

Students as Instruments of Policy: Leaders Fostering School Change through Youth Participatory Action Research

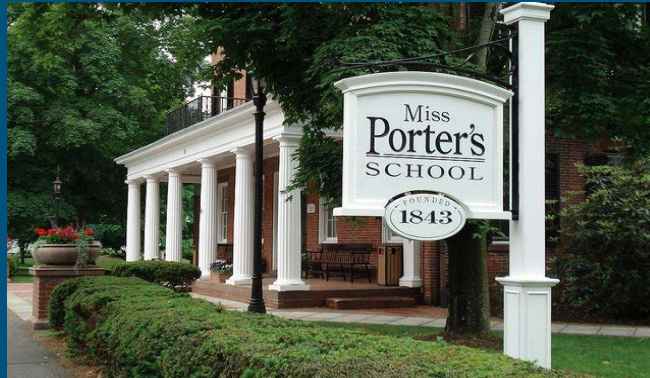


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Miss Porter's School

Miss Porter's School educates young women to become informed, bold, resourceful, ethical global citizens. We expect our graduates to shape a changing world.



SPARC: Research Grounded in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

*“In collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania, teachers and students at member schools conduct **participatory action research** so that student voices inform institutional policies...”*

- SPARC Mission Statement



<https://sparc-csbgl.org/>

School Participatory Action Research Collaborative (SPARC)

SPARC is a research consortium among faculty and students at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and school leaders, faculty and students at a cohort of leading independent schools.

The purpose of the collaboration is to systematically mobilize student insights and voices to improve school culture, policy and practice.

Taking Stock of School Climate: Comprehensive Assessment of Student Life (CASL)

- Completed by SPARC member schools every other year
- All students in grades 9-12 complete the 70-item survey
- Examines 6 factors of school life:
 - Citizenship & Student Voice
 - Social Environment
 - Faculty Support of Students (Academic & Social)
 - Peer Culture & Student Self-Confidence
 - Students' Emotional Well-Being
 - Students' Academic Self-Perception

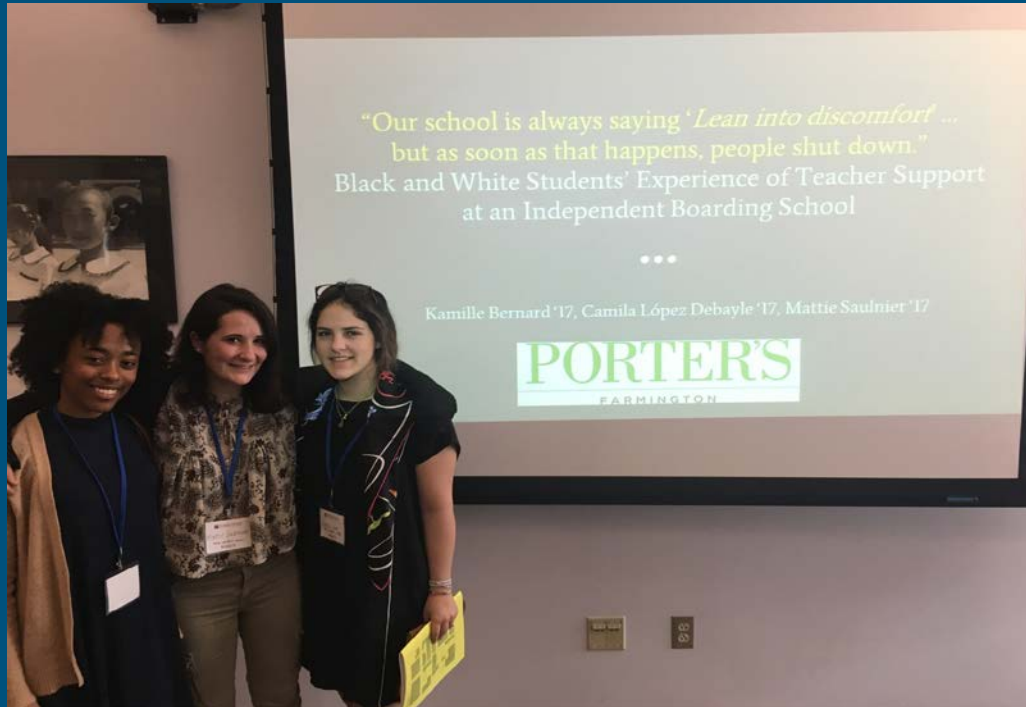


Turn and Talk

What are conversations in your school community that you're currently having or need to have connected to the "hidden curriculum" of your school?

In a few minutes we will share with the group.

Research Methods at Porter's



History of Research Projects

2010-2011: Students' and Ancients' perceptions of their preparation for co-ed college and life experiences

2011-2012: Students' academic self-perception

2012-2014: Students' perceptions of their own and their peers' SES and the impact on relationships

2014-2015: Students' definitions of success and achievement

2015-2017: Black and white students' perceptions of teacher support, feedback, and the classroom environment

2017-2019: Asian and Asian-American students' sense of belonging at school

2010-2011: Preparation for a Co-Ed World



2010-2011: Preparation for a Co-Ed World

“The ‘strange creatures’ in my college classes were not the boys, but the girls who didn’t talk. Why was I the only girl raising her hand?”

Social = Boys → Negative Impact

Social = Everyone → Positive Impact

More contact with young Ancients!

2010-2011: Preparation for a Co-Ed World

Team Ancient:

- Alumnae & Development
- College Counseling

Team Boy:

- Board of Trustees of Avon Old Farms
- Dean of Students Office

2012-2014: Socioeconomic Status

Findings:

- Middle class desire
- Ways school perpetuates the socio-economic divide

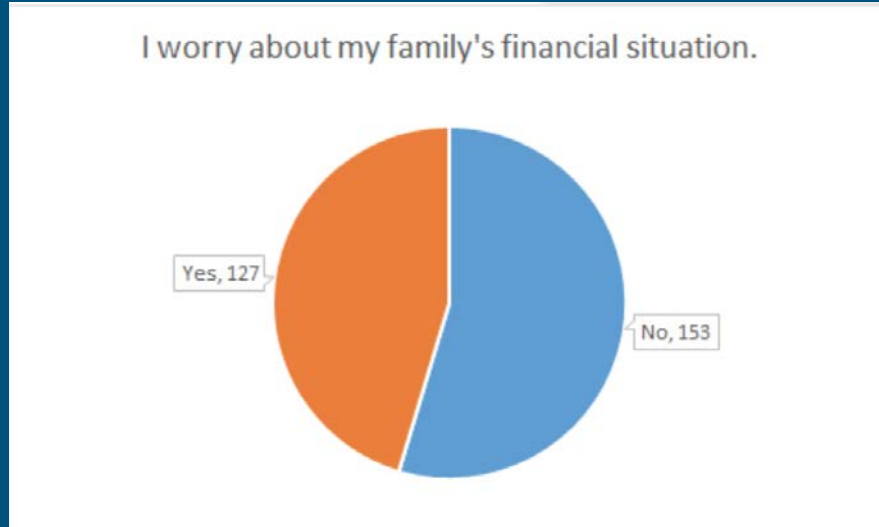
2012-2014: Socioeconomic Status

- Presented to Board of Trustees
- Shared results with Administrative Teams
- Met with CFO and Business Office staff
- Changed structure of ring prices



2012-2014: Socioeconomic Status

Students



Parents

“My daughter is not concerned with economic status.”

“Our daughter never discusses this with us. This is not something we believe she thinks about.”

2015-2016: Structures at School

Quick survey sent out to the student body during Advisory:

- “What structures positively influence your feelings of success at school?”
- “What structures negatively influence your feelings of success at school?”

2015-2016: Structures at School

Findings and Action

- Awards Assembly
- Academic Schedule
- Required Meetings and Assemblies
- **Official Notes**

2015-2016: Structures at School

Next Research Question

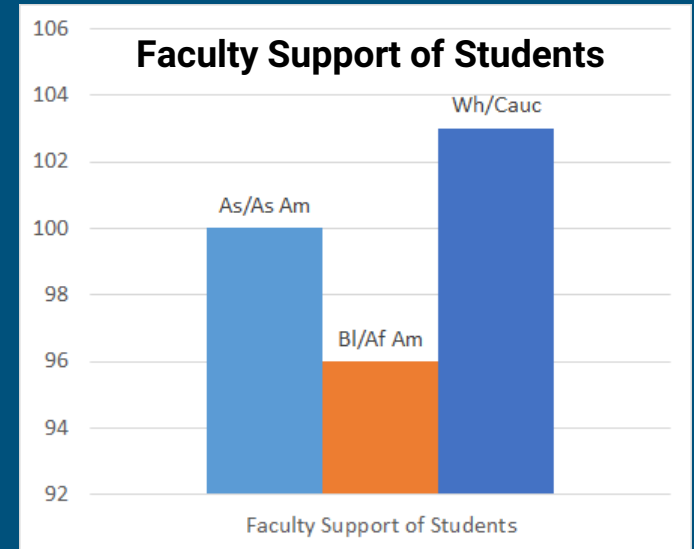
- What are students' experiences with Official Notes?

Action

- New system of Student-Teacher Dialogues and return to end-of-semester comments

2016-2017: Raced Structures?

- Are there differences in the content of Black and African-American students' versus White students' Official Notes?
- Artifact Analysis of 3.5 years of Official Notes for 8 students - no race-based differences in feedback



2016-2017: Raced Structures?

Major finding: the centrality of teachers

- Allowing certain students to opt out
- Silence for fear of “getting it wrong” or “being policed”
- “Color-blind” orientation isn’t helpful
- Not the job of the Black students to teach about race

2016-2017: Raced Structures?

Research-Based Plan

- Present to Committee on Equity and Inclusion
- Present to adult community followed by break-out groups
- Establish classroom norms across the school
- Share results with outside facilitators

Turn and Talk

What opportunities are there to bring in student voice and leadership with the goal of change in school culture in a meaningful way in your school?

In a few minutes we will share with the group.

Community Life Team

- **Committee Membership:** Shift over 5 years from large administrative committee to one student representative, to five students and five adults.
- **Senior and New Girl Interviews:** Shift from departments “reading for their names” to deliberate coding for themes
- **Action:** Shift from adult confirmation bias and individual feedback to student-initiated prioritizing, planning, and action

NEASC Accreditation

- Two seniors **appointed to lead** the Standard 5 process.
- Student-designed faculty “Speed-Date” data collection device - **important source of data** for Standard 9 - Faculty and Standard 4 - Program.
- Students part of St. Paul’s School **Visiting Committee - Spring 2018** and subsequent **follow-up with CIS.**

Impact FOR Students

- Agency, Belonging, Competence (Mitra, 2003)
- Emotional support with confronting biases and with hearing and holding sensitive information

Feedback Please!



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