

# High School Redesign Monthly

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## IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

### Focusing on Iowa High Schools: Moving From Good to Great

#### Identifying Key Issues

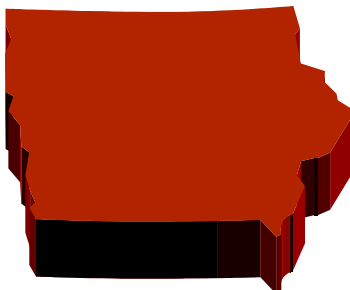
In February 2003, the Urban Education Network developed a report for the Iowa Department of Education (IDE) titled Foundation for Change: Focusing on Iowa's High Schools. Five key recommendations resulted from extensive discussions with diverse stakeholders. One recommendation is particularly relevant to current activities:

*Technical assistance must be developed for all levels of stakeholder engagement, including the active involvement of the wider community in the change process, and for the organizations and associations working to support and sustain change and continuous improvement over time.*

Reform work began under former Iowa Education Commissioner Ted Stillwill. Current Iowa Education Commissioner, Judy Jeffrey reaffirmed her commitment to effective high schools before Governor Tom Vilsack and more than 1,400 Iowa educators at the state's high school reform conference in December 2004. Under Jeffrey's leadership, IDE is aligning multiple professional development initiatives that target high school instruction.

#### Professional Development: A Crosswalk

IDE staff realized that while reform principles and strategies (High Schools That Work, Breaking Ranks II, etc.) are necessary tools for implementing reform, at the district and local levels, their effectiveness can



be lost on educators if not adapted to the challenges and needs of the local school context. To help Iowa educators understand the most critical lessons of each reform strategy, IDE staff developed a framework, Focusing on Iowa High Schools: Moving from Good to Great, that crosswalks six common elements embedded in promising reform strategies:

- high expectations
- collaborative leadership
- professional development
- school environment: student focused system
- rigorous and relevant curriculum
- student assessment and program evaluation

The framework is currently in use at the state's regional train-the-trainer sessions. Laurie Phelan, a department staff member, explained that in addition to training internal department staff, another goal is to train staff from Area Education Agencies (AEAs) and subsequently partner with them to conduct regional meetings focused on high schools. The trainings have been taking place since March and will continue through September.

With respect to professional development, Phelan explained, "Our strategy will be to invest in AEAs to provide the external support necessary to help schools employ research-based practices and best strategies for teaching and learning."

"We recognize that this isn't something we can do alone," Phelan added. "This has got to be done with our education partners like school boards, administrators and so forth."

IDE staff also work with model reform programs. In addition, the department continues its collaboration with organizations such as the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI). SAI was one of 17 administrator associations across the country that received a grant from the National Association of Secondary School Principals to participate in a train-the-trainer session on implementing strategies from Breaking Ranks II. Funding for this national effort was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

To learn more about Iowa's high school reform efforts, [click here](#).

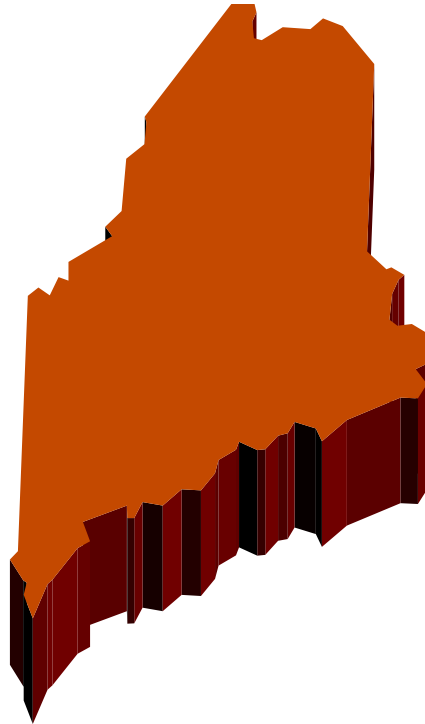
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## TRANSFORMING STATE PLANS INTO ACTIONABLE EFFORTS

# Promising Strategies for *Promising Futures*:

### The Vision

Maine 1996: The region's economy is faltering, and the state is well on its way to earning the title of the "oldest state" in the country. Clearly, the need for ensuring the state's future prosperity was not only a question for business and government leaders, but for the state's education leaders as well. In response to these and other regional challenges, a group of educators and advocates took it upon themselves to assess the condition of secondary education in their state in an effort to prepare students for what they accurately predicted as a fundamental transition into a knowledge-based economy. What emerged from this group's work was the groundbreaking report [\*Promising Futures: A Call to Improve Learning for Maine's Secondary Students\*](#).



Maybe more telling of the report's significance is its continued importance in guiding the high school transformation work in Maine as well as the emerging efforts across the country. To re-familiarize readers, the research-based principles in the report indicated that "students are successful in educational experiences which promote

1. a safe, respectful, and caring environment.
2. high universal expectations with a variety of learning opportunities;
3. understanding and actions based on assessment data;
4. teacher practice which values and builds upon the contributions and needs of each learner;
5. equitable and democratic practices; and,
6. coherence among mission, goals, actions, and outcomes. (pp. 6-7)

### The Leaders

High school reform principles persist in Maine today in part because education leaders acknowledged early on the difficulty and the longevity of the work. More than nine years later, former State Education Commissioner Duke Albanese explains, "We talked about this in 1996 and 1997 and knew that this work was going to take a very long time, and it was going to be really, really hard work. And I think

knowing this up front has helped us to maintain our deep commitment to realizing this vision for our state."

The "we" that Albanese refers to the Maine Commission on Secondary Education, co-chaired by Pam Fisher, a former high school principal, and Gordon Donaldson, a professor at the University of Maine. Fisher and Albanese explained that the ideas and perspectives of students, teachers, and the community at large were critical to informing the work, and may be even more critical to gaining the broad-based support that would follow. A sizable portion of this work would subsequently be taken on by the Maine Department of Education's (MDOE's) Center for Educational Transformation (CET), formerly called the Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education.

Statewide progress attracted funders, most notably the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. While Maine has maintained substantial resources over the last six years, Albanese quickly noted that the commission's early work to reinforce the principles of *Promising Futures* was accomplished without external funding.

### The Capacity

Maine 2004: Upon taking the lead, new Maine Education Commissioner Susan Gendron declared her commitment to continuing the work to ensure all students graduate college-ready, a move that was critical to the long-term success of *Promising Futures*. CET supports district and school efforts to eliminate tracking and align curricula across grades 6-12; ensure a rigorous core high school curriculum; reorganize time and resources to maximize the use of the school day; and, embed technological literacy across the school curricula

But the challenges to getting this work done in Maine are no less daunting than those of other states: budget limitations, competing priorities, and federal accountability issues persist. These issues prompted leaders to find new ways to support MDOE's long-term efforts. Fortunately, the relationship with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation evolved into an opportunity to establish the Great Maine Schools Project (GMSP), a statewide initiative that complements the work of the state education agency, and is housed at the Senator George J. Mitchell Scholarship Research Institute, the intermediary, coordinator and fiscal agent for the project.

## TRANSFORMING STATE PLANS INTO ACTIONABLE EFFORTS

# The Great Maine Schools Project

### *The Great Maine Schools Project*

Fisher now serves as director of GMSP and leads multiple efforts across local, district, and state levels. Albanese serves as a senior policy advisor. Both have been closely involved throughout the work, and each noted the accomplishments that have resulted from the work of GMSP:

- On-site school coaching, leadership training, and other forms of professional development and technical assistance have been offered to more than 80 high schools.
- Many secondary educators and support organizations across the state are developing a common message about graduating every student “college ready.”
- Secondary educators are beginning to understand the need to offer all students equitable access to rigorous academic courses in a personalized learning environment.
- Communities are beginning to understand the connection between the changing world around them and the need for students have a high school experience that prepares them for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### The Strategies

GMSP staff emphasized the need for each and every educator to use the core principles and practices in *Promising Futures* to create customized strategies for every high school that will help all students succeed. To this end, GMSP developed a three-tiered strategy to address the specific needs of Maine’s secondary schools.

#### *Strategy I*

Maine recognizes the value of successful high schools to students as well as to educators in need of real examples of what is working in environments similar to theirs. And while the models are tangible, they should not inspire mere replication, but also ongoing innovation.

#### *Strategy II*

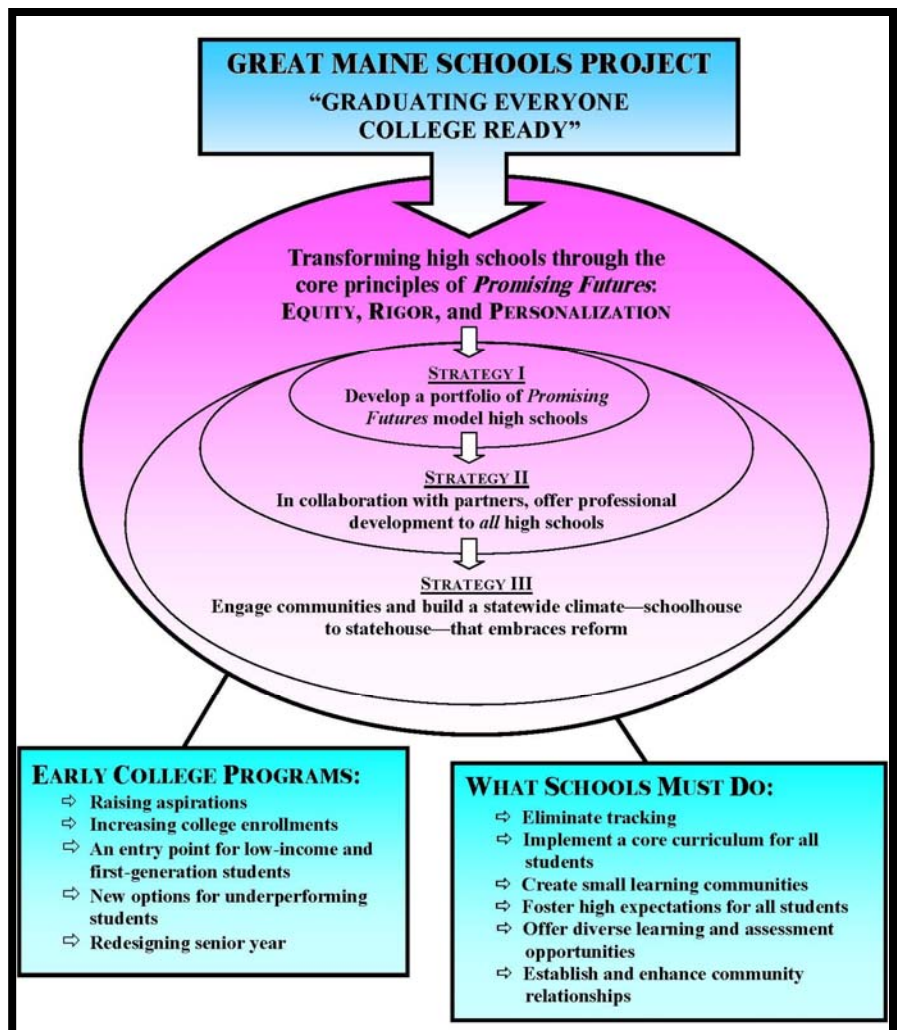
GMSP staff and their partners carry out the frequent and ongoing facilitation, professional development, and training that, over time, will equip educators and administrators with the tools and skill sets necessary to create safe and positive learning environments, as well as employ sound, research-based instructional strategies.

#### *Strategy III*

The efforts to transform the high school cannot be conducted in isolation from the stakeholders and institutions that impact the past and future of high-school-age students. Communities, state leaders, business and philanthropy must all be accountable for engaging in the conversation and committing to transform policy into action.

GMSP staff expressed their excitement about the national visibility that high school reform has attracted in recent months. But they also emphasized that without the three strategies happening simultaneously and in coordination with one another, there is little hope in sustaining effective change.

To learn more about the work in Maine, click on the following links to the [Great Maine Schools Project](#) and MDE’s [Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education](#). (Note: These websites will be updated in coming months.)



## STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

### Oregon's New HS Graduation Requirements

Beginning in 2007, Oregon high school students will be required to meet four new requirements in order to graduate:

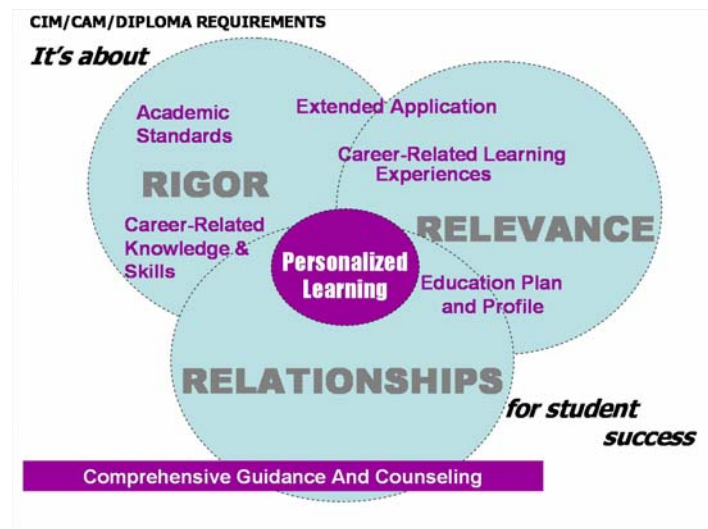
- develop an education plan and build an education profile, supported through comprehensive guidance and counseling
- demonstrate "extended application" — that is, demonstrate ability to apply what he or she knows and can do in new situations related to the student's interests and post-high school goals
- demonstrate career-related knowledge and skills (such as personal management, teamwork, problem solving)
- participate in career related learning experiences (community-connected learning)

The Oregon State Board also adopted a policy that allows school districts the option to award credit for graduation based on demonstrated proficiency. School districts create their local policy based on state guidelines.

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) is currently partnering with several high schools and districts around the state as they implement these new policies. Through targeted research and demonstration projects, ODE is providing assistance and studying implementation issues in the local context of the school and district to inform state policy and share strategies statewide.

ODE has taken the approach of building a context for these changes as well as supporting districts' adoption and implementation of the new requirements. As in many other

states, Oregon has multiple high-school-related initiatives happening across its regions, including small schools development, P-16 activities, and this transition toward more rigorous high school academics.



The underlying framework over which all initiatives occur is a core principle of personalized learning supported by rigor, relevance, and relationships. While the "3 R's" espoused by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation may be familiar to high school educators, Oregon has moved the discussion forward in their work, integrating and customizing the framework to make the case for change in the state.

For more information about Oregon's work, please visit ODE's web page dedicated to secondary work by clicking [here](#).

## PUBLICATIONS & ITEMS OF INTEREST

### National Governors Association

Governors across the country now have the opportunity to apply for competitive grants worth up to \$1 million annually for two years. The National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices' *Honor States Grant Project* gives states the opportunity to build on the momentum of the 2005 National Education Summit on High School by implementing priorities that match the recommendations of [An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools](#).

In Phase I of the project, the NGA Center will award a maximum of 10 states grants in the range of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 annually for two years. States that apply must match each grant dollar with cash or in-kind contributions from federal, state, and private sources. The grant period

will be August 2005-July 2007. The following bullets offer highlights of the selection criteria:

- Governors must create an interdisciplinary policy team that includes commitment from their chief state school officers.
- Each proposal must include a ten-year plan that is guided by elements of NGA's *Action Agenda*, and must articulate what steps will be taken during the grant cycle.
- Proposals must articulate states' readiness for change.

Governors' offices must submit the proposals by June 1, 2005. Grantees will be announced in July. For details on the selection process and all relevant materials, click [here](#).

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

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