



Secondary Schools

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According to research based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and other standardized tests, most secondary school students have sufficient basic reading skills, such as the ability to identify words on a page. What they lack is an understanding of how to read critically and fluently, translating the meaning and purpose of texts. Without those skills, they struggle in school and beyond to make sense of material — anything from science textbooks to job applications - requiring readers to think, not just decode.

MAKING ROOM FOR LITERACY IN

"What happens is that about seventh grade, everybody expects that kids can read and that content-area

ing abilities undergo a significant shift — from primarily narrative texts to complex expository material. Unfortunately, many students never learn how to crack the nonfiction code. Their interest and skills in reading decline precisely when the demands of literacy begin to soar.

teachers only need to teach them the content, not reading. But we've seen in our work across the country that this is not the case," says Patti Crotti, Senior Program Associate in WestEd's Comprehensive School Assistance Program. She notes that education leaders are looking for new ways to help middle and high schools develop students' literacy.

Integrating literacy throughout the curriculum and culture of schools is the goal of two WestEd projects that are dramatically changing the way educators think about reading instruction at the secondary level.

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Heavy public and private investment, plus considerable effort, have gone into high school restructuring in recent years. And in 2005, extending No Child Left Behind requirements to secondary schools is among the U.S. Department of Education's highest priorities.

Calls for improvement come from many other quarters, too — from concerned parents to the National Governors Association — with a recognition that strengthening our nation's high school system will require work on multiple fronts.

RETHINKING Decondary Education

FROM THE CEO

WestEd researchers and assistance providers have been focused on secondary education for many years. In this issue of *R&D Alert*, we go beyond describing the problem of high school reform to focusing on solutions that have emerged in our work.

Many students struggle after elementary school as the amount and kinds of reading expected of them begin to change. In "Making Room for Literacy in Secondary Schools," we share lessons from two WestEd projects that help numerous districts bolster students' literacy skills at the secondary level. One of these projects — WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative — is one of only two programs nationally selected as a promising supplementary literacy program for ninth–grade students, and it is being studied further in an evaluation funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

On the challenge of better preparing students for postsecondary education, we highlight findings from a recent WestEd evaluation of an initiative to improve the college prospects of traditionally underserved students. WestEd researchers found many schools had successfully addressed this challenge by, for example, replacing policies that limited opportunities for low-achieving students with new approaches that offer key "gateway" courses, such as algebra, to more students.

An article on alternatives to traditionally large high schools draws on two WestEd sources — research study and a service project. Although we often assume that students thrive in smaller settings because of closer relationships with teachers, these projects have found successful small schools require "a slightly more complex calculus," one in which "positive adult-student connections are but one factor."

The articles in this newsletter touch only the surface of WestEd's work on these issues. We encourage you to learn more online — at WestEd.org — or by using the contact information at the end of each article.

Glen Harvey
Chief Executive Of



PROMISING PRACTICES

A high school diploma isn't what it used to be. By most accounts, postsecondary education has long replaced high school as a passport to success in later life.

Concerned at how many students are inadequately prepared for college, the California State Legislature in 1984 established the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP), which has a special focus on boosting the achievement of students least likely to pursue higher education. Over the past eight years, CAPP provided two dozen high schools with five-year grants of up to \$300,000 to work on reform initiatives in collaboration with postsecondary institutions and other education partners.

According to Dave Jolly, director of CAPP, the program helps schools pull together effective strategies around curriculum, professional development, school culture, and student support services — all to boost learning. "There are a lot of good education policies out there that make sense and broad education goals on which there is agreement," he says. "Often the reason schools don't perform well is because activities to support those ideas and goals have not been well implemented."

WestEd recently completed a five-year evaluation of CAPP-funded schools to determine how well they are implementing reform strategies. The evaluation identified

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One CAPP high school saw the percentage of its graduates going on to postsecondary

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impressive outcomes. One CAPP high school saw the percentage of its graduates going on to postsecondary education increase tenfold over four years: from 3 to 30 percent. At another, the percentage of Hispanic and African American females enrolled in advanced algebra increased from 13 percent in 1998 to 48 percent in 2003. And at yet another school, the percentage of students passing the state's exit exam increased from 65 percent in July 2002 to 80 percent in March 2003.

In an upcoming book, *Inside High School Reform: Promising Practices and Explorations*, Senior Project Director Jordan E. Horowitz reports on the full findings of WestEd's evaluation. The following are a few highlights that identify some of the key elements of successful CAPP schools:

★ Engaging teachers in reform efforts, largely by having them work together to assess what was and was not working in their classrooms

That meant committing to ongoing, high-quality professional development that included release time for teachers to study state and local standards and evaluate whether their curricula and teaching practices were aligned with those standards.

Teachers analyzed and disaggregated student achievement data to determine if and how to modify their instruction and for which students.

They also worked collaboratively to ensure that everyone teaching the same course had the same expectations for students and evaluated progress against the same benchmarks. To bring additional coherence across classrooms, teachers identified common instructional strategies and vocabulary. They also conferred across grade levels to ensure that student knowledge built from year to year.

★ Providing all students, especially those less likely to pursue college, with more options for becoming academically prepared to attend and succeed in college

School leaders examined and changed policies and procedures that can limit opportunities for low-achieving students. For example, a policy linking students' enrollment in biology with their scores on a reading test was revisited at one CAPP school and abandoned in favor of giving all freshman the chance to enroll. At another school, officials minimized the prerequisites for summer school math and science courses, a decision that resulted in huge increases in enrollment in the challenging college-prep classes. And many CAPP-funded schools found ways to enroll more students in algebra, considered a "gateway" course that is crucial in preparing students for higher education.

* Providing students with the support they need to meet higher expectations

Obviously, just getting students into more demanding courses wasn't enough. Successful schools provided additional support to ensure that students could effectively complete college-prep courses. In some cases that meant extending the length of courses. In others, it meant that students enrolled in algebra were also enrolled in an algebra support class where tutors familiarized them with concepts soon-to-be introduced in the regular algebra course. Another model enrolled students at risk of failing college-prep math courses in "Grade Recovery" workshops that addressed student weaknesses and then gave students a second chance to demonstrate mastery of the material.

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Tutoring and homework centers most often delivered the extra help students needed. Successful homework centers clearly spelled out expectations for students, provided individualized support, and closely monitored their progress as well as the overall impact of the center.

* Establishing a schoolwide college-going culture and helping parents navigate the application process

Students attending CAPP schools were provided increased opportunity to participate in college or university tours, attend classes to prepare for admission exams, and take part in other activities to encourage all students to view college as a viable option. Postsecondary institutions partnering with CAPP schools provided bridge programs for students and their families that focused on study skills and facilitated the college admission and financial aid processes.

For more information, contact Jordan E. Horowitz at 562.799.5122 or jhorowi@WestEd.org; or Dave Jolly at 562.951.4780 or djolly@calstate.edu.

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WestEd's Secondary Literacy Support Network (SLSN) currently assists about 90 schools in California by focusing on system and policy issues that shape student achievement. SLSN staff help educators understand why they must blend literacy strategies into everything they do — because reading is the crucial link to achievement in all subjects.

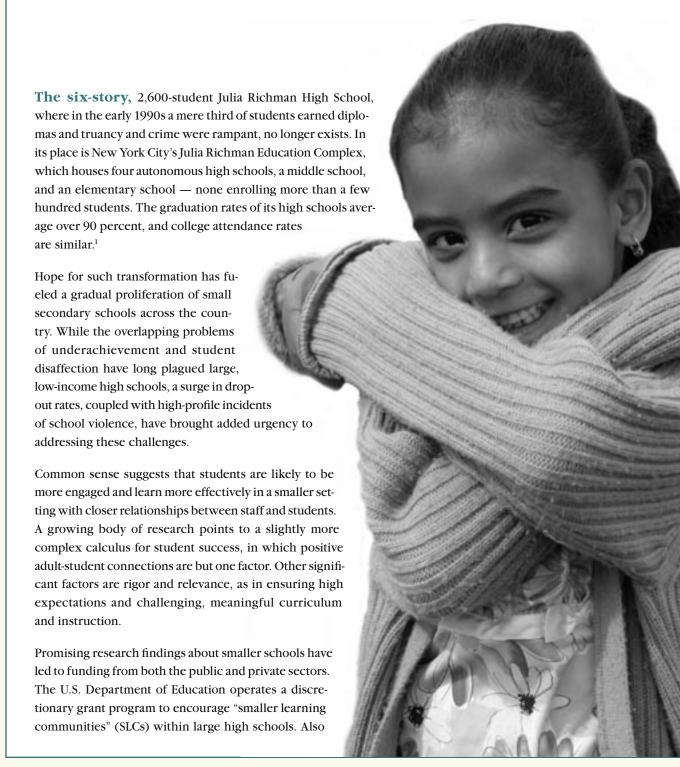
Another WestEd project, the Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI), serves schools in 22 states and the District of Columbia. SLI focuses on the day-to-day interactions between students Westd staff and teachers, using Reading Apprenticeship® as an help educators instructional frameunderstand why they work for developing content-area must blend literacy literacy. Through professional destrategies into everything velopment that they do - because reading encourages reflection and collegial is the crucial link to sharing, teachers achievement in all examine their own and each other's stratesubjects. gies for reading expository text. Then they ask, "How can we make these mental moves of ours visible and accessible to kids?" says Jane Braunger, Senior Research Associate for SLI. "Not only do I need to know how I read and look at a text, but I also need to think about how reading will be difficult for my students. Then I can consider how to support their reading for an appropriate level of understanding in my subject area."

In schools where educators have wrestled with these issues, some important lessons have emerged about improving reading skills at the secondary level:

First, teachers need to be part of a community of learners as much as students. Teachers need opportunities to deepen their understanding of literacy by networking with colleagues who teach at similar grade levels. Teachers should also have time to observe research-based practices in action and to go through cycles of

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The New LANDSCAPE of Small Schools



and Smaller Learning Communities

known as schools-within-schools, SLCs are semiautonomous units funded by the large school's budget and answerable to its accountability systems. SLCs use teaching teams, alternative scheduling, advisory systems, single- or multi-grade arrangements, or other

structures to organize students

into smaller, more personalized groups, often on the basis of academic or career interest.

WestEd's Smaller Learning Communities Technical Assistance Center serves as an information conduit for many recipients of federal SLC grants in Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. In this capacity, center staff convene meetings and institutes, conduct site visits, facilitate data-based decision making, and produce design studios in which an exemplary SLC site hosts visitors from other sites for two-and-a-half-day collaborative workshops.

Rose Owens-West, the center's senior project director, reinforces the idea that "small" is a means, not an end. "If you only focus on personalization, it won't get you anywhere," she says. Smaller learning communities need to focus on raising achievement, which means identifying and addressing barriers to student learning.

While the federal grant program seeks solutions through smaller learning communities within large schools, other funders hope to accomplish similar goals — more engagement, higher achievement

— through autonomous small schools. One private supporter, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has thus far committed more than \$800 million to fund 2,000 small schools nationwide. Last year the foundation asked WestEd to develop a snapshot of progress first at a select number of Gates-funded schools across the country and then in New York City's districtwide effort. The resulting reports — Rethinking High School: Five Profiles of Innovative Models for Student Success and Rethinking High School: An Introduction to New York City's Experience — identify early evidence of positive results.

WestEd researchers found that the small schools in these studies have rigorous and engaging curricula in supportive learning environments; higher attendance rates and lower suspension/expulsion rates than district averages; increased scores on state tests; high

Promising research findings about smaller schools have led to funding from both the public and private sectors.

graduation rates; and high college admission rates. Equally important, the students are ethnically and socioeconomically representative of their communities. Their academic performance is especially noteworthy because many of the students entered these schools performing below grade level and come from families living below the poverty line.

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Small-school leaders point to several **reasons for their success**: high-quality staff; innovative, clear plans for ensuring personalized and rigorous instruction; strong curriculum; and flexibility in school governance, with autonomy from outside control.

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Small-school leaders point to several reasons for their success: high-quality staff; innovative, clear plans for ensuring personalized and rigorous instruction; strong curriculum; and flexibility in school governance, with autonomy from outside control. WestEd's Tracy Huebner, director of the Gates studies, notes that many small schools also profit from working closely with intermediaries, nonprofits that have particular small-school expertise and offer such support as technical assistance and professional development.

Skeptics argue that maintaining a small staff/student ratio is expensive, that smallness restricts students' curricular opportunities, and that small schools are at best a boutique solution to a large-scale problem. Supporters counter that the small-school commitment to de-tracking — providing *all* students with challenging work — helps make up for the reduced number of courses offered and the relatively small number of students currently served by small schools. They also

cite research indicating that small schools' costs per *graduate* are actually lower than at large schools with high numbers of students dropping out or otherwise failing to graduate.²

One point on which supporters and skeptics are likely to agree is the need for more research. Huebner would particularly like more research to identify key conditions that help students at small schools like those within the Julia Richman Education Complex to achieve academically, how these conditions differ, if at all, from large high schools, and how they can be scaled up or transferred to other schools.

For more information on smaller learning communities, contact Rose Owens-West at 510.302.4246 or rowensw@WestEd.org. For more information on small schools, contact Tracy Huebner at 415.615.3140 or thuebne@WestEd.org.

¹ Statistics on the Julia Richman High School and Julia Richman Education Complex are from "The JREC Story," available from the School Redesign Network at Stanford University: www.schoolredesign.com.

² Seifel, L. et al. (1998). The effects of size of student body on school costs and performance in New York City high schools. New York: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy. As cited in McRobbie, J. (2001). Are small schools better? School size considerations for safety and learning. San Francisco: WestEd.

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trying out, discussing, and sharpening their own literacy practices over time. They should be able to see first-hand, in their own professional development experience, how building strong relationships with other readers and engaging in discussions about texts creates a culture of risk-taking and collaboration that spurs achievement.

"It requires a shift in belief about how kids learn and what's important to learn, bringing students to independence as readers and writers and thinkers," says Cathleen Kral, instructional leader for literacy and director of literacy coaching for the Boston Public Schools, where use of Reading Apprenticeship has helped double the number of students passing the state's annual exams in reading and math.

Having examined numerous reading programs and materials, Kral credits WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative with having "the smartest stuff out there for secondary literacy: It's realistic, it's authentic, it's research based, and it works."

A second lesson, which seems to hold across many districts, is that literacy instruction cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach. The strategies for getting the most out of a biology textbook, for

example, are different from effective strategies for reading in history. Content-area teachers must be able to adapt literacy supports to fit their subjects.

Third, literacy interventions work best when they complement reform initiatives already underway. Teachers are appropriately skeptical of initiatives that create a new set of requirements or cause them to continually change directions. In Boston, Reading Apprenticeship has been folded into a professional development program that was already in place for coaching teachers.

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and it works."

Finally, school administrators must be directly involved in the effort to develop a comprehensive literacy program. In addition to supporting the changes and evaluating implementation, administrators can keep literacy improvements on track when competing pressures threaten their stability.

For more information about the Secondary Literacy Support Network, contact Donna Covey at 916.492.4031 or dcovey@WestEd.org or visit www.WestEd.org/cs/we/view/serv/11. For more information about the Strategic Literacy Initiative and Reading Apprenticeship, contact Jana Bouc at 510.302.4245 or jbouc@WestEd.org or look for services and training schedules at www.WestEd.org/stratlit.



Are Small Schools Better? School Size Considerations for Safety and Learning (Policy Brief) Joan McRobbie (WestEd, 2001)

This Policy Brief outlines key research findings and looks at what the research says about why school size appears to make a difference, how small is small enough, effective approaches to downsizing, and key barriers. Finally, it offers policy implications and recommendations. An extensive reference list is included.

4 pages / Price: Single copy, free / Order #: PO-01-03L



Net Choices, Net Gains: Supplementing the High School Curriculum with Online Courses (Knowledge Brief)

Julie Aronson & Mike Timms (WestEd, 2003)

Online learning programs can help schools enrich their curriculum. But a school's decision to participate in such a program and its choice of program should be based on a solid understanding of what program characteristics contribute to successful online learning for students. Drawing from a review of the research literature, interviews with national experts in online learning, and the authors' evaluation of a statewide online learning program in California, this Knowledge Brief identifies key issues that schools should investigate when considering the online learning option. Net Choice, Net Gains makes recommendations related to online curriculum and assessment, effective student support, technology, professional development for online instructors and student-support staff, policy and administration, funding, and outreach.

16 pages / Price: \$8 / Order #: KN-03-02L



Access and Engagement: Program Design and Instructional Approaches for Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools

Aída Walqui (Center for Applied Linguistics & Delta Systems, 2000)

Many immigrant students in secondary school have problems succeeding because of the structures of the schools themselves. This book profiles six students to help illuminate the needs of immigrant students in secondary schools. It details the structural obstacles that inhibit students' success, and it describes ten priorities for designing effective teaching and learning contexts for immigrant students. The author describes four promising programs in detail and makes recommendations in the areas of future program development and research.

240 pages / Price: \$20.95 / Order #: CLE-00-01L

RestEd RESOUICES

ON HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

WestEd has a number of resources on high school reform issues. A few are sum marized here. For additional related products, please refer to the WestEd Resource Catalog or visit www.WestEd.org/catalog.





Rethinking High School: Five Profiles of Innovative Models for Student Success Rethinking High School: An Introduction to New York City's Experience

(Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2005)

At the request of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has committed \$800 million to fund 2,000 small schools nationwide, WestEd took a look at a sample of such schools from across the nation. The resulting report, *Five Profiles of Innovative Models for Student Success*, details preliminary findings and recommendations for further study. And in *An Introduction to New York City's Experience*, WestEd reports on a program that has so far created 109 small high schools supporting 18,517 students in the nation's largest school district.

Five Profiles: 47 pages / Price: Single copy, free / Order #: GF-05-01L NY City's Experience: 13 pages / Price: Single copy, free / Order #: GF-05-02L



Reading for Understanding: A Guide to Improving Reading in Middle and High School Classrooms

Ruth Schoenbach, Cynthia Greenleaf, Christine Cziko, & Lori Hurwitz (Jossey-Bass, 2000)

This practical guidebook provides concrete lessons for middle and high school teachers about how to support students' reading in their disciplines, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the approach. The guide is based on work in which students in an urban ninth-grade class gained an average of two years on a standardized reading test in just seven months and learned to love to read in the process.

224 pages / Price: \$19.95 / Order #: READ-99-01L

COMING SOON FROM WestEd

Early Childhood Development: Exceptional Returns for Children, Families, Taxpayers, and the Government (Policy Perspectives)

Robert G. Lynch

This paper makes a compelling case for a nationwide investment in high-quality early childhood development. Although this commitment would cost a significant amount of money upfront, it would have a substantial payoff. Making such an investment, writes Lynch, will improve the academic performance and quality of life of millions of our nation's children — many of whom live in poverty — reduce crime, make the workforce of the future more productive, and strengthen our nation's economy. This paper provides an overview of the characteristics and benefits of investing in a high-quality, large-scale, publicly funded early childhood development program for children living in poverty. It also looks 50 years in the future by calculating the impact of such a program for all low-income 3- and 4-year-old children nationwide — on future federal, state, and local government budgets, the economy, and crime.





Full-Day Kindergarten: Expanding Learning Opportunities (Policy Brief)

Malia Villegas (WestEd, 2005)

As districts across the country focus on closing the achievement gap between different socioeconomic and ethnic groups, research points to early childhood as a potent time for preventing the gap before it gets established. Many policymakers are turning to an

extended kindergarten program as part of the solution. This brief summarizes the most recent research available on full-day kindergarten, provides information on state and local reform efforts, and identifies policy implications. It also touches on the characteristics of an effective kindergarten program.

4 pages / Price: Single copy, free / Order #: PO-05-01



Bringing Technology Education Into K-8 Classrooms: A Guide to Curricular Resources About the Designed World

Edward Britton, Bo De Long-Cotty, & Toby Levenson (Corwin Press, 2005)

This comprehensive resource helps educators evaluate classroom and teacher materials to improve technological literacy. The guide looks at 25 elementary and middle school products — products that can shape a lesson on oil spills or a two-semester course on the designed

world. In-depth reviews evaluate products that can be used as "core," cross-curricular, or supplemental materials. Additionally, an extensive annotated bibliography alerts teachers to more than 100 readily available resources that can make technology education richer, more

320 pages / Price: \$34.95 / Order #: NCISE-05-01

manageable, and more enjoyable for teachers and students alike.



Finding the Teachers We Need (Policy Perspectives)

(WestEd, 2005)

The No Child Left Behind Act has given new urgency to debates over teacher recruitment, preparation, and induction. What's more, competing groups of partisans continue to dominate the debate over teacher quality and preparation: one seemingly eager to assail the nation's education schools and to suggest that there is an insufficiently defined body of professional teaching knowledge; the other committed to advancing professionalism by ensuring that all teachers are prepared and licensed through a prescribed and formal training program. The conflict is suffusing research, confusing policymakers, and stifling potentially promising reforms. This Policy Perspectives summarizes a recently published paper, "A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom? Appraising Old Answers and New Ideas" (Harvard Education Press), which lays out new approaches for ensuring high-quality teacher preparation while offering a candid assessment of the obstacles that may inhibit implementation of such models.

12 pages / Price: Single copy, free / Order #: PP-05-01



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This newsletter was produced in whole or in part with funds from the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, under contract #ED-01-C0-0012. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Education.

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