

Research Brief High Schools That Work

Questions: What is “*High Schools That Work*” from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)? How does SREB assess the program’s implementation and effect on student achievement? What does evidence reveal about the impact of the program?

Program Summary:

High Schools That Work (HSTW) is the oldest and largest of SREB’s several school improvement initiatives (which also include *Middle Schools That Work*). The central purpose of HSTW is to engage students so fully in their learning that they stay in school and complete a rigorous, relevant curriculum that prepares them for a successful transition to post-secondary studies and/or the world of work. The “centerpiece” of this reform initiative is the curriculum SREB recommends all students follow:

- 4 years of college preparatory English;
- 4 years of math including Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II;
- 3 years of college-preparatory science;
- 3 years of social studies;
- a concentration area with both career/technical and academic options chosen by the student and his/her parents.

HSTW is a reform model shaped by these beliefs:

- Most students can master a rigorous academic and career/technical curriculum and should have access to such a curriculum;
- Greater gains can be made for students when educators adopt an “effort-based” focus rather than an “ability-based” focus;
- Teachers and school leaders have the capacity to create an environment that motivates students to make the effort necessary for success.

Begun in 1987, HSTW is currently being implemented in more than 1200 sites across the United States. SREB supports the schools with technical assistance, professional development, and data analysis. Thirty-two states have chosen to become “HSTW States,” entering into a consortium with SREB and agreeing to develop and maintain a state support network for schools implementing the initiative. High schools in non-HSTW states may also join the initiative and contract with SREB to receive technical assistance from regional support centers. (Information on the costs associated with joining the initiative is obtained by contacting SREB directly.)

Implementation of this comprehensive reform initiative is guided in each school by a clearly articulated framework of goals and key practices summarized below.

***High Schools That Work* Goals:**

- Increase to 85% the percentage of students who meet the HSTW performance goals in reading, math, and science (on the NAEP-referenced HSTW assessment).

- Increase to 50% the percentage of all students who perform at least at the proficient level on the HSTW assessments.
- Increase to 85% the percentage of graduates who have completed college-prep courses in math, science, English/language arts, and social studies, and an academic or career/technical “major” (or combination of the two).
- Increase to 90% the percentage of students who enter ninth grade and graduate four years later.
- Insure that all students leave high school with postsecondary credit and/or prepared for postsecondary studies without the aid of remediation.

Ten Key Practices for Achieving these Goals:

1. Hold **high expectations** for all students and provide frequent feedback on progress.
2. Develop a **program of study** for each student that includes an academic (college-preparatory) core and an area concentration.
3. Insure **academic press** by teaching essential concepts of the college-prep curriculum through application of academic content and skills to real-world problems and projects.
4. Provide more students access to intellectually rigorous **career/technical studies** in high demand fields that require the types of higher-order math, science, and problem-solving skills students will encounter in postsecondary courses and the modern work place.
5. Enable well planned **work-based learning** opportunities from which students and their parents may choose.
6. Develop and support **teacher teams** made up of faculty from the academic core and career/technical disciplines who collaborate on the integration of reading, writing and speaking across the curriculum, and math and science into career/technical classrooms.
7. **Engage students actively** in learning through the use of best instructional practices and relevant and challenging assignments.
8. Implement a **guidance and advisement system** that engages students and their parents in setting and meeting personal goals for successful completion of their plans of study.
9. Provide a structured system of **extra help** to assist students in meeting the challenges of an academically rigorous curriculum.
10. Create a culture of **continuous improvement** by using student assessment results and program evaluation to monitor progress and make adjustments.

Specific strategies and examples for implementing these practices are part of the technical assistance and professional development provided by HSTW and SREB.

Assessment Practices:

The primary measure of both student and school progress in HSTW sites is a biannual National Assessment of Educational (NAEP)-referenced exam administered to students in grades eight and twelve in all HSTW schools. Exams are administered in reading, math, and science. In addition, surveys are administered to students, administrators, teachers and counselors that help to assess the school’s progress in implementing key practices and reaching key goals of the reform. HSTW also conducts (with assistance from school sites) a follow-up survey of graduates one year after graduation. Each school site also conducts its own annual review each spring to reflect on progress and challenges, and to help educators determine improvement priorities for the following year. Educators can get help working with the data generated by these several assessments from HSTW coaches and during “Technical Assistance Visits”.

Some Research Findings About HSTW:

SREB has been compiling achievement results from the more than 80,000 students who have taken the HSTW NAEP-referenced exams in reading, math, and science since 1987. Both internal and external research reports on the initiative have yielded similar results. Like many comprehensive school reform initiatives, impact of HSTW on achievement measures has been correlated to how fully and faithfully the reform has been implemented at a school site. This appears to be especially true for urban high schools (Bottoms, Han, Presson, 2006).

At least two studies (Kaufman, Bradby, Teitelbaum, 2000; Young & Cline, 2008) provide empirical evidence that certain of the Ten Key Practices in high implementing schools are making a difference, and have greater efficacy than others in terms of raising student achievement in reading, math, and science. In particular, both studies found that a greater proportion of students who completed the HSTW-recommended academic core and career/technical curricula “had significantly higher scores on all of the 2006 HSTW Assessment subject tests than students who did not” (Young & Cline, 2008). Even in urban high schools, where student achievement results lagged behind non-urban schools, students who had completed the HSTW recommended curriculum scored higher on the HSTW Assessment than students who had not (Bottoms, Han, Presson, 2006).

Other Key Practices strongly related to increases in student achievement in reading, math, and science included:

- active student engagement,
- quality work-based learning opportunities,
- a culture of high expectations (Young & Cline, 2008);
- collaboration between academic and career/technical faculty,
- a guidance and advisement system that provided students time to talk with counselors and teachers about their school program (Kaufman et al, 2000).

Results are promising, though a high level of implementation of at least several of the Key Practices appears to be required in order to realize achievement gains for students. Findings suggest schools considering this reform model may want to review the “Key Conditions” for successful implementation outlined by SREB and HSTW:

The HSTW Key Conditions:

- A clear, functional mission statement
- Commitment to goals for improving achievement
- Strong leadership
- Flexible scheduling
- Plan for continuous improvement
- Support for professional development
- Qualified teachers.

Online Resources:

Becoming a High Schools That Work State or Site. (n.d.) Retrieved from:

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

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<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2006Pubs/UrbanResearchBrief.asp>

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<http://www.educationpartnerships.org/>



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

High Schools That Work: An Enhanced Design to Get All Students to Standards. (n.d.) Brochure retrieved online from:
http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2005Pubs/05V07_enhanced_design.pdf

High Schools That Work: Publications and Materials. Retrieved from:
<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/pubindex.asp>

Kaufman, P., Bradby, D., & Teitelbaum, P. (2000). *High Schools That Work* and Whole School Reform: Raising Academic Achievement of Vocational Completers through the Reform of School Practice. Retrieved online from:
<http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/special/NCRReport.asp>

Young, J. W. & Cline, F. (2008). Are scores on the HSTW Assessment related to students' self-reported educational experiences? Retrieved online from:
http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/special/ETSIndexStudy_0308.pdf

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