

Redesigning High Schools to Personalize Learning

Excerpts from
The Knowledge Loom: Educators Sharing and Learning Together
Web site
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The Knowledge Loom: Educators Sharing and Learning Together

<http://knowledgeloom.org>

The attached document is a user-generated download of selected content found on The Knowledge Loom Web site. Content on The Knowledge Loom is always being updated and changed. **Check online for the most current information.**

What is The Knowledge Loom?

The Knowledge Loom is an online professional development resource featuring specially organized spotlights on high-priority education issues, including:

- a list of promising practices (including an explanation of each practice and a summary of the research or theories that support the practice)
- stories about the practices in action in actual education settings
- lists of related resources found on other web sites.

The site is designed to help educators facilitate decision-making, planning, and benchmarking for improved teaching and learning through collaborative activities.

Are there other resources on The Knowledge Loom?

In addition to printable content, the site features interactive tools that allow users to share information and knowledge, read what panels of practitioners have to say about selected topics, ask questions of content experts, and print custom documents like this one. A companion guidebook, *Using The Knowledge Loom: Ideas and Tools for Collaborative Professional Development* (<http://knowledgeloom.org/guidebook>), can be downloaded. It offers activities and graphic organizers to support collaborative inquiry about what works in teaching and learning in support of school improvement.

What spotlight topics are currently available?

- Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas
- Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Elementary Literacy
- Good Models of Teaching with Technology
- Leadership Principles in Technology
- Middle School Mathematics
- Principal as Instructional Leader
- Redesigning High Schools to Personalize Learning
- School, Family, and Community Partnerships
- Successful Professional Development
- Teaching for Artistic Behavior: Choice-Based Art

Overview of Spotlight: Redesigning High Schools to Personalize Learning

This overview provides an outline of all content components of this spotlight that are published on The Knowledge Loom Web site. The creator of this document may have printed only selected content from this spotlight. View complete content online (<http://knowledgeloom.org/>).

Research has shown that the traditional comprehensive high school is failing far too many students. Extremely high drop-out rates, low scores on international achievement tests, school violence triggered by alienating environments, and students who graduate without the tools they need to succeed in the workforce—all of these factors point to the urgent need for high school reform. Personalized, student-centered high schools offer an alternative environment. In these schools, all students can gain the skills and knowledge they need to meet the high standards imposed by the No Child Left Behind legislation as they prepare for successful adulthoods. Below are the essential practices of a personalized high school.

These practices are drawn from the work of a number of researchers and practitioners (see the Research Summary for each practice), but two major sources are *Breaking Ranks: Changing An American Institution*(1996), a publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*(2004), a publication of the NASSP and The Education Alliance at Brown University.

View the Personalized Learning diagram that illustrates how to integrate these best practices in your own redesign plan.

Practices

Each practice includes an explanation, a summary of each story that exemplifies the practice, a research summary (review of the literature), a reference list of the literature, and a short list of related Web resources (URLs and full annotations provided online or in the Related Web Resources section if it has been printed).

- **Developing a Learning Community**

The school develops a culture in which students and teachers know each other well and learning—including ongoing professional development for all staff members—is valued. Parents and other community members partner with school staff to insure that all students graduate from high school with options that lead to further achievement.

- **Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success**

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

- **Standards-Based Teaching to Each Student**

Teachers use instructional methods that allow students with different skills, aspirations, and interests to succeed in meeting standards. They develop courses that form a unified curriculum, integrating academic knowledge with real-life problems and tasks.

- **Fostering Independent Learning**

Students learn to design pathways toward their own futures through personalized learning plans, an advisory system, and student-led conferences. These and other strategies help them to identify and achieve personal and educational goals.

Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution

Breaking Ranks: Changing An American Institution is a 1996 publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It offers a series of recommendations that have become a guiding force for high school redesign throughout the nation. *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (2004) was formulated from the first edition of *Breaking Ranks*. It outlines the need for current high schools to engage in the process of change that will ensure success for every high school student. *Breaking Ranks II* is intended to assist principals by providing strategies for implementing the recommendations; illustrating possible entry points or areas in which to begin reform; and profiling the successes, challenges, and results of schools implementing the recommendations.

Visit the "What is it?" section for each practice in this spotlight, and you can view the applicable *Breaking Ranks* recommendations and indicators.

Top

Stories

The Stories correspond to the summaries printed as part of each practice published on The Knowledge Loom. These are detailed examples of how the practices look in action in educational settings.

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School
Noble High School
North Reading High School
Roosevelt High School
The Met Center
The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies
Wyandotte High School

Related Web Resources: 6

This is an annotated list of resources found on other Web sites that relate to the spotlight topic on The Knowledge Loom.

The Education Alliance at Brown University
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Practices

This section presents the Knowledge Loom practices for the spotlight you selected.

Each practice includes an explanation, a summary of each story that exemplifies the practice, a research summary (review of the literature), a reference list of the literature, and a short list of related Web resources (URLs and full annotations provided online or in the Related Web Resources section of this document).

For an overview of additional content presented on The Knowledge Loom Web site that may not have been selected for this print document, see the Overview of Spotlight located earlier in the document.

Standards–Based Teaching to Each Student

Teachers use instructional methods that allow students with different skills, aspirations, and interests to succeed in meeting standards. They develop courses that form a unified curriculum, integrating academic knowledge with real–life problems and tasks.

In a personalized high school, all students are held to high standards, and their differences are valued. Teachers use a variety of instruction and assessment methods. These are designed to engage and challenge students with various learning styles and different life experiences. Furthermore, teachers choose course content that is both standards–based and instrumental to student aspirations. Teachers provide students with a clear picture of what is required of them as well as the necessary support to meet those requirements. Courses are structured to connect to one another, both within and across disciplines, so that they comprise a meaningful, unified curriculum. The school staff links academic knowledge to real–life problems and tasks. They find ways for students to develop and demonstrate their work in public settings, where knowing something actually makes a difference.

Questions to Think About

- Is there common planning time in your school so that teachers can discuss curriculum in a meaningful way, both within departments and between departments?
- How well do students understand the connections between and among disciplines and topics of study? What evidence can they provide of this understanding?
- Is there a written statement that articulates the intent to make curriculum meaningful to students?

Breaking Ranks Recommendations

Breaking Ranks: Changing An American Institution is a 1996 publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It offers a series of recommendations that have become a guiding force for high school redesign throughout the nation. Listed below are the recommendations applicable to this practice. For a clearer picture of what each recommendation looks like in action, click on it, and its "indicators" will appear.

Each high school identifies a set of essential learnings—above all, in literature and language, mathematics, social studies, science, and the arts—in which students must demonstrate achievement in order to graduate.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #01

The high school integrates its curriculum to the extent possible and emphasizes depth over breadth of coverage.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #02

The content of the curriculum, where practical, should connect to real–life applications of knowledge and skills to help students link their education to the future.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #04

Schools make technology integral to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, accommodating different learning styles and helping teachers to individualize the learning process.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 4, #02

Each high school presents alternatives to tracking and to ability grouping without restricting the range of courses and learning experiences it offers.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 5, #06

The curriculum exposes students to a rich array of viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 8, #02

The high school requires each student to participate in a service program in the community or in the school itself that has educational value.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 12, #07

Teachers design work for students that is of high enough quality to engage them, to cause them to persist, and when successfully completed, to result in their satisfaction and their acquisition of learning skills, and abilities valued by society.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #03

Teachers know and are able to use a variety of strategies and settings that identify and accommodate individual learning styles and engage students.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #02

Teachers teach in ways that help students to develop into competent problem solvers and critical thinkers.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #04

Teachers integrate assessment into instruction so that assessment does not merely measure students, but becomes part of the learning process.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #07

Assessment of student learning will align itself with the curriculum so that students' progress is measured by what is taught.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #05

The high school will assess the academic progress of students in a variety of ways so that a clear and valid picture emerges of what they know and are able to do.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 6, #01

Each high school identifies a set of essential learnings—above all, in literature and language, mathematics, social studies, science, and the arts—in which students must demonstrate achievement in order to graduate.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #01

Indicators:

- The school has outlined what all students should know and be able to do upon graduation: What is the essential core knowledge expected of all students? What proficiencies, skills, habits of mind, and social behaviors are expected? Are these standards/expectations built upon district, state, and national standards as well as the work of professional organizations? Has the school been able to bring its own unique flavor to student learning expectations rather than relying entirely on state standards?
- The school is able to articulate the connection between the expectations and the national and state standards.
- Prominent national organizations and reports influenced the inclusion of some of the expectations (e.g., NASSP's Breaking Ranks report; the Mid-Continental Regional Lab's Common Learner Outcomes; Expected Proficiencies listed in the SCANS report; Theodore Sizer's Habits of Mind; America's Choice standards; Maine's Promising Futures report).
- Academic expectations are clearly stated in specific, measurable ways and are shared with students and used to measure success.
- A school-wide *rubric* for each expectation that describes the characteristics of the expectation at different levels of achievement.
- An indication of which level on the rubric represents the quality that allows students to "pass" or demonstrate proficiency.
- Evidence exists that the faculty was integrally involved in developing this document.
- Each subject area has its own curriculum document(s) indicating which school-wide expectations are being addressed in specific courses (or other curriculum-related programs)

and clearly identifying the learning experiences required to meet each expectation.

- Each subject area assesses student achievement of the school–wide expectations for which it has assumed responsibility by using school–wide performance standards/rubrics.

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The high school integrates its curriculum to the extent possible and emphasizes depth over breadth of coverage.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #02

Indicators: This particular indicator includes several different elements that should be visible in the curriculum and is, therefore, treated in two sections:

Part One: Efforts made to show *interdisciplinary* connections so that students recognize that knowledge and learning are not isolated within a particular subject area. Likewise, the curriculum is within a given subject area integrated so that basic concepts are shown to be connected and reinforcing of each other.

- Math courses are integrated and spiral the basic concepts of algebra and geometry, of logic and statistics, etc. as suggested in most curriculum frameworks and in the NCTM standards.
- Science courses integrate concepts, skills, and knowledge in the life and physical sciences (earth science, physics, chemistry) as recommended by national science organizations (NSTA, etc.)
- Social studies courses incorporate and show the relationships between geography, history, economics, sociology, etc. rather than acting as discrete courses (e.g., American Cultural Studies instead of American history)
- Humanities courses (rather than discrete courses in English, social studies, or art history) are offered as interdisciplinary opportunities for students to see the connections between literature, history, social culture, the arts, etc.
- Interdisciplinary courses or programs are offered (or efforts within existing courses are made) to draw connections between ranges of subject areas/disciplines (e.g., environmental literature; calculus and advanced physics; arts and literature; math and music; etc.)
- Themes or *essential questions* are used to drive the curriculum and thus encourage interdisciplinary thinking (e.g., is war inevitable in human society? An interdisciplinary unit focused on this question might ask students to read a war novel in English, analyze the causes of war in social studies, and study human behavior in psychology.)

Part Two: *Depth of understanding* is valued over *breadth of coverage*. The curriculum emphasizes higher order thinking and "essential questions." It pushes all teachers to encourage students to think critically and to "use their minds well."

(NOTE: State frameworks and standards generally call for an emphasis on "breadth." More recently, the new state testing programs have asked students to perform higher order assessment tasks such as open–ended questions and simulation exercises. Within this standard it is necessary to find evidence that the school has sought a balance in going beyond the state standards and has created opportunities for students to think critically, to spend time in truly understanding complicated concepts, and to demonstrate, perform, or exhibit their knowledge, skills, and understandings.)

- *Project–based learning* is evident throughout the school.
- Essential questions or themes are used to frame lessons, units, or course descriptions and are found in course booklets, department curriculum documents, handouts to students, or on classroom marker boards.
- History courses revolve around themes (e.g., "What impact has war had on American

society?") rather than chronological coverage (i.e., survey courses) and allow for in–depth research.

- Science and math courses allow for in–depth application of concepts to real–life situations.
- Assessment activities include many opportunities for students to demonstrate higher order thinking, not simply rote responses on multiple choice tests (e.g., students are asked to apply information, skills, ideas, and concepts that they have learned to new situations).
- "Habits of Mind," lists of expected thinking skills, and other expectations for higher order student learning are posted in classrooms in order to emphasize to students the importance of critical thinking and the level of learning expected of them; these expectations are evident in the curriculum and teaching and are continually reinforced by teachers.

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The content of the curriculum, where practical, should connect to real–life applications of knowledge and skills to help students link their education to the future.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #04

Indicators:

- The curriculum intellectually challenging and provides opportunities for students to authentically apply knowledge and skills.
- All courses, regardless of level, provide students with rigorous learning experiences that require them to apply, analyze, synthesize, compare/contrast, and evaluate.
- The course catalog clearly offers rigorous coursework for all students (i.e., there are no courses that "water down" the curriculum for certain "less able" students).
- Intellectual rigor is revealed in the quality of student work.
- Students are regularly called upon to demonstrate their growing body of knowledge, skills, ideas, and concepts and to apply them to real life situations by presenting work to a non school audience through writing, portfolios, project work.
- Opportunities are offered for student learning to occur beyond the regular course offerings and the school campus such as school–to–work opportunities (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, school–based enterprises, and cooperative education); extensive co–curricular opportunities are available that cater to a diverse set of student interests and needs; community service programs and other service learning opportunities are available to (perhaps required of) all students.
- Opportunities are offered for student learning to occur beyond the regular course offerings and the school campus such as school–to–work programs (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, school–based enterprises, and cooperative education). Extensive integrated–curricular opportunities are available that cater to a diverse set of student interests and needs; community service programs and other service learning opportunities are available to (perhaps required of) all students and distance learning (e.g., college courses via satellite) or e–learning is available to allow students access to coursework that would otherwise be unavailable at the school.

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Schools make technology integral to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, accommodating different learning styles and helping teachers to individualize the learning process.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 4, #02

Indicators:

- The use of technology is integral to a teacher's instructional practice.
- All teachers have been adequately trained in the use and application of technology in their particular field.
- Teachers use computer and other technologies to enhance their practice (e.g., graphing calculators in math, computer simulations and micro computer based laboratories in science, various software programs throughout the curriculum, etc.).
- Students are routinely called upon to use technology, particularly computers, as a means to apply knowledge and to increase computer literacy (e.g., computer animation in math, spreadsheets in social studies and science, PowerPoint presentations in language arts, etc.).
- The library/information services (both programs and materials) are fully integrated into the school's curriculum and instructional program.
- Teachers regularly use library/information services to support instruction.

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Each high school presents alternatives to tracking and to ability grouping without restricting the range of courses and learning experiences it offers.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 5, #06

Indicators:

- Student grouping patterns reflect the diversity of the school and support the learning of all students by fostering *heterogeneity*. Student grouping patterns are consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning as well as current educational research.
- Student grouping patterns ensure that all students, regardless of ability level, are provided with challenging learning experiences that enable them to achieve the school-wide expectations.
- In accordance with educational research, efforts to group students more heterogeneously and to end de facto tracking are evident.
- "Restructuring" committees base their decisions about future grouping of students upon educational research and upon consultation with schools that have investigated comparable issues.
- Inclusion models and other special education strategies have been investigated to ensure that all students, including those with special needs, have equal access to the same curriculum and school-wide expectations.

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The curriculum exposes students to a rich array of viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 8, #02

Indicators:

- Full treatment of diversity requires that the teaching resources of the school promote inclusion and use resources and materials that recognize the backgrounds of a more diverse population.
- The curriculum consists of more than just textbooks and draws upon a variety of original and supplementary sources.
- Teachers encourage students to exercise their powers of critical judgment so that they understand the difference between fact and opinion and recognize how diverse backgrounds can produce conflicting interpretations.

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The high school requires each student to participate in a service program in the community or in the school itself that has educational value.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 12, #07

Indicators:

- The health of our democracy depends on students gaining a sense of their connection to the larger community and one of the ways to create this connection is through service learning that enables young people to contribute their efforts to activities that are useful to the community and reflect on what they learn from participation.
- The school defines the educational objectives and establishes the criteria for assessing the experience.
- The school philosophy embraces the educational value of service learning.
- The school can develop a format by which students use experiences outside of the classroom to derive formal lessons on the value of helping others.

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Teachers design work for students that is of high enough quality to engage them, to cause them to persist, and when successfully completed, to result in their satisfaction and their acquisition of learning skills, and abilities valued by society.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #03

Indicators:

- All courses, regardless of level, provide students with rigorous learning experiences that require them to apply, analyze, synthesize, compare/contrast, and evaluate.
- The course catalog clearly offers rigorous coursework for all students (i.e., there are no courses that "water down" the curriculum for certain "less able" students).
- Intellectual rigor is revealed in the quality of student work.

[Return to List of Recommendations]

Teachers know and are able to use a variety of strategies and settings that identify and accommodate individual learning styles and engage students.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #02

Indicators:

Rich and varied teaching strategies are evident throughout the school and lines of desks and teacher-centered approaches are not the norm. Teachers demonstrate a repertoire of instructional strategies that accomplish the following:

- **Personalize instruction:** Teachers meet regularly with individuals or small groups of students to address individual learning needs; teachers select the appropriate instructional approaches to address various learning styles; teachers call home to talk with parents; teachers show respect, positive rapport, etc. in day-to-day conversations with students; teachers act as 1:1 advisors/mentors.
- **Engage students as active self-directed learners:** Teachers act as "coaches" who facilitate student learning by asking students to do independent research, work in cooperative groups,

apply knowledge in real–world situations, etc; teachers routinely ask students to reflect on their work and to self–critique (e.g., through the use of portfolios).

- **Provide opportunities to demonstrate the application of knowledge or learning:** Teachers ask students to write for audiences beyond the classroom, share portfolios with parents and critical friends, engage in project work that leads to formal public presentations, participate in internships and school–to–career opportunities, etc.

Teachers make assessment integral to learning in order for students to learn the skills of reflection and self–criticism.

- Teachers meet frequently to discuss assessment and rubrics.
- Teachers make it clear to students that *assessment* is part of the learning process, not simply an evaluation at the end of an activity/unit.
- Teachers routinely and regularly ask students to reflect on and critique their own work and that of their peers (e.g., peer writing groups and other *cooperative learning* opportunities, portfolio assessment approaches).

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Teachers teach in ways that help students to develop into competent problem solvers and critical thinkers.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #04

Indicators:

Teachers routinely meet to discuss problem–solving strategies that are useful in the classroom. Rich and varied teaching strategies are evident throughout the school and lines of desks and teacher–centered approaches are not the norm. Teachers demonstrate a repertoire of instructional strategies that accomplish the following:

- **Draw connections across disciplines:** Teachers know their subjects well enough to confidently integrate concepts and knowledge within and across other discipline; teachers make an active effort to show students how a given topic extends across more than one subject area/discipline.
- **Involve all students in higher order thinking to promote depth of understanding:** Teachers know their subjects well enough to confidently focus student learning on key themes, concepts, and *essential questions*, teachers spend sufficient time on a unit/theme/topic/essential question to allow students to understand the concepts or information in depth, teachers engage students in problem–solving and inquiry–based learning, teachers ask questions and use assessment approaches that encourage students to apply, analyze, synthesize, compare/contrast, and evaluate, not simply to pass information back through rote memory.
- **Provide opportunities to demonstrate the application of knowledge or learning:** Teachers ask students to write for audiences beyond the classroom, share portfolios with parents and critical friends, engage in project work that leads to formal public presentations, participate in internships and school–to–career opportunities, etc.

[Return to List of Recommendations]

Teachers integrate assessment into instruction so that assessment does not merely measure students, but becomes part of the learning process.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #07

Indicators:

Teachers make assessment integral to learning in order for students to learn the skills of reflection and self-criticism.

- Teachers meet frequently to discuss assessment and **rubrics**.
- Teachers make it clear to students that **assessment** is part of the learning process, not simply an evaluation at the end of an activity/unit.
- Teachers routinely and regularly ask students to reflect on and critique their own work and that of their peers (e.g., peer writing groups and other **cooperative learning opportunities**, portfolio assessment approaches).

Teacher grading and reporting is based upon **specific learning criteria** that are clearly communicated to students and parents.

- Student performance is evaluated based on **rubrics** or some other set of indicators that designate the range and levels of success in meeting the expectations.
- Teachers articulate clear criteria for evaluation (e.g., a research paper might be evaluated on the integration of primary sources, the proper use of the MLA style of documentation, etc.).
- Teachers provide samples of work (e.g., anchor papers) to students that clearly indicate the relative quality expected.
- Teachers tell students and parents ahead of time how grading will occur for the course as a whole and for each individual piece of work, activity, presentation, project, etc. that is required.

The results of classroom assessments are used to improve instruction

- Teachers show evidence of reflecting on and modifying their classroom practices and instructional skills as a result of examining classroom assessment results.
- Teachers use ongoing classroom assessment results to modify or adjust their instructional strategies as they proceed through the year (e.g., low scores on a rubric designed for persuasive writing suggest that students need some differentiated instruction on writing and persuasive essay).
- In departments and teams, teachers collaboratively reflect on student work.

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Assessment of student learning will align itself with the curriculum so that students' progress is measured by what is taught.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #05

Indicators:

- The curriculum is intellectually challenging and provides opportunities for students to authentically apply knowledge and skills.
- All courses, regardless of level, provide students with rigorous learning experiences that require them to apply, analyze, synthesize, compare/contrast, and evaluate.
- The course catalog clearly offers rigorous coursework for all students (i.e., there are no courses that "water down" the curriculum for certain "less able" students).
- Intellectual rigor is revealed in the quality of student work.
- Students are regularly called upon to demonstrate their growing body of knowledge, skills, ideas, and concepts and to apply them to real life situations by presenting work to a non

school audience through writing, portfolios, project work.

- Opportunities are offered for student learning to occur beyond the regular course offerings and the school campus such as school-to-work opportunities (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, school-based enterprises, and cooperative education); extensive co-curricular opportunities are available that cater to a diverse set of student interests and needs; community service programs and other service learning opportunities are available to (perhaps required of) all students.

[Return to List of Recommendations]

The high school will assess the academic progress of students in a variety of ways so that a clear and valid picture emerges of what they know and are able to do.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 6, #01

Indicators:

- Assessment of student work should provide a rich collection of information that reflects on a student's progress in moving through the curriculum.
- For assessment to depict a student's academic growth, it should not be static, and will have multiple dimensions.
- Student's accomplishments are demonstrated in the forms of portfolios, performance tasks, standardized tests, etc.
- The school presents assessment results in a way that is useful to parents, admission officers, managers, and the student.
- The assessments are rigorous and people have confidence in them.
- Teachers work together to design assessment strategies, and professional development is provided to the school community.

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Story Summaries

The Met Center

- Small, public school with six campuses of 100 students each.
- Students assigned to advisory groups of 13–15 that stay together through four years and maintain the same advisor a Rhode Island–certified teacher.
- Students explore their interests and life options through projects, courses, and activities.
- Students develop a personal learning plan, which can be adapted each quarter, with the help of family members and their advisor.
- Students engage in an internship at a Rhode Island organization as a part of their learning plan.
- Students present their work and knowledge gained to teachers, members of the community, and family members at exhibitions held four times a year.
- Students create a portfolio of work to demonstrate the skills they have acquired through both project work and their internships.

Students get more out of their education when they have a say in what they are learning, how they are learning it, and what projects will best display their mastery of the content. Students also become

engaged in learning when they can connect it to real–world concerns. These two beliefs led Elliot Washor and Dennis Littky, co–directors of the non–profit organization The Big Picture Company, to devise a curriculum for a high school that would put the student first.

The resulting Met Center, in Providence, Rhode Island, weaves together project work and explorations of real–world jobs and opportunities through its Learning Through Internship program. This program ensures that students broaden their horizons through travel, guest speakers, on–the–job shadowing, and informational interviews at local organizations and businesses. Students also learn about themselves through autobiographical project work such as building personal timelines or writing family histories. Once students have identified their interests, their personal learning plan allows them to map out the skills and knowledge they will acquire, how they will accomplish this, and the standards to which they will be held.

Advisors and family members help with the personal learning plan and work together with the student s internship mentor to assure that the student masters the targeted skills. Students then put together exhibition projects that are not only judged by school faculty, but also by community members from a related field. Preparing for these exhibitions helps the student pull together both the theory of a topic and its practical application. Students then include their project work, narratives, artwork, journal entries, and related assessments in a portfolio that they can show to recruiters and college admission officers as proof of mastery.

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies

- Small public school includes grades 6–12.
- School leadership is collaborative, involving co–directors, teachers, students, and parents.
- Professional development initiative fosters faculty collaboration as a route to improved practice.
- Student input helps to shape curricular and extra–curricular offerings.
- Internship program provides juniors with career experience and a structure for reflecting on this experience.
- Senior thesis requirement allows students to explore a topic of their choice in depth.

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies reached a crisis in its growth from a smaller school with a cohesive vision to a larger school whose faculty could no longer keep the vision coherent through casual contact. The school's co–directors, Sheila Breslaw and Rob Menken, used outside facilitation over a span of four years to establish new patterns of communication based on collegial collaboration. They created a "culture of excellence" by focusing on teacher practice and student response, answering such questions as, "What do we value? Are we stating this clearly to the students and assessing what we are saying?" The school is now using internal collaborative structures to support staff development initiatives and overall school improvement.

One key component of the Lab School's improvement efforts is its focus on creating an integrated curriculum. In addition to observing each other's classes and providing regular feedback on what they see, teachers plan their courses collaboratively, interweaving themes and content to help students see connections and explore concepts from multiple perspectives. In addition to this curricular integration, the Lab School helps students to integrate their academic knowledge with the real world of work. The internship program allows juniors to spend two afternoons each week at a job site relevant to their career interests; in monthly seminars, they reflect on their work experiences and practice resume–writing and interview techniques. The senior thesis offers another opportunity for Lab School students to develop the skills and knowledge they need to be successful as adults. To complete their senior thesis, Lab students research a topic of their choice and, with the guidance of a faculty advisor,

develop a product that reflects what they've learned. These products have ranged from a research paper to a graphic novel to a full-length production of a play.

At the Lab School, teachers collaborate to create a unified learning experience for students, encouraging them to cross the boundaries between subjects and to view both school and work as valuable places to learn and grow.

North Reading High School

At North Reading High School:

- Teachers engage students in hands-on learning experiences that complement other types of instruction, research projects, and writing assignments.
- Teachers receive professional development on multiple learning styles and personalizing the learning experience.
- Teachers learn how to adapt rubrics and assessment methods to best evaluate each student's work.
- Students participate in their own learning through presentations, portfolio creation, and a variety of group performance activities in the classroom, such as mock trials and role playing.

Five years ago, the superintendent of schools and the school committee of North Reading, Massachusetts commended North Reading High School for its placement of graduates in good colleges, students' above-average SAT scores, and its high ranking on the statewide list of 10th grade students passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. But something was still missing. Only a small number of students had the opportunity to extend themselves into high-level courses.

In order to engage every student at the school and make sure that the school served all students equitably, the administration came up with a new mission and vision. Teachers attended workshops related to multiple learning styles and assessment for diverse learners, and they began using different teaching strategies in the classroom. Hands-on projects, performance, and writing across the curriculum engaged students in their own learning and allowed teachers to articulate high expectations for all students.

Soon, students began to see connections between their school work and their own lives. They internalized what was expected of them, took pride in their work, and gained the confidence to take the initiative in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities.

Through the use of multiple teaching strategies in the classroom, special education students were mainstreamed and made gains in content areas. Teachers used cooperative teaching strategies to have more advanced students help students who were struggling in a particular area. Participation on the SAT rose from 84% to 97% of seniors, and scores on the MCAS math section for 10th graders rose from 64% passing in the class of 2000 to 98% and 97% passing in the classes of 2003 and 2004 respectively (Massachusetts Department of Education Summary of District Performance Report, March 2003).

"All students can learn," says Patty Lally, the school's Academic Division Leader for Humanities. "We had to show that you can teach hard concepts to all kids. It's just in how you teach it."

Research Summary

Research

- I. Research Summary for Standards–Based Teaching to Each Student
- II. General Research Summary for Redesigning High Schools
- III. Annotated References for Standards–Based Teaching to Each Student
- IV. Additional References for Standards–Based Teaching to Each Student
- V. General References for Redesigning High Schools

I. Research Summary for Standards–Based Teaching to Each Student

With the ever–increasing pressure placed upon schools to demonstrate student achievement through scores on standardized tests, the need for standards–based instruction is greater than ever. Smaller learning communities can use a variety of strategies for addressing this challenge. Teachers can team–teach, use differentiated instructional techniques, and integrate content across the discipline areas to increase student achievement (Callahan 1999). The integration of math and humanities for example, can help teachers to transform their practice to provide more meaningful and productive experiences for students (Worsley 2002). Enhancing students' literacy skills is another powerful means of improving their academic achievement. Research has shown that the explicit teaching, modeling, and practicing of certain reading and writing strategies improves students' ability to learn across the content areas (e.g. Alvermann &More, 1991; Rosenshine &Meister, 1994; Rosenshine et al, 1996; Rosenshine, 1997; Schoenbach, et al, 1999). Teachers who use a variety of techniques to assess their students' literacy skills and then adapt their instruction accordingly can further support their students' learning (Langer, 1999a). Ultimately, more students can achieve at high levels when instruction is shaped not only by standards but also by their specific needs and interests. (For more information about effective adolescent literacy instruction, visit the Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas spotlight at <http://www.knowledgeloom.org/adlit/index.jsp>).

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II. General Research Summary for Redesigning High Schools

The research on redesigning high schools is about both size and quality. The discussion about size focuses on the various ways to reorganize large schools into smaller learning communities and the persuasive findings that smaller can be better in terms of student performance and engagement in learning. The discussion about quality refers to improving the teaching and learning environments so that they are also more student–centered, more individually relevant and rigorous in content, and more versatile/effective with respect to teaching strategies.

Most studies of high school redesign look at "best practices" in concert and as elements of unified and systemic change. In a 1999 New American High Schools publication, *Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings*, authors Visher, Emanuel, and Teitelbaum listed ten reform strategies with two warnings:

First,...none of the strategies by themselves should be expected to make a significant difference in any one school. That is, the available evidence suggests that it is the gathering of several strategies under one roof, especially certain combinations of strategies, that matters . . . Second, schools should adapt strategies to fit their own unique circumstances. Unfortunately, there is no single, correct way to implement reforms . . . (p. 2).

Having identified the essential elements of reform, researchers have since turned to focusing on the barriers to improvement that schools have encountered. *All Over the Map* addresses what states can do to help. *New Small Learning Communities: Findings from recent literature* looks at numerous barriers and their roots.

Researchers also continue to probe the interplay of reform elements with other factors such as individual school cultures, teacher and administrator capacity, and racial and economic inequities. *Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities* by Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and Robert Bickel (ERIC Digest, 2000) reviews the findings of the Matthew Project, a multi-state study that replicated findings showing that small schools significantly reduce the achievement gap for low-income students. All else equal, larger school size benefits achievement in affluent communities, but it is detrimental in impoverished communities (Howley & Bickel, 1999). Even in affluent communities, however, schools serving 1,500 or more students might have diseconomies of scale and bureaucratic operating modes that are not educationally hospitable. Indeed, a wide consensus seems to have emerged (cf. Fulton, 1996) that schools larger than 1,000 are unwise choices for any community. The consensus clearly suggests that schools in impoverished communities should be much, much smaller.

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III. Annotated References for Standards-Based Teaching to Each Student

Brualdi, A. (1998, August). Implementing performance assessment in the classroom. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED423312).

The purpose of this digest is to outline the basic steps that you can take to plan and execute effective performance-based assessments.

Buckner, K. & McDowelle, J.O. (2000, May). Developing teacher leaders: Providing encouragement, opportunities and support. *NASSP Bulletin*, 84(616), 35–41.

Teachers' daily contact with students, other teachers, and the instructional program places them in a unique position to influence school reform efforts. Principals who are comfortable with teacher leaders can provide the encouragement, opportunities, and support teachers need to become leaders.

Childs-Bowen, D., Moller, G. & Scrivner, J. (2000, May). Principals: Leaders of leaders. *NASSP Bulletin*, 84(616), 27–34.

Teacher leaders can help guide fellow teachers and the school at large toward higher standards of achievement and recognition of individual responsibility for school reform. Until this responsibility for teacher leadership is realized in every teacher, the field of teaching will not change.

D'Amico, J.J. (2001, Spring). A closer look at the minority achievement gap. *ERS Spectrum*, 19(2), 4–10.

Research shows that the minority/white achievement gap is real and is having devastating effects on youth and society. However, school leaders can influence certain educational causes and correlates (like teacher qualifications and expectations). Programs must be individualized, and narrowing the achievement gap should become a national priority.

Education Trust (1998, Summer). Good teaching matters: How well-qualified teachers can close the gap. *Thinking K-16*, 3(2), 1-14. Copyright 1998 The Education Trust.

Focuses on what all of the studies conclude is the most significant factor in student achievement: The teacher. Evidence suggests that the achievement gap would close if the best teachers were assigned to students that need them most.

McMillan, J.H. (2000, November). Basic assessment concepts for teachers and school administrators. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED447201).

In light of current assessment demands and contemporary theories of learning and motivation, this digest presents eleven basic principles to guide the assessment training and professional development of teachers and administrators.

Popham, W.J. (2001). Building test to support instruction and accountability: A guide for policymakers. Washington, DC: Commission on Instructionally Supportive Assessment.

Presents nine requirements for a new generation of statewide achievement tests to create responsible state assessment systems. Tests written to these requirements will benefit students by providing educators with information they can use to improve the quality of instruction. At the same time, the tests will provide states with information to hold educators, schools, and school districts accountable for student performance.

Popham, W.J. (2001, February). Uses and misuses of standardized tests. *NASSP Bulletin*, 85(622), 24-31.

Examines five tests by three publishers currently used in high schools today, and discusses four appropriate and inappropriate uses of these tests. Asserts that assessment literacy on behalf of educators is essential in order to avoid the misuse of standardized tests.

Reeves, D.B. (2001, January). Standards make a difference: The influence of standards on classroom assessment. *NASSP Bulletin*, 85(621), 5-12.

The focus on academic standards should be on rigorous classroom assessment, and the influence of that assessment process is overwhelmingly positive for the thinking, reasoning, and communications skills of students and their performance on high-stakes tests. School leaders are encouraged to

promote the effectiveness and fairness of standards-based assessment in their schools.

Sadowski, M. (2001, May/June). Closing the gap one school at a time. *Harvard Education Letter*, 17(1), 1–7. Copyright 2001 Harvard Education Letter.

Teachers and administrators are becoming researchers as they work to narrow the black/white achievement gap in schools.

Schwartz, W. (2001, December). Closing the achievement gap: Principles for improving the educational success of all students. ERIC Digest. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED460191).

Reviews the educational policies and practices whose effectiveness in closing the achievement gap has been shown, and provides a list of resources offering detailed information about them.

Taylor, J. (2001, Fall). Under construction: Closing the achievement gaps. *NCREL's Learning Point*, 3(1), 1–9.

Looks at closing the gaps that exist among diverse student groups including academic achievement, curricular experiences, and access to resources. Includes an interview with superintendent Allan Alson, Ed.D. and sheds new light on solutions to a familiar problem.

Usdan, M., McCloud, B. & Podomostko, M. (2001). Leadership for student learning: Redefining the teacher as leader. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership. Copyright 2001 Institute for Educational Leadership.

This report presents information from discussions by the Institute for Educational Leadership Task Force on Teacher leadership, highlighting dilemmas surrounding teacher leadership and suggesting that education's policymakers should exploit the experience and capacity to lead today's schoolteachers.

Wanzare, Z. & da Costa, J.L. (2000, October). Supervision and staff development: Overview of the literature. *NASSP Bulletin*, 84(618), 47–54.

Instructional supervision should be an important component of a successful staff development program. This article examines the literature and research on instructional supervision and addresses the importance of supervision for fostering professional growth.

Weller, L. D. (2001, May). Department heads: The most underutilized leadership position. *NASSP*

Bulletin, 85(625), 73–81.

Literature and practice have shown that ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities of department heads, yet it is a position that is vital to efficient school operations. This article describes a survey conducted of 200 department heads to determine job performance. Results show that the role is poorly defined and multifaceted, and most department heads lack adequate preparation. Suggestions for improvements are offered.

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IV. Additional References for Standards–Based Teaching to Each Student

Alvermann, D.E. & Moore, D. (1991) Secondary school reading. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P.D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research*, Volume II (pp. 951–983). White Plains, NY: Longman.

Bryk, A. S., and Driscoll, M. E. (1988). *The high school as community: Contextual influences and consequences for students and teachers*. Madison: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools.

Callahan, C.M. (1999, September) Classrooms for Learners, not winners and losers. *High School Magazine*, 7 (1), 22–26.

Darling–Hammond, L. (1999). *Teacher quality and student achievement*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.

Langer, J.A. (1999). Excellence in English in middle and high school: how teachers? professional lives support student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(2), 397–439.

Little, J.W. and McLaughlin, M.W. (eds.) (1993). *Teachers' work: Individuals, colleagues, and contexts*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Little, J.W. (1999). Organizing schools for teacher learning. In L. Darling–Hammond and G. Sykes (eds.) *Teaching as the learning profession*, pp. 233–262. San Francisco: Jossey–Bass.

Miles, K. H. and Darling–Hammond, L. (1998, Spring). Rethinking the allocation of teaching resources: Some lessons from high–performing schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 20: 9–29.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1996). *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. New York: Author.

Newmann, F.M., Marks, H.M., & Gamoran, A. (1995). Authentic pedagogy: Standards that boost student performance. *Issues in restructuring schools*, 8, pp. 1–10. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Newmann, F. M., Secada, W. G., & Wehlage, G. G. (1995). *A guide to authentic instruction and assessment: Vision standards and scoring*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Rosenshine, B. & Meister (1994, Winter). Reciprocal Teaching: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 64 (4), 479–530.

Rosenshine et al, (1996, summer). Teaching Students to Generate Questions: A review of the intervention studies. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(2), 181–221.

Rosenshine, B. (1997, March). The case for explicit, teacher–led, cognitive strategy instruction. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association. Chicago. Retrieved November 14, 2001, from <http://olam.ed.asu.edu/barak/barak1.html>

Shoenbach, et al (1999). *Reading for understanding: A guide to improving reading in middle and high school classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey–Bass.

Stigler, J. and Stevenson, H. (1991, Spring). How Asian teachers polish each lesson to perfection. *American Educator* 15: 12–20, 43–47.

Waxman, H.C. (1991). Productive teaching and instruction: Assessing the knowledge base. In H. C. Waxman & H. J. Walberg, *Effective teaching: current research* (pp. 33–61). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Company.

Worsley, D. (2002) Teaching for Depth: Where Math Meets the Humanities. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann.

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V. General References on Redesigning High Schools

Breaking Ranks in Action

http://www.principals.org/publicaffairs/pr_br_action040202.htm

New Report Tracks Progress of Groundbreaking Research

http://www.principals.org/schoolimprove/breakingranks_2002.html

An analysis of the most current research and findings surrounding the recommendations in *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*, provides a synopsis of the literature underpinning the more than 80 recommendations in the original *Breaking Ranks* report.

School Redesign Network at Stanford University Internet Resources on Starting Small Schools

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/SUSE/csrn/resources/small/>

Top 5 websites with links to research on small schools

Looking for research on small schools? These five websites are great places to start:

- **ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools**

These short "digests" are probably the best quick overview of the of the research on small schools.

- **Small Schools Workshop**

This site provides a more comprehensive overview of the research on small schools, including links to recent studies.

- **National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities**

This is another comprehensive list of links to studies and articles on small schools, including some of the most recent research.

- **Small Schools Project**

This is a shorter (and thus more manageable) list, which includes some of the key studies on small schools.

- **Coalition of Essential Schools Fieldbook**

This is another shorter list of resources which includes some key studies, including some articles by the Coalition not cited elsewhere.

The Research in Brief:

ERIC digests and other research summaries

These studies provide an excellent overview of the of the research on small schools:

New Small Learning Communities: Findings From Recent Literature

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed425049.html by Kathleen Cotton (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001).

This is a clear, comprehensive overview of the recent research on small schools and small learning communities, with a primary focus on studies completed in the past five years.

Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed414615.html by Michael Klonsky (Small Schools Workshop, 1998).

This article provides an excellent overview of the research data on small schools, including some older studies that are not referenced in many other publications.

Current Literature on Small Schools

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed425049.html by Mary Anne Raywid (ERIC Digest, 1999).

This digest provides a brief overview of research literature on the effectiveness of small schools and describes current topics researchers have begun to explore.

Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed401088.html <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/nslc.pdf> by Kathleen Cotton (ERIC Digest, 1996).

This digest is a brief version of a longer paper called "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance." (School Improvement Research Series Close Up #20, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996). Both publications provide an excellent overview of small schools research, including in particular the affective and social benefits of small schools.

School Size

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed414615.html by Karen Irmsher (ERIC Digest, 1997).

This digest is another good overview of small schools research, including information on cost-effectiveness, facilities, and whether there is an optimal school size.

Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed448968.html by Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and Robert Bickel (ERIC Digest, 2000).

This digest reviews the findings of the Matthew Project, a multi-state study that replicated findings showing that small schools significantly reduce the achievement gap between low-income and wealthier students.

Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer Than 400 Pupils (9–12)

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed401090.html by Christopher Roellke (ERIC Digest, 1996).

This digest reviews research showing that small school size facilitates the development of a high-quality curriculum.

ASK ERIC Internet Sites:

Youth at the Crossroads: Facing High School and Beyond (Winter 2001)

http://www.edtrust.org/main/documents/k16_winter01.pdf

This report provides an overview of available data on student achievement and school completion, and ends "with a look at some core building blocks for rethinking high school education". This report was published by the Education Trust, Inc and is available as a pdf document.

Transforming the American High School: New Directions for State and Local Policy (2001)

<http://www.jff.org/pdfs%20and%20downloads/transforminghs.pdf>

This report identifies "systemic policy issues and change strategies necessary to respond to this emerging crisis on a large scale and in the fastest possible time frame" Published by Jobs for the Future's From the Margins to the Mainstream Initiative and the Aspen Institute's Program on Education in a Changing Society.

High Schools That Work

<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/hstwindex.asp>

High Schools That Work offers a framework of goals and key practices that more than 1,000 schools in 23 states are implementing to raise student achievement. Site includes publications and materials that can be downloaded for immediate use.

The New American High Schools Initiative

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/HS/index.html>

This is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. It focuses on high schools that are committed to providing challenging academic standards for their students, standards that will adequately prepare them for higher education and careers.

High Schools of the Millenium

http://www.aypf.org/publicatons/HSchools_round_3.pdf

This report "examines the crisis of America's outdated high schools as they try to handle the changing needs of today's youth." Published by the American Youth Policy Forum and is available as a pdf document.

State Graduation Requirements

<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Graduation/StatesGrad.htm>

This site includes links to state web sites with information on graduation requirements.

Initiation Rites in American High Schools: A National Survey (August 2000)

http://www.alfred.edu/news/html/hazing_study.html

This report, by Nadine C. Hoover, Ph.D. and Norman J. Pollard, Ed.D. of Alfred University, examines the presence of hazing and initiation rites for high school students.

1994 Bibliography on School Restructuring

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/leon-toc.htm>

This bibliography provides a recommended list of research and theoretical literature in school restructuring. The literature, chosen to be of interest for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers,

is organized into five areas:

I. General References on School Restructuring

II. Student Experiences

III. Professional Life of the Teachers

IV. School Governance

V. Collaboration Between Schools and Community

These topics reflect specific research projects conducted at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools

University of Wisconsin–Madison

Wisconsin Center for Education Research

1025 West Johnson Street, Madison, WI 53706

(608) 263–7575

Related Web Resources

Problem Based Social Studies (0)

Resources for Problem and Project Based Learning (0)

Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

For personalization strategies to survive and grow, school and district leaders must promote the adaptation of existing school policies and organizational structures. Principals in personalized high schools do not try to solve every school problem on their own. Rather, they empower staff and students to develop solutions and plans. They support the development of teacher-leaders, encourage students to take an active role in school governance, and allow for flexible scheduling to meet students' and teachers' needs.

Questions to Think About

- How well does your school's daily schedule provide opportunities for effective and varied instructional strategies?
- Do teachers, students, and administrators use the same language to talk about your school?
- Is there an articulated, written commitment to foster teacher-leadership as well as a plan to do so?
- Are there existing programs that were teacher- or student-generated and have been sustained over several years? Is it likely that these programs will endure after the departure of the teacher(s) or students who created them?

Breaking Ranks Recommendations

Breaking Ranks: Changing An American Institution is a 1996 publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It offers a series of recommendations that have become a guiding force for high school redesign throughout the nation. Listed below are the recommendations applicable to this practice. For a clearer picture of what each recommendation looks like in action, click on it, and its "indicators" will appear.

High schools develop flexible scheduling that allows for more varied uses of time in order to meet the requirements of the core curriculum.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 5, #03

Teachers provide the leadership essential to the success of reform, collaborating with others in the educational community to redefine the role of the teacher and to identify sources of support for that redefined role.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 13, #06

The principal provides leadership in the high school community by building and maintaining a vision, direction, and focus for student learning.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 13, #01

Current principals build and refine the skills required to lead and manage change.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 13, #03

The principal fosters an atmosphere that encourages teachers to take risks to meet the needs of students.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 13, #04

High schools develop flexible scheduling that allows for more varied uses of time in order to meet the requirements of the core curriculum.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 5, #03

Indicators:

The master schedule best supports the learning needs of students as well as the implementation of curriculum and instruction. It is based upon current educational research and supports the beliefs expressed in the school's mission as well as student achievement of the school-wide expectations.

- Thoughtful review of the master schedule occurs annually to ensure that it best supports the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
- The schedule supports implementation of effective instructional practices (e.g., collaborative learning, team-teaching, etc.).
- The schedule supports delivery of the curriculum (e.g., longer blocks of time for in-depth learning, project-based learning, interdisciplinary units, etc.).
- The schedule allows for the flexible use of time.

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Teachers provide the leadership essential to the success of reform, collaborating with others in the educational community to redefine the role of the teacher and to identify sources of support for that redefined role.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 13, #06

Indicators:

- Teachers take on leadership responsibilities that support the mission, foster student learning, and ensure school improvement.
- Teachers serve on, and are actively engaged in, leading committees that review and revise curriculum, assessment strategies, instructional practices, and school organizational practices.
- Teachers take the initiative for keeping current through professional development, reflection, collaboration, etc.
- Teachers act as department heads, academic coordinators, team leaders, and in other formal roles that support school improvement.
- Teachers regularly recommend new initiatives or ideas that will improve the overall climate and life of the school.

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The principal provides leadership in the high school community by building and maintaining a vision, direction, and focus for student learning.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 13, #01

Indicators:

- The principal is viewed as the "vision-keeper," the leader who continually fosters and supports the school's mission and builds and maintains direction and focus for student learning.
- The principal is a visible force in the building, modeling and "living" the mission statement.
- Important decisions made by the principal reflect the mission of the school, support student learning, and are perceived as consistent and fair.
- The primary focus of the principal's time is on teaching and learning (e.g., the principal constantly visits classrooms, meets with teachers about instructional practice, facilitates collaborative review of student work, etc.) This indicates a shift in the role as "police officer" to educational leader.

- The principal ensures that the school leadership team focuses on student learning.
- The principal shows students that their learning is paramount (e.g., academic success is highlighted more frequently than athletic success; honor roll students are sent letters or invited to breakfast by the principal; students are interviewed for their perspective on the quality of teaching they are receiving; the principal asks random groups of students to bring in their portfolios for review).
- When major issues arise in the school, the principal addresses the faculty and students directly and consistently.

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Current principals build and refine the skills required to lead and manage change.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 13, #03

Indicators:

- The qualifications of principals require skills to manage change.
- Principals should be knowledgeable about balancing resources, building consensus, and knowing about instruction that takes account of individual needs and the latest findings in research and theory.
- Principals must be political leaders, entrepreneurs, business managers, and educational leaders in order to reach the level of asserting leadership and rallying others on behalf of improvement and school reform.

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The principal fosters an atmosphere that encourages teachers to take risks to meet the needs of students.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 13, #04

Indicators:

- The principal must enable and support teachers in order to take risks to improve instruction and innovate in the best interests of students.
- The principal will release the talents of the faculty to innovate and take risks in the pursuit of better instruction.

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Story Summaries

The Met Center

- Small, public high school (9–12) with six campuses of 100 students each.
- Students assigned to advisory groups of 13–15 that stay together through four years and maintain the same advisor—a state-certified teacher.
- Students explore their interests and life options through projects, courses, and activities.
- Students develop a personal learning plan, which can be adapted each quarter, with the help of family members and their advisor.

- Students choose an internship at a Rhode Island organization as a part of their learning plan.
- Students present their work and knowledge gained to teachers, members of the community, and family members at exhibitions held four times a year.
- Students create a portfolio of work to demonstrate the skills they have acquired through both project work and their internships.

Students get more out of their education when they have a say in what they are learning, how they are learning it, and what projects will best display their mastery of the content. Students also become engaged in learning when they can connect it to real-world concerns. These two beliefs led Elliot Washor and Dennis Littky, co-directors of the non-profit organization The Big Picture Company, to devise a curriculum for a high school that would put the student first.

The resulting Met Center in Providence, Rhode Island allows students to create their own path with the help of advisors, family members, and internship mentors. No two days are the same at The Met because students are given the freedom to explore their options, read and research during independent study time, and tackle project work and an internship at their own pace. Advisory periods help students set goals for the day about what needs to be done and how they can best manage their time to accomplish everything. Students also work into their daily schedules SAT and financial aid form training, community service projects, and personal learning plan meetings with their advisors.

Because students are given the opportunities to control their own learning, motivation is high and older students take time to build positive relationships with younger students at the school.

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies

- Small public school includes grades 6–12.
- School leadership is collaborative, involving co-directors, teachers, students, and parents.
- Professional development initiative fosters faculty collaboration as a route to improved practice.
- Student input helps to shape curricular and extra-curricular offerings.
- Internship program provides juniors with career experience and a structure for reflecting on this experience.
- Senior thesis requirement allows students to explore a topic of their choice in depth.

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies reached a crisis in its growth from a smaller school with a cohesive vision to a larger school whose faculty could no longer keep the vision coherent through casual contact. The school's co-directors, Sheila Breslaw and Rob Menken, used outside facilitation over a span of five years to establish new patterns of communication based on collegial collaboration. They created a "culture of excellence" by focusing on teacher practice and student response, answering such questions as, "What do we value? Are we stating this clearly to the students and assessing what we are saying?" The school is now using internal collaborative structures to support staff development initiatives and overall school improvement.

Leadership at the Lab School is genuinely collaborative. In weekly faculty meetings, teachers collaborate with the co-directors on important school decisions, sometimes overriding the school directors' own preferences. In 90-minute weekly team meetings, teachers lead each other toward improved teaching practices. They create plans to help struggling students succeed, and they also engage in cross-curricular planning, sharing lessons and designing interdisciplinary projects to build bridges among content areas. For students, collaboration is not only an integral part of classroom work with peers but also a means of shaping the direction of the larger school community. In addition to student government, clubs, and sports teams, Lab School students have a voice on the School

Leadership Team, alongside teachers and parents. In recent years, students have successfully lobbied for new course offerings and helped to design a new advisory program for seventh graders.

At the New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies, the staff and the students have worked together to sharpen the school's vision, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and create an environment where student interests matter and student needs are met. The school's collaborative approach to learning, leadership, curriculum planning, and professional growth is the key to its success.

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

Francis W. Parker Charter School is a school where

- the curriculum's essential question is different every year, voted on by the community, and developed into a curriculum by the faculty
- students proceed through divisions based on their proficiency, not based on grade years
- the school day leaves time for connection advisory periods in the morning, reflection periods in the afternoon, and advisory periods on Wednesdays that could last from an hour to a whole day depending on the activities planned
- students, with their advisors, create personal learning plans and are involved in school governance and discipline issues
- teachers are given common planning time and a block of time to meet in Critical Friend groups

The hallmark of the Francis W. Parker Charter School in Devens, Massachusetts, is its flexibility not only in the school organization but also in the curriculum. The school-wide essential question is broad, giving students and teachers the opportunity to take the concept in different directions. Students' personal learning plans also allow them to work at their own pace and in a style that is most comfortable for them. Students learn what they need to do, says current Parker principal Teri Schrader. The length of time may vary and the ways to do it vary, but the standards don't.

North Reading High School

At North Reading High School:

- Administrators worked with the superintendent's office to create a new mission and vision for the school.
- Two Academic Division Leader positions were created to assist the principal with modeling of instructional strategies and improving communication among teachers.
- Block scheduling was instituted to give teachers more time to explore content and to give students more opportunities to fit extra-curricular activities and high-level classes into their schedules.
- A "Power Hour" was established to allow students who have after-school jobs or family responsibilities to study, do research, or get extra help with their work.

Five years ago, the superintendent of schools and the school committee of North Reading, Massachusetts commended North Reading High School for its placement of graduates in good colleges, students' above-average SAT scores, and its high ranking on the statewide list of 10th grade students passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests. But something was still missing. Only a small number of students had the opportunity to extend themselves into high-level courses.

In order to engage every student at the school and make sure that the school served all students equitably, the administration came up with a new mission and vision. Teachers studied multiple learning styles and different teaching strategies, but also worked with the administration to help change the structure of both the school day and the school management system.

The Academic Division Leader (ADL) positions for Humanities and Math, Science, and Technology were created and filled by Lally and Dr. Patricia Oakley respectively. They joined Principal Ann Papagiotas in leading the staff toward creating a more student-centered learning environment. The ADLs regularly hold meetings with teachers in their divisions and teach two classes themselves. These meetings help teachers share information about students and strategies that have worked for them in the classroom.

In order to free up time for these meetings and for the professional development necessary for a shift in practice, the administrators of the school reorganized the school day. Teachers investigated and chose a new schedule that would afford more time per period. The block scheduling the school adopted dropped the class number from seven to four per day. This opened up possibilities for students to take directed study time during the Power Hour, engage in extra-curricular activities, or attend talks by former graduates on preparing for postsecondary schooling and employment.

Teachers also helped the administration and students develop a writing rubric that could be used across the curriculum. Teachers in all content areas made adjustments in their practice to accommodate writing assignments that would help students express themselves clearly and understand the expectations for a particular unit or project.

"When we say we want them to write effectively across the curriculum, this can be handled differently in each classroom," says Papagiotas. "In an art class, rather than just turning in a painting they will have to answer a question about the style or the medium they are working in. The kids know they have to be able to explain themselves clearly."

The changes in structure and management of time at North Reading have allowed more students to enroll in higher level classes, take advantage of study time, and engage in activities that motivate them and personalize the learning experience for them. Five years ago, the school had one precalculus class with 21 students in it. Now, there are four full sections of the class, and approximately 91% of students from the class of 2002 went on to postsecondary education.

Noble High School

- Large, rural high school (9–12) of roughly 1150 students grouped in fifteen small, independent learning communities.
- Integrated learning teams consist of an English, science, social studies, and math teacher, special education teacher, and guidance counselor; teams have common planning time and a core group of students.
- Teachers create a more customized, personalized environment for students.
- Teams are small learning communities that, given the opportunity to carve out their own identity, can become safe havens for kids, and can generate a great sense of belonging.
- Heterogeneous teams are more equitable for teachers, too. Everybody teaches everybody. There is no tilting the hat to the veteran regarding who gets "the best kids."
- Integrated teams are a great first step to creating small autonomous schools within a large school.
- Talented, veteran teachers took the lead in increasing graduation requirements for all students, making four years of rigorous mathematics, and four years of science, including chemistry

and physics, required. At all levels, the school redefined its standard of excellence to include all learners.

After more than thirteen years of implementation, continuous rethinking and tweaking, Noble High School is a place where everyone learns more every day and asks better questions. The journey of change has positioned the school to meet the challenges of helping every student acquire rigorous academic skills and concepts through a strong, equitable program grounded in core principles.

Wyandotte High School

- Wyandotte is a large, urban high school in a high-poverty community.
- Its schedule has been reorganized on Wednesdays to allow for two hours of professional study each week.
- The school has adopted a reform framework that presents an articulated commitment to teacher leadership.
- The Stakeholder Team, comprised of 13 staff members, has worked to build capacity around the features of the framework from the beginning.
- Teacher-led study groups target areas of need identified by teachers in small learning communities.
- Teachers established policies for tardiness, handle scheduling of classes, and serve as advisors to students and families.

In the mid 1990s, when Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas contended with such problems as low test scores, school violence, high dropout rates, its principal's top-down style did not sit well with staff. To enact the dramatic change necessary, the district hired current principal Walter Thompson, a man who believed in the leadership abilities of his teachers. He allowed staff to study, learn, and explore together and empowered them to create the conditions necessary to improve their students' performance. As a result, students' and teachers' work is not governed by a clock but by a commitment to learning and to each other.

The culture of the school has significantly changed over the past six years. The culture is one of collaboration and hope supported by a process of study and inquiry. Professional development is embedded into the work of the school, and teachers take responsibility not only for their own practice but also for the achievements of their small learning community and the school in general.

Roosevelt High School

To improve student achievement at the Roosevelt High School in Yonkers, New York, Principal Bill Moore and a school-based Design Committee worked to establish smaller learning communities. The goals of the small learning community program were to increase parent involvement, community involvement, professional development for staff, and the use of technology.

Teachers at this urban school of 1600 students contribute to the ongoing development of the new models being used at the school.

- Teachers and other staff serve on a school-wide Design Committee, which helped identify school weaknesses and developed a program to implement a teaming model at the school.
- Staff members serve on numerous subcommittees, including a data committee and an "out-of-the-box" committee.
- Teachers regularly observe programs at other schools and bring back best practices to share.

To address attendance issues, administrators adapted school policies:

- Administrators changed the start of the school day to accommodate some students who had problems with the city's public transportation schedule. Those who had difficulty arriving on time now begin their school day at the start of the second period. This has dramatically decreased problems related to punctuality.

Research Summary

Research

- **I. Research Summary for Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success**
- **II. General Research Summary for Redesigning High Schools**
- **III. Annotated References for Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success**
- **IV. Additional References for Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success**
- **V. General References for Redesigning High Schools**

I. Research Summary for Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Successful small learning communities allow for flexibility in the leadership roles of teachers, staff and administrators, with shared decision-making becoming the norm. The principal acts as an instructional leader rather than simply a building manager, creating an environment that encourages the use of "out-of-the-box" strategies to engage students. This ultimately leads to greater student achievement. In many high schools that strive to personalize student learning, staff can become consumed with issues of design and structure. However, it is imperative to balance these issues with the development of new methods of teaching and learning (Wallach & Lear 2003).

Schools have created new systems, including the use of teacher teams, student advisory programs, personal learning plans, project based learning, peer mentoring, and service learning programs; are all innovative methods for promoting student achievement while creating smaller and more personalized environments for students (DiMartino, Clarke & Wolk 2003). Working within these new models can be daunting for teachers and administrators. Yet learning new ways to use data and creating new organizational structures to support personalization are critical to the success of these efforts (Schomker 2001).

School staff must also adapt the schedule to work within emerging small learning communities. While there are many strategies available to schools to adapt scheduling to suit their needs, it is important to have structured conversations around what the new schedule(s) for the school should be (LAB 1998; Ballinger 2000).

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II. General Research Summary for Redesigning High Schools

The research on redesigning high schools is about both size and quality. The discussion about size focuses on the various ways to reorganize large schools into smaller learning communities and the persuasive findings that smaller can be better in terms of student performance and engagement in

learning. The discussion about quality refers to improving the teaching and learning environments so that they are also more student-centered, more individually relevant and rigorous in content, and more versatile/effective with respect to teaching strategies.

Most studies of high school redesign look at "best practices" in concert and as elements of unified and systemic change. In a 1999 New American High Schools publication, *Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings*, authors Visher, Emanuel, and Teitelbaum listed ten reform strategies with two warnings:

First, . . . none of the strategies by themselves should be expected to make a significant difference in any one school. That is, the available evidence suggests that it is the gathering of several strategies under one roof, especially certain combinations of strategies, that matters . . . Second, schools should adapt strategies to fit their own unique circumstances. Unfortunately, there is no single, correct way to implement reforms . . . (p. 2).

Having identified the essential elements of reform, researchers have since turned to focusing on the barriers to improvement that schools have encountered. *All Over the Map* addresses what states can do to help. *New Small Learning Communities: Findings from recent literature* looks at numerous barriers and their roots.

Researchers also continue to probe the interplay of reform elements with other factors such as individual school cultures, teacher and administrator capacity, and racial and economic inequities. *Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities* by Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and Robert Bickel (ERIC Digest, 2000) reviews the findings of the Matthew Project, a multi-state study that replicated findings showing that small schools significantly reduce the achievement gap for low-income students. All else equal, larger school size benefits achievement in affluent communities, but it is detrimental in impoverished communities (Howley & Bickel, 1999). Even in affluent communities, however, schools serving 1,500 or more students might have diseconomies of scale and bureaucratic operating modes that are not educationally hospitable. Indeed, a wide consensus seems to have emerged (cf. Fulton, 1996) that schools larger than 1,000 are unwise choices for any community. The consensus clearly suggests that schools in impoverished communities should be much, much smaller.

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III. Annotated References for Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Ballinger, C. (2000, May). Changing time: Improving learning. *High School Magazine*, 7(9), 5–8.

Changes to the length of class periods and school days have become acceptable to most schools and their communities. Changes to the school year, however, still are met with skepticism despite logical arguments and promising results.

Chaika, G. (1999, August). Alternative school calendars: Smart idea or senseless experiment? *Education World*. Copyright 1999 Education World.

If American students are to compete effectively in a global economy, do they need to spend substantially more time in school? Would increasing the length of the school year or school day raise students' achievement, or would it be more advantageous to alter how we use the time we currently have? Many school systems are experimenting with alternative instructional schedules in an attempt to find out.

Deweese, S. (1999, December). The school-within-a-school model. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED438147).

The traditional governance culture in which most school boards function contributes to role confusion. Most board policies focus more on operational concerns than on governance. Several Colorado boards have applied John Carver's Policy Governance model to define their parameters.

George, P.S. & McEwin, C.K. (1999, April). High schools for a new century: Why is the high school changing? *NASSP Bulletin*, 83(606), 10–24.

Growing student diversity, reports and government mandates, ninth–grade transition problems, and middle–school influences have produced new enthusiasm for high–school reorganization. Restructuring approaches such as block scheduling, differentiated instruction, academic teaming, house plans, career academies, heterogeneous grouping, and integrated curricula are transforming many high schools.

Gregory, T. (2001, December). Breaking up large high schools: Five common (and understandable) errors of execution. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED459049).

In the past 30 years, research has suggested the need for much smaller high schools. In response, some administrators have attempted to subdivide big high schools into smaller entities. This digest reviews recent research on the movement to break up large schools and discusses five types of error common to such attempts—errors of autonomy, size, continuity, time, and control.

Kneese, C. (2000, August). Teaching in year–round schools. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED449123).

The year–round calendar is an increasingly popular alternative to the traditional 9–month school calendar. This digest examines the benefits and challenges of teaching in year–round schools. Year–round schools may be on a single–track or multi–track schedule. Single–track schedules call for an instructional year of 180 days with short breaks interspersed throughout. Multi–track schedules stagger the instructional and vacation/intercession periods of each track throughout the entire year, so some students are receiving instruction while others are on vacation.

Kruse, C.A., & Kruse, G.D. (1995, May). The master schedule and learning: Improving the quality of

education. *NASSP Bulletin*, 79(571), 1–8.

The master schedule determines instructional time, use of space, student grouping, and teacher role. Currently, secondary school buildings are used like factories, and teachers can spend an entire career in the same classroom. Traditional, intensified, and flexible block scheduling produces master schedules with greater flexibility, less isolation, and more sensitivity to brain functioning.

Metzker, B. (2002, March). School calendars. *ERIC Digest*.

This Digest discusses the rationale for changing school calendars, describes what some districts are doing, and advises school leaders and board members on the issues that typically arise when a calendar is changed.

Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory (1998). Block scheduling: Innovations with time. Providence, RI: Author.

This booklet provides information about block scheduling—its advantages and drawbacks. Schools can use it as a discussion tool to improve their use of time by reformulating student and teacher schedules. The booklet can help educators choose a block scheduling program that will suit their school. The booklet explains the purpose of block scheduling and presents various models of this type of scheduling, such as the 4x4 plan, the A/B plan, and the trimester plan.

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IV. Additional References for Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Bryk, A. S., Lee, V., and Holland, P. B. (1993). *Catholic schools and the common good*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Comer, J. P. (1996). *Rallying the whole village: The Comer process for reforming education*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Darling–Hammond, L., Aness, J. , and Ort, S. W. (forthcoming). Reinventing high school: The coalition campus schools project. *American Educational Research Journal*.

DiMartino, J., Clarke, J., and Wolk, D. editors (2003). Personalized Learning: Preparing High School Students to Create Their Futures. Lanham, MD: ScarecrowPress.

Glickman, C. (1993). *Renewing America's schools: A guide for school–based action*. San Francisco: Jossey–Bass.

Lee, V., and Smith, J. (1994). Effects of high school restructuring and size on gains in achievement and engagement for early secondary school students. Madison: Center on the Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Lee, V.E., Smith, J., & Croninger, R. (1995). Another look at high school restructuring. *Issues in Restructuring Schools, No. 9*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Lieberman, A. (1995). *The work of restructuring schools: Building from the ground up*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Meier, D. (1995). *The power of their ideas: lessons for America from a small school in Harlem*. Boston: Beacon Press.

National Institute of Education. (1977). *Violent Schools—Safe Schools: The safe school study report to Congress*. Washington, DC: Author.

Newmann, F. M., & Wehlage, G. G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Schmoker, M. (2001) The Results Fieldbook: Practical Strategies from Dramatically Improved Schools. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Smylie, M., Lazarus, V., and Brownlee—Conyers, J. (1996, Fall). Instructional outcomes of school-based participative decision making. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis 18* (3): 181–198.

Wallach C. and Lear R. An Early Report on Comprehensive High School Conversions. Seattle WA: Small Schools Project.

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V. General References on Redesigning High Schools

Breaking Ranks in Action

http://www.principals.org/publicaffairs/pr_br_action040202.htm

New Report Tracks Progress of Groundbreaking Research

http://www.principals.org/schoolimprove/breakingranks_2002.html

An analysis of the most current research and findings surrounding the recommendations in *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*, provides a synopsis of the literature underpinning the more than 80 recommendations in the original *Breaking Ranks* report.

School Redesign Network at Stanford University Internet Resources on Starting Small Schools

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/SUSE/csrn/resources/small/>

Top 5 websites with links to research on small schools

Looking for research on small schools? These five websites are great places to start:

- [ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools](#)

These short "digests" are probably the best quick overview of the of the research on small schools.

- [Small Schools Workshop](#)

This site provides a more comprehensive overview of the research on small schools, including

links to recent studies.

- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities
This is another comprehensive list of links to studies and articles on small schools, including some of the most recent research.
- Small Schools Project
This is a shorter (and thus more manageable) list, which includes some of the key studies on small schools.
- Coalition of Essential Schools Fieldbook
This is another shorter list of resources which includes some key studies, including some articles by the Coalition not cited elsewhere.

The Research in Brief:

ERIC digests and other research summaries

These studies provide an excellent overview of the of the research on small schools:

New Small Learning Communities: Findings From Recent Literature

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed425049.html by Kathleen Cotton (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001).

This is a clear, comprehensive overview of the recent research on small schools and small learning communities, with a primary focus on studies completed in the past five years.

Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed414615.html by Michael Klonsky (Small Schools Workshop, 1998).

This article provides an excellent overview of the research data on small schools, including some older studies that are not referenced in many other publications.

Current Literature on Small Schools

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed425049.html by Mary Anne Raywid (ERIC Digest, 1999).

This digest provides a brief overview of research literature on the effectiveness of small schools and describes current topics researchers have begun to explore.

Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed401088.html <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/nslc.pdf> by Kathleen Cotton (ERIC Digest, 1996).

This digest is a brief version of a longer paper called "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance." (School Improvement Research Series Close Up #20, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996). Both publications provide an excellent overview of small schools research, including in particular the affective and social benefits of small schools.

School Size

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed414615.html by Karen Irmsher (ERIC Digest, 1997).

This digest is another good overview of small schools research, including information on cost-effectiveness, facilities, and whether there is an optimal school size.

Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed448968.html by Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and

Robert Bickel (ERIC Digest, 2000).

This digest reviews the findings of the Matthew Project, a multi-state study that replicated findings showing that small schools significantly reduce the achievement gap between low-income and wealthier students.

Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer Than 400 Pupils (9–12)

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed401090.html by Christopher Roellke (ERIC Digest, 1996).

This digest reviews research showing that small school size facilitates the development of a high-quality curriculum.

ASK ERIC Internet Sites:

Youth at the Crossroads: Facing High School and Beyond (Winter 2001)

http://www.edtrust.org/main/documents/k16_winter01.pdf

This report provides an overview of available data on student achievement and school completion, and ends "with a look at some core building blocks for rethinking high school education." This report was published by the Education Trust, Inc and is available as a pdf document.

Transforming the American High School: New Directions for State and Local Policy (2001)

<http://www.jff.org/pdfs%20and%20downloads/transforminghs.pdf>

This report identifies "systemic policy issues and change strategies necessary to respond to this emerging crisis on a large scale and in the fastest possible time frame." Published by Jobs for the Future's From the Margins to the Mainstream Initiative and the Aspen Institute's Program on Education in a Changing Society.

High Schools That Work

<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/hstwindex.asp>

High Schools That Work offers a framework of goals and key practices that more than 1,000 schools in 23 states are implementing to raise student achievement. Site includes publications and materials that can be downloaded for immediate use.

The New American High Schools Initiative

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/HS/index.html>

This is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. It focuses on high schools that are committed to providing challenging academic standards for their students, standards that will adequately prepare them for higher education and careers.

High Schools of the Millenium

http://www.aypf.org/publicatons/HSchools_round_3.pdf

This report "examines the crisis of America's outdated high schools as they try to handle the changing needs of today's youth." Published by the American Youth Policy Forum and is available as a pdf document.

State Graduation Requirements

<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Graduation/StatesGrad.htm>

This site includes links to state web sites with information on graduation requirements.

Initiation Rites in American High Schools: A National Survey (August 2000)

http://www.alfred.edu/news/html/hazing_study.html

This report, by Nadine C. Hoover, Ph.D. and Norman J. Pollard, Ed.D. of Alfred University,

examines the presence of hazing and initiation rites for high school students.

1994 Bibliography on School Restructuring

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/leon-toc.htm>

This bibliography provides a recommended list of research and theoretical literature in school restructuring. The literature, chosen to be of interest for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, is organized into five areas:

I. General References on School Restructuring

II. Student Experiences

III. Professional Life of the Teachers

IV. School Governance

V. Collaboration Between Schools and Community

These topics reflect specific research projects conducted at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools
University of Wisconsin–Madison
Wisconsin Center for Education Research
1025 West Johnson Street, Madison, WI 53706
(608) 263–7575

Related Web Resources

Redesign Network at Stanford University
Internet Resources on Starting Small Schools (0)
Resources for High School Reform (0)

Developing a Learning Community

The school develops a culture in which students and teachers know each other well and learning—including ongoing professional development for all staff members—is valued. Parents and other community members partner with school staff to insure that all students graduate from high school with options that lead to further achievement.

When high schools become learning communities, they show improvement in both the practice of educators and the engagement of students. There is regular collaboration about school goals, curriculum design, assessment strategies, and instructional techniques. This, in turn, raises the bar for educators' performance while providing the support necessary for their improvement. Furthermore, staff who know their students well can celebrate their distinctive successes and support their individual growth. Such attention helps to engage students in the learning process and to make them feel part of the school community. Schools partner with parents, business leaders, and other community members to provide a range of experiences for students. These include internships, service learning activities, and other non-academic growth opportunities, all of which further enrich their learning community by extending it beyond the school walls.

Questions to Think About

- What kinds of departmental and interdepartmental collaboration take place in your school (coaching, study groups, team teaching, etc.)? How effective is this collaboration at contributing to staff members' professional growth? What kind of impact has it had on student learning?
- Do parents and community members feel ownership of your school's change initiative? How do you know? What activities would members of the community describe as engaging them in planning and school improvement?

Breaking Ranks Recommendations

Breaking Ranks: Changing An American Institution is a 1996 publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It offers a series of recommendations that have become a guiding force for high school redesign throughout the nation. Listed below are the recommendations applicable to this practice. For a clearer picture of what each recommendation looks like in action, click on it, and its "indicators" will appear.

High schools create small units in which anonymity is banished.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 5, #01

Every high school will be a learning community for teachers and the other professionals it employs.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 7, #01

Each educator creates a Personal Learning Plan that addresses his or her need to grow, stressing knowledge and skills related to improved student learning.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 7, #02

The school offers its staff substantive, ongoing professional development to help them deal with issues of diversity.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 8, #04

A high school regards itself as a community in which members of the staff collaborate to develop and implement the school's learning goals.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 12, #01

The support staff of a high school— secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, and others— will also

be encouraged and assisted in their own career growth and drawn into the larger school community as adults who can promote the well-being of students.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 7, #05

The high school requires each student to participate in a service program in the community or in the school itself that has educational value.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 12, #07

High schools create small units in which anonymity is banished.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 5, #01

Indicators:

- The high school is organized in a way that addresses the individual needs of students and teachers and students know each other well.
- House plans and cluster programs group students into smaller units.
- The school develops a schedule whereby students and teachers are teamed, and there is time allowed for advisory.
- The school philosophy permits students to flourish as individuals, and promotes the idea that adults at the school care about students and their schoolwork.

[Return to List of Recommendations]

Every high school will be a learning community for teachers and the other professionals it employs. *Breaking Ranks, Ch 7, #01*

Indicators:

- Teachers work together collaboratively to reflect upon and critique their instructional practices and to share feedback about student work with one another.
- Teachers regularly share with one another their experiences about effective classroom practice and engage in *reflective dialogue* about their instruction.
- *Teacher collaboration* and reflection are valued and respected to the degree that they permeate the culture of the school (e.g., lunchroom conversations are about teaching and student learning).
- *Examining student work* together is the basis of much of the school improvement effort within the building and occurs both formally and informally (e.g., teachers across different subject areas look at samples of student writing together to determine if students are meeting the learning expectations that have been established).
- Teacher teaming allows teachers to have common planning time to develop lessons together, to discuss student progress, and to reflect upon and critique their work.
- *Critical friends* groups or comparable peer support/mentoring programs exist.

[Return to List of Recommendations]

Each educator creates a Personal Learning Plan that addresses his or her need to grow, stressing knowledge and skills related to improved student learning. *Breaking Ranks, Ch 7, #02*

Indicators:

- Teachers work together *collaboratively* to develop and revise curriculum.
- All teachers are involved in curriculum development and revision through a variety of formal

and informal collaborative opportunities both within and across departments.

- The district and the school provide multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development toward instructional improvement.
- Teachers are supported and encouraged in their efforts to meet together frequently to critique and improve their own classroom curriculum.
- Teachers are knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches and reflective about their own practice.
- Teachers engage in professional development opportunities that allow them to develop a broad range of assessment strategies for their classes.
- Teachers engage in formal training opportunities about *assessment* strategies (e.g., workshops on portfolio development; seminars on performance assessment; a conference on senior projects).

[Return to List of Recommendations]

The school offers its staff substantive, ongoing professional development to help them deal with issues of diversity. Breaking Ranks, Ch 8, #04

Indicators:

- Teachers and staff members are provided with professional development preparation to discuss issues of diversity and how they can best teach students with diverse backgrounds.
- Educators inform themselves about the cultural backgrounds of their students and show sensitivity toward the particular needs that may accompany those differences in backgrounds.
- Teachers help students understand and appreciate the differences among those that inhabit the classroom.

[Return to List of Recommendations]

A high school regards itself as a community in which members of the staff collaborate to develop and implement the school's learning goals. Breaking Ranks, Ch 12, #01

Indicators:

- Teachers and administrators meet together to look at student work and classroom assessment results in order to revise curriculum and modify instruction.
- Teachers meet together regularly (ideally with administrators as well) to share and look at student work for the purpose of improving curriculum and instruction (e.g., all grade 10 English teachers look at samples of student essays written in their classes as a means of determining consistent grading standards and whether curriculum and instruction need modification; all teachers at a staff meeting look at cross–subject student portfolios to determine whether students are acquiring self–reflection skills).
- The professional *culture of the school* is one of collaboration and reflection and is characterized by thoughtful, reflective, and constructive discourse about student learning and well being in both formal and informal settings. Teachers routinely dialogue with each other both within and across subject areas about students, curriculum, and teaching.
- A collaborative spirit of reflection and inquiry exists within the faculty evidenced by ongoing conversations, both formal (e.g., within departments, critical friends groups, common planning time, meetings of teams, peer–coaching sessions, study groups, etc.) and informal (e.g., at lunch tables, over coffee in the faculty room, in the hallways between classes, etc.).
- Teachers routinely engage in conversations about learning expectations, consistent grading

standards, quality of student work, Personal Learning Plans, instructional practices, and curriculum revision.

[Return to List of Recommendations]

The support staff of a high school– secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, and others– will also be encouraged and assisted in their own career growth and drawn into the larger school community as adults who can promote the well–being of students. Breaking Ranks, Ch 7, #05

Indicators:

- All staff members (not just teachers) assume responsibility for promoting the well–being and learning of students.
- Administrators, support service personnel, and other non–teaching professionals engage in conversations with teachers about the quality of and issues associated with student learning.
- Where appropriate, support service personnel are integral members of teams who consult about the needs of individual students.
- Teachers routinely alert appropriate personnel and/or contact parents when they have concerns about students.
- Staff members keep one another appropriately informed about individual student needs/issues and how they impact student learning.
- All personnel (e.g., administrators, faculty members, secretaries, custodians, aides, cafeteria workers, etc.) treat students in respectful and supportive ways.
- Support services personnel and library/information services personnel knowledgeable about the curriculum and involved in its implementation, evaluation, and revision and work with classroom teachers to ensure students have access to resources that support the curriculum.
- The support services personnel (i.e., guidance, health, special education) interact and work collaboratively with staff both within the building and in community organizations to address the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of students.
- All students have access to comprehensive guidance and counseling services that include personal, social, career, and college counseling.

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The high school requires each student to participate in a service program in the community or in the school itself that has educational value. Breaking Ranks, Ch 12, #07

Indicators:

- The health of our democracy depends on students gaining a sense of their connection to the larger community and one of the ways to create this connection is through service learning that enables young people to contribute their efforts to activities that are useful to the community and reflect on what they learn from participation.
- The school defines the educational objectives and establishes the criteria for assessing the experience.
- The school philosophy embraces the educational value of service learning.
- The school can develop a format by which students and use experiences outside of the classroom to derive formal lessons on the value of helping others.

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Story Summaries

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

Francis W. Parker Charter School is a place where

- students come from 40 different towns outside the initial northwest suburbs of Boston
- students work together in advisories to bring their own individual talents to a group community service project
- teachers work with students to devise personal learning plans built on the students' interests
- older students guide younger students
- the curriculum's essential question is broad, thereby allowing students and teachers to take the concept in different directions of interest to them
- students are involved in school committees and the board of trustees
- advisory groups include parent representatives, and senior exhibitions are judged partially by outside experts

The Francis W. Parker Charter School in Devens, Massachusetts serves all its students through a mission built on personal relationships and individual learning. Staff understand that knowing each student well can help them tailor learning to the specific needs of each student. Through these efforts, they include family and community members and create a supportive place in which the student can grow and excel. The support and acceptance that kids receive at Parker has not only translated into higher grades, college acceptances, and a feeling of unity at the school. It has also allowed students to concentrate on acquiring a love of inquiry and learning itself. They don't do school, says Arts and Humanities teacher Deb Merriam. They learn to be inspired to learn and to find and pursue the questions that motivate them.

Roosevelt High School

To improve student achievement at the Roosevelt High School in Yonkers, New York, Principal Bill Moore and a school-based Design Committee worked to establish smaller learning communities. The goals of the small learning community program were to increase parent involvement, community involvement, professional development for staff, and the use of technology.

Now, at this urban high school of 1600 students:

- Students and teachers are grouped into small teams that promote personalization.
- Professional development is ongoing and based on what teachers are learning about student needs as a result of the smaller learning communities.
- Students graduate with more options and marketable skills. They earn licenses in such things as computer training and public safety. Internships are available with local police and fire departments.
- Teachers and administrators make it a point to not only get parents involved, but to train them. Parents attend English and computer skills classes that are taught by students on Saturdays.

Wyandotte High School

- A large, urban high school is now organized into small learning communities, defined as "schools-within-a-school," taught by interdisciplinary teams of teachers serving groups of 160–200 students.
- Together, teachers and administrators have developed a Teaching and Learning Document that articulates a focus for all teachers and students.
- Teachers participate in regular study groups and are paid for two hours of professional development per week.
- Graduation rates have risen from 40% in 1999 to 70% in 2001.

Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas had a rich history as one of the oldest high schools west of the Mississippi. But by the mid–1990s, urban flight and other factors had sparked a major decline. The school contended with safety concerns, test scores that were among the worst in the state, high dropout rates, and accreditation that was in question. Change at Wyandotte High School had to be broad and systemic.

Beginning with the 1998–99 school year, the staff restructured the entire school into small learning communities of about seven teachers for groups of 160–200 students. Teachers and administrators have worked collaboratively to ensure the success of the communities, and every teacher builds relationships with the students and parents

Research Summary

Research

- I. Research Summary for Developing a Learning Community
- II. General Research Summary for Redesigning High Schools
- III. Annotated References for Developing a Learning Community
- IV. Additional References for Developing a Learning Community
- V. General References for Redesigning High Schools

I. Research Summary for Developing a Learning Community

The small schools movement has shown us that size alone does not guarantee the success of a small learning community or school. It is necessary to personalize the environment so that students and teachers know each other well, to establish a unified vision of teaching and learning that binds the school and wider community, and to grant schools the autonomy to create unified learning communities (NESSN, 2002). Even with those conditions met, the members of the immediate school community need to share a common sense of purpose and shared vision, and the school must also receive the support of the district and school board. Clarke (2000) reveals the importance of building the conditions for systemic change: "Change can begin with the teacher, students, or the district, but you need the whole system to change to make it lasting." Schools can solicit enduring support for change by creating key stakeholders in the process, drawing from both the district and the wider community (Cunningham 2002). In order to truly support the conditions for change, schools must engage students, teachers, parents, community members, and political leaders in meeting a set of goals (DiMartino, Clarke &Wolk 2003).

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II. General Research Summary for Redesigning High Schools

The research on redesigning high schools is about both size and quality. The discussion about size focuses on the various ways to reorganize large schools into smaller learning communities and the persuasive findings that smaller can be better in terms of student performance and engagement in learning. The discussion about quality refers to improving the teaching and learning environments so that they are also more student-centered, more individually relevant and rigorous in content, and more versatile/effective with respect to teaching strategies.

Most studies of high school redesign look at "best practices" in concert and as elements of unified and systemic change. In a 1999 New American High Schools publication, *Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings*, authors Visher, Emanuel, and Teitelbaum listed ten reform strategies with two warnings:

First,...none of the strategies by themselves should be expected to make a significant difference in any one school. That is, the available evidence suggests that it is the gathering of several strategies under one roof, especially certain combinations of strategies, that matters . . . Second, schools should adapt strategies to fit their own unique circumstances. Unfortunately, there is no single, correct way to implement reforms . . . (p. 2).

Having identified the essential elements of reform, researchers have since turned to focusing on the barriers to improvement that schools have encountered. *All Over the Map* addresses what states can do to help. *New Small Learning Communities: Findings from recent literature* looks at numerous barriers and their roots.

Researchers also continue to probe the interplay of reform elements with other factors such as individual school cultures, teacher and administrator capacity, and racial and economic inequities. *Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities* by Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and Robert Bickel (ERIC Digest, 2000) reviews the findings of the Matthew Project, a multi-state study that replicated findings showing that small schools significantly reduce the achievement gap for low-income students. All else equal, larger school size benefits achievement in affluent communities, but it is detrimental in impoverished communities (Howley & Bickel, 1999). Even in affluent communities, however, schools serving 1,500 or more students might have diseconomies of scale and bureaucratic operating modes that are not educationally hospitable. Indeed, a wide consensus seems to have emerged (cf. Fulton, 1996) that schools larger than 1,000 are unwise choices for any community. The consensus clearly suggests that schools in impoverished communities should be much, much smaller.

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III. Annotated References for Developing a Learning Community

Clearinghouse on Educational Management (2002). *Corporate Involvement in School Reform*. Eugene, OR: Author.

Focuses on business involvement in school reform, an increasingly significant trend that has been met with mixed reactions from both educators and policymakers. Includes the history of business's role in attempting to improve schools, the goals of both education and of business, reform programs implemented around the country, problems that come with business participation in education, and a number of examples are cited and questions raised to help educators and policymakers decide what level of business involvement is right for their districts.

Clearinghouse on Educational Management (2000). *Business Partnerships with Schools*. Eugene, OR: Author.

Addresses a range of ethical concerns educators have raised concerning school–business partnerships. The section on school–business partnerships highlights recent education policies, federal laws, and practical guidelines for relationships between schools and businesses. Special attention is given to legal and ethical guidelines for partnerships with businesses that offer technology resources to students.

Cooper, C. (1999, Fall/Winter). Beyond the bake sale: How parent involvement makes a difference. *NCREL's Learning Point*, 1(3), 1–6.

An interview with NCREL's Greg Hall, Program Associate for the Center for School and Community Development, provides readers with a close–up look at effective parent involvement programs.

Cunningham, C. (2002, April). Engaging the community to support student success. *ERIC Digest*.

Examines how public engagement can foster student achievement, how school boards and administrators can facilitate the public–engagement process, and how school leaders can solicit enduring support from key stakeholders.

Decker, L.E. (2001, September). Allies in education. *Principal Leadership*, 2(1), 42–46.

Increasingly, the public is losing faith in America's public schools. Principals can prevent this loss of faith by developing relationships between schools and the communities they serve.

Henderson, A.T. & Raimondo, B.N. (2001, September). Unlocking parent potential. *Principal Leadership*, 2(1), 26–32.

A statewide program in Kentucky, the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, nurtures and trains parents to become effective partners in improving schools. Almost 700 parents have graduated from CIPL, and they form a small army of informed activists.

Kuo, E.W. (1999, February). Creating beneficial institutional collaborations. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED427818).

This digest examines the value of collaborations among businesses, community organizations, and educational institutions, and explores how partnerships create new opportunities and challenges.

Manning, M.L. & Lee, G. (2001, Summer). Working with parents—Cultural and linguistic considerations. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 37(4), 160–163. Copyright 2001 Kappa Delta Pi International, International Honor Society in Education.

Involving parents of various cultures in their children's education is essential to working effectively with all students. This paper describes: The rationale for cultural considerations; the need for objectivity; passive parental involvement; extended family involvement; generational differences; communication challenges; parents' expectations for school performance; school emphases on parental role; and ways to involve parents at school.

Potter, L. & Meade, D. (2002, March). Show me the money. *Principal Leadership*, 2(7), 81–82.

When districts need money, they can go to the community for help – but their efforts will only be successful if they follow some important guidelines.

Sanders, M.G. (1998). Schools, families, and communities—Partnership for student success. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Focuses on three areas for building effective school, family, and community partnership programs: a planning framework, an organizational structure, and an assessment of challenges.

Simon, B.S. (2001, October). Family involvement in high school: Predictors and effects. *NASSP Bulletin*, 85(627), 8–19.

Study of high school, family, and community partnerships is based on reports from 11,000 high school parents and 1,000 high school principals. Findings revealed that regardless of students' background and prior achievement, various parenting, volunteering, and home–learning activities positively influenced student grades, course credits completed, attendance, behavior, and school preparedness.

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IV. Additional References for Developing a Learning Community

Bairu, G. (2001, Summer). Public school student, staff, and graduate counts by state: School year 1999–2000. *Education Statistics Quarterly* 3 (2). Available online at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/Vol_3/3_2/q2-6.asp.

Clarke, J. (2000) Dynamics of Change in High School Teaching: A Study of Innovation in five Vermont professional development schools.

DiMartino, J., Clarke, J., and Wolk, D. editors (2003). Personalized Learning: Preparing High School Students to Create Their Futures. Lanham, MD: ScarecrowPress.

Ferguson, R. (Summer 1991). Paying for public education: New evidence on how and why money matters. *Harvard Journal on Legislation* 28: 465–98.

Henderson, A.T., &Berla, N. (Eds.). (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Citizens in Education

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V. General Research on Redesigning High Schools

Breaking Ranks in Action

http://www.principals.org/publicaffairs/pr_br_action040202.htm

New Report Tracks Progress of Groundbreaking Research

http://www.principals.org/schoolimprove/breakingranks_2002.html

An analysis of the most current research and findings surrounding the recommendations in *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*, provides a synopsis of the literature underpinning the more than 80 recommendations in the original *Breaking Ranks* report.

School Redesign Network at Stanford University Internet Resources on Starting Small Schools

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/SUSE/csrn/resources/small/>

Top 5 websites with links to research on small schools

Looking for research on small schools? These five websites are great places to start:

- **ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools**

These short "digests" are probably the best quick overview of the of the research on small schools.

- **Small Schools Workshop**

This site provides a more comprehensive overview of the research on small schools, including links to recent studies.

- **National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities**

This is another comprehensive list of links to studies and articles on small schools, including some of the most recent research.

- **Small Schools Project**

This is a shorter (and thus more manageable) list, which includes some of the key studies on small schools.

- **Coalition of Essential Schools Fieldbook**

This is another shorter list of resources which includes some key studies, including some articles by the Coalition not cited elsewhere.

The Research in Brief:

ERIC digests and other research summaries

These studies provide an excellent overview of the of the research on small schools:

New Small Learning Communities: Findings From Recent Literature

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED425049> by Kathleen Cotton (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001).

This is a clear, comprehensive overview of the recent research on small schools and small learning communities, with a primary focus on studies completed in the past five years.

Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED414615> by Michael Klonsky (Small Schools Workshop, 1998).

This article provides an excellent overview of the research data on small schools, including some older studies that are not referenced in many other publications.

Current Literature on Small Schools

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed425049.html by Mary Anne Raywid (ERIC Digest, 1999).

This digest provides a brief overview of research literature on the effectiveness of small schools and describes current topics researchers have begun to explore.

Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED401088>

<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/nslc.pdf> by Kathleen Cotton (ERIC Digest, 1996).

This digest is a brief version of a longer paper called "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance." (School Improvement Research Series Close Up #20, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996). Both publications provide an excellent overview of small schools research, including in particular the affective and social benefits of small schools.

School Size

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED414615> by Karen Irmsher (ERIC Digest, 1997).

This digest is another good overview of small schools research, including information on cost-effectiveness, facilities, and whether there is an optimal school size.

Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED448968> by Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and Robert Bickel (ERIC Digest, 2000).

This digest reviews the findings of the Matthew Project, a multi-state study that replicated findings showing that small schools significantly reduce the achievement gap between low-income and wealthier students.

Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer Than 400 Pupils (9–12)

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED401090> by Christopher Roellke (ERIC Digest, 1996).

This digest reviews research showing that small school size facilitates the development of a high-quality curriculum.

ASK ERIC Internet Sites:

Youth at the Crossroads: Facing High School and Beyond (Winter 2001)

http://www.edtrust.org/main/documents/k16_winter01.pdf

This report provides an overview of available data on student achievement and school completion, and ends "with a look at some core building blocks for rethinking high school education." This report was published by the Education Trust, Inc and is available as a pdf document.

Transforming the American High School: New Directions for State and Local Policy (2001)

<http://www.jff.org/pdfs%20and%20downloads/transforminghs.pdf>

This report identifies "systemic policy issues and change strategies necessary to respond to this emerging crisis on a large scale and in the fastest possible time frame." Published by Jobs for the Future's From the Margins to the Mainstream Initiative and the Aspen Institute's Program on Education in a Changing Society.

High Schools That Work

<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/hstwindex.asp>

High Schools That Work offers a framework of goals and key practices that more than 1,000 schools in 23 states are implementing to raise student achievement. Site includes publications and materials that can be downloaded for immediate use.

The New American High Schools Initiative

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/HS/index.html>

This is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. It focuses on high schools that are committed to providing challenging academic standards for their students, standards that will adequately prepare them for higher education and careers.

High Schools of the Millenium

http://www.aypf.org/publicatons/HSchools_round_3.pdf

This report "examines the crisis of America's outdated high schools as they try to handle the changing needs of today's youth." Published by the American Youth Policy Forum and is available as a pdf document.

State Graduation Requirements

<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Graduation/StatesGrad.htm>

This site includes links to state web sites with information on graduation requirements.

Initiation Rites in American High Schools: A National Survey (August 2000)

http://www.alfred.edu/news/html/hazing_study.html

This report, by Nadine C. Hoover, Ph.D. and Norman J. Pollard, Ed.D. of Alfred University, examines the presence of hazing and initiation rites for high school students.

1994 Bibliography on School Restructuring

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/leon-toc.htm>

This bibliography provides a recommended list of research and theoretical literature in school restructuring. The literature, chosen to be of interest for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, is organized into five areas:

I. General References on School Restructuring

II. Student Experiences

III. Professional Life of the Teachers

IV. School Governance

V. Collaboration Between Schools and Community

These topics reflect specific research projects conducted at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools

University of Wisconsin–Madison

Wisconsin Center for Education Research

1025 West Johnson Street, Madison, WI 53706

(608) 263–7575

Fostering Independent Learning

Students learn to design pathways toward their own futures through personalized learning plans, an advisory system, and student-led conferences. These and other strategies help them to identify and achieve personal and educational goals.

Teachers in personalized high schools prepare students to set their own goals and gather the skills and knowledge they need for success. An advisory system prevents anonymity and allows school staff to teach targeted skills and guide students in choosing courses. It also allows staff to engage in a variety of other activities designed to help students reflect on their own goals and progress. Chief among these is the development of a personal learning plan that connects students' own learning goals to the standards of the school. In personalized high schools, teachers' instructional strategies also promote independent thinking and lead students to take a personal stake in their own learning.

Questions to Think About

- Is each student known well by at least one adult at your school? Are teachers' student loads small enough to make this a realistic goal?
- How do advisors at your school ensure that the academic and social needs of their advisees are being met?
- How do teachers at your school stimulate independent thinking in their classrooms?

Breaking Ranks Recommendations

Breaking Ranks: Changing An American Institution is a 1996 publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. It offers a series of recommendations that have become a guiding force for high school redesign throughout the nation. Listed below are the recommendations applicable to this practice. For a clearer picture of what each recommendation looks like in action, click on it, and its "indicators" will appear.

Every high school student will have a Personal Adult Advocate to help him or her personalize the educational experience.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 3, #03

Teachers will be adept at acting as coaches and facilitators to promote more active student involvement of students in their own learning.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #03

The school will accord meaningful roles in the decision-making process to students, parents, and members of the staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 3, #04

Teachers will convey a sense of caring to their students so that their students feel that their teachers share a stake in their learning.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #05

Each student has a Personal Plan for Progress to ensure that the high school takes individual needs into consideration and to allow students, within reasonable parameters, to design their own methods for learning in an effort to meet high standards.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #06

Experiences in high school acknowledge multiple talents and ways of learning to help students achieve the meaningful success that leads to further achievement.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 3, #02

The high school will assess the academic progress of students in a variety of ways so that a clear and valid picture emerges of what they know and are able to do.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 6, #01

The school reviews each student's Personal Progress Plan continually and indicates the extent of progress toward graduation and post secondary transition plans.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 6, #02

Every high school student will have a Personal Adult Advocate to help him or her personalize the educational experience.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 3, #03

Indicators:

- Each student has an adult member of the school community who knows that student well and serves as a *personal advocate, mentor, or advisor*.
- To foster personalization and reduce the sense of anonymity felt by many high school students, the school has a formal program that connects each student with an adult member of the school community.
- Each student is assigned an advisor/advocate (in addition to the guidance counselor) who is charged with supporting every aspect of the student's educational experience (e.g., advocates meet regularly with their students, generally in groups of 12–20, throughout the year and often will be assigned to work with the same students for all 4 years; advocates routinely call parents to keep them informed about the progress of their students in meeting all learning expectations; advocates serve as the prime facilitator of the *Personal Learning Plan* for each student; and advocates develop a rapport with students so that students feel comfortable in seeking their assistance).
- Advocates are generally teachers and other professional members of the staff (e.g., the principal, guidance counselors, nurse, curriculum leaders), but secretaries, custodians, and other staff members can also act as advocates (i.e., to enhance their roles as members of the school community who are concerned about students and to reduce the ratio of students to adult advocates).
- The school provides additional opportunities for adult members of the school community to get to know students well (e.g., adults collaborate with students on school–related projects adults serve as mentors for senior projects teams of teachers work with the same group of students).

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Teachers will be adept at acting as coaches and facilitators to promote more active student involvement of students in their own learning.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #03

Indicators:

Rich and varied teaching strategies are evident throughout the school and lines of desks and teacher–centered approaches are not the norm. Teachers demonstrate a repertoire of instructional strategies that accomplish the following:

- **Personalize instruction:** Teachers meet regularly with individuals or small groups of students to address individual learning needs; teachers select the appropriate instructional approaches to address various learning styles; teachers call home to talk with parents; teachers show respect, positive rapport, etc. in day–to–day conversations with students; teachers act as 1:1 *advisors/mentors*.
- **Engage students as active self–directed learners:** Teachers act as "coaches" who facilitate

student learning by asking students to do independent research, work in cooperative groups, apply knowledge in real–world situations, etc; teachers routinely ask students to reflect on their work and to self–critique (e.g., through the use of *portfolios*).

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The school will accord meaningful roles in the decision–making process to students, parents, and members of the staff to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
Breaking Ranks, Ch 3, #04

Indicators:

- Teachers and other staff members, students, and parents have a voice in decision–making that is sufficiently meaningful to promote an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
- The principal models accessibility and openness to feedback from students, faculty, and parents.
- The principal offers regular coffee hours, lunchtime chats, and other forums to allow the voices of all constituents to be heard.
- Formal mechanisms are in place to provide decision–making roles for students, teachers, and parents (e.g., faculty councils or steering committees, community councils, school improvement teams).
- Surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, and other vehicles are used regularly to collect data/feedback from all constituents that become part of the decision–making process.
- The school climate is positive, respectful, and supportive in a way that it promotes a sense of pride and ownership to the entire school community.
- Randomly selected students and teachers talk with enthusiasm and pride about their school and its academic values.
- The school facility reflects the sense of ownership and pride felt by students (e.g., clean and well–maintained, minimal or no graffiti or breakage, etc.).
- Teachers and students speak to each other with respect; a tone of decency and trust is evident.
- All members of the school community are treated equitably.
- Students respect the diversity of backgrounds and interests of their peers and show no noticeable segregation by cliques or alienation due to unique differences.
- In non–classroom settings (e.g., cafeteria, auditorium, hallways, media center, athletic events, etc.) students demonstrate values of respect and habits of behavior that indicate that they are independent and responsible.
- The student body is well–behaved at all school and school–sponsored events.
- Discipline and attendance policies and procedures are consistent with the school's mission and expectations for student learning.
- The integrated–curricular program promotes student involvement and school pride.
- The school routinely reflects on its climate and takes steps to improve it.
- Students and their families are actively engaged as partners in the students' education and are encouraged to participate in school programs and parent support groups.
- Outreach efforts are made to engage parents in the scholastic lives of their sons and daughters (e.g., frequent parent forums and seminars, invitations to open houses and parent coffees, parent support groups, calls to the home by teachers, etc.)
- Parent support groups are formed to encourage good parenting skills, to provide support around such issues as divorce, drugs, and alcohol, etc.
- Parents are regularly contacted and involved in conferences regarding the learning needs of their children.

- Training is provided to teachers for conferencing with and assisting parents in how best to support student learning.
- Site-based councils or other forms of school governance engage parents as members.
- Parents are involved as tutors, lecturers, and aides within the school.
- Parents are invited to programs that showcase student work, to roundtable presentations of student portfolios, etc.
- Students participate in parent/teacher conferences that deal with their learning needs and progress.
- A school website keeps parents informed about events, strategies, and their children's education.

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Teachers will convey a sense of caring to their students to that their students feel that their teachers share a stake in their learning.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 2, #05

Indicators:

- All staff members (not just teachers) assume responsibility for promoting the well-being and learning of students.
- Administrators, support service personnel, and other non-teaching professionals engage in conversations with teachers about the quality of and issues associated with student learning.
- Where appropriate, support service personnel are integral members of teams who consult about the needs of individual students.
- Teachers routinely alert appropriate personnel and/or contact parents when they have concerns about students.
- Staff members keep one another appropriately informed about individual student needs/issues and how they impact student learning.
- School personnel (e.g., administrators, faculty members, secretaries, custodians, aides, cafeteria workers, etc.) treat students in respectful and supportive ways.
- Students are involved in parent night presentations with teachers.

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Each student has a Personal Plan for Progress to ensure that the high school takes individual needs into consideration and to allow students, within reasonable parameters, to design their own methods for learning in an effort to meet high standards.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 1, #06

Indicators:

- All students have opportunities to practice and achieve each of the school-wide academic expectations.
- A core curriculum is required of all students that addresses all of the school-wide academic expectations.
- The design of the curriculum ensures that each student is provided with the learning experiences necessary to achieve the school-wide academic expectations at the desired level.
- When appropriate, alternative paths/programs and time options are available to those students who need significant additional support or time to meet the expectations (e.g., night school, summer school, or Saturday programs; Algebra 1 is offered over three semesters for some

students).

- Ancillary support mechanisms are in place to help all students achieve the expectations, but they should not be the only vehicle for providing students with the necessary learning experiences (e.g., teachers are available to provide extra help; learning centers are open to provide support both during and after school; tutoring is available).

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Experiences in high school acknowledge multiple talents and ways of learning to help students achieve the meaningful success that leads to further achievement.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 3, #02

Indicators:

- All teachers use a variety and range of classroom assessment strategies and are able to determine which tools and strategies are most effective for assessing particular outcomes.
- All teachers are well versed in various approaches to assessment and grading including *alternative assessment* strategies that extend the teacher's understanding of student learning beyond the results of traditional paper-and-pencil tests.
- Most teachers use exhibitions and performance assessment approaches routinely.
- *Portfolio assessment* is used in areas such as writing and the arts to measure growth in learning over time.
- *Authentic assessment* approaches are used to expose students to real world interpretations of their work.
- Teacher collaboration is evident in determining appropriate approaches for assessing particular outcomes.

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The high school will assess the academic progress of students in a variety of ways so that a clear and valid picture emerges of what they know and are able to do.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 6, #01

Indicators:

- Assessment of student work should provide a rich collection of information that reflects on a student's progress in moving through the curriculum.
- For assessment to depict a student's academic growth, it should not be static, and will have multiple dimensions.
- Student's accomplishments are demonstrated in the forms of portfolios, performance tasks, standardized tests, etc.
- The school presents assessment results in a way that is useful to parents, admission officers, managers, and the student.
- The assessments are rigorous and people have confidence in them.
- Teacher's work together to design assessment strategies, and professional development is provided to the school community.

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The school reviews each student's Personal Progress Plan continually and indicates the extent of progress toward graduation and post secondary transition plans.

Breaking Ranks, Ch 6, #02

Indicators:

- Teachers and the school as a whole clearly communicate to students and their families how student work and progress are being assessed.
- The school makes special efforts to communicate frequently in writing about student progress in achieving course-specific learning goals and school-wide expectations.
- The school makes it clear that assessment is an integral part of the learning process.
- Teachers work hard to demystify assessment (e.g., they make continuing efforts to state clearly to both students and their families ahead of time what type of assessment will be used to judge the quality of particular student work, how final grades will be determined, what measurable criteria will be used, etc.)
- When alternative forms of assessment are used, teachers clearly indicate how the results will be translated into grades or other final reporting documents.
- Teachers provide models to inform students of the expected quality of work.
- Teachers give students specific feedback on how to improve future performance.

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Story Summaries

The Met Center

Students construct their education by developing personal learning plans with a mentor–advisor. Through individual learning plans, students meet personal aspirations and the common standards of the student and the school.

- Small, public school with six campuses of 100 students each.
- Students assigned to advisory groups of 13–15 that stay together through four years and maintain the same advisor – a Rhode Island–certified teacher.
- Students explore their interests and life options through projects, courses, and activities
- Students develop a personal learning plan, which can be adapted each quarter, with the help of family members and their advisor.
- Students engage in an internship at a Rhode Island organization as a part of their learning plan
- Students present their work and knowledge gained to teachers, members of the community, and family members at exhibitions held four times a year.
- Students create a portfolio of work to demonstrate the skills they have acquired through both project work and their internships.

Students get more out of their education when they have a say in what they are learning, how they are learning it, and what projects will best display their mastery of the content. Students also become engaged in learning when they can connect it to real–world concerns. These two beliefs led Elliot Washor and Dennis Littky, co–directors of the non–profit organization The Big Picture Company, to devise a curriculum for a high school that would put the student first.

At the resulting school, The Met Center in Providence, R.I., students map out their entire educational plan in a personal learning plan that can be adapted every quarter. Family members, the student's advisor, and eventually the student's internship mentor meet to help the student with the planning.

Through this document, standards are agreed upon and made clear to everyone involved. Students are given the opportunity to explore and connect areas they may not have been able to delve into at a traditional high school. They are also able to individually determine how they will pursue knowledge and demonstrate their mastery of a subject.

The personal learning plans also allow teachers to advise students on the basis of their individual progress. The teacher/advisor becomes a manager of the students' chosen work rather than a lecturer. In this way, students build closer relationships with their advisors and feel they can turn to them for help.

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies

- Small public school includes grades 6–12.
- School leadership is collaborative, involving co-directors, teachers, students, and parents.
- Professional development initiative fosters faculty collaboration as a route to improved practice.
- Student input helps to shape curricular and extra-curricular offerings.
- Internship program provides juniors with career experience and a structure for reflecting on this experience.
- Senior thesis requirement allows students to explore a topic of their choice in depth.

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies reached a crisis in its growth from a smaller school with a cohesive vision to a larger school whose faculty could no longer keep the vision coherent through casual contact. The school's co-directors, Sheila Breslaw and Rob Menken, used outside facilitation over a span of four years to establish new patterns of communication based on collegial collaboration. They created a "culture of excellence" by focusing on teacher practice and student response, answering such questions as, "What do we value? Are we stating this clearly to the students and assessing what we are saying?" The school is now using internal collaborative structures to support staff development initiatives and overall school improvement.

Personalized teaching is a key component of the Lab School's improvement efforts. Students were behind a number of recent additions to the school curriculum, and students envisioned and helped to design a new advisory program for seventh graders. Teachers are constantly adapting existing courses, both to reflect current events and issues and to better fit their students' needs and interests. Student interests are also at the heart of two Lab School graduation requirements: the junior internship and the senior thesis. The internship program allows juniors to spend two afternoons each week at a job site relevant to their career interests and to reflect on their experiences during a monthly seminar. To complete their senior thesis, Lab students research a topic of their choice and, with the guidance of a faculty advisor, develop a product that reflects what they've learned. These products have ranged from a research paper to a graphic novel to a full-length production of a play. For students interested in in-depth exploration of a topic before their senior year, Lab School teachers volunteer to supervise independent studies. The opportunities for students to shape their own learning experiences in collaboration with a workplace supervisor or a faculty member are numerous at the Lab School.

At the New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies, the staff and the students have worked together to sharpen the school's vision, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and create an environment where student interests matter and student needs are met. The school's collaborative approach to learning, leadership, curriculum planning, and professional growth is the key to its success.

Research Summary

Research

- I. Research Summary for Fostering Independent Learning
- II. General Research Summary for Redesigning High Schools
- III. Annotated References for Fostering Independent Learning
- IV. Additional References for Fostering Independent Learning
- V. General References for Redesigning High Schools

I. Research Summary for Fostering Independent Learning

Real-world experiences empower and inspire students to take control of their own learning. Small learning communities can create the conditions to allow for the use of personal learning plans (PLPs), student-led conferences, project-based learning, service learning, and other innovative strategies to promote active student engagement in education (Clarke 2000).

Alternative forms of assessment can be used to gauge what a student knows and is able to do. Using student exhibitions and portfolios is a powerful alternative to using standardized testing to identify students' depth of knowledge in a subject area (Cushman Brandjes 2003; Levine 2002).

Experiential learning programs like Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound provide students with the opportunity to test their physical limits by learning skills like team building and self-reliance, while continuing academic growth in literacy, science, and math (NSDC 2000). Soliciting student input in formal meetings or informal conversations can provide the school with a picture of students' needs and interests. It can also help staff to design coursework around those needs and interests (Park & Smith 2003).

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II. General Research Summary for Redesigning High Schools

The research on redesigning high schools is about both size and quality. The discussion about size focuses on the various ways to reorganize large schools into smaller learning communities and the persuasive findings that smaller can be better in terms of student performance and engagement in learning. The discussion about quality refers to improving the teaching and learning environments so that they are also more student-centered, more individually relevant and rigorous in content, and more versatile/effective with respect to teaching strategies.

Most studies of high school redesign look at "best practices" in concert and as elements of unified and systemic change. In a 1999 New American High Schools publication, *Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings*, authors Visher, Emanuel, and Teitelbaum listed ten reform strategies with two warnings:

First,...none of the strategies by themselves should be expected to make a significant difference in any one school. That is, the available evidence suggests that it is the gathering of several strategies under one roof, especially certain combinations of strategies, that matters . . . Second, schools should adapt strategies to fit their own unique circumstances. Unfortunately, there is no single, correct way to implement reforms . . . (p. 2).

Having identified the essential elements of reform, researchers have since turned to focusing on the barriers to improvement that schools have encountered. *All Over the Map* addresses what states can do to help. *New Small Learning Communities: Findings from recent literature* looks at numerous barriers and their roots.

Researchers also continue to probe the interplay of reform elements with other factors such as individual school cultures, teacher and administrator capacity, and racial and economic inequities. *Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities* by Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and Robert Bickel (ERIC Digest, 2000) reviews the findings of the Matthew Project, a multi-state study that replicated findings showing that small schools significantly reduce the achievement gap for low-income students. All else equal, larger school size benefits achievement in affluent communities, but it is detrimental in impoverished communities (Howley & Bickel, 1999). Even in affluent communities, however, schools serving 1,500 or more students might have diseconomies of scale and bureaucratic operating modes that are not educationally hospitable. Indeed, a wide consensus seems to have emerged (cf. Fulton, 1996) that schools larger than 1,000 are unwise choices for any community. The consensus clearly suggests that schools in impoverished communities should be much, much smaller.

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III. Annotated References for Fostering Independent Learning

DiMartino, J., Clarke, J., and Wolk, D. editors (2003). Personalized Learning: Preparing High School Students to Create Their Futures. *Scarecrow Press*, Lanham, MD.

This book, written by 23 education practitioners, administrators and policy-makers highlights current initiatives aimed at personalizing learning for high school students. Personal Learning Plans that tie the learning to the talents and aspirations of the student are described. Classroom teaching that allows individuals to gain knowledge while pursuing their own hops is explored. Sections describe high school designs that engage students in democratic processes and systemic changes that must accompany and support personalized learning for all students. Written by practitioners with practical interest in moving high schools toward personalization, this book will excite others to initiate reforms that enable ALL young adult learners to meet common standards while designing and pursuing a unique pathway toward adult roles.

Jenkins, J.M. & Keefe, J.W. (2002, February). Two schools: Two approaches to personalized learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(6), 449–456. Copyright 2002 Phi Delta Kappa International.

The authors believe that the kind of vital personalization exemplified at Haney and Parker—not state testing or rigid standardization—must become the cornerstone of school renewal if educators and the communities they serve hope to change, in any significant way, the basic grammar of schooling.

Nagel, J.E. & Smith, P. (2001, November). The art of personalizing learning. *Principal Leadership*, 2(3), 36–39.

Creativity is often reserved for the traditional arts, but personalized learning is an art of its own.

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IV. Additional References for Fostering Independent Learning

Clarke, J. (2000) *Dynamics of Change in High School Teaching*. A Study of Innovation in five Vermont professional development schools.

Cohen, E. (1994). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cohen, E. and Lotan, R. A., eds. (1997). *Working for equity in heterogeneous classrooms: sociological theory in practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cushman Brandjes, E. *Assessing to Engage: Developing Personal Profiles for Each Student*. Chapter 2 in DiMartino, J., Clarke, J., and Wolk, D. editors (2003). *Personalized Learning: Preparing High School Students to Create Their Futures*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Darling Hammond, L., Snyder, J., Aneess, J., Einbender, L., Goodwin, A. L., & Macdonald, M. B. (1993). *Creating learner-centered accountability*. New York: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Dixon-Krauss, L. (1996). *Vygotsky in the Classroom: Mediated literacy instruction and assessment*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Levine, E. (2001) *One Kid at a Time: Big Lessons from a Small School*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Park J. and Smith P. (February, 2003) *Turn Up the Volume*. *Principal Leadership* 37–40.

Wehlage, G. G., Rutter, R. A., and Tumbaugh, A. (1987, March). A program model for at-risk high school students. *Educational Leadership* 45: 70–73.

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V. General References for Redesigning High Schools

Breaking Ranks in Action

http://www.principals.org/publicaffairs/pr_br_action040202.htm

New Report Tracks Progress of Groundbreaking Research

http://www.principals.org/schoolimprove/breakingranks_2002.html

An analysis of the most current research and findings surrounding the recommendations in *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*, provides a synopsis of the literature underpinning the more than 80 recommendations in the original *Breaking Ranks* report.

School Redesign Network at Stanford University Internet Resources on Starting Small Schools

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/SUSE/csrn/resources/small/>

Top 5 websites with links to research on small schools

Looking for research on small schools? These five websites are great places to start:

- **ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools**
These short "digests" are probably the best quick overview of the of the research on small schools.
- **Small Schools Workshop**
This site provides a more comprehensive overview of the research on small schools, including links to recent studies.
- **National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities**
This is another comprehensive list of links to studies and articles on small schools, including some of the most recent research.
- **Small Schools Project**
This is a shorter (and thus more manageable) list, which includes some of the key studies on small schools.
- **Coalition of Essential Schools Fieldbook**
This is another shorter list of resources which includes some key studies, including some articles by the Coalition not cited elsewhere.

The Research in Brief:

ERIC digests and other research summaries

These studies provide an excellent overview of the of the research on small schools:

New Small Learning Communities: Findings From Recent Literature

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed425049.html by Kathleen Cotton (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001).

This is a clear, comprehensive overview of the recent research on small schools and small learning communities, with a primary focus on studies completed in the past five years.

Small Schools: The Numbers Tell a Story

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed414615.html by Michael Klonsky (Small Schools Workshop, 1998).

This article provides an excellent overview of the research data on small schools, including some older studies that are not referenced in many other publications.

Current Literature on Small Schools

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed425049.html by Mary Anne Raywid (ERIC Digest, 1999).

This digest provides a brief overview of research literature on the effectiveness of small schools and describes current topics researchers have begun to explore.

Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed401088.html <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/nslc.pdf> by Kathleen Cotton (ERIC Digest, 1996).

This digest is a brief version of a longer paper called "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance." (School Improvement Research Series Close Up #20, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1996). Both publications provide an excellent overview of small schools research, including in particular the affective and social benefits of small schools.

School Size

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed414615.html by Karen Irmsher (ERIC Digest, 1997). This digest is another good overview of small schools research, including information on cost-effectiveness, facilities, and whether there is an optimal school size.

Research About School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed448968.html by Craig Howley, Marty Strange, and Robert Bickel (ERIC Digest, 2000).

This digest reviews the findings of the Matthew Project, a multi-state study that replicated findings showing that small schools significantly reduce the achievement gap between low-income and wealthier students.

Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer Than 400 Pupils (9–12)

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed401090.html by Christopher Roellke (ERIC Digest, 1996).

This digest reviews research showing that small school size facilitates the development of a high-quality curriculum.

ASK ERIC Internet Sites:

Youth at the Crossroads: Facing High School and Beyond (Winter 2001)

http://www.edtrust.org/main/documents/k16_winter01.pdf

This report provides an overview of available data on student achievement and school completion, and ends "with a look at some core building blocks for rethinking high school education". This report was published by the Education Trust, Inc and is available as a pdf document.

Transforming the American High School: New Directions for State and Local Policy (2001)

<http://www.jff.org/pdfs%20and%20downloads/transforminghs.pdf>

This report identifies "systemic policy issues and change strategies necessary to respond to this emerging crisis on a large scale and in the fastest possible time frame" Published by Jobs for the Future's From the Margins to the Mainstream Initiative and the Aspen Institute's Program on Education in a Changing Society.

High Schools That Work

<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/hstwindex.asp>

High Schools That Work offers a framework of goals and key practices that more than 1,000 schools in 23 states are implementing to raise student achievement. Site includes publications and materials that can be downloaded for immediate use.

The New American High Schools Initiative

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/HS/index.html>

This is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. It focuses on high schools that are committed to providing challenging academic standards for their students, standards that will adequately prepare them for higher education and careers.

High Schools of the Millenium

http://www.aypf.org/publicatons/HSchools_round_3.pdf

This report "examines the crisis of America's outdated high schools as they try to handle the changing needs of today's youth." Published by the American Youth Policy Forum and is available as a pdf document.

State Graduation Requirements

<http://education.umn.edu/nceo/TopicAreas/Graduation/StatesGrad.htm>

This site includes links to state web sites with information on graduation requirements.

Initiation Rites in American High Schools: A National Survey (August 2000)

http://www.alfred.edu/news/html/hazing_study.html

This report, by Nadine C. Hoover, Ph.D. and Norman J. Pollard, Ed.D. of Alfred University, examines the presence of hazing and initiation rites for high school students.

1994 Bibliography on School Restructuring

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/leon-toc.htm>

This bibliography provides a recommended list of research and theoretical literature in school restructuring. The literature, chosen to be of interest for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, is organized into five areas:

[I. General References on School Restructuring](#)

[II. Student Experiences](#)

[III. Professional Life of the Teachers](#)

[IV. School Governance](#)

[V. Collaboration Between Schools and Community](#)

These topics reflect specific research projects conducted at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools

University of Wisconsin–Madison

Wisconsin Center for Education Research

1025 West Johnson Street, Madison, WI 53706

(608) 263–7575

Related Web Resources

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Serving Small Learning Communities (0)

Stories

This section presents Knowledge Loom stories about classrooms, schools, or districts that exemplify one or more of the practices in the spotlight.

Each story contains a full feature article and a set of facts about how the practice was put into action. Each story lists the practices it exemplifies and the name of the content provider.

For an overview of additional content presented on The Knowledge Loom Web site that may not have been selected for this print document, see the Spotlight Map located earlier in the document.

The Met Center

The Met Center

Providence, RI

School Type: Public

School Setting: Urban

Level: High

School

Design: Alternative

Content Presented By:

The Education Alliance at Brown
University



Two years ago, Will Guise, a Rhode Island high school student, liked nothing better than to curl up with a good social work casebook. The stories of people helping others with mental illnesses and related issues fascinated him. But he was barely passing English at his school.

My parents knew my situation, Guise says. They'd been to enough teacher conferences where people said, We just can't help your son. But, when I was motivated, I knew I was capable of doing the work.

So, Guise and his parents researched alternative high schools where he could pursue a course of learning tailored to his interests. Enter The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met Center) in Providence. Opened in 1996 by the Big Picture Company, a non-profit educational organization dedicated to rethinking American schooling, The Met Center revolved around a program called Learning Through Internship (LTI). Big Picture co-directors Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor believed it would be more productive for a school to focus on the student first instead of working with a preset curriculum and structured classroom learning. They also believed that students learned more when they were engaged personally in meaningful work related to a chosen topic.

The LTI program Littky and Washor devised consists of activities for determining a student's interests, strengths, talents, and professional goals; a personal learning plan developed by the student with input from an advisor, family members, and a mentor; and real-world internship experience with working adults.

It sounded like just the thing for Guise. Not only would he be able to put his interests to use for internship credit, but he would also be able to build strong relationships with a teacher (who The Met calls an advisor) and an on-the-job mentor. A strong guidance relationship had been missing from his previous school experience.

At my old school, I was more of a number than a student, Guise says. Whether I passed or failed didn't really matter to [my teachers]. They were authority figures I couldn't talk to. Now, I refer to my advisor on a first-name basis and I feel like I can ask her for help.

The Met considers strong relationships key to a student's success at the school. Each campus (there are now six throughout Providence) is designed to hold no more than 100 students. When they enter their first year, students are placed in an advisory group of about 13–15 students. Instead of seeing six

or seven instructors, students have one advisor, a certified teacher, who works intensively with the group for all four years. The advisories are then grouped together across grades to form eight larger groups, which work together on community service projects and discuss school governance. The advisories provide a small community of peers with whom students can discuss their work and receive feedback. The larger groups also allow for positive relationships between older and younger students.

While students at The Met forge bonds with their advisors and peers, they are also discovering interests that will fuel their projects and internship work. Guise dove right in with an internship at a Providence center for people recovering from mental illness. To prepare for the internship, Guise participated in a series of activities called group explorations, Family Learning Plan meetings, and Who am I? projects. Once he was sure of his target area, he worked with his advisor and an internship coordinator to schedule informational meetings with the center and an on-the-job shadow day.

These explorations, which often include travel in and outside of Providence, guest speakers, movies, and other discussion and research tools, confirmed his interest in mental health and social issues. Soon he was accruing over 300 hours of job experience a year. He helped run group therapy sessions and often had to work with the aid of an interpreter.

It took a lot of commitment on my part, Guise says. It has been a big lesson in how to manage time.

For students who are not as sure of their direction as Guise was, the group explorations help broaden their views of the world and lead them to discover the wide range of opportunities they may not have considered before. For example, a trip to the Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence may provoke discussion about landscape architects working at the zoo or the people who develop the zoo's publicity and advertising.

At the same time students are participating in group explorations, they are attending Family Learning Plan meetings. Students meet with their advisor and a member of their family at the beginning of each quarter to develop and update the student's learning plan. This meeting can uncover valuable resources for the student within their family's experiences. One student actually based a part of her learning plan on fibromyalgia, a condition with which her mom had been diagnosed. This component to The Met's program ensures that family members remain active and involved with the student's academic career.

Finally, the Who am I? projects help students gain a better understanding of themselves as they learn basic project and time management skills. These projects include autobiographical sketches, family histories, oral histories, and personal timelines. Each student chooses the project that best suits his or her experiences.

Throughout the exploration process, advisors support the students and have the freedom to guide each student at the appropriate pace. They schedule informational interviews and on-the-job shadowing opportunities for the student and work with the student's internship mentor to build the skills needed for the student to reach his or her personal goals.

I'm more of a manager of the student's work, says Laura Maxwell, an advisor at The Met. I don't have to nag about grammar or sentence structure. They know their work is going to be seen by larger audiences out there. They know it needs to be professional.

Internships start at 5–10 hours a week for first year students and grow depending upon the student s learning plan. Flexibility remains the hallmark of the LTI program. Students can revise their plan when necessary, and advisors can team up to bring a variety of expertise and perspectives to their students.

It varies from one person to the next, what our strengths are, Maxwell says. Teachers have all sorts of life experiences, things they can contribute to an advisory. We rely on each other and pool our talents.

Although the program of work is different from the traditional high school curriculum, The Met Center still holds its students to high standards of accountability. Because the student s Learning Team (student, family members, mentor, and advisor) discusses the learning plan over a period of time, there is eventual agreement about what constitutes attainment of the student s stated goals.

Students demonstrate their proficiency through exhibitions held four times a year. During the exhibition, students present evidence of learning and finished projects to a public panel of advisors, family members, mentors, fellow students, and community members who bring relevant field expertise to the topic. Guise, for example, conducted a study and workshops about the stigma of mental illness. Mental health providers then attended his exhibition and reviewed his methods and conclusions along with The Met faculty. In this way, the panel not only evaluates the work in regard to the previously established school standards but also against the standards of the field.

Students also create a portfolio of their work. Advisors and administrators at the school have forged relationships with colleges to explain this method and developed a special transcript that functions as a table of contents to the portfolio. The contents vary, but students have included videotapes of exhibitions, artwork, research reports, and narrative assessments written by the student s advisor and mentor.

The combination of a learning plan, Learning Through Internship experience, and detailed portfolio work ensured that each student in The Met Center s first graduating class was accepted to college. Nearly 70% of those accepted represented the first generation in their family to go on to higher education. Through the program they also cemented time management, presentation, public speaking, and research skills that will help them succeed in both their academic and professional endeavors.

Elliot Washor views this end as the school s continuing mission.

Our accountability to our students, their families, and to ourselves is to ensure that students graduate and are prepared to move on to higher education and the workforce, he says. It demonstrates how effective a school can be when the entire community is a resource for education.

Demographics

- Houses grades 9–12
- Student population of 300
- 38% Caucasian, 32% Hispanic, 22% African American, 2% Asian, 6% other
- Six campuses operating at half capacity
- Eight advisors (teachers) per school who meet with advisory groups of 13–15 students each
- All advisors are Rhode Island–certified teachers
- 75% of students live in Providence; 25% from surrounding communities
- 52% qualify for free or reduced–price lunch

Background

In 1995, The Big Picture Company, a non-profit educational organization, wanted to turn traditional schooling on its ear. Co-directors Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor believed it would be more productive to focus on the student first instead of working with a preset curriculum and structured classroom learning. They also believed that students learned more when they were interested and engaged personally in meaningful work related to a topic. Thus, the Learning Through Internship (LTI) model was born, and implemented at The Met Center in Providence a year later. This model includes activities for determining a student's interests, strengths, talents, and professional goals; a personal learning plan developed by the student with input from an advisor, family members, and a mentor; and real-world internship experience with working adults. Personalizing a plan for education and connecting learning to the real world motivates students to achieve. The Met graduated its first class in 2000 and has expanded from two campuses to six.

Design & Implementation

Schools should engage children in learning by tailoring the academic experience to each individual's interests, strengths, and passions. That's the philosophy that led The Big Picture Company co-directors Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor to develop a program where the students themselves, with guidance from family members, advisors, and mentors, could chart their own course of learning. This program, which was implemented at The Met Center in Providence, Rhode Island beginning in 1996, consists of four main components: advisories, exploration of interests, Family Learning Plans, and the Learning Through Internship piece. These overlapping parts are described below.

- **Advisories:** Students are placed in an advisory group with 13–15 students. This group and its advisor, a certified teacher, stay together for the entire four years. This allows students to spend intensive time with one teacher and develop close relationships that are grounded not only in academics but also in personal goals and aspirations.
- **Exploration of interests:** Students beginning the program of learning with the identification of their personal interests and goals. They are exposed to travel opportunities, guest speakers, movies, and research projects designed to open doors to opportunities they may not have thought of before. This exploration also includes "Who am I" projects, such as autobiographical sketches or personal timelines, which help students gain a better understanding of themselves and the resources within their family and personal experiences. But the exploration doesn't end when the student identifies interests. Met students are able to attend informational interviews and on-the-job shadow days at local businesses so they can find an internship that suits their individual goals.
- **Family Learning Plans:** Overlapping with the exploration phase, students sit down with their advisor and members of their family to chart their course of learning on paper. These plans can be revised each quarter with new interests evolving from the student's experience. This allows the student to get feedback on the direction in which they are heading and it allows the family to stay involved through each step of the student's education. These meetings and the plan itself also ensure that there is agreement among all parties on the high standards the student should meet to prove his or her proficiency during the exhibitions of student work held four times a year.

- **Learning Through Internship:** This component of the program is critical to the student's development of real-world skills. Students have interned at such diverse Rhode Island organizations as the Providence Film Commission, Women and Infants Hospital, Save the Bay, and the Providence Police Department. A mentor at the student's internship works with the student's advisor at The Met to build the skills necessary to the student's achievement. Internship coordinators help students set up their internships and hours range depending on the student's individual learning plan. This kind of opportunity allows students to see the connection between their learning and the working world.

Within the construct of this program, The Met provides tools and supports to ensure that the students can concentrate solely on their interests and goals. The school provides SAT training for students and pays for every student to take the test. The school also developed a specific transcript and a portfolio component to demonstrate the breadth of knowledge and experience that students attain over the course of their four years at the school. Finally the school exhibitions are structured such that community members with related expertise in the field join family members and advisors on the judging panel. This allows students to receive feedback not only academically but also in relation to the standards of their chosen field of interest.

Results

Through an innovative program that includes internships, close relationships with mentors and advisors, and personal learning plans that make the student the master of his or her own academic journey, The Met Center in Providence, Rhode Island has created a truly student-centered and engaging learning environment.

Beginning with its first graduating class in 2000 and continuing today, The Met Center has a 100% acceptance rate to college. More than 70% of those students are the first in their family to go on to higher education. Met graduates have completed internships with such varied organizations as the Providence Film Commission, the Rhode Island State Supreme Court, and Women and Infants Hospital before ever setting foot on a college campus. They have also cemented time management, presentation, public speaking, and research skills that will help them succeed in both their academic and professional endeavors.

Replication Details

For personalized learning to really take hold in a school, whether it is through an internship program or some other form of curriculum, teachers and administrators must remember to put the student first. Keeping the following tips in mind, staff can support students through a rewarding process of learning and growth.

- **Listen to the student's voice:** Teachers must step back and become the facilitators, helping the student to chart his or her own course. Ask insightful questions about the student's interests designed to open up new avenues rather than closing doors.
- **Nothing's carved in stone:** The Met ensures that students have the time and opportunity to revise their learning plans as their interests grow and evolve. Students may need assurance that they are not committing to one thing for the rest of their high school career.
- **Encourage peer support:** Even though personalized learning is inherently individual,

students can gain valuable experience and information from collaborating with their peers. Peers can challenge each other and offer constructive criticism that will make a student's work stronger in the long run.

- **Flexibility for staff and students:** Allow staff to make decisions based on each student's rate of progress and give them time to create strong relationships with each of their students. The advisory component of The Met's program gives teachers this kind of flexibility.
- **Keep family members involved:** Include family members in all activities of the school, not just their student's planning meetings. The Met includes family members in community service projects and the creation of a student's portfolio.
- **Professional development:** Provide staff with consistent professional development geared toward guiding students through personalized learning.

Costs and Funding

N/A

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Rating Criteria

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Standards-Based Teaching to Each Student

Teachers use instructional methods that allow students with different skills, aspirations, and interests to succeed in meeting standards. They develop courses that form a unified curriculum, integrating academic knowledge with real-life problems and tasks.

Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

Fostering Independent Learning

Students learn to design pathways toward their own futures through personalized learning plans, an advisory system, and student–led conferences. These and other strategies help them to identify and achieve personal and educational goals.

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies

New York, NY

School Type: Public

School Setting: Urban

Level: 7–12

School

Design: Alternative

Content Presented By:

The Education Alliance at Brown
University



Ask Sheila Breslaw and Rob Menken the directors of the New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies what their recipe for success is, and they'll tell you, "Everything is collaborative." During after-school meetings once or twice a week, staff members discuss issues of concern. They collaborate on decisions about school priorities and even decide which new teachers to hire sometimes overriding the school directors' own preferences. In 90-minute weekly team meetings, smaller groups of teachers discuss their struggling students and create plans to help them succeed. They also engage in cross-curricular planning, sharing lessons and designing interdisciplinary projects to build bridges among content areas. For students, collaboration is not only an integral part of classroom work with peers but also a means of shaping the direction of the larger school community. In addition to student government, clubs, and sports teams, Lab School students have a voice on the School Leadership Team, alongside teachers and parents. According to Menken, "every class and meeting at the school is set up to encourage and facilitate collaboration."

While collaboration has always been a central principle of the Lab School philosophy, it also proved to be a key element in the school's recent improvement efforts. Menken and Breslaw founded the school in 1987 after a successful experience working with low-performing students in another New York City district. They were recruited by the District Two superintendent to create a school for gifted seventh- and eighth-grade students a school using the same collaborative strategies for learning and leadership that they had developed at their previous school. Initially their small school was a success, but as it grew from a staff of seven to 40 teachers, the cohesion of the staff began to show strains. With the addition of new staff and the development of a high school, the school's vision was becoming blurry, and students were not being served well academically or emotionally. Breslaw and Menken decided to embark on a course of collaborative professional development activities to address these issues. (See the Design & Implementation section for a detailed description of these activities.)

With the help of outside facilitators funded by the district, the directors set out to create a "culture of excellence" at the Lab School. They wanted to raise teachers' self-awareness about their practices and help them to develop a regular means of refining these practices. They also wanted to create an environment where student voices were consistently valued and where high expectations for students were balanced with compassion; according to Menken, they sought to "fight against the tide of competitive edge" at the school and "make sure that no one's left in the dust."

Collaboration proved to be essential to meeting both of these goals. During a five-year professional development process, teachers examined their own work and the work of their colleagues. They scrutinized and critiqued curriculum plans and rubrics, observed each other's classrooms, identified qualities of excellence in teaching, and determined how to change their practices to better reflect these qualities. The staff also read and discussed texts such as James Stigler and James Hiebert's *The Teaching Gap: Best Ideas from the World's Teachers for Improving Education in the Classroom* and Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's *Understanding by Design*, but their professional development process was informed largely by their own insights and experiences.

For example, during the second year of the process, the staff focused on answering the questions "What do we value?" and "Are we stating this clearly to students and assessing what we are saying?" To address these questions, teachers brought samples of assessment practices from their classrooms; examined these artifacts in collaborative groups; recorded the values they saw reflected in them; and chose "observation buddies" to visit each other's classrooms, where they noted which values were evident, collected student comments, and made other observations. They met at the end of the first semester to compare the values they noted in the classroom with the ones they had inferred from the samples of assessment practices. Each teacher was then asked to answer the question, "How might I better reflect what I value in my curriculum and assess it more congruently?"

Activities like these can be uncomfortable; to be effective, they require teachers to be straightforward with each other in pointing out shortcomings and inconsistencies. Even at the Lab School, where a collaborative environment already existed, Menken admits that in the first two years of the professional development initiative teachers were reluctant to speak critically to each other about their work. However, a "culture of brutal honesty" gradually took shape at the school, he says. "This sometimes leads to bruised egos, but it keeps the school alive."

According to Breslaw, this new culture of openness has improved teachers' self-awareness about their practice. In grade-team meetings, where teachers used to spend their time venting frustrations about student behavior, now the focus is on collaborative curriculum planning and strategies for approaching student problems. "The dialogue has shifted," Breslaw says, "from 'These kids are no good' to 'Let's plan curriculum' and 'How do you get so-and-so to do homework?' 'Maybe I should do that.'" Menken notes that the process of establishing norms for constructive criticism has changed the climate of the school and the willingness of teachers to discuss and change their practice. "Once teachers feel that dialogue is for the general good and not an attack, they're able to get away from that 'siege mentality' and take it as something that could be beneficial for them."

Today, the new patterns of communication and inquiry that were established during the professional development initiative are firmly rooted at the Lab School. In addition to observing each other's classes and providing regular feedback on what they see, teachers plan their courses collaboratively, interweaving themes and content to help students see connections and explore concepts from multiple perspectives. For example, 11th graders learn in history class about the social and political context of novels they're reading in English class, while topics raised in eighth-grade health class, such as peer pressure, are further explored through related reading and writing assignments in eighth-grade English. Some teachers further integrate their courses by reconfiguring into double periods and team teaching. Although weekly team meetings provide a regular venue for within-grade collaboration, Lab School teachers also share their curriculum plans across grades to ensure a more cohesive and coherent curriculum. According to one teacher, "If we are aware of what is happening in other grades, we can more effectively build on student knowledge to create more sophisticated strategies for students to use as they get older." These different forms of curricular collaboration have the added benefit of keeping teachers on their toes. As Breslaw points out, "It's hard to be a 'do-nothing' teacher when your curriculum is public."

Although curricular collaboration is now embedded in the Lab School culture, the curriculum itself and the extra-curricular offerings remain flexible enough to adapt to new student interests and needs. During the school's five-year professional development initiative, the staff surveyed students to determine their own priorities for improving the school. The response from students was clear: they wanted a more compassionate school environment and more varied course offerings. Through a combination of student and staff efforts, these goals are being met.

One upperclassman, concerned that seventh graders needed a stronger social support system at the school, developed a program with parents and teachers on the School Leadership Team to address this problem. The Peer Alliance and Leadership (PAL) program now selects and trains junior and senior peer leaders to lead weekly advisory meetings for seventh graders. At these meetings, the younger students can air their concerns and engage in a process of community-building through a series of lessons developed by the peer leaders and their faculty advisors. In another program initiated by Lab School students, eighth and ninth graders are grouped into small book clubs with teachers who share their taste in reading. Both of these programs along with regular homeroom and advisory meetings have helped to build a stronger sense of community at the school.

Another group of students was frustrated by the school's limited course offerings. Because of its relatively small faculty, the Lab School, like most small schools, had difficulty providing a wide variety of courses; students in each grade had identical or very similar schedules. However, through a joint student-faculty effort, the school managed to meet the demand for a new computer programming course and a number of new AP courses. A student revamped the scheduling system so that students in the same grade could choose among a few different classes, and a number of teachers volunteered to take on extra preps and sometimes extra teaching periods to ensure that student interests were met. This extraordinary faculty commitment has been critical to the school's success. "If our school went by the contract," Menken says, "it would be a disaster."

In addition to these major changes in the Lab School curriculum, teachers are constantly adapting existing courses, both to reflect current events and issues and to better fit their students' needs and interests. Students fill out surveys for each course they complete, giving feedback on what readings and assignments they found most meaningful or enlightening, what aspects of the course they struggled with and why, and what changes they might suggest. Teachers consider this input carefully when revising and updating their courses, and students can tell. "When we can take off in a direction that interests us," one Lab School student says, "it makes it easier to get excited about schoolwork."

Student interests are also at the heart of two Lab School graduation requirements: the junior internship and the senior thesis. The internship program, which was strengthened during the professional development initiative, allows juniors to spend two afternoons each week at a job site relevant to their career interests; internship sites, often provided by Lab School parents, have included a day care center, a hospital, an architectural firm, and a judge's office. Once a month these students also participate in a structured seminar to discuss the issues they encounter in the work world and to hone resume writing and interviewing skills. The senior thesis, another requirement for all Lab School students, can take a variety of forms. Past products have included a graphic novel about boxing, a full production of Edward Albee's *American Dream*, and an in-depth exploration of one of Shakespeare's villains. With the help of a faculty advisor and a class on writing and research skills, seniors develop a product that reflects what they've learned through their research but also expresses their own point of view. For students interested in in-depth exploration of a topic before their senior year, Lab School teachers have volunteered to supervise independent studies. The opportunities for students to shape their own learning experiences in collaboration with a workplace supervisor or a faculty member are numerous at the Lab School.

At the New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies, the staff and the students have worked together to sharpen the school's vision, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and create an environment where student interests matter and student needs are met. The school's collaborative approach to learning, leadership, curriculum planning, and professional growth is the key to its success. "Collaboration is riskier, messier, and more time-consuming," says Menken, but in the end "it raises the bar for everyone."

Demographics

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies is a public school for students in grades 6 – 12.

- Enrollment: 740
- Staff: 42
- Admissions: screened, but with a special education inclusion program
- Graduation rate: 100%
- Ethnicity: 50% white, 13% African American, 11% Latino, 26% Asian American
- Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch: 12%

Background

Founded in 1987 as a small middle school using collaborative learning strategies, the New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies was experiencing growing pains as it transformed into a larger middle and high school. Without a system in place for faculty and students to communicate about their values and expectations, the school lacked a clear vision and no longer provided the social and emotional support that its students needed. Concerned about these changes, the school's co-directors, Sheila Breslaw and Rob Menken, enlisted the help of outside facilitators in a long-term project to create a culture of excellence at the school a culture founded on staff, student, and parent collaboration to foster personalized teaching.

Design & Implementation

At the New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies, the staff embarked on a long-term professional development initiative to create a culture of excellence where student voices were consistently valued. Although consultants from Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) provided Lab School educators with a structure for examining and improving their school culture and teaching practice, the educators themselves collaborated to identify appropriate directions for improvement. Once they had come to a consensus about their primary goals for the Lab School, educators began the long process of realizing these goals.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- **Year One:** Staff members identify the school's collective vision of excellence by examining each other's curriculum plans and rubrics, observing and conferring about each other's classes, creating a collage of their impressions, and soliciting students' perspectives on what excellence means. They examine the degree of congruence between their own views of excellence and those of their students, sharing their conclusions with a team drafting the school's statement of philosophy. Parents also provide input on the mission statement.
- **Year Two:** School staff members collaborate to determine what they value in the classroom

and how clearly they are conveying these values to their students. After mapping their curriculums, they identify the core ideas and best pedagogical practices of their subject areas and submit this information to the School Leadership Team for inclusion in a book entitled *Theories and Practices*. Weekly "Portfolio Lunch" workshops begin; teachers examine student work together in collaborative assessment conferences and also critique each other's curriculum plans.

- **Year Three:** School directors organize a series of staff discussions around James Stigler and James Hiebert's *The Teaching Gap*. Teachers examine different models of assessment and continue to revise their practice. Portfolio Lunches and the compilation of *Theories and Practices* continue.
- **Year Four:** Grade teams and departments continue to collaborate, with curriculums becoming more integrated and coherent. Portfolio Lunch program continues, and staff choose another shared text for regular discussion: Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe's *Understanding by Design*. In the second semester, staff discussions focus on adolescent literacy.
- **Year Five:** School staff members replace ELOB facilitators as leaders of Portfolio Lunches and other workshops on teacher practice. In weekly grade team and departmental meetings, teachers plan curriculum and discuss strategies for helping struggling students. Observation pairs also visit each other's classes regularly and provide feedback about particular areas of concern. Working from the vantage point of *Understanding by Design*, the staff reshapes their course overviews with the Lab School Philosophy Statement as a centerpiece. All curriculum designs consider elements of collaboration, diversity and pluralism, academic rigor, and compassion.

Results

Founded in 1987 as a small middle school using collaborative learning strategies, the New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies was experiencing growing pains as it transformed into a larger middle and high school. Without a system in place for faculty and students to communicate about their values and expectations, the school lacked a clear vision and no longer provided the social and emotional support that its students needed. Concerned about these changes, the school's co-directors, Sheila Breslaw and Rob Menken, enlisted the help of outside facilitators in a long-term project to create a "culture of excellence" at the school—a culture founded on staff, student, and parent collaboration to foster personalized teaching.

This initiative has had a major impact on Lab School teachers. According to Breslaw, the most significant change has been the growth in teachers' self-awareness about their practice. In grade-team meetings, where teachers used to spend their time venting frustrations about student behavior, now the focus is on collaborative curriculum planning and strategies for approaching student problems. "The dialogue has shifted," Breslaw says, "from 'These kids are no good' to 'Let's plan curriculum' and 'How do you get so—and-so to do homework?' 'Maybe I should do that.'" Menken notes that the process of establishing norms for constructive criticism has changed the climate of the school and the willingness of teachers to discuss and change their practice. "Once teachers feel that dialogue is for the general good and not an attack, they're able to get away from that 'siege mentality' and take it as something that could be beneficial for them."

Students have also benefited from the Lab School's more open lines of communication. Through surveys during and after the professional development initiative and through their representatives in student government and the School Leadership Team (a team that also includes school staff and parents), students have helped to make the school a more compassionate place where their interests are always valued. Students were the driving force behind a Peer Alliance and Leadership (PAL) program that trains high school juniors and seniors to run advisory workshops for seventh graders. They also pushed for the addition of a number of new courses to the curriculum and the creation of teacher–student book clubs to build stronger relationships between eighth and ninth graders and introduce them to a large number of adults in the building.

The collaborative approach to schooling seems to work quite well for students at the Lab School. Its graduation and attendance rates are both close to 100%, and almost all of its students attend four–year institutions.

Replication Details

- If you expect teachers and students to work collaboratively with each other, you need to model the collaborative process in your encounters with them.
- A collaborative leadership structure is about taking risks and giving up control; only through taking these risks can you continue to raise the bar for teacher and student performance.
- Collaborative school leadership requires a major increase in the number of meetings with individual staff members, teaching teams, parents, and students. However, you can streamline the process by asking different bodies to appoint representatives charged with voicing their interests. At the Lab School, the co–directors meet as requested with parent representatives from each class and grade so that teachers aren't overwhelmed by individual parent concerns and are freed up to take risks in the classroom.
- Interdisciplinary planning can create a dialogue among teachers that leads to increased competence. Making curricula public keeps teachers on their toes.
- Helping teachers to improve their practice is not about forcing them into a pre–conceived template for excellence. It's about watching them work, helping them to identify what's good in their practice and what they want to be doing but aren't yet able to; dialogue is the key.
- Bring everyone in. Listen to your students' and parents' concerns and encourage them to conceive of solutions. They can be a very helpful resource for school leadership.

Costs and Funding

The New York City Lab School for Collaborative Studies received district funding for the facilitation of its four–year professional development initiative.

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Rating Criteria

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Standards-Based Teaching to Each Student

Teachers use instructional methods that allow students with different skills, aspirations, and interests to succeed in meeting standards. They develop courses that form a unified curriculum, integrating academic knowledge with real-life problems and tasks.

Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

Fostering Independent Learning

Students learn to design pathways toward their own futures through personalized learning plans, an advisory system, and student-led conferences. These and other strategies help them to identify and achieve personal and educational goals.

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

Devens, MA

School Type: Public

School

Setting: Suburban

Level: High

School Design: Charter

Content Presented By:

The Education Alliance at Brown
University



Imagine a school where all students feel like they are part of the community, involved in the inner workings of the place, and important to teachers, administrators, and their fellow students.

The Francis W. Parker Charter School, in Devens, Massachusetts, makes that dream a reality on a daily basis.

In 1995, a group of parents, teachers, and education professionals banded together to write a charter for a school where the individual needs and talents of each student would be central to the curriculum and practice of the school. The group soon grew from a few like-minded people to dozens of participants from several towns northwest of Boston, including noted education experts Ted and Nancy Sizer.

"This was just a bunch of people who agreed on how a school should be," says former principal of Parker, Gregg Sinner.

That agreement produced what Sinner calls "a new, untried adventure in learning," on the site of a decommissioned military base in Devens. Students from 40 different towns eventually found their way to Parker, where the school's mission is based on the ten common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools (<http://www.essentialschools.org/>). With these guiding principles and a mission statement focused on knowing each student well, Parker set out to improve education for a socioeconomically diverse group of kids.

"In a traditional high school, there are many cracks for kids to fall through," says current Parker principal, Teri Schrader. "But being real members of a community helps. Here there are few places where kids are going to get lost because they have their people and they know their people aren't going anywhere."

The students' "people" are the members of their advisory groups at Parker. Each student is placed in a 12-student advisory group with one of his or her teachers and a parent representative. In these sessions that last 30 minutes every morning, 15 minutes in the afternoon, and from an hour to a whole day on Wednesdays, students discuss community issues, work out their personal learning plans, plan and execute a community service project, and engage in recreational activities.

All segments of the advisory period are designed to open kids' eyes to the possibilities available to

them. "Everyone is meticulously following up and giving feedback to help others improve, not to judge," says Schrader. "Advisory members inspire the students to do more than they thought they could when they started."

Arts and Humanities teacher Deb Merriam agrees: "Our kids connect with us personally, and that often inspires them to do their best work. And, because we know them so well, we are able to tailor what we do to their needs."

Parker serves the academic needs of its students through three divisions, which are successively more challenging but are only loosely based on grade levels. Students move through the divisions based on public exhibitions and portfolios of work and research, but these promotions are not connected to a strict timeline. Student work is judged using school-wide rubrics that indicate if the work is just beginning to meet standards (JB), approaches standards (A), or meets standards completely (M). This way, students can move at their own pace and revise and improve their work. This also gives teachers the flexibility to offer extra support to those who need it.

This flexibility is a hallmark of the Parker School and a major reason for its success. Administrators, faculty, and staff focus more time on student needs and interests than on management issues not directly related to academic achievement.

"Usually, in a school, what is valued is order," says Sinner. "This often comes at the expense of growth and students finding their own voices."

Students at Parker are allowed to explore their own interests and weave them into their personal learning plan. They can also choose their own probing question for their senior exhibition, a graduation requirement that is juried by outside experts as well as faculty. Sinner calls it "very sophisticated, almost like a graduate school qualifying exam." In the past, students have explored such topics as "How do I set up an exhibit in a historical museum?" "How does religion play a part in people's lives?" and "How do violent images affect aggression in adolescents?"

The administrators at Parker and the Parker Board of Trustees have built into the school's organization several other ways of honoring the student voice. Students sit on the board as well as the school's Community Congress and Justice Committee. But one of the most important ways in which Parker engages the community and students in the learning process is the annual choosing of a school-wide "essential question," around which the entire curriculum will revolve for the next year.

Students, teachers, and community members voice their opinions on topics for the question through something called "Chalk Talk," a board where anyone can write their thoughts on the subject. The faculty members then discuss the ideas and try to extract the main themes winding through the responses. They whittle the feedback down to a few essential questions and then put it to the community for a vote.

"This has to be a question that isn't easily answered," says Schrader. "It must have bearing on all areas of development in the school community."

Former questions have included "What's the limit?" "Where's the truth?" and "What is change?" Faculty members then work together to design a curriculum that derives from this question or builds on it. Again, the flexibility of changing the curriculum from year to year allows teachers to reassess not only their students but their own practice as well.

"What we teach and how we teach and how kids demonstrate what they learn are thoroughly

integrated with each other and inform and respond to each other," says Merriam. "Because teachers design the curriculum each year, it stays alive and current while responding to what kids need, what teachers are passionate about, and what is important for kids to know and be able to do."

Parker ensures that teachers have all the support they need in this process. Each faculty member participates in a Critical Friends group. These groups range across the three interdisciplinary domains of Arts and Humanities, Math, Science, and Technology, and Wellness. Within these groups, teachers study student work, discuss the standards, and talk about their own practice.

"This fundamental driver gives faculty the chance to come together, build relationships, and share successes and failures without being attacked," says Sinner. "It's about getting feedback."

Teachers routinely meet by division or by domain for common planning time and to share discoveries or concerns about the students they share. About eight hours a week are devoted to these meetings. Faculty members also form committees to investigate issues important to their growth and development.

"Faculty learn the skill of collaboration," says Schrader. "You can have a fabulous teaching body, but dead leadership. So, the key is constant conversations among every constituency. One strong constituency isn't enough to get a school where it needs to be."

The success that Parker has had due to its flexibility and strong relationships shows through in a high number of college acceptances and strong test scores. Every member of the classes of 2003 and 2004 has already passed the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test, a state requirement to graduate.

"We rely on our academic program, which teaches kids the mechanics,' says Schrader. "They learn how to read and write critically, so the MCAS is just asking them to do stuff they do all the time."

Parker received a renewal of their charter for another five years in 2000 and was granted accreditation in 2002 by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Schrader attributes the success of the school to keeping open lines of communication, and Merriam cites the strong relationships among teachers and students. But Sinner points out the issue of paramount importance to students: acceptance.

"Everyone sees everyone else for who they are," he says. "Seniors feel obliged to help the others along, and the idiosyncrasies of youth are accepted. It's the ideal environment to learn about yourself, your world, and your relationships with others."

Demographics

- Houses grade-levels 7–12
- Student population of 350
- Students come from 40 towns 30–40 miles northwest of Boston
- 62 staff members; 30 classroom teachers; two thirds of staff hold advanced degrees
- Approximately 95% white, 5% minority
- Approximately 15% identified as needing special education services
- Enrollment: Open lottery with preference for siblings

Background

A new, untried adventure in learning. That's what the parents of 120 students in Harvard, Massachusetts and surrounding towns embarked upon when they decided to send their children to the newly chartered Francis W. Parker Charter School in 1995. The school had been created in response to the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, but also because residents of several towns in north central Massachusetts wanted a change.

"Like most charter schools, it started because people wanted something different," says former principal Gregg Sinner. "It grew from kitchen table conversations to ultimately involving Ted and Nancy Sizer, who are residents of Harvard."

The Sizers became members of the Parker Board of Trustees and helped the parents, core teachers, and community members write a charter based on the ten common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools (<http://www.essentialschools.org/>). The school was rechartered in 2000 for another five years, and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) evaluated it for accreditation in the fall of 2002. Adding 75 students each year from various towns in the area, the school has been declared a regional charter school.

Design & Implementation

The mission of the Francis W. Parker Charter School in Devens, Massachusetts is "to move the child to the center of the education process and to interrelate the several subjects of the curriculum in such a way as to enhance their meaning for the child" (Charter, October 1994). To achieve this aim, the school employs the ten common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools through the following features:

- An academically challenging, integrated curriculum at the secondary level
- Teachers working in cross-disciplinary teams with small groups of students
- Performance-based assessments for course work and as gateways to higher levels of schooling
- Using technology to provoke active learning
- Flexible scheduling that allows for teacher planning time and in-depth focus on student work
- An advisory system that allows teachers to know their students well and serve as academic and personal guides
- Mentoring for junior staff members by senior teachers; critical reflection and peer observation built into teacher's daily schedules
- A volunteer service component in which students learn by contributing to the school and the larger community
- A student-faculty governance system
- An administrative system that puts student advisement and management decisions in the hands of the teaching staff

Students at Parker do not advance by grade levels. Instead, they move toward graduation at their own pace through three divisions according to their own individualized learning plan. Graduation to a new division depends on demonstrated mastery of the previous division's criteria in each of the two domains of study: Arts and Humanities (which includes Spanish) and Math, Science, and Technology. Students also must demonstrate understanding of a Wellness curriculum in which they tackle health and self-esteem issues.

Students demonstrate their knowledge through projects, portfolios of work, and exhibitions that progress in complexity from one division to the next. To graduate from the school, seniors must present a project based on an essential question of their own choosing. These exhibitions are juried by

teaching staff and outside experts and resemble a graduate qualifying exam in their sophistication and standards.

In the spring of each year, the school solicits input from students and community members regarding an essential question around which teachers will build the curriculum for the coming year. In the past, these questions have included, "What is community?" (1995–96) and "What's the limit?" (1999–2000). Teachers take the input and pick out themes that stand out across the many suggestions. Once they have whittled the list of themes down to a few interesting ones, the students and the community vote for the question they think is best.

Professional development for teachers is also focused on a yearly theme, such as improving advisory strategies or regional accreditation work. Each teacher is part of a critical friends group that provides individual support and peer discussion about student work and protocols. The teachers also have built-in common planning time by division and by academic domain.

Results

Last year, 39 of 42 seniors at the Francis W. Parker Charter School in Devens, Massachusetts applied and were accepted to U.S. colleges and universities. Acceptances ranged from community college to state schools to Ivy League institutions. Armed with a graduation portfolio and narrative evaluation of their work from juried exhibitions at school, Parker students demonstrated to higher education institutions their complete development personally as well as academically. Because student voices are heard and respected at Parker, attendance averages 93% and students are motivated to help fellow classmates. Also, Parker students' scores on the 1998 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests were higher on average than the scores from 22 of the 25 districts from which Parker draws its students. As of January 2003, all members of the classes of 2003 and 2004 had met the standard for graduation set by the MCAS tests.

But probably the biggest testament to the success of the school and its personalization of learning is the fact that 86% of students who attended Parker in the eighth grade graduated from the school. According to its annual reports, most students who have left Parker have done so because they wanted to attend school closer to their homes.

Replication Details

Both Gregg Sinner, former principal of the Francis W. Parker Charter School in Devens, Massachusetts, and current principal Teri Schrader agree that schools need to determine what they value most in the educational process and build their curriculum and community around these values.

"People in a school need to commit to some core beliefs about kids," says Schrader. "For a school to look different, it takes work. You need leadership that knows how to construct a plan for putting kids in the middle. And the faculty needs to envision what's worth changing."

Below, Sinner and Schrader share some additional recommendations for crafting a student-centered learning community.

- Be clear about mission and vision: Figure out what you value and put it in writing. Even if it takes years to refine, staff, students, and the community will have a document to keep them focused on what is most important.

- Create a culture of inquiry: Schrader says that all members of the school community must feel comfortable asking questions and challenging assumptions. "You need to create an atmosphere of asking together, even if the questions are new and different."
- Nourish relationships with kids: Discipline and motivation problems can be kept to a minimum when students have good relationships with teachers and fellow students. Focused advisory periods are a good place to start, but every student in the school community should feel that they have at least one adult with whom they can discuss important issues.
- Commit time for people to expand their capacities: Common planning time, flexible advisory periods, and critical friends groups all allow teachers the opportunity to learn from their students and colleagues, and grow within their practice.
- Harness the talents and interests of students: Sinner says extra-curricular activities are often overlooked, but these are the places where some students find their voices. If you encourage these interests, you not only validate the student but also may uncover resources that may be incorporated into the student's learning plan.
- Include families in the discussion: Parker has parents on its board of trustees and welcomes family members at exhibitions and community service projects.

Costs and Funding

N/A

Contact Information

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Rating Criteria

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

Developing a Learning Community

The school develops a culture in which students and teachers know each other well and learning—including ongoing professional development for all staff members—is valued. Parents and

other community members partner with school staff to insure that all students graduate from high school with options that lead to further achievement.

North Reading High School

North Reading High School

North Reading, MA

School Type: Public

School Setting: Suburban

Level: High

School Design: Traditional

Content Presented By:

A walk through a classroom at the North Reading High School in North Reading, Massachusetts might reveal students wearing oversized artificial hands or extremely long fake fingernails and attempting to gather a bunch of nuts. What is the meaning of this? Kids are learning about mutations in the gene pool, of course.

Classrooms at North Reading often combine hands-on or visual activities like this one with topic discussion, research projects, and writing about the subject in order to accommodate multiple learning styles and engage every student. Over the past five years, the school has sought to improve its service towards students at all ability levels through the use of personalized teaching techniques.

"All students can learn," says Patty Lally, the school's Academic Division Leader for Humanities. "We had to show that you can teach hard concepts to all kids. It's just in how you teach it."

To prepare the school and its staff for this new mission, the administration and district leadership changed the structure of both the school day and the school management system. The Academic Division Leader (ADL) positions for Humanities and Math, Science, and Technology were created and filled by Lally and Dr. Patricia Oakley respectively. They joined Principal Ann Papagiotas in leading the staff toward a more student-centered learning environment.

"We wanted Academic Division Leaders who could model for teachers," says Papagiotas. "We wanted to have teachers talk to one another—more talk, more sharing of best practices."

The ADLs regularly hold meetings with teachers in their divisions and teach two classes themselves. These meetings help teachers share information about students and strategies that have worked for them in the classroom.

In order to free up time for these meetings and for the professional development necessary for a shift in practice, the administrators of the school reorganized the school day. Teachers investigated and chose a new schedule that would afford more time per period. The block scheduling the school adopted dropped the class number from seven to four per day.

"On a seven-period schedule, things were very frenetic," says Papagiotas. "Kids ran through the day. Now, there is time to get to know the kids better. [Block scheduling] has also opened up a lot of opportunities for students to participate in electives."

One of the programs the change made time for is the Power Block. This is directed study time where students can go to the library, the computer lab, or the art resource center. For students who are not able to stay after school because of jobs and family obligations, Power Block offers an extended

learning experience, a time when they can focus on individual work.

The school also brings in graduates during this time to talk about future planning, what colleges want to see from applicants, and the realities of postsecondary school or employment. The schedule ensures that every student has the opportunity to take advantage of these offerings.

The staff at North Reading kept the larger community informed throughout all of these changes. "Parents and community members were involved with the change to block scheduling through informational meetings," says Lally, "and they could informally speak with the principal during her once-a-month administrative teas," meetings designed to gather parents' input on important issues.

Once the new mission and structure of the school had begun to take shape, North Reading involved every teacher, regardless of year, in a six-week course on multiple learning styles. Teachers learned from each other and worked together on lesson plans.

"Some teachers found it hard to break the lecturing habit," says Lally. "[But] after the adoption of the block schedule, teachers realized that 78 minutes would be too long to lecture and that student-centered, multisensory activities would best fit the time and the student body."

Teachers got into the habit of using hands-on activities to make abstract concepts concrete. They modeled themselves after elementary teachers, actively engaging the class, presenting the outcome or objective of the day, and then letting the students take some ownership of their learning.

"Students here are not as complacent as they once were," says Lally. "They are used to performing in class and they expect that this will be a part of their assessment."

Teachers have engaged their students through projects such as writing newspaper articles for the local paper or holding a mock trial on Truman's dropping of atomic bombs in World War II. Students say these performance tasks help them understand things better, and the teachers use their training in multiple intelligences to determine fair and rigorous assessment criteria for all students in their classrooms.

Although North Reading's teachers have used their knowledge of multiple intelligences to create a variety of new projects, one constant across the curriculum is the school-wide writing rubric. North Reading's Mission and Expectations for Student Learning Committee—composed of teachers from a number of disciplines, students, and parents—produced the rubric to reflect the standards of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test, which students must pass before the state will allow them to graduate. Teachers in all content areas at the school use this rubric not only to evaluate written work across the curriculum but also to make students aware of the high expectations teachers have for their work.

"When we say we want them to write effectively across the curriculum, this can be handled differently in each classroom," says Papagiotas. "In an art class, rather than just turning in a painting they will have to answer a question about the style or the medium they are working in. The kids know they have to be able to explain themselves clearly."

These changes to the North Reading structure and curriculum produced an environment where all students were able to extend themselves and work up to their full potential. All special education students were mainstreamed and have made strides under the different instructional strategies. Teachers are aware of each special education student's individual education plan and use their training in multiple learning styles to accommodate these students while still engaging the rest of the class.

"The belief system is that all kids can learn," says Papagiotas. "So, regardless of whether it's an AP [advanced placement] student or a [special education] student, the varied teaching styles and strategies are going to benefit everyone."

Papagiotas stresses that the aim of the different techniques is to teach for understanding. Regardless of what kind of content is being taught, if it is taught in a way that engages the students and makes the expectations and steps clear, they can take those strategies and apply them to anything.

"In a 78-minute block of time, each teacher knows what he or she needs to accomplish, what the kids should know and be able to do," says Papagiotas. "They'll maybe use maximum three strategies. In science they might be doing labs or oral presentations. They might use portfolio creation or cooperative learning techniques. Of course, lecture is a technique, but it would only last 15 minutes at the most."

North Reading's approach has brought the percentage of 10th-grade students passing the MCAS in English language arts to 96% and 99% for the classes of 2003 and 2004 respectively (Massachusetts Department of Education Summary of District Performance Report, March 2003). Five years ago, 90% of 10th graders (class of 2000) passed the English language arts portion and just 64% passed in math. Math scores have now risen to 98% and 97% of 10th graders passing for the classes of 2003 and 2004 respectively. Improved access to educational opportunities at North Reading is also marked by the expansion of high-level classes and an increase in the number of students taking the SAT.

"Before, we had high [SAT] scores, but not a high percentage taking the test," says Papagiotas. "Now, 97% took the SAT and 91% move on to postsecondary schools. Five years ago we had one precalculus class with 21 kids in it. Today, we have four full sections of precalculus."

In just three years, the number of seniors who have taken the SAT rose to the current number stated above (97%) from 84% in 2000. Papagiotas and her staff see this as a testament to the students' improved confidence in their work and their abilities. With the help of professional development focused on serving all students equitably and presenting clear objectives, teachers have been able to communicate high expectations to students and help them see the benefits of taking control of their own learning.

"They seem to feel a sense of empowerment and confidence through their own involvement," says Lally. "[They] make connections and see the relevance of assignments. If they don't, they ask! Taking the initiative in projects, discussions, and co-curricular activities seems to be spreading among the students."

Demographics

- Houses grade-levels 9–12
- Student population of 597
- 82 staff members (teachers, administration, and staff)
- Approximately 96% white students, 4% minority students
- 3.5% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch
- 99% graduation rate; 91% move on to postsecondary education

Background

Five years ago, the superintendent of schools and the school committee of North Reading, Massachusetts commended North Reading High School for its placement of graduates in good

colleges, students' above-average SAT scores, and its high ranking on the statewide list of 10th grade students passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System tests. But something was still missing. Only a small number of students had the opportunity to extend themselves into high-level courses.

Also, the town, northwest of Boston, was growing rapidly and there was no development plan in place to accommodate the diverse learners who would be entering the school in the near future. So, the school community set to work reorganizing the mission and vision of the school, the time configuration of the school day, and the administrative hierarchy. The school's goal was to create a student-centered learning atmosphere that would serve each individual student—not just the majority—well.

Design & Implementation

Once the leadership at North Reading High School in North Reading, Massachusetts decided to address equitable education issues at the school, they realized they needed a mission statement and vision to guide them in their efforts. The resulting document voiced the philosophy that all students can learn and all learning is personal.

In order to lift this philosophy from the page and into the classroom, the school community enacted the following changes at North Reading:

- **Collaborative leadership structure:** Two in-house Academic Division Leader (ADL) positions were created to work with the principal and supervise curriculum, instruction, and assessment in Humanities (English and social studies) and Math, Science and Technology. In regular division meetings, teachers discuss curriculum ideas and teaching strategies with the ADLs and each other. Curriculum chairs from the district, spanning K–12, cover foreign language, performing arts, health, and school-to-career. These chairs meet regularly with the ADLs to plan and reflect on educational strategies and to keep each other informed about their progress.
- **School leadership team:** This group includes staff from special education, guidance, athletics, and health and social services, as well as content area teachers. Together, these representatives meet to further the school's mission of personalized learning and teaching. They discuss every aspect of students' school lives to gain a better perspective on how their school can meet the needs of the whole student.
- **Modified block scheduling:** Instead of having seven classes a day, students now have four. There is also a time called Power Block, when students can do research in the library or computer lab, seek advice from guidance counselors, or work on projects in the art resource center. This schedule allows time for teachers to attend pertinent professional development opportunities and to work active, hands-on projects and personal assessment into their classroom practice.
- **Professional development on personalized teaching:** Prior to implementing the full student-centered mission of the school, all teachers had to attend a six-week course on multiple learning strategies. This helped them identify the learning preferences of their students as well as their own different ways of learning. Throughout the year, teachers attend workshops on new instructional strategies for personalizing learning and other areas that may need improvement.
- **School-wide writing rubric:** This common document, created by a committee of teachers, students, and parents, ensures that students are writing to a high standard in each of their classes.

Results

North Reading students have responded well to different teaching techniques. Approximately 96% and 99% of 10th graders from the classes of 2003 and 2004 respectively met or exceeded the competency level on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) English language arts portion. Approximately 98% and 97% of 10th graders from the same classes passed the math portion (Massachusetts Department of Education Summary of District Performance Report, March 2003). Five years ago, 90% of 10th graders (class of 2000) passed in English language arts and just 64% passed in math (Mass. DOE Summary Report, 1998).

In addition, North Reading raised the number of students taking the SATs. Although students who took them had been getting high scores on these tests, the school wanted all its students to have the opportunity to complete this college admissions requirement. In 2000, 84% of seniors had taken the test. In the class of 2003, 97% of seniors at North Reading took the SAT, and 91% of the class of 2002 moved on to postsecondary education.

The access to high-level classes for all students has also improved by leaps and bounds. Five years ago, the school offered one section of precalculus, which accommodated 21 students. Today, the school has four full sections of the class.

Replication Details

At North Reading High School in North Reading, Massachusetts, administrators found these steps essential to personalizing teaching and learning:

- **Articulate mission statement and vision:** Everyone should know, understand, and buy into the mission and vision of the school. A more focused approach helps teachers, administrators, and students pinpoint what is most important in the pursuit of student achievement.
- **Help teachers assess multiple learning styles:** Teachers should be able to not only assess the different learning styles of their students but also their own learning style, which can influence the ways in which they present material to their students.
- **Engage teachers in professional workshops across disciplines:** Through these workshops, teachers can update and refine their practice, and learn how to tailor their teaching to the specific students in their classrooms. Professional development also reduces isolation for teachers and makes them aware of the resources available to them.
- **Create flexible time schedule:** A flexible time schedule allows teachers to learn from each other and improve their practice. It also assures that topics can be covered in depth and that students can hone their skills to a higher level of mastery.
- **Create collaborative leadership structure:** A leadership structure that involves teachers in making decisions and encourages them to become leaders in their own right produces a stronger professional atmosphere and a more cohesive staff.
- **Keep the parents and community informed and involved:** Communication is the key to getting the community's support for reform. Parents and community members can make substantial contributions on school leadership teams, on committees, and in the classrooms themselves.

Costs and Funding

N/A

Contact Information

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Rating Criteria

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Standards–Based Teaching to Each Student

Teachers use instructional methods that allow students with different skills, aspirations, and interests to succeed in meeting standards. They develop courses that form a unified curriculum, integrating academic knowledge with real–life problems and tasks.

Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

Roosevelt High School

Roosevelt High School

Yonkers, NY

School Type: Public

School Setting: Urban

Level: High

**School
Design:** Magnet

Content Presented By:

The Education Alliance at Brown
University



"Anonymity is the power to rebel.

So says Janice Young, a teacher in a small learning community at Roosevelt High School in Yonkers, New York. "When you're not known to anyone, who's there to hold you accountable?"

Young teaches English in the Academic Improvement Magnet (AIM) program, a self-contained community for students repeating the ninth grade. Students remain together for all academic courses and occupy a separate wing of the school, with about 30 pupils on each team. "The difference is the personalization factor," she says. "The same teachers are teaching the same students. It builds in some accountability."

Roosevelt High School is a magnet school in Yonkers, NY. Its 1,600 students are drawn to the school's many specialized programs, including a computer track and a public safety track. With the district's only bilingual high school program, Roosevelt receives all of the city's English language learners in that age group. Nineteen languages have been identified at the school, and 71% of pupils receive free or reduced-priced lunch.

In the year 2000, the state of New York designated Roosevelt High School as a School in Needs of Improvement (SINI). This designation pushed staff to closely examine what was not working at the school and to consider new ways of doing things. To create a new program, a Design Committee composed of teachers, administrators, and students came together in spring 2001. It quickly became clear that opportunities for parent involvement were low, as were test scores. Also, in reviewing school records, staff found that the Roosevelt school had particularly high rates of suspensions and tardiness.

Based on the needs identified at the school, the Design Committee determined that teaming might help. This model, through which students are assigned to small learning communities and share teachers in common, was implemented in the fall of 2001. The school also placed parent and community involvement at the top of their agenda and made technology a central focus for improvement. The staff understood that professional development would need to be ongoing and responsive to what they were learning about student needs.

"We had to ask ourselves, 'What can we do to make it work?'" says Principal Bill Moore. "How can we adapt things according to the needs of the kids? Because when you start a program, nothing works

the way it is supposed to at first. You have to make it work."

As a result, adjustments have been ongoing. At the program's inception, Moore regularly sent 45 teachers out to observe programs at other schools that were socio-economically similar. Staff members were able to bring back best practices that they believed in. (Those visits were funded through a Smaller Learning Communities grant from the federal government.)

Moore cites three main goals for teaming at Roosevelt: (1) promoting personalization at the school, (2) using data to make decisions, and (3) teaching "out of the box."

Personalization is built into the school's program via frequent student-teacher contact and ambitious approaches to parent/community involvement. The Data Committee has begun to analyze data for school use, considering such things as success rates in specific subjects based on gender or race. As an example of "out-of-the box" teaching, Moore refers to Young's use of old-time radio shows like "The Lone Ranger" and "The Shadow" to teach listening skills.

While the school has the curriculum of a high school, it also boasts the social supports of an elementary school. Teachers and administrators have put in place outreach programs that have significantly increased parental involvement. They have also helped the school adapt to a multilingual population and the community's transportation challenges.

On the walls of the school are welcome signs in multiple languages. Stationed throughout the school are guides who wear buttons that indicate their native languages. Teachers make it a point to keep each other and parents apprised of student progress. They contact parents when a student is doing well, not just when things are going poorly.

Weekly progress meetings are held among teachers to make good and critical comments about the development of students. The principal personally schedules all of his appointments with parents.

Parent-teacher meetings are designed to be welcoming and conveniently located. Although the school is located on the east side of Yonkers, off-site meetings are held at an elementary school on the west side of the city, home to a large portion of the student population. Parental guides act as cultural liaisons between the school and community, and parents are trained in English and computer skills at student-taught classes on Saturdays.

Administrators also addressed the issue of chronic tardiness, and ultimately determined that it stemmed from problems with public transportation. Students who had difficulty arriving on time now begin their school day at the start of the second period. This has dramatically decreased problems related to punctuality.

To Young, the English teacher, all of these adjustments have added up to a change in the overall climate of the school.

"For kids who are coming from unstable backgrounds, the stability of the school and our program is something they instinctively crave," she says. "The school almost becomes a second home. It's the one constant in their lives. If you create a safe haven, you tend to get better results academically."

Demographics

Roosevelt High School is a magnet school located on the northeast side of Yonkers, NY. Its students are drawn primarily from the southwest side of the city and take an average of two buses to get there.

Roosevelt has the district's only bilingual high school program, so it receives all of the city's English language learners in that age group. Nineteen different native languages have been identified at the school.

Roosevelt's 1,600 students are drawn to the school's many specialized programs, including a computer track and a journalism track. To promote more individualized attention, students in the ninth grade become part of a small learning community of about 350 students. The same kind of teaming model will be in place for tenth graders this year.

Overall, 75% of the school's students have been identified as minorities, and 71% of pupils receive free or reduced-priced lunch. About 15% are English language learners.

Background

In the year 2000, the state of New York designated Roosevelt High School in Yonkers as a School in Need of Improvement (SINI). This designation pushed staff to closely examine what was not working at the school and to consider new ways of doing things. To develop a new model, a Design Committee composed of teachers, administrators, and students came together in spring, 2001. The school also invited parents to become involved. Through the committee's assessment, it became clear that opportunities for parent involvement were low, as were test scores. Also, the school had high rates of suspensions and tardiness.

Design & Implementation

Based on the needs identified at Roosevelt High School in Yonkers, New York, the school's Design Committee determined that teaming might help. This model, through which students are assigned to small learning communities and share teachers in common, was implemented in the fall of 2001. The school also placed parent and community involvement at the top of their agenda and made technology a central focus for improvement. The staff understood that professional development would need to be ongoing and responsive to what they were learning about student needs.

Specifically, the goals of the small learning community program were to increase parent involvement, community involvement, professional development for staff, and the use of technology. Principal Bill Moore regularly sent 45 teachers out to observe programs at other schools that were socio-economically similar. As a result, staff members were able to bring back best practices that they believed in. (Those visits were funded through the Smaller Learning Communities grant provided by the federal government.)

While the school has the curriculum of a high school, it also boasts the social supports of an elementary school. Teachers and administrators have put in place outreach programs that have significantly increased parental involvement. They have also helped the school adapt to a multilingual population and the community's transportation challenges.

1. Students are grouped into teams that help break down anonymity at this large, urban school. Team teachers share students in common and are better able to make sense of student behavior and performance and to respond to changes in those areas. In the ninth grade, there is a separate program for students repeating that grade.
2. Administrators know that students are drawn to the school because of the magnet component.

They use this as leverage, keeping students out of the magnet programs for their first year if they are not within two years of grade level. In this way, they spend at least one year getting extra help in math and reading.

3. On the walls of the school are welcome signs in multiple languages. Stationed throughout the school are guides who wear buttons that indicate their native languages.
4. Teachers make it a point to keep each other and parents apprised of student progress. They contact parents when a student is doing well, not just when things are going poorly. Weekly progress meetings are held among teachers to make good and critical comments about the development of students. The principal personally schedules all of his appointments with parents.
5. Parent–teacher meetings are designed to be welcoming and conveniently located. Although the school is located on the east side of Yonkers, off–site meetings are held at an elementary school on the west side of the city, home to a large portion of the student population. Parental guides act as cultural liaisons between the school and community.
6. The teachers and administrators make it a point to not only get parents involved, but to train them. Adult Education Classes for parents are held on Saturday mornings. In these classes, students are paid to teach parents English as a Second Language and computer skills.
7. Another program that has attracted more parental involvement has been the "Monthly Hot Topics" program, a discussion of an important issue about which parents need to be informed. These discussions are scheduled three times a month at different hours of the day: 8 a.m., noon, and 8 p.m. The discussions have addressed such things as report cards and graduation requirements. Two dozen parents have attended these discussions, and the PTA has begun to draw parents from these monthly sessions.
8. Teachers and administrators have also increased the number of mailings they send to parents, including the school newspaper and newsletters. These mailings are often published in multiple languages.

Results

The results of the reforms at Roosevelt High School in Yonkers, New York include an increase in test scores and attendance rates and a decrease in suspension rates. State test scores in spring 2001 showed that 71% of Roosevelt High School's students were at the lowest (failing) level; in spring 2002, a year after the program was put into place, just 33% were still in that category. Attendance among ninth

graders increased by 9 percent, while overall suspensions were down 23 percent.

Replication Details

Smaller Learning Communities Timeline: Roosevelt High School

September, 2000

- Arrival of new principal, Bill Moore
- Start to address student-centered learning
- Goal to become a family-friendly school
- Establish Design Committee
- Assistant principals now responsible for specific grades

September, 2001

- Ninth-grade academy begins and implements teaming
- Staff makes site visits to see models of student-centered learning at other schools
- Data committee formed
- Leadership seminars and teaming workshops held

September, 2002

- Teams have classes physically near one another
- Teaming is implemented for grade 10 as well as 9
- "Hot topics" meetings for parents held in various locations throughout the month
- Roosevelt becomes a model site for visits from other schools

September, 2003

- Teaming to begin for grades 11 and 12
- Development of an alternative high school program that would allow students and teachers to have more interactions outside of class
- Working to see that personalization becomes a part of the school's culture

Principal And Staff Advice

According to Principal Bill Moore, a school that wishes to implement such a program will need "absolute support from [the district's] Central Office." He also states that administrators must secure buy-in from teachers first. "You have to get people to believe," he says.

Furthermore, Moore recommends that administrators learn to be very flexible. "Don't be afraid to decentralize power," he advises. "Letting teachers feel that they have input is crucial."

Teacher Amy Young agrees, and points to the additional need for supportive scheduling. "I would suggest that teachers who work with the same students be given the same prep periods," she says, "so that they can share information that may be pertinent to the students' success. This scheduling is also good for parental visits, as the students' parent can meet all core people at once."

Young also recommends programming student schedules so that groups move as such, have the same core teachers, and, when possible, occupy blocks of rooms that are close to one another.

Costs and Funding

Title I	\$28,000 per year
Smaller Learning Communities grant	\$160,000 per year, for three years
Federal Magnet Assistance Program	\$350,000 per year, for three years
Learning Technology grant	\$15,000 per year
New York School in Need of Improvement (SINI) funding	\$50,000 per year

Title 1 funds are used for literacy–related staff development, materials, and targeted instruction. Funds from the Smaller Learning Communities grant and the Federal Magnet Assistance Program help support data review, team planning, committee work, travel, and training related to magnet/small learning community goals. The Learning Technology grant goes toward materials and professional development that help strengthen instruction in the classroom. The SINI money is used for staff development.

Contact Information

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Rating Criteria

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

Developing a Learning Community

The school develops a culture in which students and teachers know each other well and learning—including ongoing professional development for all staff members—is valued. Parents and other community members partner with school staff to insure that all students graduate from high school with options that lead to further achievement.

Noble High School

Noble High School

North Berwick, ME

School Type: Public

School Setting: Rural

Level: High

School Design: Essential
School

Content Presented By:

The Education Alliance at
Brown University



National Association of
Secondary School Principals



The Mitchell Institute

Noble High School, serving a student population of 1150 from three small, rural, southwestern Maine communities, is a large school learning to be small. Today, it is a school with a strong common vision of equity and excellence for all students. It has come a long way since Ted Sizer, founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, visited ten years ago and challenged a group of teachers: "You have to change enough, quickly enough, so that gravity cannot drag you back." This is the story of how Noble reinvented itself.

When Principal Pam Fisher arrived at Noble High School in the summer of 1990, she found a school where student achievement data did not back up the school's sense of success. She interviewed every Noble faculty member and employee during that summer, and although most teachers were eager to serve students well, others were convinced they were doing well enough already. Fisher discovered a schedule of favoritism for some faculty, practices she considered discriminatory regarding room and course assignments for students, and a long history of a department head structure. Course requirements and expectations were different for different kids.

Interviews with parents revealed dissatisfaction with the school. Mothers told stories of children being channeled into programs because they were not "college material." Other parents worried about discipline and drugs.

Grading systems have an impact on equity, the school culture, and the core beliefs of a school community. Noble's system simply wasn't working. Principal Fisher's review of the grades of all students showed that the final exam, when averaged with the quarter grades, lowered the grades of two-thirds of the students.

Noble served students from three towns that were geographically dispersed, with many students traveling an hour by bus. The district received substantial subsidy from the state due to the level of income and property valuation.

The story of Noble's change began in the fall of 1990, when Principal Fisher built connections with the community by inviting interested teachers to help plan a freshman orientation program that would

be a positive start to the year. Several teachers planned a barbecue for freshman and their parents, with entertainment and older students engaging students and parents in welcoming and informational activities. The evening was a great success, culminating with the faculty singing a Simon and Garfunkel tune to the parents. Fisher commented, "With high expectations, but with no real strategy, I was ready to learn more about Noble and to understand why so many students were not achieving."

By November of that year, Fisher was ready to share her personal vision for a good school with the faculty and to ask for their help in reinventing the school to be equitable, rigorous and personalized for all learners, where every practice, structure and policy would be held to a new standard.

"I asked whomever was interested in making some significant changes for students and teachers to meet with me for a daylong retreat and begin to plan. Nearly thirty teachers showed up," Fisher reminisced.

During the session, a veteran Noble teacher commented, "If not in our schools, where else should democracy and equity thrive? We need to completely change the way we've been doing things." This was a turning point.

The teachers, first called the strategic planning team and later the faculty council, were empowered to develop a five and ten year action plan, including professional development and community engagement activities, that would reinvent the concept of schooling to ensure equity of opportunity for all kids to learn and to be successful.

During the 1990–91 year, the group of teacher leaders came forth with a plan to change organizational and structural practices to begin to address equity, rigor, personalization, and what they considered to be injustices in the way students were labeled and sorted. The plan involved phasing in integrated 9th grade teams consisting of an English, science, social studies, and math teacher, special education teacher, and guidance counselor. Each team would have common planning time and a core group of 80 students.

Twelve teachers, coming from all grade levels and who were at times targeted as "born again teachers," volunteered to take the lead. The program would be a heterogeneously grouped core curriculum, would include all special education students within the classrooms, and would require all students to take algebra as their first high school math course. The Freshman Core was born.

On the same night that former President Bush announced the beginning of the Gulf War in January of 1991, Noble faculty stood before over two hundred parents in the cafeteria and were challenged to explain why the school would ever consider having "those" kids sit in the same classroom with their kids. On that evening, Noble's own war began?over tracking. Meetings with the superintendent over concerns about moving too quickly for the community assured faculty that they could not afford to lose another generation of students. Parents and teachers continued to meet in small groups over the winter months.

A respected researcher from the University of Southern Maine facilitated a Parent Assessment Advisory Group charged with evaluating every aspect of this new idea, and the school board gave approval for a trial period for the Freshman Core. The school overcame the tracking concerns with its own data tracking system, by inviting parents into any and all classrooms, by including parents in the evaluation of the program, and by not giving up when the going got tough.

By the end of the 1990–91 school year, everyone, including the parents, felt more comfortable with the concept of heterogeneously grouped, integrated teams. The school gathered and assessed student

achievement and other data, which provided hard evidence of progress and helped to make the case for change. The next year, the sophomore teams were instituted. Principal Fisher commented, "Teachers who were weren't interested in teaming, or getting involved with change, were beginning to trickle up. Un-tracking half the school led the other half to topple quickly." Teachers at all grade levels were becoming open to change. At the same time, talented, veteran teachers were taking the lead in increasing graduation requirements for all students, making four years of rigorous mathematics, and four years of science, including chemistry and physics, required. At all levels, the school was redefining its standard of excellence to include all learners.

Today, all students are required to meet the standards in heterogeneously grouped core classes. This is assured by a move toward standards-based grading, common assessments, and the senior project. Courses are mostly organized within the integrity of the academic discipline, but as part of a team structure, common schedules and teacher planning time provide multiple opportunities for integrated, project-based and community-based learning. Since 1991, teachers at Noble have experimented with many projects and thematic events as their allegiances have shifted from their departments to their teaching teams and to the students. Constructing new standards and matching them to organizational structures and practices was the real challenge met by Noble High School.

Noble High, a relatively poor rural school, established a culture safe for experimentation that celebrates the talents of all teachers. The entire school community shared a common vision and mission. Changing structures changed beliefs. Many teachers wouldn't believe that heterogeneous grouping would work until they got involved. Once involved with teams, teachers relied less on departmental support. Because every student deserves to be taught by a person who is passionate about the content, Noble provided for teachers the same thing that was provided for students: equity of opportunity to learn and to work in an environment that ensures success. Teaching teams did not dissolve the integrity of disciplines but served as a great first step to creating small autonomous schools within a large school.

The more teachers have an opportunity to articulate the vision of change, the more it becomes part of the life and breath of the school, and the better the vision sticks. When asked about the importance of public advocacy, Principal Fisher commented, "Just as the role of principals changes, teachers need to be included in public advocacy, to be able to lead parent groups, and speak at community events regarding the practices of the school. Change happened at Noble in large part due to a trusted veteran [teacher] speaking at Board meetings, facilitating anxious parent groups, and speaking at the local civic clubs. Teachers are the best folks to assure parents and students that they do not turn into poor teachers overnight if they are trying out a new idea!"

Within three years, the changes at Noble had a dramatic impact on student learning. Test scores escalated, and the number of students attending college nearly doubled. Years later, the rural school community of 1150 students lives in a new building designed for fifteen small, independent learning communities and plans shortly to complete its conversion into three separate schools. The new programs and structures have persisted after several changes in leadership at all levels in the district. Today they are how Noble defines itself—they are no longer "changes." They are Noble's vision of an Essential School.

This story was adapted from *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies to Change the American High School*, a book created by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) with the support of the Education Alliance at Brown University. It was released at the annual conference of the NASSP in February 2004. *Breaking Ranks II*, which includes a more detailed case study of Noble High, is a follow-up to the highly acclaimed book *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. This book, issued in 1996 by the NASSP and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, offers a vision of a successful high school for the twenty-first century.

Demographics

- Houses grades 9–12
- Student population of 1150
- 99% Caucasian
- One building designed for 15 small, independent learning communities
- 90 teachers and 80 additional staff
- Regional high school serving three towns
- 29% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch

Background

In 1990, a group of teacher leaders at Maine's Noble High School, led by a visionary principal, designed and launched a plan to reinvent their school. Their goal was to define and build a democratic and equitable learning environment for all students, from the under-served to the presumed elite, to raise the aspirations of all students, and to guarantee that every student would leave the high school with a transcript that would open doors to higher education. Noble's story is a successful one that chronicles the endurance of core beliefs over more than 13 years.

Design & Implementation

Schools that believe in the promise of every student have the capacity for equity and will leave no child behind. In 1990, a group of teachers at Noble High School launched a plan to shift beliefs, change organization structures, and construct a school governance plan to ensure democracy and equity for faculty and students. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices at Noble continue to evolve.

- **The Freshman Core:** The plan involved phasing in integrated 9th grade teams consisting of an English, science, social studies, and math teacher, special education teacher, and guidance counselor. The teams had common planning time and a core group of 80 students. The program was a heterogeneously grouped core curriculum, including all special education students within the classrooms, and required all students to take algebra as their first high school math course.
- **Sophomore Teams instituted and graduation requirements increased:** In the second year, sophomore teams were instituted, involving half the school in integrated teams with a core curriculum. At the same time, talented, veteran teachers took the lead in increasing graduation requirements for all students, requiring four years of rigorous mathematics, and four years, of science, including chemistry and physics. At all levels, Noble redefined its standard of excellence to include all learners.
- **Course organization and scheduling:** Courses are now mostly organized within the integrity of the academic discipline. As part of a team structure, common schedules and teacher planning time provide multiple opportunities for integrated, project-based and community-based learning. This core curriculum allows flexibility for many AP courses to grow and is an early college option open to any student willing to complete the summer assignment.
- **Grading and assessment:** All Noble students are required to meet the standards of the core curriculum, which is assured by the grading systems, common assessments, and the senior project. All students work on the senior project for up to two years. The project is presented to a panel, along with the student portfolio, at the end of the senior year. Students who attend vocational centers during the day are engaged in core curricula as well. Whether a student is

involved with an internship, mentorship, or early college options, the core curriculum is required. An important point in this is the redesign of the traditional grading system and report card. Noble students, parents, teachers, and school board members got together ten years ago to address the impact of "number averaging" on grades, students attitudes and engagement over the year. Final exams were abolished in 1990 by the administration?not a democratic decision, but one made to allow new ideas evolve and to abolish inequitable results.

- **An Essential School design:** Today Noble High School lives in a new facility designed as an Essential School, consisting of fifteen small learning communities. Designed by a teacher–led Future Planning Team and having the advantage of a philosophy for teaching and learning firmly in place, the school space liberates teachers to maximize the potential of small learning communities. The school teams are aligned as three "vertical learning communities," becoming small schools with one grade level team looping. (Others are considering looping in the coming years.) While students have the opportunity to be part of small teams and communities, they have the advantage, in very rural areas, of participating in a vast array of opportunities in the arts, athletics, and AP programs. The on–site health center and other services address a huge need able to be provided by an economy of scale. Noble is a large school of more than 1100 students learning to be small in a variety of ways. The effectiveness of personalized environments and curriculum is measured by the equity in design.

Results

Through a program that promises a democratic and equitable learning environment for all students, Noble High School in North Berwick, Maine, has designed a school that provides the greatest social capital to all students: a core program of essential skill and knowledge.

Within three years of implementation, the changes at Noble had a dramatic impact on student learning. State test scores began to rise and by 1994–1995 were above the state average in every subject. The number of students attending college nearly doubled.

In recent years, the personalized learning environment has also contributed to improved student behavior. From 2001 to 2004, Noble tracked a 60% decrease in violent incidents and a 50% decrease in peer harassment.

Under current principal Christian Elkington, Noble's staff continues to work together for improved teaching and learning in accordance with the Coalition of Essential Schools' guiding principles.

Replication Details

Noble High School in North Berwick, Maine, is proof that large, traditional public schools can change. According to Noble's former principal, Pam Fisher, faith in teachers is one of the keys to implementing change. "Most teachers are wonderful people who truly want the very best for all students. Leaders need to believe in their capacity to change and to mobilize commitment guided by clarity of common vision." Fisher offers the following tips for changing existing public schools, to ensure that they are equitable, democratic, and inspiring learning communities for all students and teachers:

- **Establish a culture safe for experimentation:** Celebrate the talents of all teachers and agree upon and articulate a common vision and mission.
- **Guide professional development:** For the core beliefs of the school to be anchored in

improving students and practice for students (not focused on the needs and wants of the teachers), schools leaders must guide the professional development. This may be as simple as reading common articles weekly, common tests, or hosting forums and seminars to engage parents and teachers in common dialogue.

- **Put the student at the center of changes in classroom practices:** Faculty will gravitate more easily to changes that tinker, such as interpreting personalization by adding an advisory program as opposed to personalization of pedagogy in the classroom. Putting the student at the center of changes in classroom practices, including curriculum, instructions and assessments is the starting point.
- **Provide equity of opportunity for teachers:** Any practices that tilt the hat to favoritism for veterans, or put new teachers in untenable situations, are professionally unsound and discriminatory. Every teacher, new or old, veteran or "green," needs to be able to participate in the governance and leadership of the school, make key decisions about the school, and share in the development of curriculum.
- **Teachers need to be supported in both the good and bad times:** Teachers may be skeptical of collaborative teams and small learning community environments for a number of reasons. For some, it is the first time they have had to share their practice. There is fear of making mistakes. Perhaps there is fear of accountability for student achievement, or fear of lacking skills to teach in a heterogeneous environment. Teaching all kids to a rigorous standard is never easy.
- **Be clear about models for change:** The mission of the school is to attend to the diverse learning needs and styles of young adolescents. Making best use of technology, an array of models beyond schools walls and many other learning options are needed to enrich the resources of the local school. This includes anchoring the student in a small learning community that knows him/her well, taking charge of the learning plan, and shepherding the student toward success. There is no place for a poor or uncommitted teacher to hide in a small team or learning community.
- **Beware of impediments to change:** There are structures in our schools that are absolutely guaranteed to impede change and limit students: persistence in tracking students, department head structures, traditional grading practices, school schedules of short learning periods, and teachers working in isolation.
- **Lead with passion and humility:** If the principal is not passionate about equity for all kids, is not passionate about practices that ensure equity, and cannot lead the learning and mobilization of the faculty, change will not occur. Leaders must be humble, trust that all teachers want the best for students, take little credit, and assume blame.

Costs and Funding

A relatively poor rural school is challenged to be creative in finding resources for professional development. Early on, Noble High School tapped into those provided by the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), becoming a member in 1993, adopting the then nine common principles, and engaging in every opportunity provided by CES. The aim was to create a school of professional learning communities.

Not enough can be said about the impact of the Coalition of Essential Schools and the vision of Dr. Ted Sizer on the change implemented over time at Noble High School. Additionally, successful grant awards from the state, CSRD and the Small Learning Community programs at the state and national level continue to support teachers' work at the school.

Contact Information

Since beginning its transformation from a traditional high school to a personalized and equitable learning environment, Maine's Noble High School has received much local and national recognition. In the 1994–1995 school year, it was nominated by Maine for National Schools of Excellence Recognition and also nominated for Redbook's "America's Best Schools" program. It has received numerous state, federal, and foundation grants to help fund its innovative programs. It regularly hosts visiting educators, both within and outside of the Coalition for Essential Schools. Recently, it was identified as an exemplary Smaller Learning Communities grantee and chosen as one of three national "Design Studios" to hold a professional development workshop for other recipients of Smaller Learning Communities grants.

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Rating Criteria

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

Wyandotte High School

Wyandotte High School

Kansas City, KS

School Type: Public

School Setting: Urban

Level: High

School

Design: Alternative

Content Presented By:

The Education Alliance at Brown University



National Association of Secondary School Principals



Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas has a rich history as one of the oldest high schools west of the Mississippi. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was the pride of the area, until urban flight and other factors sparked a dramatic decline. By the mid-1990s, safety concerns and academic difficulties had district officials thinking about closing the school's doors. Test scores were among the worst in the state. Accreditation was in question. Even at their worst, other schools in the district could always guarantee that they were "at least better than Wyandotte."

"Like most urban schools, we had inner-city issues," says current Wyandotte principal, Walter Thompson. "We maybe had communication issues, race issues. People not caring about people."

This was a challenging spot from which to launch a school reform effort. But in 1996, district leaders opted to make one last attempt to turn around this troubled school. They brought in Thompson and adopted a program called First Things First, a framework that identifies seven critical features for school improvement. The features—based on developmental and educational research on children and youth, current research on organizational change, and current work in public schools—included continuity of care; increased instructional time; clear, fair, and high standards for conduct and academic achievement; enriched and diverse opportunities for learning; teacher empowerment to improve instruction; flexible resource allocation; and collective responsibility for achievement.

The staff understood that they had to make the seven critical features a reality in the day-to-day life of the school. Principal Thompson had a genuine belief in and respect for teachers. A former coach and football quarterback, he knew how to coach his faculty and, when necessary, to get out of their way and let them take the lead.

"When [Principal Thompson] came to the school, we had had a top-down person who was not very organized or efficient. People were pretty much grumbling about that regime," says special education coordinator Carol Normandin.

Thompson approached the teachers first with the opportunity to fix the problem of students who were tardy to class. With seven class changes a day and a large building that was built to house 3000 students, many students never made it from one class to another, and no accountability system existed.

"He came to us and said we could work together to solve this problem," says Normandin. "Staff took turns sweeping the halls for kids and we took tardies down from the thousands to about 30. That was our first taste of the power we had. We could really effect change and he would let us do that."

Thompson next set up a Stakeholder Team, comprised of 13 staff members, to discuss how Wyandotte could adapt each feature of First Things First to its unique environment. The team included several veterans, who had some reservations about a new plan. Naming them to the Stakeholder Team allowed them to discuss their concerns and listen to the viewpoints of their peers.

After much discussion, the Stakeholder Team facilitated a two-day roundtable about the features for the entire Wyandotte staff. Immediately following this roundtable, all staff members at Wyandotte began meeting weekly in small teams to discuss the options available to them. Two members of the Stakeholder Team co-facilitated each of the small team sessions after school, and took responsibility for ensuring that all staff members stayed informed about the ideas, research, and alternatives on the table. These small teams provided a structure to promote good communication.

By December 1997, the staff had decided that, beginning with the 1998–99 school year, they would reorganize Wyandotte High School into self-contained, small learning communities (SLCs), defined as "schools-within-a-school." In these learning communities, interdisciplinary teams of teachers would teach groups of 160–200 students from grades 9–12, including special education students. English language learners would participate in elective classes with the communities and receive pull-out language instruction.

Also, each small learning community would revolve around a common theme, and all members of the community would focus teaching and learning around that theme. Teachers would engage in ongoing professional development activities related to the theme and to meeting the needs of their students. In fact, the school examined the needs and interests of students to develop the themes and created an advisory structure that promoted close relationships among students, staff, families, and community members for the length of the students' high school careers.

"It was surprising to us that there were very few schools across the country doing small learning communities," says Principal Thompson. "We were looking for the best plan for our students, and through this we have seen a great deal of improvement. We are seeing better relationships between kids and their teachers."

One of the reasons for improved relationships was the feature of collective responsibility. All individuals involved in the small learning community (students, teachers, parents, community members, etc.) were expected to take responsibility for improved student performance. Parents would meet with teacher advisors who made sure the students took the right classes and gathered enough credits. Teachers handled scheduling concerns, eliminating both the long lines outside the counselor's office and excuses to get out of class. And all students' classes were located in close proximity to help build a sense of "family" within the communities.

"The smallness of the communities gave us a real identity," says Normandin. "We had lost that identity. Now when kids say what community they're in, they're proud. It boosts their self-esteem and that of the teachers."

The task of reorganizing, however, was not an easy one to achieve. After the school had communicated the purpose, structure, and functions of the small learning communities to all involved, and students had chosen their themes for the fall of 1998–1999, the teachers spent the summer developing agendas for each community regarding reading, problem solving, assessment, and

instruction. They also defined their goals, expectations, and parent involvement components, and identified and analyzed the academic needs of students who had chosen their themed community. This summer workshop helped the staff build a collective professional learning culture in the school.

The beginning of the 1998–99 school year brought with it a mixed bag of excitement, fear, and reservation about this new approach to high school. There were still many unanswered questions, and staff raised concerns about what appeared to be more chaos than before. Now that students came to class, teachers had to handle many of the previously unknown issues with which students were dealing. Their responsibilities were growing from teaching those who chose to come to class to collectively caring for each and every student in their small learning community. It became critical for the school to provide staff members with support in managing the multiple transitions of this change process. Continual dialogue, questioning, and collaboration were important tools in this process.

The teachers' efforts and the school's support began to pay off later that year when, on the last day of school before the winter holiday, students and teachers could still be found saying their goodbyes more than an hour after dismissal. No longer were the teachers beating the students out the door. Staff had also become more comfortable with how the school improvement process looked at change—using an inquiry approach rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

To further support staff development, the local school board approved the reorganization of Wednesdays, allowing for an early release of students and two hours each week for staff to spend in SLC study groups. Teacher groups met, some every day, to connect their theme to their content and to discuss student progress. Sometimes they even brought a student into their meetings. "We'd talk about what's going on, what's an obstacle for success," says Normandin. "We knew we needed to join up to achieve success."

The flexibility and empowerment of the small learning community has proven essential in allowing the school improvement features of First Things First to become real. But the teachers knew that structural change alone was not enough to make the impact on student performance they wanted. Consequently, teachers and administrators worked together at the district level to develop a teaching and learning document that articulates a focus for all school staff. Through study of professional readings, dialogue, and collaboration, staff chose three key topics: classroom environment; instruction (to include active engagement, connectedness, and reflection); and professional learning communities. Since its creation, the document has served as the target for instructional improvement at Wyandotte.

While teachers and administrators maintained their focus on teaching and learning, they also kept an eye on the data. Teachers looked at assessment results for students in their small learning communities and shared this information with all staff within a SLC. This became a crucial piece of the improvement work. It was no longer someone else's problem; it was everyone's concern.

Student reading performance emerged as a particular concern. Teachers' newly strengthened relationships with their students pushed them to research and explore what could be done for those with poor reading skills. The teachers soon began training in Second Chance Reading in order to integrate skills for teaching reading into their practice.

"The staff took a serious attitude toward non-readers," says Principal Thompson. "Our basic goal is to get kids to graduate and be able to move on to the working world, or junior college, or a four-year school. We implemented this [reading program] to help kids get back on track."

During training, teachers not well-versed in teaching reading looked to their peers for support. What started as an after-school open discussion of teaching reading strategies has grown in sophistication

ever since. It is an environment of trust and respect in which teachers can share their failures as well as their successes. Teachers exchange materials, demonstrate lessons, discuss implementation and appropriate use of strategies, and offer one another suggestions for improvement.

"Having groups of teachers working together helps," says Thompson. "It means no one is standing on an island by themselves."

In keeping with the spirit of the reading study group, the staff at Wyandotte also developed a peer coaching system in January 2001. Administrators brought in substitutes two days a week to allow teachers to observe other teachers in their classrooms. As the process developed, teachers spent time collaboratively planning lessons, observing lessons, and participating in reflective conferences after lessons. The process further enhanced the development of a collaborative culture at Wyandotte and identified collaboration as a part of the teacher's professional role as opposed to something to be done "on your own time." The peer coaching system continues to evolve to include mentoring new teachers, collaborating with teachers in other schools, and embedding support from outside consultants into the classroom.

"This wasn't anything someone said we had to do," says Thompson. "It was an idea from the teachers here that they wanted independence of evaluation, the ability to look into other classrooms and partner with each other. It's also about not leaving young teachers out on their own."

The results have been astounding. The dropout rate during the 1996–97 school year was a high 28.8%, but by the 2001–02 school year, it had fallen to 5.1% and stands at 4.25% as of February 2004. Teachers know their students better and work with them to help them stay in school.

In 1997–98, the student attendance rate at Wyandotte was 73%. By the 2001–02 school year, it had climbed to 86%. This increase is coupled with increasing enrollment in a time when the district's overall secondary enrollment is decreasing. The graduation rate was at a low of 40% in 1998–99, but has improved to a high of 70% in 2000–01. This includes an increase in the number of special education students graduating, from 1–3 eight years ago to an average of 22–23 a year as of 2003. In addition, incidents of violence against students declined 93%, from 155 in 1997–98 to 14 in 2001–02.

On the Kansas Reading Assessment, there was a 28% decrease in the number of students scoring at the "Unsatisfactory Performance" level from 2001 to 2003. In addition, there was a 20% increase in the number of students scoring at or above "Satisfactory", coupled with a 31% increase in the number of students tested. On the Kansas Math Assessment, the number of students scoring at the "Unsatisfactory Performance" level has decreased by 9% since spring of 2000.

Against a backdrop of poverty, crime, and unemployment, Wyandotte High School staff members have committed to work together with their students, parents, and community to change the culture of their school from one of chaos and isolation to one of hope and collaboration. But teachers at Wyandotte by no means believe that they have reached their goal. Their work continues to evolve based on the needs of the students. Eight years ago, the district was thinking of closing the school. No one would consider that action today.

"The thing about the work is that it got teachers and kids excited," says Principal Thompson. "When you look into the future and see what you can do for these kids, no road is too difficult. For a school that no one gave much support to, all of a sudden the last has become the first."

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follow-up to the highly acclaimed book *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*. This book, issued in 1996 by the NASSP and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, offers a vision of a successful high school for the twenty-first century.

Demographics

Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas has, in recent years, undergone considerable changes in its demographic makeup. These include a 10% increase in students receiving free and reduced-price lunch (72% in 1997–98; 82% in 2001–02 and 2002–03) and a growing Hispanic population (from 12% of the student body in 1997–98 to 26% in 2002–03). In addition, the English language learner (ELL) enrollment has grown from 50 students in 2000–01 to 187 students in 2002–03, constituting approximately 14% of the population at the school.

Background

Wyandotte High School has a rich history as one of the oldest high schools west of the Mississippi. Its current building was a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project in the mid 1930s and is now on the National Historic Register. In the 1960s and 70s, the school was the pride of the area. Then urban flight and other factors sparked a dramatic decline. By the mid 1990s, district officials considered closing the school's doors.

In 1995, Wyandotte's test scores were among the worst in the state of Kansas, and the school's accreditation was in question. Safety was an issue. Fires were frequently set inside the building, students were often seen more in the halls than in the classrooms, and fights were frequent occurrences. In addition, the staff was dejected. Teachers worked in isolation. As a survival tactic, good teachers would go in their classrooms, lock the doors, and try to block out the chaos enough to teach the students who showed up. By April and May, the number of students who attended classes was sometimes less than half of those who started the previous fall. The rest had just quit coming, at least to class.

In 1996, instead of closing the school, the district opted to make one last attempt to turn it around. They began by bringing in a new principal and making a commitment to a framework of reform entitled First Things First. The First Things First framework identifies seven critical features for school improvement based on developmental and educational research on children and youth, current research on organizational change, and current work in public schools. Though the research was important, making the features part of the reality of the school had to come from the people who worked there. Fortunately for the Wyandotte community, the principal assigned to the job, Walter J. Thompson, had a genuine belief in and respect for teachers and a collaborative working style that marked a departure from the school's previous leader.

"We felt we had an opportunity and we had to grasp that opportunity," says special education coordinator Carol Normandin. "This wasn't being imposed. We perceived that we could do what we wanted to do to change things. It was really empowering."

Design & Implementation

In order to begin reform at Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas, the new principal, Walter J. Thompson, felt he had to give staff members the autonomy to address some of the problems themselves. He did this by allowing them to change their schedules to make time for hallway duty and by establishing a Stakeholder Team to discuss how the seven features of the First Things First program could be integrated into Wyandotte's unique environment. After this team had explored the possibilities of the program, they designed a two-day roundtable about the features for the entire Wyandotte staff and facilitated weekly small-team meetings with all staff to discuss the options

available to them.

Through these meetings, the staff decided to reorganize the school into small learning communities, defined as "schools-within-a-school." Interdisciplinary teams of teachers would teach groups of 160–200 students from grades 9–12, including special education students. English language learners would remain in an SLC for elective classes and receive pullout language instruction.

In addition, the staff decided that each small learning community would revolve around a common theme, and all members of the community would focus teaching and learning around that theme. The staff developed the small learning community themes based on the needs and interests of students and agreed to engage in ongoing staff development focused on these needs and the theme of their community.

To staff the learning communities, the school developed a Staffing Committee, which included teachers, and had an outside consultant examine a staffing survey. The Staffing Committee also interviewed and selected a lead teacher to serve as coordinator for each SLC.

"The idea of small learning communities gave us the opportunity to interview and bring in the caliber of talent we needed," says Principal Thompson.

Once the staff was in place and students had chosen their communities, teachers received payment for 56 hours of preparation time, including a summer workshop where each SLC planned its goals, expectations, parent involvement component, and agenda for reading, problem solving, assessment, and instruction. In addition, teachers took responsibility for scheduling issues and advisory tasks within their SLC.

As the reform got underway, staff worked together to collaboratively solve problems and address the issues of their students. However, they found they needed more support from the school to face the previously unknown issues of those students who had not come to class in the past. To this end, the local school board approved the reorganization of Wednesdays to allow for an early release of students and two hours of study–group time for teachers. During this time, teachers discussed the needs of their students and how to connect their content to their SLC theme.

Teachers and district–level administrators also collaborated on a teaching and learning document that articulates a focus for all school staff. Through study of professional readings, dialogue, and collaboration, the staff chose three key topics: classroom environment; instruction (to include active engagement, connectedness, and reflection); and professional learning community.

School staff also kept an eye on student achievement data at Wyandotte. When reading skills emerged as a problem, the teachers researched and selected a reading program and began training. This training led to an after–school study group for teachers who had little experience teaching reading skills. The group meets weekly to model lessons, discuss the appropriate use of strategies, and offer suggestions for implementation.

The staff at Wyandotte also participates in peer coaching, including two days a week when the school brings in substitutes so that teachers can observe other teachers in their classrooms. In addition, the coaching system now includes mentoring new teachers, collaborating with teachers in other schools, and embedding support from outside consultants into the classroom.

Results

Attendance at Wyandotte High School has increased from 73% in 1997–98 to 86% in 2001–02. This increase is coupled with increasing enrollment in a time when the district secondary enrollment is decreasing. The dropout rate also improved, decreasing from 28.8% in 1996–97 to 5.1% in 2001–02. As of February 2004, the rate stood at 4.25%.

The graduation rate, which is determined by following a class for its four years of high school, increased from 40% in 1999 to a high of 70% in 2000–01. This includes an increase in the number of special education students graduating, from an average of 1–3 a year in 1996 to an average of 22–23 in 2003. Incidents of violence against students declined 93%, from 155 in 1997–98 to 14 in 2001–02.

In the realm of test scores, Wyandotte has had some success moving students out of the bottom quartile or lower performance standards on the Kansas Math and Reading Assessment and the norm-referenced MAT7 Assessment. On the Kansas Math Assessment, the number of students scoring at the "Unsatisfactory Performance" level has decreased by 9% since spring 2000. This decrease is coupled with a 20% increase in the number of students tested. In addition, the overall mean score has continued to increase each of the past two years.

On the Kansas Reading Assessment, the gain is even more dramatic, as evidenced in the following chart. There was a 28% decrease in the number of students scoring at the "Unsatisfactory Performance" level from 2001 to 2003. In addition, there was a 20% increase in the number of students scoring at or above "Proficient." This was coupled with a 31% increase in the number of students tested.

Replication Details

Principal Thompson and his staff offer the following tips for traditional high schools attempting reform:

- **Involve all staff and keep everyone informed at each step of the process.** The Stakeholder Team at Wyandotte included veterans who might have been naysayers had they not had input in the process. Also all staff had a hand in setting priorities and discussing the improvement program, options for instruction and hiring, and professional development. The group also set up communication mechanisms for parents and the community.
- **Use research and data at every step in the process.** Teachers and administrators at Wyandotte based their approach to small learning communities, the features of the First Things First program, their reading model, and their peer coaching system on research. They also based all discussions and decisions within the SLCs on careful examination of the demonstrated needs and performance data of the students.
- **Make professional development ongoing, job embedded, and focused on staff and student needs.** "We have an outside consultant who's been with us for five years," says Principal Thompson. "As long as you stay away from the "fly-by-night" people you can build a good foundation."
- **Create solid relationships among teachers, students, parents, and the community.** Small learning communities provide the environment in which teachers and students can build strong relationships. But the Wyandotte staff has also branched out into the community. They invite teachers from other schools in to observe their classes and make presentations on their progress. "When we were looking for something eight years ago, other people extended a hand to us," says Thompson.
- **Give a reform time to work and realize that the work is never truly done.** "This is an ongoing process," says Thompson. "We have not cornered the market on this stuff but we have a good handle on it and we've seen a great deal of improvement."

Costs and Funding

The reform work at Wyandotte High School is a collaborative partnership among the school, the Kansas City, Kansas School District, The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and The Institute for Research and Reform in Education.

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Rating Criteria

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Adapting School Organization to Promote Student Success

Administrators distribute power among the staff and students. They also encourage the adaptation of school policies and structures to meet the learning needs of students.

Developing a Learning Community

The school develops a culture in which students and teachers know each other well and learning—including ongoing professional development for all staff members—is valued. Parents and other community members partner with school staff to insure that all students graduate from high school with options that lead to further achievement.

Related Web Resources

This is an annotated list of resources found on other Web sites that relate to this spotlight topic on The Knowledge Loom. We encourage you to access them from the links provided on The Knowledge Loom. To do this, go to the Web address noted in the header. Then click on the Related Resources link.

For an overview of additional content presented on The Knowledge Loom Web site that may not have been selected for this print document, see the Spotlight Overview located earlier in the document.

1) Problem Based Social Studies

<http://www.bie.org/pbss/index.php>

This Web page from the Buck Institute for Education provides a series of free curriculum units to guide problem based learning in social studies. It includes units related to real–world problems in economics and government, many on high–interest topics for students.

2) Redesign Network at Stanford University

Internet Resources on Starting Small Schools

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/SUSE/csrn/resources/small/>

A Starting Point: Top 5 websites with links to research on small schools

Why Small Schools?

Articles and studies showing the importance of small schools

The Research in Brief

ERIC digests and other research summaries

Small Schools as a Systemic Reform

How school districts are adopting small schools strategies

The Bottom Line

Research on cost–effectiveness and facilities

Who's Who

Regional small schools organization

3) Resources for High School Reform

<http://ncrve.berkeley.edu/NAHS/Resources.html>

This compilation lists a variety of government, public and private groups that have demonstrated an interest in high school reform. Those organizations in **boldface** co–sponsored the New American High School Conference held in Washington, D.C., May 22–24, 1996.

4) Resources for Problem and Project Based Learning

<http://www.bie.org/pbl/resources/index.php>

This Web page from the Buck Institute for Education provides a list of online resources to support problem and project based learning, including resources related to school reform.

5) The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Serving Small Learning Communities

<http://nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/resources.shtml>

Web–based resources that give a good introduction and links to smaller learning communities research, programs, and activities

Content Providers

This is an annotated list of organizations that provided content for this topic on The Knowledge Loom.

1) The Education Alliance at Brown University

The Education Alliance, a department at Brown University, has been working to effect real change in education for more than 25 years. The organization helps schools and school districts provide equitable opportunities for all students to succeed. It applies research findings and develops solutions to problems in such areas as school change, secondary school restructuring, professional development, first and second language acquisition, educational leadership, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

2) National Association of Secondary School Principals

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)—the preeminent organization and national voice of middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and aspiring school leaders—provides its members the professional resources to serve as visionary leaders. NASSP promotes excellence in school leadership to Congress, the administration, the national media, and the general public. Through its programs and student leadership services, NASSP promotes the intellectual growth, academic achievement, character development, leadership development, and physical well-being of youth.

The NASSP is a proud sponsor of the National Honor Society, National Junior Honor Society, and National Association of Student Councils.

