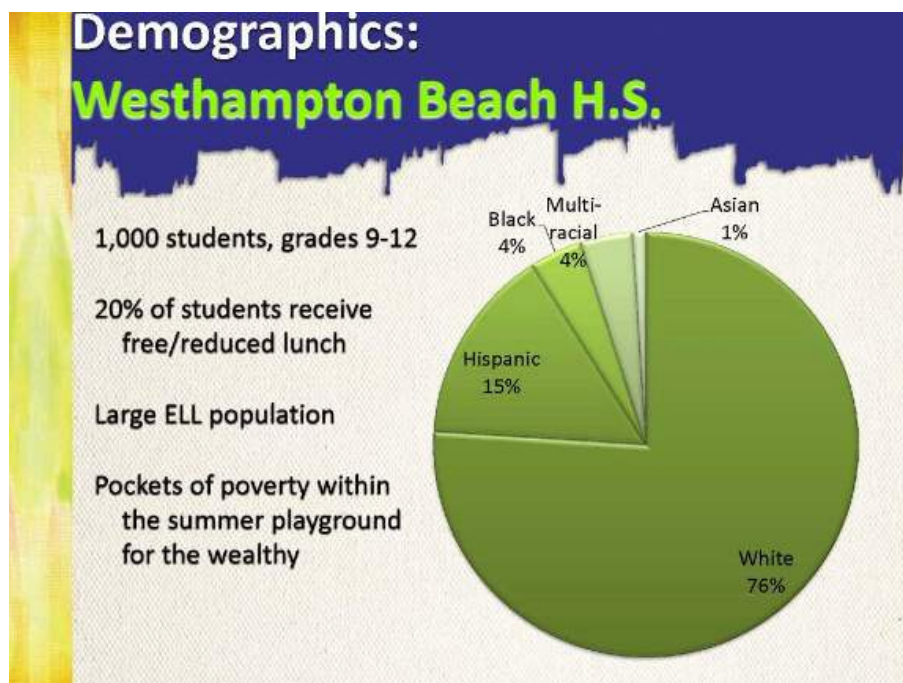
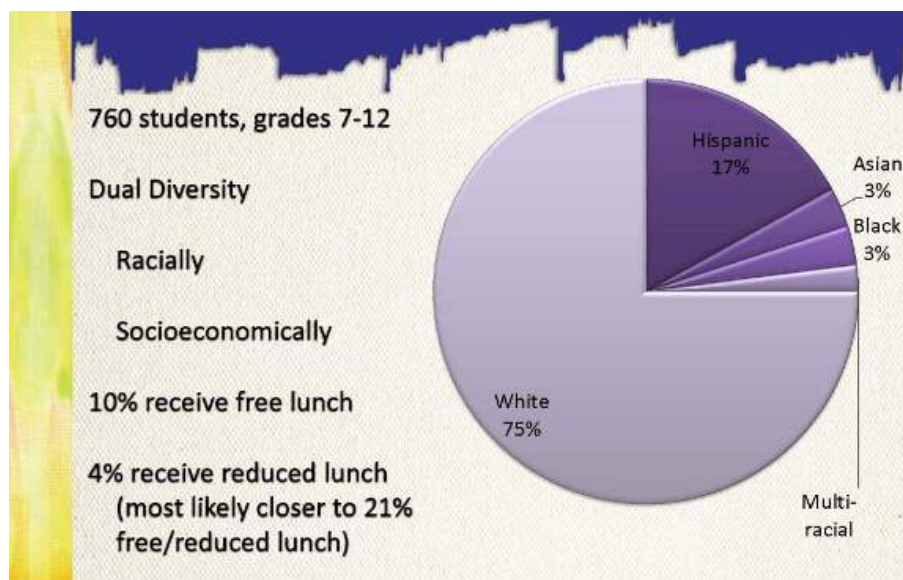
York school district said, "Usually we come away from a presentation with one or two items. This presentation had everything I need and can use."

The trio of presenters left the hotel and headed straight for the airport where they boarded an airplane for Las Vegas where they presented the program at the **College Board National Forum**. At the conclusion of the presentation in Las Vegas, a woman approached the presenters and asked if they would like to present at the **2015 College Board Middle States Regional Forum** in Baltimore. Dr. O'Hara realized that he would be in the Baltimore/DC area for the first two days of the OBHS tenth-grade trip and that it would coincide with this conference. The woman was excited about the possibility of bringing the students to the event. This is still in the initial idea stage and nothing has been set. More information will be forthcoming. Interestingly, this is the conference at which Dr. O'Hara was presented the **William U. Harris Award of Excellence** last year in Philadelphia.

Ms. Taryn Johnson is currently enrolled in a Doctorate program at the

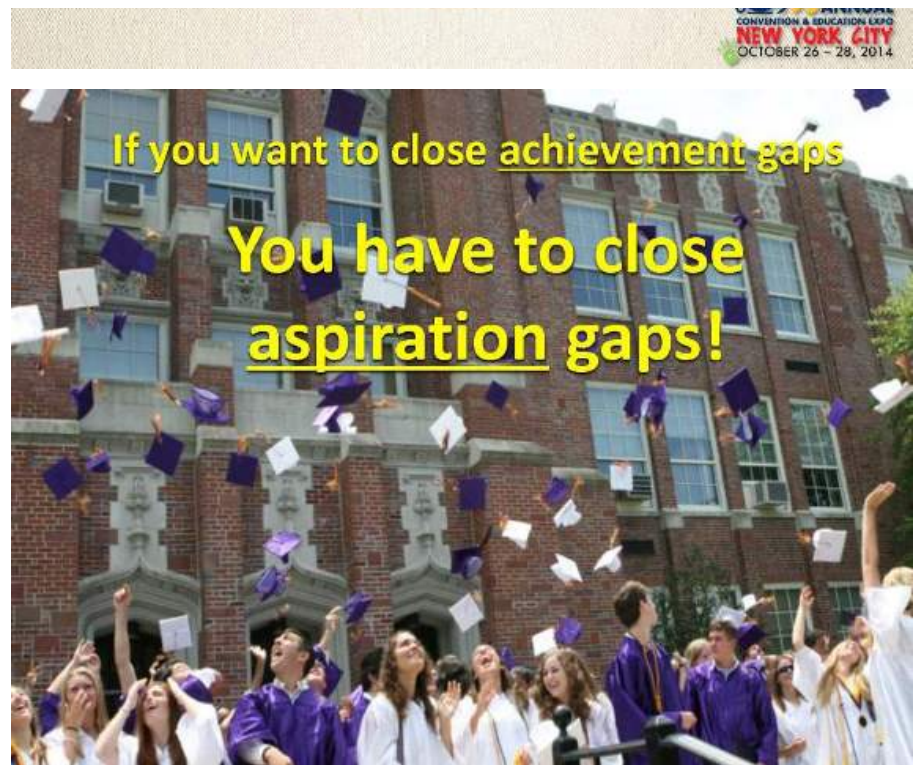
University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. She is doing her dissertation on college access and is interviewing OBHS students and students from other schools about their college awareness and application experiences. The early data is very interesting.

What follows is a list of the professional presentations Dr. O'Hara has done since becoming a principal: (18 presentations in total, 2 national and 1



regional and 1 state) in total, 8 presentation about the college-going culture.

- College Board - Las Vegas, NV: Using a Continuum Approach to Create and Sustain a College-going Culture (October 2014)
- New York State School Boards Association - New York, NY: Using a Continuum Approach to Create and Sustain a College-going Culture (October 2014)
- Hofstra University - Hempstead, NY: Confronting Educational Inequities on in Education: Nurturing Equity and Excellence in All Schools - Panelist (April 2014)
- College Board: Regional Forum - Philadelphia, PA: Crafting the Continuum: College Board to College Campus (January 2014)
- Teachers College: Columbia University - New York, New York: Summer Principals' Academy Panelist (August 2013) (August 2012)
- Oyster Bay-East Norwich CSD - Oyster Bay, New York: Tri-States Steering Committee: Creating a Department Vision Statement (January 2013)
- New York State English Council - Albany, New York: Closing the Achievement and Aspiration Gap through the College Awareness Program and College Essay Course to Ensure that All Students are College and Career Ready (October 2012)
- Guidance Direct NYS Webinar - Closing Aspiration Gaps (May 2012)
- Nassau County Principals' ...



Evolution of an Idea!

My experiences and memories of the college application process

- Vague memory of meetings with my guidance counselor
- Attended one evening college fair at my high school
- One computer survey
- Hofstra University and SUNY @ Albany
- Wrestling team and I liked the colors
- Wrestling team and a friend was applying there

My experience coaching high school wrestling

- I wanted my athletes to wrestle at the next level
- One weekend trip per season to see college wrestling and college campuses

My four sons

- "You should see the book store at the University of North Carolina!"
- My eldest son's college application process

Why do this? Why a continuum?

Step 1: Decide – the most important and probably the most overlooked...

Unless students want to go to college, telling them how to get in and how to pay for it is a waste of time and resources.

-Step-by-Step College Workshops for Students

Association Leadership Seminar Series - Hempstead, New York: Leading Through APPR (April 2012)

- Suffolk County Directors of Guidance - Oakdale, New York: Early College Awareness (March 2012)

- Nassau County High School Principals' Association Leadership Seminar Series - Hempstead, New York: Holding Administrators to High Standards (March 2011)

- New York State Association for College Admissions Counselors - Niagara, New York: Increasing College Awareness for All Students (June 2010)

- Nassau County High School Principals' Association Leadership Seminar Series - Hempstead, New York: Increasing College Awareness for All Students (March 2010)

- Long Island Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development - Melville, New York: Increasing College Awareness (October 2009)

- July 2009 - College Summit Institute - Las Vegas, Nevada: College Awareness for All: How One School is Working to Close the Achievement Gap (July 2009)

- Nassau County High School Principals' Association Leadership Seminar Series - Hempstead, New York: The Principal as Staff Developer (March 2009)

- Nassau County High School Principals' Association Leadership Seminar Series - Hempstead, New York: The Principal as Manager (February 2009)

- Nassau County High School Principals' Association Leadership

Recruiting only juniors and seniors misses a large number of students. -NACAC Annual Conference September 2008

A desire to provide our students with more and something better than I had. -Dennis O'Hara

Why do this? Why a continuum?

Up until this point, our education system has not systematically ensured that all young people who are college-ready actually make it to college.

- College Summit

National data indicates that low-income students who got A's on a standardized test went to college at the same rate as top-income students who got D's on the same standardized test. -College Summit

"I'd assumed we'd all go to college together, but we didn't, and the issue wasn't that they weren't college material. The issue was, my parents had gone to college, their parents didn't. I relied on my parents to get through this process. They relied on the system - the system didn't work."

-J.B. Schramm, CEO of College Summit

The chances of a child from a low-income family graduating college is 1 in 17, while it is better than 1 in 2 for children from wealthy families.

-Don Cheadle, College Summit video

Research Support

- <http://hepg.org/hep-home/books/the-resegregation-of-suburban-schools> 168
- <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2013/low-income-high-achieving-hoxby-avery>



Conditions that undermine a college-going culture

No clearly stated or widely publicized college-going mission (coupled with


Seminar Series - Hempstead, New York:
Developing Students as Leaders (April
2008)

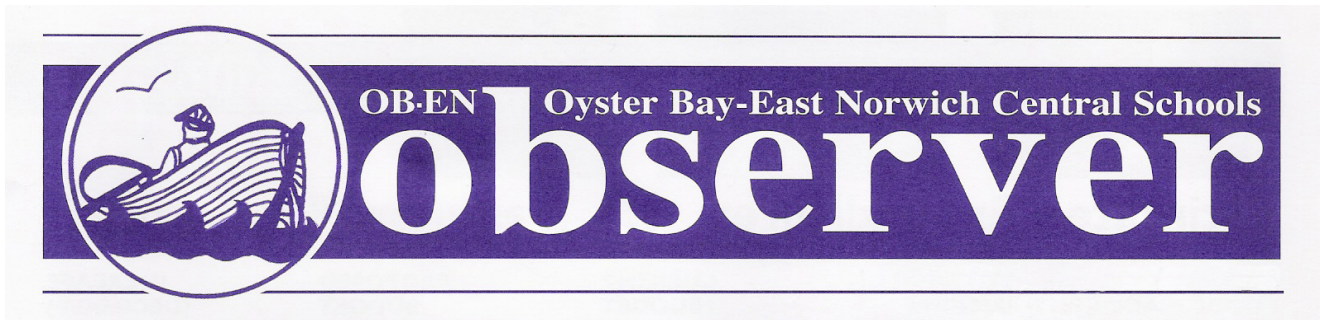
Limited number of individuals who articulate the college-going mission
Lack of relationships with colleges
2 year and 4 year institutions
Academic programs without a college emphasis
limited number of AP courses
few teachers who incorporate college activities
Weak college emphasis among counseling staff
Limited space and funds for college activities
Limited clerical support
Insufficient/unwelcoming space for counseling center
Insufficient space for meeting with large groups of parents

Source: Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis

Components of a Continuum

All Grades	
Oyster Bay High School	Westhampton Beach High School
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Universal Acceleration in MathematicsAcceptance (required reading)Best College FitCollege FairsFinancing a College Education (Heather McDonald)Bilingual Financial Aid NightAP Enrollment PoliciesHispanic College Night (completely in Spanish)Additional Counseling PositionCounselor Campus VisitsCollege OmnipresenceCollege WeekI Declare Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Universal Acceleration in Mathematics and ScienceCollege FairsOpen AP EnrollmentCounselor Campus VisitsCounseling Department PublicationsCollege Day

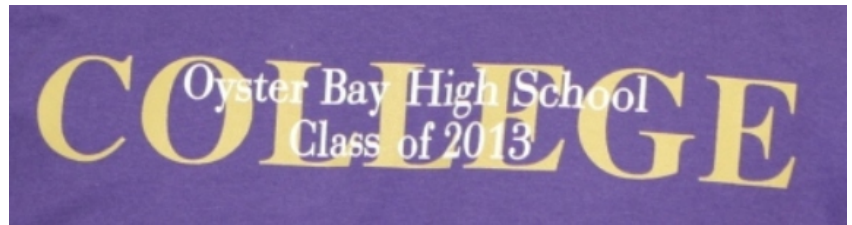




Oyster Bay High School 10th Grade College Visitations Reap Big Benefits

On Saturday, January 22, 2011, the Oyster Bay High School tenth grade class boarded buses at four-thirty in the morning to set out on a [five day four night tour of college campuses](#) from [Maryland to North Carolina](#), including attending a show at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. [Oyster Bay High School Principal Dr. Dennis O'Hara](#) developed the concept of taking students to Colleges and Universities early in their education, well before they are confronted with the daunting application process. The idea behind the trip was to take kids who had never seen a college and expose them to the opportunities. It was designed to build a vivid image of what college could be so that when students find themselves in Oyster Bay High School Principal Dr. O'Hara's office talking about their schoolwork, they can draw on the memories of the college visits.

When the student knows what the college that they want to strive for expects from them academically, they can apply themselves directly to a real image of their anticipated college life. Having a tangible image such as that can help motivate students to try harder to achieve an attainable goal.



The trips are completely self-sustained. All costs are paid through fundraisers and family contributions. The 2011 tenth grade trip is particularly notable because the very first OBHS college tour was taken with this class when they were in the eighth grade. So, when this tour is complete these students will have visited fourteen different schools.

The trips have reaped tremendous benefits. Dean Furda at the University of Pennsylvania always tells the students of Oyster Bay to mail the group picture taken in the UPenn quad with their application and those applications will get noticed. Marymount Manhattan College waived the application fee for all seniors visiting with the Ms. Crowley's OBHS art class. The National Hispanic College Fair at Molloy College provided free transportation for the 28 OBHS students who participated in the event.

A noticeable difference has been seen in the students' approach to school after being on a college visitation trip. Director of Guidance, Mr. Mike Tweed says that his staff has been getting requests from students to move out of study halls and into elective classes that they feel will improve their chances at getting into the college of their choice.

Many testimonials from parents have been coming into Dr. O'Hara's office. Two tenth grade students, Christine Drexler and Alexa Ritacco, waited patiently until the end of a long Board of Education meeting in early February of 2010 to praise the trip and the value it has had for them already. A video of their experience is posted on the [Guidance Department page](#) of the Oyster Bay School District website.

Here are a couple of testimonials from parents.

Dear Dr. O'Hara,

I can not begin to say how grateful I am to you for providing this trip for my son. This has



University of Pennsylvania



Molloy College

been a life changing experience for him. He completely fell in love with one of the colleges.

He learned so much about what is required from him as a student in order to go to college. He has not had an easy life with troubles in his family life. We live a much different life than we used to. Thank God for people like you in this world who can make someone like my son, with our circumstances, feel like he could do anything if he tries hard enough. I admire his fight to not turn angry or to drugs or trouble. With the great teachers like Mr. Davis, Mr. Brown, Mr. Soper, and Ms. Johnson, you have helped him take his anger and put it into positive activities.

He really truly is a ray of sunshine in my life and so deserves what you did for him. I, as a parent, can not even begin to express my gratitude for your help and guidance from the bottom of my heart. He is the kind of student who really got what you were trying to show them and took it very seriously. He's also the kind of student who will do you proud and be glad you did it. I admire him so much and couldn't be more proud to be his mother.

Another parent had this to say.

Dear Dr. O'Hara,

My son came home so "College Positive" from his trip. Things I have never heard from him like "I have to step it up with my studies" were being said. Everyone has a life changing experience. This may be it for my son. Thank you and your staff for your time devoted to my son and his class.

[Click on this picture to hear Dr. O'Hara talk about the Trip](#)



University of Virginia



Philadelphia



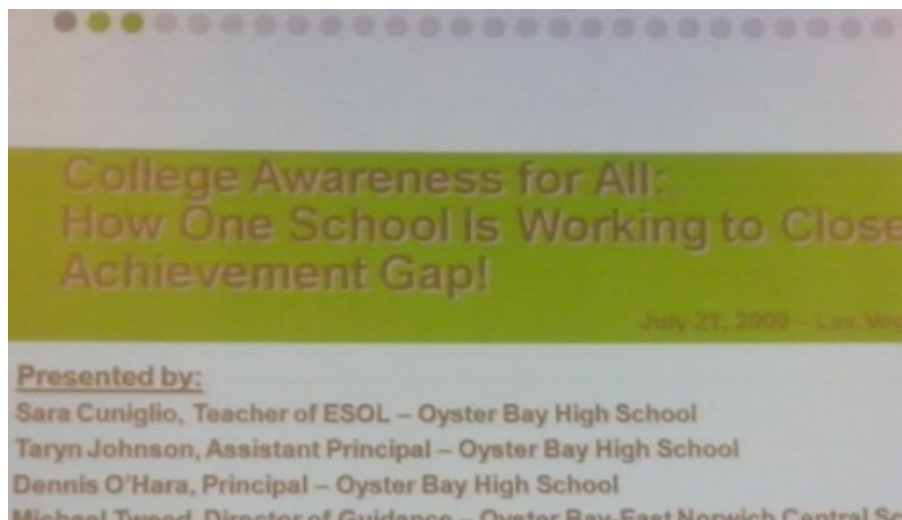
Oyster Bay East Norwich Staff Share Their Innovations at a National Summit

This past summer, Oyster Bay High School Principal Dr. Dennis O'Hara, Assistant Principal Taryn Johnson, Director of Guidance Mike Tweed, and Oyster Bay High School Teacher Sara Cuniglio were invited to share a 90 minute presentation at the [College Summit](#) Summer Institute in Las Vegas, Nevada. People from all over the country attended. They were joined there by Carolyn Johnsen, who worked in the guidance department at Oyster Bay High School last year as an intern and substitute. Ms. Johnsen took pictures of the presentation.

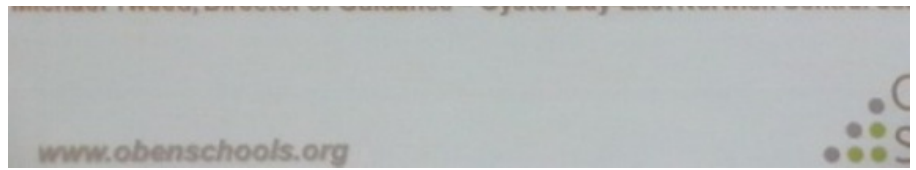
College Summit is a national nonprofit organization that partners with schools and districts to strengthen college-going culture and increase college enrollment rates, so that all students graduate career and college-ready. College Summit is an organization that was founded with the ideal that every student who is college ready goes to college. There are a lot of students who come from poverty homes or minority



Dr. Dennis O'Hara, Sara Cuniglio, Mike Tweed, and Taryn Johnson



come from poverty homes or minority situations where they may be the first generation in the family to attend college. These students don't have the counseling or the vision. The subject is often not talked about at home.



The person who founded the College Summit went to high school with kids who were just as bright as he was. When he went to college, he assumed his friends were going to college as well, but found that many were not going to college. This was the inspiration that later led him to establish the College Summit.

A classmate of Dr. O'Hara at the University of Pennsylvania works at College Summit. She sent an e-mail out to Penn alum requesting proposals. Dr.

O'Hara submitted a proposal outlining the program that was initiated last spring here in Oyster Bay where [the eighth grade was taken on a college weekend to Philadelphia](#). College Summit accepted the proposal and provided travel reimbursement, food and lodging.

The whole idea of that trip was to take kids who had never seen a college and expose them to the opportunities. It was designed to build a vivid image of what college could be so that when they find themselves in Dr. O'Hara's office talking about their schoolwork when they are not applying themselves as best they can, Dr. O'Hara can draw on the memories of the college visits and ask if they want to go to a campus like the ones they saw. When the student knows what the college that they want to strive for expects from them academically, they can apply themselves directly to a real



image of their college life. Having a tangible goal such as that can help motivate students to try harder to achieve an attainable goal.

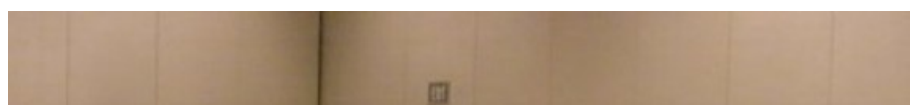
Dr. O'Hara explains the inspiration for this program in this way. "The idea to take that trip came out of a

conversation I had with my son. I used to take my sons to all sorts of college campuses. Two summers ago my two older sons were going into 7th and 8th grades. We took them to a wrestling camp in Virginia. On the way down, we stopped at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Then we visited William and Mary. The wrestling camp was located on the campus of Virginia Wesleyan College. After the camp, we drove to North Carolina and visited Duke and Chapel Hill.

About two weeks later I took my son to lacrosse camp at a small local college. I went into the small campus bookstore to get something and my son said, 'Dad, is this it?' My son turned to his friend and said, 'You should see the bookstore at North Carolina.' He told his friend how massive it was and how you could get anything you wanted. It clicked in me that that image is in his head now and I thought every 8th grader should have that experience and foster their own images. That's where the idea of the 8th grade trip began."

In Las Vegas, the OBEN team

presented the reasons behind the eighth grade trip, the goals, the logistics, and



how this program can grow. Dr. O'Hara plans on continuing with the 8th grade trip and introducing a 10th grade trip. Also, plans are being considered to develop something for students between their Junior and Senior years.

Dr. O'Hara says, "We learned a lot at the conference about the college admissions game, how to help our ESL students, how to help our students get college credits while still in high school. We made some great connections. Overall it was a fantastic conference." Taryn Johnson said it was the best conference she had ever attended.

Sara Cuniglio sent Dr. O'Hara a text message while at the conference that read, "I'm in the best session. I can't wait to teach my kids and colleagues all about it."

The presenters returned to Oyster Bay energized and inspired. Plans are already in the works for great innovations to be put in place to stimulate students to want to do well and go to college.

On October 6, [Gwyeth Smith](#) and [Dave Marcus](#) are coming for a Parent-Student discussion night sponsored by the PTA. Copies of their book, [Acceptance](#), will be available. They will speak about the book and sign individual copies.

On October 16, Dr. O'Hara, Taryn Johnson, Mike Tweed, and Sara Cuniglio will deliver the full presentation to the



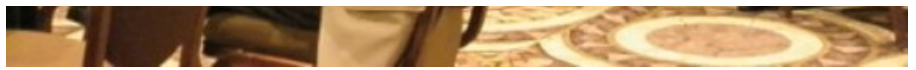
Long Island Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (LIASCD) at the Melville Marriot. This group is composed of teachers and administrators (mostly administrators) from all over Long Island. For info about the national group (ASCD), go to www.ascd.org. Valerie Vacchio, Supervisor of the English Language Arts Department, and Christine Bartell, Roosevelt Literacy Coach will also be presenting at this event. Their presentation will be on Elementary Literacy Portfolios. Assistant Superintendent Laura Seinfeld, who is the president of LIASCD, will be doing a presentation at the National ASCD conference next spring.

On January 13, Peter Van Buskirk, who was the Dean of Admissions at Franklin and Marshal for many years and a presenter at the College Summit conference who spoke about the tricks of college admissions and the games colleges play in his presentation called "[The Admissions Game.](#)" came to speak to an audience of more than 200 students and parents.

The date is not yet set, but there will be another eighth grade trip to Philadelphia this school year.

In January, during mid-term time [10th graders will be taken on a 5 day 4 night trip](#) to eleven colleges.

Also Sara Cuniglio will be taking some of our ESL kids on day trips to Nassau Community College and Hofstra on one day and Dowling and St Josephs on another. They will also join us at the



on another. They will also join us at the appropriate grade on the bigger trips. We are trying to give our kids a well rounded view of what is out there locally and far from home.

There will be no cost to the district at all. All trips are paid for through fundraising efforts.

The eighth graders from last year's trip are now beginning a new school year as ninth graders. Here is what they have found since that trip.

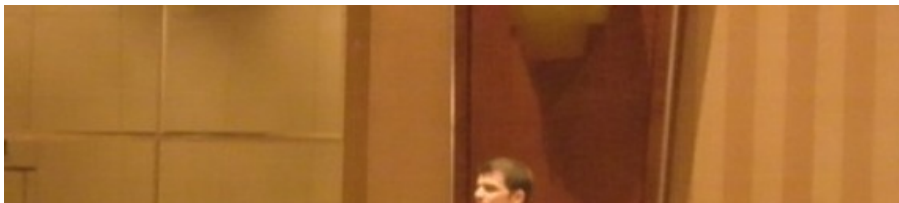
"It made me want to do better in school so I could go to a good college where I could play sports. It made me want to do well now so that I don't regret it when I get older." said OBHS student Jordon Contreras.

OBHS ninth grader, Matthew Drexler noted, "It helped me in thinking about taking better classes and working harder in my classes"

"It made me want to try harder so I can get into a good school." added Ryan Gouse.

Dr. O'Hara summed up with alacrity, "We can really change their lives by showing them their potential. Kids tend to meet expectations. If we expect them to go to college, then most of them will go."

For [a comprehensive look at the presentation](#) given by the OBEN staff



members at the College Summit

[Click Here.](#)

The college hunt is on!!!

Visit our

[Guidance Department webpage](#)

for [College Planning Resources](#),

[College Open Houses](#),

and [Scholarship Opportunities](#).

