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ABSTRACT

The conversion of large urban high schools into small, focused learning centers is gaining currency as an education reform strategy. This publication provides guidelines, along with guiding questions, for those considering such a conversion. The first section explores the structural, organizational, and political challenges involved in converting large high schools into identifiable, autonomous learning communities. It begins with a discussion of the advantages of "small." It continues with an examination of the experiences of some large schools that have broken into small learning communities but have failed to produce the desired results. From these efforts have emerged eight strategies, which the guide presents in detail. The second section of the guide explores the challenges that emerge once a school has reorganized into small units. It looks at how these units stay focused on the combination of effective learning principles and practices that "small" makes possible. It presents examples of routines and best practices from successful small schools, alternative schools, and youth-development programs. Finally, the guide presents a tool, "the five Cs," for blending youth development approaches with contextual and authentic learning to create effective learning environments. (References are included in 11 footnotes.) (WFA)




FROM LARGE TO SMALL

Strategies for Personalizing the High School

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PREFACE

Growing momentum for high school reform across the country suggests that this may be a crucial moment of opportunity for making progress on the seemingly intractable problems of high school design, practice, and policy. In efforts such as *Schools for a New Society*, a Carnegie Corporation of New York and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-supported initiative, and the *Breaking Ranks* initiative of the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, urban districts across the country are working to create high schools that are learning communities with cultures that support high expectations, inquiry, effort, and persistence by all. Such schools will have a core vision and mission; high expectations and a clear definition of the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes students should gain; authentic, caring, and respectful relationships between teachers and students, with every student known well by an adult and engaged in meaningful work; and qualified teachers who have opportunities to collaborate and focus on student work.

High school reinvention at this scale is a daunting challenge that requires vision and policy, practice and cultural change. A promising entry point for many districts is through transformation of their large comprehensive high schools into sets of small schools and small learning communities. These efforts build on a growing body of research indicating that small learning communities are a promising strategy for implementing these elements. Small size, achieved through freestanding schools or small units within larger facilities, makes it possible for teachers to know students well and to be able to recognize their strengths and their needs. Small size also allows teachers to focus on student work over time and collaborate to develop the instructional strategies to help students engage with rigorous work. Data from a variety of studies indicate that while small

schools are of value for all kinds of students, they can be especially strong learning environments for students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Yet, small size alone is not a panacea; it is a platform for creating the kind of learning communities needed for high levels of achievement by all students. Through *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, Jobs for the Future (JFF) has identified outstanding examples of effective small schools. In this publication JFF profiles these schools and synthesizes the key lessons about why they are effective.

In addition JFF has examined the experiences of a number of school reform efforts where large comprehensive high schools broke into small learning communities but reproduced inequities and ineffective practices. Based on these analyses, including many conversations with principals, teachers and students engaged in this work, JFF has honed in on the key areas where efforts to go small foundered in ways that fundamentally limited their success. The authors offer an approach that raises key questions in each area to focus attention and effort on critical decisions to ensure positive outcomes. These guiding questions, together with the examples from the Margins to Mainstream project, make *From Large to Small* a very useful tool for planning for schools and districts.

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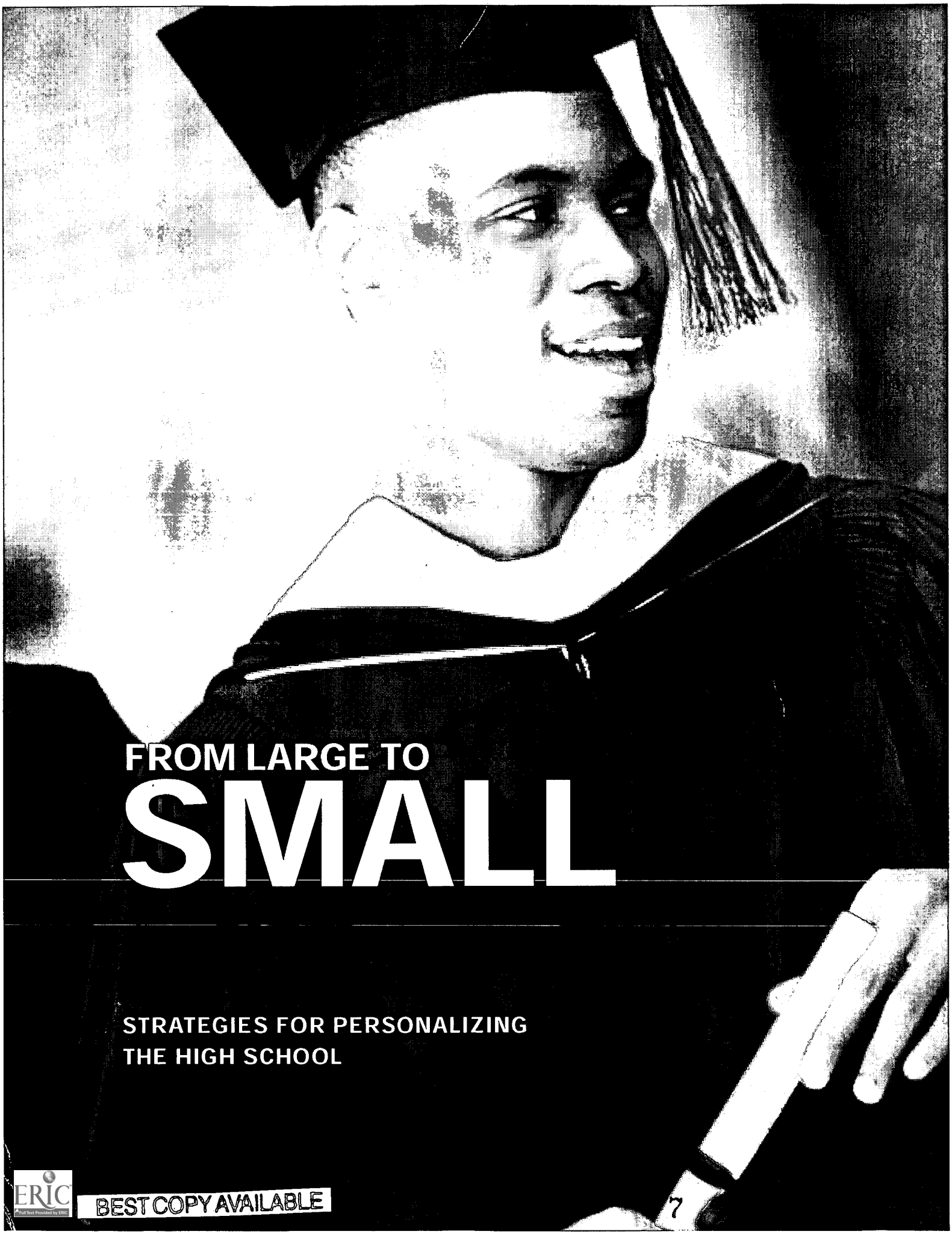

FROM LARGE TO SMALL

STRATEGIES FOR PERSONALIZING THE HIGH SCHOOL

FROM LARGE TO SMALL

The conversion of large high schools into small, focused learning environments is gaining currency as an education reform strategy in communities across the United States. While the research on the positive impact of small schools on student outcomes provides a strong rationale for this reform push, it offers few concrete guideposts to school leaders in traditional comprehensive high schools who are seeking to go "wall to wall" with a small schools strategy.

In the absence of such guideposts, one approach leaders have taken is to layer various forms of small learning communities onto the already complex structure of the comprehensive high school. The resulting hybrid is, in many cases, even more complex organizationally and more diffuse in its messages and mission. To explore the structural, organizational, and political challenges involved in converting a large high school into identifiable, autonomous learning communities, the first section of *From Large to Small* draws on preliminary lessons emerging in schools and districts that have begun this difficult work.[1]

Once a school has reorganized into small units, a new set of challenges emerges. How do these new units stay focused on the combination of effective learning principles and practices that "small" makes possible? To explore this challenge, the second section of this report turns to a less traditional source of lessons: small schools, alternative schools, and youth development programs—often on the margins of the school system—that blend cognitive challenge with the caring and connections associated with positive youth development. Such environments are a source of concrete practices and routines that can help guide teachers and school leaders seeking to provide young people with the full range of supports and opportunities they need to succeed in school and beyond.

[1] The authors have drawn particularly from their experience as partners in Boston's high school reform work undertaken as part of *Schools for a New Society*, an initiative of Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The authors would also like to thank Kathi Mullin, Special Assistant to the Superintendent for High School Reform, Boston Public Schools, for her helpful input into this paper.

THE CASE FOR "SMALL"

In many communities across the United States, high school reform has risen to the top of the agenda. The reasons are not hard to find. At a time when every student needs to develop the knowledge and skills to handle the rigors of college, careers in the new economy, and life in an increasingly complex world, many students appear to be moving through high school without reaching these goals:

- In the 35 largest central cities in the country, between 40 and 50 percent of schools have weak "promotion power"—that is, the capacity to hold and promote students from ninth to twelfth grade. In these cities, almost half of the high schools graduate only 50 percent of their students four years later.[2]

- Only 68 percent of students entering high school earn a standard high school diploma. Another 16 percent eventually receive an alternative diploma, such as a GED.[3]

- Increasing numbers of college-going youth must take remedial courses because they lack the knowledge and skills for college-level work. In 1995, 29 percent of all college freshmen, and more than 40 percent of those in colleges with high minority enrollment, were required to take remedial courses in reading, writing, or math.[4] Students who needed the most extensive remediation (more than two semesters of reading) were six times less likely to earn a BA than those who required no remedial work.[5]

- In focus groups conducted for the National Commission on the High School Senior Year, recent high school graduates reported that: (1) what they learned in high school left them unprepared for college, work, and the adult world; (2) their senior year was a waste of time; (3) they found high school to be pointless, boring, and not challenging; and (4) socializing was more important to them in high school than academics.[6]

In a concerted effort to address this crisis, school leaders across the country have begun the hard work of high school reform. As a result of a first wave of this process, high school students in most states and districts are now expected to pass state assessment examinations and complete a more rigorous set of graduation requirements. Within this context of standards-based reform, a primary focus of the past few years has been to align curriculum, assessments, and teaching strategies to the standards.

In large, impersonal urban high schools where expectations and achievement have been low, the strategy of raising standards and aligning curriculum and instruction has been difficult to implement and has had limited

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[2] Balfantz, Robert and Nettie Legters. 2001. "How Many Central City High Schools Have a Severe Dropout Problem, Where Are They Located, and Who Attends Them? Initial Estimates Using the Common Core of Data." Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Graduate School of Education and Achieve, Inc.

[3] McCabe, Robert H. 2000. *No One to Waste: A Report to Public Decision-Makers and Community College Leaders.* Washington, DC: Community College Press.

[4] National Center for Education Statistics. 1997. *The Condition of Education* 1997 (NCES 97-388), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

[5] Adelman, Clifford. 1999. *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

[6] National Commission on the High School Senior Year. 2001. "The Lost Opportunity of Senior Year: Finding a Better Way." Washington, DC: National Commission on the High School Senior Year..

impact. Some schools with both the resources to respond to the demands of improving instruction, and with academically prepared students who already identify with their schools' academic goals, are showing some positive results. But the crisis in urban high schools will not be solved by setting high standards and pushing more students through the same pipeline that works for just a portion of them. By the time they reach high school, many young people are so disaffected that higher expectations and more challenging curricula—the primary tools of standards-based reform—are not enough to engage or motivate them.

With large numbers of students at risk of not meeting high school exit requirements, community leaders are searching for new ideas and opportunities. In response, an increasing number of large urban districts are seeking to personalize their high schools by creating small schools and breaking up larger schools into smaller learning communities. This "small is better" movement has been fueled by well-publicized research indicating that small high schools generally have higher achievement levels, higher graduation rates, and lower dropout rates, and that they are safer than larger high schools.[7] Most encouraging to urban leaders has been the finding that small schools make the most difference for low-income and minority youth.[8]

The move to smaller learning environments is also supported by a body of resiliency research on the personal and social assets young people need to make a successful transition into adulthood and on the features of environments that are likely to help them build those assets. Although less well-known to educators, the resiliency research points to a number of features of positive developmental settings—such as high expectations, supportive relationships, community membership, and opportunities for youth service and leadership—all of which are much more likely to be found in smaller learning environments.

[7] Raywid, Mary Anne. 1996. *Taking Stock: The Movement To Create Mini-Schools, Schools-within-Schools, and Separate Small Schools.* Urban Diversity Series No. 108: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Madison, WI. ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, New York, NY. See also Gladden, Robert. 1998. "The Small School Movement: A Review of the Literature" in Fine, Michelle, and Janis I. Somerville, eds. *Small Schools, Big Imaginations: A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools.* Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. See also Lee, Valerie E. 2000. "School Size and the Organization of Secondary Schools" in Hallinan, Maureen T., ed. 2000. *Handbook of the Sociology of Education.* New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

[8] Howley, C; Strange, M.; and Bickel, R. 2000. *Research about School Size and School Performance in Impoverished Communities.* ERIC Digest. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ED 448 968).

THE PITFALLS OF LAYERING SMALL ONTO LARGE

While most of the literature on "getting smaller" has focused on the positive results achieved by new start-ups and stand-alone small schools, a growing emphasis in urban districts today is on creating small learning communities within large comprehensive high schools and, increasingly, on actually converting large schools into a collection of smaller, more personalized ones.

In this process, districts and schools have tended to layer small learning communities onto the existing organizational structure of the comprehensive high school, rather than transform one large high school into several small, autonomous or semi-autonomous units. This layering approach has its perils: the already complex organizational chart of the comprehensive high school, with its array of groupings and affiliations, becomes even more complex. Thus a "restructured" high school might offer a smorgasbord of "learning communities," including: ninth and/or tenth grade clusters or "academies," grade 9-12 or 10-12 "houses" of 400 or more students, multi-grade sequences of courses (often focused on career themes and called "career pathways"), a smattering of interdisciplinary courses (e.g., a humanities sequence), bilingual course sequences for several different native-language groupings, and special education "pull-outs."

Faculty often belong to several of these small learning units while remaining more tightly affiliated with their subject matter departments, which have been charged with implementing new curricula aligned with state assessments. Heightening the complexity of these arrangements are district and state policies, such as those governing promotion, graduation, and teacher and student assignment, that have a major effect on the composition and overall configuration of all these groupings.

While the kinds of small learning communities described above may be an improvement for some students over the anonymity and fragmentation of the typical high school organization and schedule (six or seven subjects, each with different teachers and groups of students, in 45-minute blocks), it is unlikely that the positive results associated with being a student in a small, autonomous school will accrue to the students and teachers experiencing such hybrids. The multiple affiliations and choppiness of such arrangements do not offer the heightened accountability of students and teachers that comes from students being known well by a consistent group of adults, and from professionals making collective decisions and acting in mutually interdependent ways.

HOW LARGE SCHOOLS BECOME SMALL: EMERGING LESSONS

The question is whether, how, and under what circumstances a large comprehensive high school can reinvent itself to offer the advantages of "smallness" that the literature suggests. To date, some of the most dramatic—but controversial—examples of converting a large high school into small, autonomous units have occurred as the result of an intervention or reconstitution process developed by a district or state to deal with particularly dysfunctional or low-performing large schools. While important lessons can be learned from these efforts, the multiplicity of issues in such schools, as well as the particular circumstances of an intervention process, limit the potential applicability of these lessons.

The challenge facing urban districts today is to make equally dramatic changes with a less top-down, less coercive process. No blueprint exists for how to do this. Rather, there are "works-in-progress": districts and schools across the country that are in the early stages of converting large high schools into small, inventing more varied models of high school, and incorporating youth development principles into that work. Supported by recent and significant investments by Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Education's *Smaller Learning Communities Program,* these cities are developing new strategies that combine top-down with bottom-up energy and that leverage opportunities and pressure from both inside and outside the school system.

Eight strategies emerge from such ongoing work, along with guiding questions for each:

- Develop and communicate a clear vision and mission for the reform work.
- Begin planning with the data.
- Engage the district office and the teachers' union in the process of reforming the high school.
- Build community support/mobilize community resources.
- Tackle the difficult issues of autonomy.
- Address the equity issues for bilingual and special education students.
- Create a school schedule that supports the goals of personalization for students and increased collaboration for teachers.
- Develop a process for continual improvement.

Develop and communicate a clear vision and mission. The first step for any school considering fundamental changes in the way it is organized is to state clearly why such changes are necessary and how the changes will help the school accomplish its core mission. The vision and mission statements are critical to building support among stakeholders, both inside and outside of the school. Questions to guide a team in the development of these materials include:

- How can the move to smaller learning environments help us to address our core goals for our students and our school community?
- How can the move to smaller learning environments help to promote caring and respectful relationships between students and adults in the building and bring more adults into the lives of our young people?

■ How can the move to smaller learning environments promote a culture of support for effort and increase the level of cognitive challenge and academic achievement in the school?

■ How can the move to smaller learning environments improve students' access to postsecondary education and training?

Coming up with real and clearly communicated answers to these questions will go a long way in helping members of the broader school community feel comfortable with proposed changes. It will help them to realize that the proposed reform plan is not just "another add-on" or a capricious shift in direction. Rather, it represents a key strategy for moving closer to developing the kind of learning community that everyone wants.

Begin planning with the data. Before making such basic decisions as the number and size of small schools, how students and faculty will select or be assigned, and the degree to which each unit will be autonomous, it is critical for a school leadership team to do both a needs and a resource assessment. This will involve looking at disaggregated student data, as well as available human resource data—a more comprehensive and all-inclusive analysis than most schools currently undertake—targeting both classroom performance of particular populations of students and teaching capacity.

Questions to ask at this stage include:

Who are the students?

■ What is the profile of the incoming ninth-grade population? What are the literacy levels of the students? What percent of the students are special needs? What percent are bilingual?

■ What percentage of the student body is in each grade? What percentage of students, at each grade, does not move on to the next grade level? How are specific populations of students doing? Are there patterns as to who is making accelerated progress (e.g., more than a year of progress in one year), who is holding ground, and who is losing ground? Are there patterns as to which areas of skills and knowledge are weakest?

■ What is the profile of the bilingual and special needs populations (e.g., percentage that is new immigrant, level of native language literacy, level of special needs)?

■ What is the school's dropout rate, both annually and by cohort?

Who are the teachers?

■ How many adults are in the building? In what roles? How many teachers, counselors, special education staff, bilingual staff, administrators, paraprofessionals, contract employees, etc.? How many teachers are in each subject matter department?

■ How many faculty are projected to retire over the next year? Two years? Five years?

■ What percentage of faculty are teaching within their area of certification?

■ What professional development has the faculty undertaken?

■ What skills and interests do faculty have outside of their subject area?

■ How many faculty have experience and expertise in teaming with faculty within their discipline? Outside of their discipline? How many faculty have experience in integrating academics with real world issues?

By carefully examining student demographics and performance and determining what resources are available to address them, a school can start to develop a school design that is connected to student needs and that is organized to help all students succeed. For example, if a school finds itself with a "bulge" in the ninth grade, due to a large number of ninth-grade repeaters, the design might include the formation of small, intensive ninth-grade clusters, with an advisory support system and additional supports and opportunities that help young people meet district-level benchmarks and move forward with their high school education.

Engage the district office and the teachers' union in the process of reforming the high school. A high school cannot do this work in isolation. The district office and teachers' union have important roles to play in addressing the political, strategic, funding, and operational challenges to converting a large high school into smaller units. Together, the school, the district, and the union can determine the resources and policy changes that are available to support a plan that best meets student needs.

Questions to consider at this stage are:

- Does the district's capital planning for the school align with the school's goals? For example, is it possible to create a physical layout that supports the new small schools within the building?

- What are the resources from the departments of curriculum/instruction (such as instructional coaches), bilingual education, and special needs, and how will these resources be deployed across the new smaller units?

- What additional resources will the school need to develop the human capacity and physical infrastructure for smaller learning environments? What are the potential sources for these resources?

- Does the current union contract provide for teachers not satisfied with the school's plans to move to another building? Do union work rules need to be amended to allow schools to hire teachers interested in teaching in a small learning community with a specific theme or pedagogical approach?

To maximize available resources, schools, districts, and unions must view themselves as partners in the change

process. For example, high school conversions require significant investments in human resources and facilities. A district and school will need to strategize to develop an appropriate funding package, drawing on local, state, federal, and private dollars. Central office departments (capital planning, human resources, curriculum/instruction, bilingual education, special needs) need to work with one another and with the new small schools to support the redesign plan. And without the flexibility to hire staff who embrace the mission of a new smaller unit, school leaders can be hamstrung in their ability to focus instruction in a way that they have identified as most promising for their young people.

Managing this partnership through these steps may require the assistance of an outside facilitator or the leadership of a high-level district administrator who can help the school garner the support it needs over the long term. Districts may also consider the development of cross-functional support teams from multiple district departments that can continue the alignment of district and school plans as the school proceeds with its reforms.

Build community support/mobilize community resources. Many districts pride themselves on forming partnerships with local businesses and colleges, as well as with community-based institutions, but these partnerships often do not go beyond small pilot programs or general agreements to share information between institutions. For the type of reform discussed here, a different level of parent and community involvement is required. Initially, parents, community institutions, and leaders can play a central role in fueling the impetus to redesign high schools. More importantly, they can help district leaders stay the course over the

long term, building and sustaining expectations for higher achievement for all students, and they can play key roles in helping schools leverage learning resources in the wider community.

Questions to consider include:

- Who are the respected community leaders who can galvanize others around high school reform?
- How can parents and community leaders be informed about and provide input into plans for changes in high schools? Have they received key data on how the school is currently doing? The research on small schools?
- Who else in the community works with the students? In what roles? In what settings?
- What types of learning environments should students be in beyond the school walls? Which partners could offer such environments? What current partnerships could serve as models for the new small schools or small learning communities?
- How can the learning students do in such environments be captured and validated or credentialed?

For example, a school may determine that a partnership between a particular community-based organization and a new small learning community can help provide distinctive learning experiences that extend learning beyond the school building and school day,

while also reducing student alienation by giving students a sense that what they are learning does matter. Higher education institutions can also play a key role in the improvement of teaching practices.

Local intermediary organizations—such as a private industry council, a higher education coordinating council, or a community-based organization—may be in a position to increase the critical mass of parents and community institutions engaged in the school change effort and to broker partnerships at the small school/small learning community level.

Tackle the difficult issues of autonomy. As new small schools or learning communities take shape, the schools will need to select leaders and clarify the parameters of their freedom of action, both within the school building and within the school system. Many, if not all, of the most successful small schools have negotiated some degree of budgetary, curricular, and hiring autonomy, and credit that autonomy with their positive outcomes for students.[9]

Questions to consider, at the school and district level, include:

- Who will lead each small learning community? What degree of autonomy will each small learning community have over its own budget? Hiring? Curriculum? Governance? Scheduling?
- Will each small unit have its own floor? Section of the building? Separate entrance?
- Will administrative offices support each small learning community?
- What school resources—such as auditorium, gym, cafeteria, college/career resource center, and library—will be shared across small schools?
- How will the school building be governed? How will safety concerns be addressed?

If the school restructures into autonomous small schools, there may be no need for an overall building principal. In effect, the principal may oversee a process that results in a drastic change in, or even the elimination of, his or her job. If the design calls for somewhat less autonomous small learning communities, each of these smaller units will require leaders—whether administrators or teachers—who can create a coherent team and focus instruction and school practices on student success. In what will likely be the most difficult challenge in the restructuring process, new smaller units in today's comprehensive high schools will need to travel as far down the road of autonomy as possible.

Address the equity issues for bilingual and special education students. Throughout this process, schools need to make decisions about how to assign students and how to deploy staff in ways that meet equity goals for so-called "special" populations that, in reality, make up a large percentage of the urban high school student body.

Questions to consider include:

- Will bilingual students have access to all small learning communities? Which students will have access to which ones? What staffing structure will support this plan?

[9] See, for example, Center for Collaborative Education. 2001. "How Boston Pilot Schools Use Freedom Over Budget, Staffing, and Scheduling to Meet Student Needs." Boston, MA: Center for Collaborative Education.

■ Will special education students have access to all small learning communities? Which students will have access to which ones? What staffing structure will support this plan?

■ To what degree will inclusion be used as a strategy for integrating special education students into regular education classrooms and for bringing class sizes down in regular education?

Some schools have created separate small learning communities for bilingual students with very limited English proficiency, organized around a relevant theme, such as global studies. Others have found the resources to create parallel pathways, leaving the bilingual program intact as a unit but assigning staff to support separate small learning communities. Several small schools have devised ways to fully include special needs populations in the mainstream classroom, capitalizing on smaller class sizes and using alternative teaching strategies.

Create a school schedule that supports the goals of personalization for students and increased collaboration for teachers. A fundamental benefit of smaller learning environments is the opportunity they provide for a group of teachers to know, and be collectively responsible for, the success of a subgroup of students. Making this possible requires reorienting the scheduling process. Many schools currently make it a practice to schedule students first into "singletons" (electives such as band or drama that are offered only once or twice during the day), and then put students in courses such as English I or Algebra II that are offered at many different times. If the central goal is to cluster a small group of students and teachers into a small learning community, this rationale for scheduling no longer holds. Students must first be scheduled into their core SLC courses, with other courses fit in around this block of time. While this scheduling logic might reduce students' access to some favorite electives, it should make it possible for students to spend a significant part of each day (e.g., 75 percent) with a core group of teachers—a basic part of establishing an SLC as a separate and distinctive entity.

Some initial questions to address are:

■ What percentage of the day will students spend in the small learning community? What percentage will teachers spend?

■ Will different small learning communities be on the same or different schedules?

■ In creating a master schedule, which courses will be prioritized (e.g., scheduled first)?

■ How long will classes be? Will they be of varying lengths (e.g., longer blocks for English and math, shorter for other classes) or will all classes be of the same duration?

■ When and how often will teachers have common planning time? Will it be scheduled during the school day or after school? How will teachers use common planning time?

■ Does the school have the appropriate software and expertise to realize the goal of scheduling teachers and students into discrete small learning communities?

Schools may take different approaches to addressing the scheduling issue. For example, some schools have started by clustering teachers in the first year of conversion, giving them the experience of collectively

reviewing student work and discussing teaching practices. Others have identified and purchased scheduling software that enables them to cluster students and teachers immediately. In many communities, major schedule changes—such as the adoption of a block schedule—require a faculty vote; this may necessitate a campaign on the part of the school leadership team to gain teachers' support.

Develop a process for continual improvement. In the last decade, data-based reform has become far more commonplace. Once a school has launched a school redesign, leaders across the smaller units will need to hold themselves and one another accountable for improving student performance in all settings. Schools will need to identify both the expected changes in student behavior and outcomes and the targeted pace of change.

Questions to consider over the course of several years include:

- What are reasonable benchmarks to set for each year regarding measures of engagement (e.g., attendance, discipline, drop-outs) and achievement (e.g., grades, course failures, test scores)?
- Are particular student populations—such as bilingual or special needs students—performing to their potential in all of the smaller units?
- Are subgroups of students gravitating to particular small learning communities, resulting in inequities in experience?

Throughout the first years of high school conversion, school and district leaders will need to make good decisions about what to measure and when. While all eyes will be on academic performance, a focus on student achievement too early in a reform process can lead to premature judgments that undermine the environment that is needed to protect and nurture innovation. Schools and their partners will need a way to assess the progress of all partners in implementing practices that prepare the groundwork for improved student outcomes.

A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

It is likely that no two schools or districts will have the same answers to the questions in the eight categories above—and, of course, many new questions will emerge. In the absence of clear-cut answers and few guideposts along the way, the success of each school's plan depends in large degree on how, and by whom, this potentially overwhelming process is conducted.

In one school in Boston, a team of school and district leaders addressed all of the issues over the course of several months, periodically providing faculty, students, union leaders, parents, and others with opportunities for input along the way. A school leadership team might also enlist the help of its partners. For example, the team could look at student outcome data with the help of parents and community partners, and then engage others—such as faculty teams—in the basic design of the school based on their findings. In any case, a strong principal with community and staff support will need to manage the overall process, with the help of district leaders who can marshal the political will and the resources to enact the resulting plan.

Managing this process places particular demands on principals, who are called upon today to exhibit a broad array of skills: from instructional leadership and human resource management to negotiation, facilities maintenance, entrepreneurship, and resource development. Site-based management asks principals to share responsibility and accountability with teachers, parents, and community members, while standards-based reform holds the principal primarily accountable for student outcomes.

The move toward smaller, more autonomous units further complicates the leadership demands in a school. Principals must negotiate a difficult political terrain, engaging school staff who can help to lead the effort as well as those who may be most resistant but who are influential with the faculty. School reorganization, as described here, also demands "distributive leadership" on the part of principals—which requires a particular set of skills around the development of teacher-leaders. Clearly, districts will need to make an investment in leadership development if principals are going to negotiate their way through these critical and sometimes contradictory demands.

MAKING THE MOST OF SMALL: CREATING EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The political and operational challenges outlined above can consume even the most seasoned school leaders. But if these efforts are to result in better outcomes for young people, it is equally essential for everyone involved to stay focused on the combination of learning principles and practices that "small" makes possible. Specifically, small schools that are succeeding—particularly with students who have not thrived in large, impersonal high schools—embody the principles of positive youth development that have emerged from more than a decade of resilience studies and studies of community programming for youth along with the principles of contextual and authentic learning that have emerged from several decades of cognitive science research.

The challenge is how to put such principles into practice in the new small schools and learning communities that large schools are creating. How can the teachers and school leaders staffing new small schools or learning communities translate broad principles into programmatic clarity?

Over the past two years, through the *From the Margins to the Mainstream* initiative, Jobs for the Future has identified schools and programs—representing a wide variety of institutional arrangements—that have successfully blended effective practices drawn from cognitive and youth development research.[10] Early in that process, the project developed a tool called "The Five C's" as a codification of the blending of youth development approaches with contextual and authentic learning.

Using the "C's" as criteria, Jobs for the Future fielded an extensive nomination process that identified over 50 schools and programs to look at more closely. These are programs that succeed in attracting and holding young people, getting them onto pathways to high school diplomas and college level studies, and engaging them in contributing to their communities. The box on the following page offers six examples of small schools studied.

THE FIVE C'S

Caring relationships that help young people build an attachment to the learning environment and provide them with the support they need to overcome obstacles;

Cognitive challenges that engage young people intellectually and help them to develop the competencies they will need for postsecondary success;

Culture of support for effort that pushes young people to do their best work;

Community, Contribution, Voice, and Leadership in a group that young people feel is worth belonging to; and

Connections to high-quality postsecondary learning and career opportunities through an expanding network of adults.

[10] *From the Margins to the Mainstream* is supported by grants from Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and Atlantic Philanthropies.

HIGH SCHOOLS THAT BLEND COGNITIVE CHALLENGE AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

■ **Fenway High School**, Boston, Massachusetts: Now 19 years old, Fenway sends 90 percent of its diverse student body to college. In addition to its integrated curriculum and strong advisory system, Fenway credits its students' success in high school and beyond to a relentless focus on creating a school-wide community of readers and writers. This small school further personalizes the student experience by allowing the choice of a theme-based learning "family" that serves as intellectual and personal home for four years and provides students with extended learning opportunities in the community. With an emphasis on performance assessment and panel reviews of student work, Fenway students also perform well on state assessments. In 2001, its student pass rates on English and math were higher than any other nonselective urban high school in the state.

■ **Best Practice High School,** Chicago, Illinois: With the goal of offering "rigor without mortis," this small school is beating the averages in a system where graduation and attendance rates are low and violence levels high. To date, 75 percent of graduates have gone on to college in a district where only 67 percent of students finish high school. Despite its disadvantaged student profile (80 percent qualify for free lunch), Best Practice ranks in the top 10 percent of Chicago high schools in its scores on state assessments. The school harnesses the energy of its learners and teachers through strategies such as literature circles, multidisciplinary units offering deep inquiry into relevant topics, teacher teaming, daily advisory groups, and student seminars.[11]

■ **Boston Arts Academy,** Boston, Massachusetts: In only its third year, BAA is already garnering praise and recognition for its success in integrating students' passion for artistic expression with a personalized learning community and a rigorous curriculum centered on literacy and the arts. In 2001, BAA had a higher percentage of students than any other nonselective high school scoring in the top two quartiles of the state assessment. Through its partnership with the Professional Arts Consortium, a non-profit organization of six institutions of higher education in the arts, BAA helps prepare students for entry into a conservatory, art school, or liberal arts college.

■ **Washtenaw Technical Middle College,** Ann Arbor, Michigan: Started five years ago with a "ragtag band of students who had been thrown out of other places," Washtenaw has been recognized by the governor for its unique combination of academics, technical education, and workplace experience that enables students to graduate high school with a technical certificate or two-year degree from the host community college. With an 80 percent pass rate in their college course work, the Washtenaw Middle College students outperform their college student peers on campus.

■ **El Puente High School,** Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Started by the TransCenter for Youth, a community-based organization, El Puente combines the supports of a community-based organization with the academic focus of a school. Deemed "at risk" by state criteria and behind in credits and skills, El Puente students still manage both to tackle a more rigorous course of study (including more science and math) than their peers in district schools and defend portfolios to outside reviewers.

■ **The Met,** Providence, Rhode Island: Blending college prep and vocational emphases, the Met's program prepares students for college through workplace internships and independent projects tailored to student interests. Aided by a parent and teacher-advisor, each student designs a personal learning plan used to chart progress toward acquisition of the skills, knowledge, and personal qualities needed for postsecondary success. Of the first graduating classes, 85 percent have advanced to college and 82 percent were still in college two years later.

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[11] What Kids Can Do, et al. 2002. *Learning Outside the Lines: Six Innovative Programs That Reach Youth.* Providence, Boston, and Battle Creek, MI: What Kids Can Do, Jobs for the Future, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

In looking at these and other effective learning environments, some of which are outside of schools, Jobs for the Future has identified concrete practices and routines that can help guide teachers and school leaders as they seek to transform newly formed "units" of a large school into coherent learning environments that encourage and support young people to do their best work. The tool offered below unpacks the essential supports and opportunities that young people need, listing key practices and routines that embody each "C," and offering snapshots of those practices in action.

CARING RELATIONSHIPS

Perhaps the most fundamental feature of an effective learning environment is the presence of adults who demonstrate genuine interest and belief in the youth who participate. "Teachers who care" is the usual response of young people to the question of what they most want in a learning environment. Pressed to explain what they mean, young people talk about more than just nurturing and support, although that is clearly important. Caring relationships, to young people, are based on fairness, equity, and respect—not just for themselves as individuals but also toward their families.

CARING RELATIONSHIPS
Practices and Routines in Effective Learning Environments

- Continuous, Sustained Relationships with Trusted Adults
- Membership in Family-like Groups (e.g., Advisories, Teams, Crews)
- Transparent and Shared Codes of Behavior
- Fair and Equitable Treatment
- Emphasis on Looking Beyond Stereotypes
- Families as Active Partners

Snapshots

- "Building the Shalom Community" is a week-long orientation for students at Milwaukee's Shalom High School, a public school operated by TransCenter for Youth, Inc. Students and staff undertake joint projects for the school and the surrounding community, including gardening and neighborhood clean-up. Staff outline graduation requirements and classroom expectations, and community partners discuss their role in the school and the community. At the end of the week, all students develop and sign a "covenant" that describes the standards for which they will be held accountable, and that covenant is depicted in a public mural.[12]
- From the first day of the Food Project, a youth and community development program focused on creating a sustainable metropolitan food system, participants know they are "joining a community that operates under common assumptions," says one of its directors. On a weekly basis during the intensive summer program, 60 youth gather in their 12-person farm crews to engage in "Straight Talk." They use a communications protocol for speaking and listening candidly and respectfully, especially when exchanging information about what they as individuals and as a team are doing well, where they can improve, and any lapses in conduct. A Standards Sheet and a Violations Chart developed by youth early in the summer spell out behavioral expectations as well as possible violations and consequences.
- At South Brooklyn Community Academy, a small alternative high school in New York City designed and run by Good Shepherd Services, adults take responsibility for knowing students well and holding them accountable for their performance both in and out of the classroom. Counselors and teachers evaluate student progress biweekly on all aspects of their work at the school and in the community—from academic performance to communication, goal-setting, and decision-making skills.

[12] Smith, Stephanie, and Jean Thomases. 2001. *CBO Schools: Profiles in Transformational Education.* Washington, DC: AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research.

CULTURE OF SUPPORT FOR EFFORT

Young people are much more likely to become engaged in their own learning and to be supportive of the efforts of their peers when they feel included in decisions about what and how they learn and when they believe the support will be there to help them achieve ambitious goals. Research on motivation shows that many young people give up when they do not believe their efforts will pay off. Furthermore, researchers have confirmed the damage that can occur when student popularity is linked to lack of effort at school and school achievement is associated with "acting white" or being "a nerd." Conversely, being part of a positive peer group can lead to higher academic achievement, increased school competence, and higher educational aspirations. Effective learning environments take advantage of positive peer influence and foster cultures that look and feel like sports teams or drama groups, where young people and staff count on and applaud one another's efforts, and where adults act as facilitators and coaches who help students get better at what they are doing.

CULTURE OF SUPPORT FOR EFFORT
Practices and Routines in Effective Learning Environments

- Personal Learning Plans (Developed and Reviewed Periodically by Youth and Adults)
- Peer (Reciprocal) Teaching, Assessment, and Critique
- Cross-age Tutoring and Mentoring
- Rites of Passage and Celebrations of Accomplishment

Snapshots

- At New York City's Humanities Prep High School, structured protocols for frequent debates and in-depth discussions allow youth to engage with their peers, building both community and intellectual development. Rather than fearing the word "intellectual," youth are applauded by peers and adults for voicing ideas.
- Youth know and use "safety language" in reviewing and challenging the work of their peers at the Fenway High School, an alternative small school in Boston, Massachusetts. "No shame, no blame," "try it on," "show what you know," and "agree to disagree" are among the phrases and concepts that lead to productive discussions and constructive feedback of student portfolios and projects.
- At the Met, a small public high school with several sites of 100 students each in Providence, Rhode Island, each student has a personalized learning plan, arrived at by a team including teachers, mentors, and parents. The process of identifying, broadening, and focusing interests is itself a central aspect of the program and takes place both individually and within small advisory groups, through such activities as reading, group discussions, informational interviews, job shadows, and eventually internships. As students work on projects, their peers and their teachers help them to continuously improve their work and cheer them over and through difficulties.
- Young artists in Rhode Island have a number of venues and formats in which to display and celebrate their creative work, under the auspices of AS220's Muse Union, a family of programs that help youth find their voices. *Muzine* is a magazine of visual and written work by young people. Once a month, AS220's theatrical stage plays host to the youth-driven Performance Showcase. And any artist under the age of 22 can book a show at the Muse Union Gallery, the second floor hallway of AS220's 22,000-square-foot building that serves as an open exhibition space. For many young people, the opportunity to present work they feel proud of serves as a spark that ignites their confidence and determination to succeed.

COGNITIVE CHALLENGE

Young people want to become capable and competent adults. Yet many of them see high school as irrelevant to that goal. While teachers experience the resulting disengagement as laziness, the major reason young people give for disconnection from school is that it's "boring." "We do the same old thing all the time," and "I'm never going to need that stuff" are frequent complaints. Learning environments that move beyond this downward spiral are centered on tasks that have a purpose learners buy into and that push them beyond their comfort zone, while not being totally out of reach. In such environments, according to studies of motivation, young people can see the connection between effort and "getting smarter." Studies of the transfer of learning reveal the importance of going beyond rote learning so that learners understand how different modes of inquiry contribute to solving a problem, how one problem is similar to and different from another, and how particular skills and concepts contribute to competent performance.

COGNITIVE CHALLENGE
Practices and Routines in Effective Learning Environments

- Agreement on What It Is Important to Know and Be Able to Do
- Standards Pegged to Academic and Real World Competence
- Rubrics that Make Standards Transparent
- Literacy and Numeracy Routines
- Inquiry and Investigative Research
- Complex Projects with a Public Purpose

Snapshots

- At Urban Academy, a small high school in New York City known for its academic focus and inquiry-based curriculum, a strong culture of reading and writing begins with the admissions process. Prospective students write about themselves and respond to opposing viewpoints by, for example, reading and reacting to contrasting articles on Nike's impact on youth culture. The insistence that students think critically and on paper is carried throughout the academic program. Even student infractions are seen as an occasion to build literacy and communication skills.

- In learning to make professional films that speak to social issues, students in Educational Video Center's High School Documentary Workshop in New York City engage with audiences throughout the editing process, beginning with early screenings of rough cuts that allow young filmmakers to test out the impact of their work. After re-editing their films, students present them at a public screening attended by film and other professionals in related fields, as well as peers, teachers, and family and community members. The screening is followed by an intense question-and-answer session. Student films typically meet with high praise and also candid suggestions for improvement. The screenings apply real-world standards to the young filmmakers' work, while they recognize and celebrate their efforts and contributions to the community.

- Four times a year, teachers and students at Chicago's Best Practice High School participate in integrated, thematic units that cross all disciplines and use a range of teaching methods. Units often come from specific student questions and concerns about themselves and their world. At other times of the year, teachers teach more traditional discipline-based subject matter but with an emphasis on experiential learning: a simulated "crime scene" is the setting for a lesson on biology, while history students create legislation as a way to learn about the constitution.[13]

- At Champion Charter, a small alternative school in Brockton, Massachusetts, students demonstrate proficiency in core academic areas through portfolio presentations. Students who feel ready to present their portfolios are invited to submit a letter of interest reflecting on their growth and accomplishments and explaining their readiness to defend their work. These documents are reviewed by school staff who assess preparedness and then share their reasoning with the applicant in a formal meeting. During that meeting, students have an opportunity to question the decision and create a plan to address any staff concerns.

[13] Daniels, Harvey, Marilyn Bizar, and Steven Zemelman. 2001. *Rethinking High School.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION, VOICE, AND LEADERSHIP

To commit to a learning environment, young people need to feel a strong sense of contribution and connection. Such connectedness, according to the Adolescent Health Study, helps to protect youth from behaviors that are risky to their health, and is a powerful predictor of academic achievement. In addition, effective learning environments make young people feel like they are resources and potential leaders, rather than problems who need to be fixed. For example, evaluations of programs in which youth teach younger children, are leaders, or participate in service learning, all show positive effects on a range of learning outcomes.

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION, VOICE, AND LEADERSHIP
Practices and Routines in Effective Learning Environments

- Youth Voice in Program Activities and Governance
- Service Learning
- Projects Focused on Social/Community Improvement
- Youth Presentations/Participation in Public Forums

Snapshots

- At South Brooklyn Academy, students establish the agenda and lead monthly community meetings. Adult staff attend the meetings as participants and partners in decision making. To support this process, students participate in weekly meetings with adult facilitators who help them develop skills in decision making and group facilitation. Each student is also a member of a group that meets twice a week to provide critical feedback on the school's programs and environment.
- YouthBuild Day, run annually by YouthBuild Philadelphia, gives youth an opportunity to meet with and educate policymakers at the Pennsylvania State House. Youth work to present success stories and statistics in a compelling way. This "citizenship tour" continues to Washington, D.C., where youth visit legislators to advocate for federal funding for the program itself. Educating legislators about the value and benefits of the program is combined with academic study of how government works.
- Each year the young people on the Youth Council at La Plaza Community Center, Alianza Dominicana's Beacon Program, manage $25,000 in grants to community organizations fostering youth development and leadership. The youth establish a RFP process, host three bidders conferences, review applications, and organize an awards ceremony for grant recipients. They also conduct site visits to assess organizations' use of the awarded funds.
- For students at El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, in New York City, social action and community development is at the heart of their studies. As a year-long senior project, for example, one class of students investigated lending practices in their community, identified patterns of discrimination, and detailed their findings and recommendations in a report to their congressional representative, who sits on the House Committee on Banking and Financial Services.

CONNECTIONS TO POSTSECONDARY LEARNING AND CAREERS

To make a smooth transition to the world beyond high school, young people need not only adult role models but also the concrete support and assistance of capable adults. Young people's ambitions will remain "dreamlike" unless they have adults to turn to who can help them make sensible decisions, obtain good information about college and career paths, and handle the challenges of applying for and staying in college (e.g., gaining financial aid). Furthermore, many young people lack the access to well-connected networks of adults that comes as a birthright to others. Enriched learning environments help diverse youth gain access to such networks.

CONNECTIONS TO POSTSECONDARY LEARNING AND CAREERS

Practices and Routines in Effective Learning Environments

- Dual Enrollment and Other Forms of "Early College"
- Focused College Counseling and Support
- Immersion in Adult Roles
- Developing Adult Contacts and Networks
- Alumni Networks and Supports

Snapshots

■ Housed at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Washtenaw Technical Middle College offers a unique combination of academics, technical education, and workplace experience that allows students to graduate high school with a technical certificate or two-year degree from the host college. Students begin by enrolling in competency-based "core transition" courses, as well as career seminars and study skills courses. This mix is designed to help them transition successfully to technical programs and credit courses offered at WCC. Students graduate with either an Associate's degree or a certificate in one of thirty-seven programs within six major career pathways.

■ At PCC Prep, an alternative school on the campus of Portland (Oregon) Community College, all students are presumed to be working toward college completion—but where they enter depends on their life circumstances and skill levels. All students move as quickly as possible into college credit courses, rather than having to complete a long sequence of ESL or remedial courses up front. Older students with very low skill levels enter PCC Prep's GED program, where they can both earn a GED and transition into college-level courses. Limited English proficient students attend the Multicultural Academic Program and concentrate on developing language skills, then transition to the College Bound program. College Bound, for those with an eighth-grade reading level, is a one-term program that prepares them academically and socially for college coursework. In all programs, students move as quickly as possible into college credit courses. All students complete either a GED or a diploma and make significant progress towards a college degree at the same time.

■ The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, in Edcouch, Texas, is a youth and community development organization that sends a significantly high number of children of migrant workers to college. A central focus of the center's culture is that young people will go to college but that they will do so as part of an extended community that stays in close contact with them while they are away. An extensive alumni network keeps youth in touch with one another and with the center while they attend college, often on the other side of the country. The center raises funds for college-goers to return during summer breaks and after graduation to staff the center.

■ Youth are fully responsible for the organization itself at Youth in Action, a youth leadership program based in Providence, Rhode Island. In the process of running all aspects of a nonprofit organization, youth define, internalize, and reinforce key principles of behavior and ways of doing business. Youth take responsibility for hiring, training, supervising, and paying their peers. They also learn to raise funds through grant writing and fund development strategies.

FROM PROMISE TO REALITY

Each of the effective schools and programs identified through *From the Margins to the Mainstream* has a clearly defined conceptualization of the full range of supports and opportunities that young people must have if they are to make a successful transition to adulthood. And each has designed its practices and routines accordingly. As many schools have found, importing a practice (such as "advisories" or "peer tutoring" or "graduation portfolios") will only be effective if everyone involved (students and adults) is very clear on the purpose of that practice and can implement it in ways that preserve, rather than undermine, that purpose.

The Five C's provide a possible starting point for school teams designing new learning communities. The fundamental question is, if all young people need to have multiple chances to develop these supports and opportunities over time, what can we provide "in-house" and how can we connect that to the other potential learning environments in students' lives? From the student perspective, school should feel coherent—a place that inspires, supports, and pushes them to develop their potential, whether in the classroom, in the hallways, in the auditorium, or in community learning experiences outside the school walls.

Moving a large, comprehensive high school to a place in which conversations about supports and opportunities are commonplace is, at first, a process of unlayering a myriad of organizational structures and mandates. To describe this process, we have looked to the experiences of a handful of mainstream comprehensive high schools that are reconfiguring from the ground up. For the next step—making real the promise of small schools—a wide angle lens on young people's experiences inside and outside the school walls can yield practices and routines that effectively engage young people in learning.

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