



**Tri-State
Consortium**

**Princeton Public Schools
TRI-STATE VISIT 2018**

K-12 Social Studies, May 16-18, 2018

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Tri-State Consortium

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K-12 Social Studies, May 16-18, 2018

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Executive Summary

“Develop creativity, collaboration, and independent thinking among students through inquiry, research, and analysis, thereby equipping empowered and empathetic local, national, and global citizens.” (Princeton Public Schools Social Studies Program Philosophy)

The Princeton Public School District invited a team of educators representing the member districts of the Tri-State Consortium to benchmark the progress in its decision-making process to clarify, enhance, and deepen the teaching and learning of Social Studies, K-12, May 16-18, 2018. The Princeton Public School district is a longstanding and valued member of the Tri State Consortium (2000), whose mission statement describes, *“...a dynamic learning organization devoted to assisting its member districts in using student performance data to develop a rigorous framework for systemic planning, assessment, and continuous improvement. The Consortium assists its member districts in using quantitative and qualitative data to enhance student performance and to build a rigorous framework for planning, assessment, and systemic change.”* As the Consortium enters its third decade, our core beliefs remain focused on authentic and interdisciplinary teaching and learning and purposeful assessment practices that are directly linked to optimal student performance. Princeton’s efforts to *“...prepare all of our students to lead lives of joy and purpose as knowledgeable, creative and compassionate citizens of a global society,”* align with this vision.

Working together as critical friends, the Tri-State team, composed of teachers, school and district-level administrators, spent three days examining documents prepared as evidence of the social studies program, interviewing Board of Education Members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students, and observing student learning and engagement in classroom instruction related to social studies, K-12. The goal of the Tri-State visit team is to affirm and confirm the district’s efforts toward continuous improvement of student learning, to observe the strength of the professional learning community, to help the district reflect on the current

status, and to think about the next steps in the district’s journey. Through the examination of student work samples, curriculum documents, district and building initiatives, representative district publications, and data, both quantitative and qualitative, the visit team studied the progress of the social studies program across all schools. One of the highlights of our visit was the generosity of the administrators and teachers in each school who invited us into their classrooms to observe students engaged and interacting in their daily instruction, and to provide an authentic view of the Social Studies Program.

When we arrived at the district offices, our team was greeted by members of the administrative team who set the warm, welcoming tone that we experienced over the course of three days. Superintendent Steve Cochrane spoke about the current climate of “transformation” in Princeton; he described a heightened awareness in the district that centers on “joy and purpose” and a sense of “giving back to the world” through service learning, for example, and a more flexible design of the district’s learning environment. Supervisor of Social Studies/Global Education PK-8, Timothy Charleston; and Supervisor of Humanities 9-12, Mark Shelley, provided background information to contextualize the purpose of the District’s work and to provide an overview of the Social Studies Program. The preparation of a binder of relevant information was most impressive; in particular, the Program Review Committee’s self-study that identified specific areas of focus on updating resources, refining professional learning, and looking closely at redundancies K-12. In addition, the Committee collaborated to connect its recommendations for a shift in curriculum, by developing project-based learning instructional strategies that include art and music, active, student-centered learning, and attention to research-based modes of differentiated assignments for Special Education students. Evident in this overview was the significant progress that Princeton has made in reviewing, revising, and enhancing the Social Studies curriculum to ensure a comprehensive, coherent, integrated, and developmentally appropriate program that is engaging for students and aligned with New Jersey State and internal district standards. In tandem with this work, the District is also in the process of rethinking the learning environment and pedagogical philosophy to ensure that it reflects the Princeton Public Schools Mission, which was shared

with our team during the opening presentation.

Some common themes that emerged from the presentation were the District's commitment to equitable access to the curriculum for all students, dedication to teaching racial literacy by embedding it and augmenting the curriculum K-12, and efforts to align and enhance curriculum on and across grade levels. The district is committed to ensuring that teaching and learning are engaging for students and include opportunities for application to real-world problems.

In preparation for our visit, the district drafted a three-part Essential Question designed to guide the team's thinking and focus as well as to provide the framework for the National School Reform Faculty Descriptive Consultancy protocol that occurs on the third day of the visit. The format of the Consultancy unfolds in a specific and purposeful conversation between District representatives and selected members of the Tri-State team that involves further clarification of practices, and opportunities for the District to describe the steps ahead that support the future planning of its goals for Social Studies teaching and learning in Princeton.

Response to Essential Question

Essential Question:

To what extent is our current revised approach to teaching Social Studies evident in, or reflected in:

1. an accessible, consistent progression of content and skills for all students?
2. a curriculum that is student-centered, rigorous, and authentic?
3. and our goal to prepare our students to be active, empathetic, global citizens?

Essential Question #1:

To what extent is our current revised approach to teaching Social Studies evident in, or reflected in an accessible, consistent progression of content and skills for all students?

Over the past few years, the District has made a concerted effort to map a curriculum with an emphasis on vertical and horizontal alignment designed to enhance lessons and activities that are student-centered, purposeful and more engaging. This process has also created a curriculum that is more consistently aligned in terms of the “what” and “when” topics are taught so that teachers can focus more on the best practices and the metacognitive approach of “how” they are teaching content and skills.

The Program Review Committee members analyzed the PreK-12 Scope and Sequence that delineated content and materials for each grade level. Furthermore, within the K-12 Social Studies Curriculum, Princeton has infused several major concepts such as cause and effect, relating current or recent history to the past, and increasing the exploration of interdisciplinary opportunities for learning. A major goal of the committee is to develop racially literate citizens and to design the curriculum to challenge and provoke critical thinking for students.

During interviews with students, Board of Education members, the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, principals and teachers, it was evident that the District has a strong commitment to equity and access all for students to courses, field trips, and experiences that help prepare students to be global citizens. Several stakeholders mentioned a desire to expand study abroad experiences for more students as part of the District’s mission to develop compassionate citizens of a global society

In our interviews with parents at all levels it became apparent that they perceived they didn’t know much about the district’s social studies program. This suggests that more emphasis needs to be placed on communication with parents about the program’s content and desired outcomes.

We wish to note the difference between data, which largely are numerical and emanate from tests, and evidence, which takes many forms and is readily available in classrooms each and

every day. It would be helpful, we think, to have the teachers engage in discussions about the evidence that relates to these three essential questions, how to identify that evidence, and how to capture it in ways that help them understand the efficacy of their work. Doing so will help the district answer the question: “How will you know the impact of your efforts?”

We also think that generating data around important concerns would be helpful. For example, we wonder about the composition of Advanced Placement courses - how many are Cranbury students, how many are students of color, and how many are special education students?

We also recommend that the faculty be engaged in a discussion about the difference between content and processes focusing on history and content and processes focusing on the social studies ; although they are related , they are not interchangeable.

Transition points are always challenging for students and for the faculty teaching in those grades. As students move from the elementary schools to the middle school, and then from the middle school to the high school, the shift in content is viewed by some students are stark, and the change in expectation and pedagogy is noticeable to many students. This is an area worthy of exploration by the district.

Finally, in answering this question we would be remiss if we didn’t mention the appreciation the faculty expressed about the efforts of Tim Charleston and Mark Shelley - their solid work is recognized throughout the district.

Essential Question #2:

To what extent is our current revised approach to teaching Social Studies evident in, or reflected in, a curriculum that is student-centered, rigorous, and authentic?

The district has made a significant investment in resources to support and enhance units of

study, and to ensure that history is being taught from multiple perspectives. A new Social Studies textbook at the elementary level , *Social Studies ALIVE*, and non-fiction classroom libraries extend learning opportunities beyond the textbook are in place. Although *Social Studies ALIVE* can be scripted, it is also 100% customizable and adaptable to a variety of students and needs. Its flexibility to intertwine with existing curricular materials is particularly significant.

Students across the district have many opportunities to participate on field trips that are aligned to the curriculum units; students experience events and ideas through multiple lenses. For example, trips such as visits to Gettysburg, the local farm, walking trips around Princeton, and access to the Holocaust Museum, help students develop a deeper and more relevant understanding of the content they are learning. Picture books such as Cheryl Minnema’s *Hungry Johnny*, a book about a present day Native American boy, or *Separate is Never Equal*, by Sylvia Mendez, a book about a family’s fight to end segregation in education, are examples of how information is being presented from a variety of perspectives to foster critical thinking and empathy. Hands-on classroom activities and text sets representing multiple viewpoints of the same historical time period or event, combine to provide student-centered, authentic learning experiences and access to a variety of learning styles and abilities. During our visit, we saw many examples of authentic learning opportunities for students.

As the district continues to assess and expand these opportunities for students, further areas of growth and improvement will be identified to include both quantitative and qualitative data. For example, under the umbrella of “What does the Social Studies Program look like?” it might make sense to study which students are in advanced and regular courses, which students are in clubs that are connected to this content area (i.e. school newspapers, social justice, service learning clubs), and which students experience field trips at the various grade and course levels as they move through the system.

The district’s commitment to providing students with rich and rigorous content that ties history to today and enables students to apply their learning to real-world problems was evident in

reviewing documents and on classroom visits. These opportunities can be a powerful indicator to measure student voice, autonomy, independence, and to what extent they are provided equitably to all students across K-12. Student longitudinal surveys would also help determine the extent to which students are applying their learning and taking it with them into their adult life.

Finally, we suggest that the district engage the faculty in a discussion about the professional development opportunities that would benefit them most. In our time in the district, for example, it was clear that the teachers would be helped by knowing more about performance-based assessment and inquiry-based teaching strategies. Getting their collective voice engaged in discussions about PD will be an important step in maintaining momentum. It was clear to us that the current tasks that are assigned could be easily transitioned to performance-based assessments. The inclusion of interdisciplinary projects that require critical thinking, deep research, and assessment using a common rubric across a grade level would elevate the tasks to performance-based inquiry. The projects might be celebrated between classrooms, or in the displays of student work.

Essential Question #3:

To what extent is our current revised approach to teaching Social Studies evident in, or reflected in, our goal to prepare our students to be active, empathetic, global citizens?

During their opening presentation, the Princeton administrators emphasized the district's focus on embedding racial literacy into the curriculum in all grades. They shared a TED Talk by two recent Princeton High School graduates, *What it Takes to be Racially Literate*, that included research and statistics on gaps in racial literacy, and explained how they incorporated the students' ideas and suggestions into their curriculum. All stakeholders in the Princeton school community cited and embraced the district's commitment to addressing racial literacy. This is an area where the District expressed a desire to continue to strengthen this commitment, perhaps by building teacher capacity to provide leadership of - and take ownership in - the work. It might be worthwhile at this time to provide one consistent District level narration of

what the Social Studies Committee and District leadership is hoping to accomplish with this focus on racial literacy and global citizenship (and the shift in pedagogy) and why it is important. Along with this narration may be the need to provide a common understanding of what global citizenship means in Princeton, and to consider how the District will measure these outcomes.

Narration also will address a concern some (perhaps many) teachers have about the difference between consistency (which they understand and support) and standardization (which they resist). And, it will help the faculty to understand, and weigh in on, the district's desire to shift from a largely academic approach to a more application driven approach. There are many examples of courses, programs, field trips, and activities that focus on addressing racial literacy and global citizenship. Princeton has an exemplary World Language program and there are numerous opportunities for students to travel overseas already in place. It might be interesting to leverage these experiences in service of building global citizenship.

Books and materials at all levels, and particularly at the middle and high school, have been thoughtfully selected to include the diverse perspectives of Hispanic, Latino, Asian, and African American authors. Providing additional time for collaboration between Library Media Specialists and classroom teachers to share literature and nonfiction texts from African American authors, and ways to include these texts in the curriculum, could be very impactful.

The District has a community service requirement of fifty hours per student for high school sophomores, along with clubs at the middle and high schools that provide outreach to the community. There are community service projects at the elementary schools, and service learning integrated into the curriculum. The District is considering ways to expand service learning opportunities by embedding these opportunities into the curriculum earlier, which aligns with their vision of authentic learning experiences and building empathy. The district will have to think about what social justice looks like from a curriculum standpoint, and how it might measure their desired outcome of developing empathetic citizens. It might be interesting

to gather information from Princeton’s graduates and see what they are doing in the world.

The visit team benefited enormously from our discussions with Princeton’s thoughtful students, and we urge the district to consider doing the same. Student voice will enrich the district’s internal conversations about future directions. Organizing focus group discussions with students at all levels is one way to go about engaging them in the process.

Our sense is that students of color are underrepresented in higher level social studies courses, such as Advanced Placement classes. We think the district has the opportunity to generate data that will enable it to know if this is the case. If it is, we suggest that it could be helpful to reach out, proactively, to underrepresented students to encourage them to enroll in higher level courses, and to support them when they decide to enroll. In a related matter pertaining to equity and access, we were told that elementary special education students miss out on Focus Period, causing us to wonder if there might be a different way of scheduling that would enable special education students to benefit from this period.

Finally, our special thanks to Tim and Mark for their gracious revisions of the schedule and the school buses that delivered us to our building interviews on time ! Tim and Mark were attentive to our questions and available throughout the three days. Our accommodations and creature comforts were excellent, all thanks to Giovanna Byzewski! The high level of professionalism of Princeton’s administrators and classroom teachers was discussed in each team debrief over the course of the visit, and the Tri-State team applauds them!

Commendations and Recommendations

Indicator #1 Performance Based Assessment

Commendations:

- There is evidence of some student choice in performance based projects K-12 that focus

on topics related to social studies, for example:

- Kindergarten Family activity connecting learning at home and school
 - 7th Grade “Create a culture assignment”
 - 8th Grade Monument project
 - 8th Grade Civics Creating Public Policy to address student selected issue
 - 12th Grade Accelerated Sociology “Project on Development”
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- Teachers value having students demonstrate their learning in multiple ways, and there is a noticeable range of student choice in modes of expression: oral presentation, student writing, role playing, debate, murals, interviews, 3D model displays.
 - There is interest among secondary teachers to create interdisciplinary projects (Social Justice Murals, Visual-Metaphor assignment, 7th grade end-of year research project) and an expectation for Social Studies teachers to plan closely with Media Specialists at the secondary level.

Recommendations:

- Although there are well-developed projects and performance tasks in place across all levels, the team suggests that the “assessment” part of these tasks be considered to measure desired student outcomes: consider transitioning from performance tasks to performance assessments.
- Consider reviewing the current integration of rubrics that reflect the expectations of an authentic performance-based assessment. This review could include common criteria in rubrics aligned with selected outcomes.
- Consider developing a collaborative process to review and refine the new performance based assessments through a variety of lenses, such as the role of authentic audiences

in the development or revision of performance based assessments

Indicator #2: Student Metacognition

Commendations:

- Students are able to discuss what they have learned and describe the valuable learning experiences they have had at different levels.
- Students are encouraged to use a variety of methods to reflect on the content they are learning in class, i.e., drawing, questions, writing prompts, discussion.
- There is a strong emphasis on providing students with tools, scaffolds, and other supports to advance their learning, which indicates that teachers value student independence and agency in their learning.

Recommendations:

- Consider developing a district-wide definition of metacognition and using that definition to create opportunities for students to reflect on their work (with feedback) and consider how they learn, what strategies and tools are most helpful, and goals they want to work on to advance their learning.
- Consider creating exemplars of how to generate metacognition at each level. Consider looking at opportunities for systematic metacognition in some courses, particularly in the high school, and plan for embedded experiences across levels.

- Consider norming practices around student feedback and exploring best practices around helping students to apply that feedback. Understanding and applying feedback is a step towards metacognition.

Indicator #3: Student Performance Data

Commendations:

- Princeton students score well above state average on PARCC exams in ELA.
- AP scores in Social Studies are above national averages across the board. In AP US History, World, and Government an impressive majority of students scored 3 or better.
- Student surveys were administered to provide feedback that was utilized by social studies staff to inform in terms of implementation of programs.

Recommendations:

- Consider creating a more collaborative approach to data analysis in which data are not only collected, but disaggregated, analyzed, and utilized ways that will inform instructional practices and the student experience. The District might allocate professional development time and resources to train teachers district-wide in this work.
- In alignment with the district goal to provide a rigorous curriculum to all students, consider revisiting the 85% requirement for students to be admitted to AP-Level courses.

- Consider developing a shared vision and protocol for looking at student performance data collaboratively to make informed decisions about student performance and improvements in curriculum and instruction.

Indicator #4: Curriculum and Instruction

Commendations:

- There is a strong commitment to the teaching of social studies at the elementary level. Time is consistently allotted for instruction. Summative assignments and projects are honored by being displayed throughout the hallways at each building.
- There are opportunities available at each grade level for students to engage in outside (field trips) or community based experiential learning, and these experiences are consistent across each grade level.
- There is a wide range of rich and topical elective course offerings at the high school. Many of these, like Racial History, align with the goal of preparing students to be active global citizens.
- There is a commitment to focusing on the development of citizenship skills in the US history courses. There is evidence that students understand the link between American history and their responsibilities as citizens of a democracy.
- There is a spirit of innovation and collaboration around the development of electives at the high school.

Recommendations:

- Consider the question, “Are we delivering a social studies or a history curriculum?” In doing so, explore which lens best serves the goal of providing a student-centered, authentic learning sequence that prepares children to actively and empathetically take their place in the world.
- Consider developing shared definitions of “global citizenship,” “authenticity,” and “rigor.” This will engage staff in considering and in creating a common language around important critical competencies..
- Consider strategies for comprehensively integrating racial literacy throughout the pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade learning arc.
- Consider the potential role of inquiry in creating authentic learning experiences for students.

Indicator #5: Professional Learning

Commendations:

- Professional learning opportunities allow for teacher choice and reflect district initiatives. Activities such as the “unconference” exemplify this balance. It is clear that the district supports professional learning by sponsoring faculty attendance at external conferences as well as inviting speakers and resources from the extended community, including partnering with the University.
- The high school electives, including World Religions, Human Behavior, and Contemporary Crises and Current Events, are teacher-designed and reflective of connections to local university experts. Racial Diversity and The Harmony Project are recent additions. Teachers report that the opportunity to collaborate with university professors has informed their practice and brought a high level of content and rigor to

the curriculum. The Minority Student Achievement Network's involvement in creating electives centered on racial literacy speaks to a level of success in student agency and joint curriculum design.

- The district plan for mentoring and induction is aligned to state standards for teaching and for mentoring programs as well as with the district's values, beliefs, and goals. It makes explicit the expectations and processes involved in selecting mentors and the work they are to do with mentees.

Recommendations:

- Consider the current balance between teacher autonomy and planned shifts in curriculum design as opportunities to identify new professional learning that can be shared among teachers within and between schools;
- Consider providing professional development opportunities at the elementary level that will develop the agency necessary for students to self-manage their learning;
- Consider providing professional development opportunities that support teachers in managing debate and in handling complex historical content;
- Consider increasing teacher voice in decision-making linked to professional learning and preparation for the new learning spaces;
- Consider identifying measures of student learning that would enable the district to assess the impact of the social studies initiative and that would provide information to design future professional learning;
- Continue to embed desired outcomes, such as student-centered learning, rigor, and

authenticity, in the supervision and evaluation process of teachers.

Indicator #6: Equitable Support

Commendations:

- The District does not shy away from difficult topics of conversations. Teachers are asked about their beliefs; the district issues relevant public statements and guidance for families and teachers around equity. The Tri-State team noted an impressive awareness in our conversations with students and staff around active citizenship at the secondary level and articulated connections to local history at every school level.
- There is ample evidence that the district strives to provide equitable access to opportunities in order for students and staff to pursue their full potential as responsible citizens and lifelong learners.
- Systems are in place across the district to plan and communicate about ELL (English Language Learners), Special Education student skills, and approaches to modifications. Content specialists and student support teachers plan strategies to modify the core academic content for students with learning needs.
- Students have been invited to propose school / community course changes and have added four semester courses at the high school level (e.g, World Religions, Racial Literacy ,Contemporary Crises). Students' requests indicated their aspirations to learn more and embrace the study of global beliefs and the contemporary world.
- There is a strong commitment and community value firmly in place around equity, that has resulted in an analysis of the reasons for student enrollment in courses and attention paid to providing increased opportunity.

Recommendations:

- Consider ways to introduce content language to students and promote higher order thinking simultaneously. This approach will ask teachers to think even more about skills (thinking, reading, writing) in the context of (and separate from) content.
- In classes where Racial Literacy is studied, think about how to include people across a number of categories. The “default” is racism and the diversity of the community is more nuanced; teachers, students and parents want to learn and share more.
- Special education support for students in co-taught classrooms might be strengthened by professional development for administrators and teachers focused on specific aspects of and expectations for highly effective co-teaching.
- Consider a review of scheduling with the focus on consistency in co-teaching partnerships year to year that are compatible with each co-teacher’s daily schedule.
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- Consider more personalized ways of reaching out to individual students who may not view themselves as Honors/AP level learners, by fostering a growth mindset, looking closely at multiple sources of student performance and encouraging them to enroll in more challenging courses.
- The District might look to gather data around who the students are in the AP courses related to their socioeconomic, racial, special education, and K-8 district enrollment.
- The District is encouraged to continue to think programmatically about the sequence of courses in PHS Social Studies with the intent of integrating English and Social Studies and increasing access to AP courses for more students.

Indicator #7: Shared Vision

Commendations:

- The district is commended for its thorough self-study, the calibrated review of the Social Studies program and for its self-identification of curricular and instructional recommendations.
- The district sets high expectations for students to develop the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for a variety of post-graduation options.
- The district is committed to fostering healthy, productive, and supportive relationships between students, staff, families, and the community.
- Princeton history is interwoven throughout the curriculum, vision, and mission of the organization.
- All stakeholders understand the need for a unified vision of teaching and learning within the Social Studies program and there is a concerted effort being made to advance this vision.

Recommendations:

- Consider one consistent district- level narration that unfolds the story of the social studies program review process, outlining the particular shifts and accomplishments in place, and the research-based decisions that supported the process.

- Consider creating a K-12 Social Studies Leadership Team that will involve teacher leaders at each grade level. This team can help continue to shape and share the district’s vision and generate greater ownership of the district’s vision.
- Continue to review and refine teachers’ instructional strategies, such as questioning techniques, that encourage and support inquiry-based student centered classrooms.
- Consider ways of sharing the social studies mission statement with the larger community.

Indicator #8: Parent and Community Support

Commendations:

- The district has made a concerted effort to cultivate relationships with the larger community through purposeful connections to the Princeton Historical Society, religious organizations, the New Jersey Holocaust Commission, the Princeton Public Library, and local service groups.
- Specific events are planned across the district that provide all students assured experiences:
 - Black History Month Celebrations
 - Active Citizenship Project in the middle school
 - Gettysburg trip in fifth grade
 - 10th grade community service project
 - Washington D.C. trip and related projects
 - Assemblies designed to enrich student experience through simulations and theatrical presentations

- There are systems in place for communication with families through individual teacher websites, email, Back to School Nights, and celebrations. The Social Studies supervisors communicate directly with parents about vision and topics of concern through grade level letters and presentations to the Board of Education. The report created by the Social Studies Committee is published on the District website.
- Princeton Education Foundation (PEF) annually supports the Social Studies curriculum through teacher grants ranging from technology integration to events that engage parents and students with Social Studies content. Examples are high school advocacy group for students with special needs, immersion experience related to the realities of poverty, providing texts with global perspectives in middle school and technology upgrades.

Recommendations:

- Continue to communicate with families about what matters most in the teaching and learning of social studies. Use multiple avenues to communicate with families as an opportunity to share what is valued, in addition to providing information about curriculum and assessments. The district might consider strengthening their outreach efforts by continuing to translate this communication into the languages needed by the community.
- Continue to engage community resources and use those resources to support the shifts in the social studies curriculum. Be explicit about how these opportunities can help students make connections between past and present, or how they can support the work around diversity and racial literacy.
- Continue to share the Social Studies scope and sequence with parents.

- Consider engaging parents in discussions about racial literacy and providing educational programming focused on helping parents facilitate conversations about race with their children.

In conclusion, the Princeton School District provides students with a rigorous and engaging social studies curriculum across grades K-12. The district is committed to helping students develop the knowledge and skills that foster independence and global citizenship. There is an emphasis on teaching racial literacy that permeates throughout the program. Consider ways to expand these opportunities for learning to the elementary level. The district has leveraged its library media specialists to provide resources to make learning the content more relevant and engaging for students.