High School Restructuring in Kansas
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It is readily apparent that if high schools are going to be able to help all children learn well, the 20th century model of schooling has to change. The system design used for the last 100 years of public schooling—a system focused on time as the constant and learning as the variable—must change to a system in which learning is the constant and time the variable. Most recently, a slew of research reports on high schools have been made available. The research reports clearly indicate that several alternatives exist in restructuring high schools to meet these needs. Synopses of each of the research reports are included in the attached appendix.

Students entering grades 9-12 today, enter with more complex needs and challenges than those faced by past generations. No matter what path a student may follow once leaving high school, including career education as well as college education, all students need to be well-grounded in the core curriculum. Additionally, all students must be provided the ability to pursue and be successful in post-secondary education options.

In order to ensure that all students learn well and meet the requirements needed to be successful in pursuit of post-secondary education and in life, one redesign option used by a number of districts throughout the United States is to offer three, four, and five year graduation programs. These variable program options may better address individual student learning as well as increase instruction time while allowing others to accelerate through the curriculum. Several districts, including New York, San Diego, Chicago, Denver and most recently Boston, have redesigned the traditional four-grade high school structure to allow students to work at their own pace toward graduation. In Rochester, New York, the Pathways initiative classifies students in grade 8 and offers the students graduation plans of three, four, and five years. It also includes opportunities to move between paths. Chicago's Accelerated, Classical, Extended (ACE) model enables students to proceed either faster or slower than the traditional four year pace. Both Rochester's and Chicago's five year programs provide some students with double doses of core classes in grades 9 and 10, with the final three years filling out needed credits.

Additionally, a number of studies recommended other guidelines and restructuring options for high schools. The following summarizes the reports common strategies that have proven to be helpful in the redesign of high schools for the 21st century:

Structure

- Set clear goals and establish high expectations.
- Lengthen time blocks for in-depth learning.
- Take time at the beginning of the school year to establish clear expectations for students and create an atmosphere of trust.
- Offer twilight schools for students who work.
- Adjust the daily schedule so that it is more closely aligned with students' learning patterns.
- Design the school schedule so that parents, teachers and staff can interact often.
- Plan for the effective use of added instructional time including curricular materials that are appropriately challenging and instructional methods that are paced to engage students and facilitate mastery.

- Structure the school day and year in ways that respect individualized learning needs.
- Divide large classes into smaller success academies; e.g., schools within schools.
- Provide individual learning plans for all students.
- Provide multiple pathways guaranteeing every student a rigorous level of academic proficiency.
- Honor each student's interests.
- Strengthen relationships among students and adults.
- Lower student-adult ratios.
- Foster an environment of respect and affection for students.

Assessment

- Use multiple methods for assessing, evaluating and reporting student performance.
- Use standards-based report cards as opposed to traditional letter grades.
- Use project-based learning culminating in a senior year project.
- Use student data to inform instruction.
- Use data to guide the flexible grouping of students and to provide more focused instruction.
- Use data to plan professional development.
- Use data to set targets and goals.
- Use high school graduation exams to ensure students meet standards before earning a high school diploma.
- Align tests given to high school students with the tests used for college admissions.
- Validate high school assessments as accurate predictors of postsecondary performance.

Teaching

- Bring arts and sciences faculty, education faculty and practicing teachers together to define curricular standards.
- Incorporate technology into the curriculum and instructional practices.
- Anticipate the need for techniques to foster attendance. This includes challenging lessons as well as accommodating schedules, encouraging frequent parental contact and awards for attendance, and communicating high expectations for students' attendance.

Professional development

- Incorporate decision-making roles for instructional staff. Aspects of the design and implementation of projects need to fall to teachers working directly with the students.
- Offer teacher-mentoring programs.
- Focus on improving instruction.

Curriculum/Instruction

- Offer double-dose courses in core academic areas to accommodate student needs.
- Align high school academic standards with the knowledge and skills required for college and workplace success.
- Specify core content knowledge.
- Insist all students are held to the same standards.
- Make the college preparatory curriculum the default curriculum.

- Ensure every student, regardless of a career requiring a college degree or technical certificate, meets the prerequisites of algebra, geometry, laboratory sciences and strong communication skills.
- Formally evaluate student progress as well as the effectiveness of program components. The continuation of a program and determinations about which components to expand or improve require the information developed through evaluations.
- Offer a first year program that provides students with avenues for self-discovery.
- Offer a strong youth development focus.
- Offer schools with a thematic focus to provide discipline and purpose.
- Recognize joint opportunities between schools and community services to apply and extend what is learned in schools; include community youth organizations, cultural organizations, libraries, parks and recreation departments, health agencies, businesses, and institutions of higher education.

Post-secondary

- Establish K-16 partnerships.
- Offer dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment programs.
- Hold postsecondary institutions accountable for the academic success of the students they admit.
- Use high school assessments for college admissions.
- Provide information to high schools on the academic performance of their graduates in college.

In light of these recommendations and redesign options, a set of guiding principles was developed. The three principles under which high schools in Kansas should operate include:

1. Ensuring that every student graduates with the prerequisite knowledge and skills to pursue post-secondary education.
2. Providing all students the flexibility to fulfill graduation requirements that best matches their learning pace.
3. Providing all students with coursework that authentically engages them in their learning.

Finally, to assist high schools in Kansas to meet the guiding principles and in redesigning the schools for the 21st century, a plan of action was developed and approved by the Kansas State Board of Education in October, 2004. The following plan includes the guiding principle and core principle under which it falls:

Core Principle One	Guiding Principle
All students in Kansas must be held to essential and challenging learning standards as defined by State Board of Education.	Ensure that every student graduates with the prerequisite knowledge and the skills necessary to pursue post-secondary education.

Action Plan:

1. Create a postsecondary transition council in cooperation with the Board of Regents and the Department of Commerce to include parents with an initial focus on the following issues:

a. Identify the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue post secondary education and ensure they match qualified admission requirements
b. Determine how post secondary placement assessments can be used as diagnostic tools as well as benchmarks to ensure student readiness
c. Recommend policies to ensure a smooth transition for students from high school to postsecondary education including a review of dual credit courses and secondary access to technical college programs

Core Principle Two and Five
All students must be provided appropriate instruction to successfully learn the essential standards.

Professional growth and development that increases the capacity of those who work in the system to help all children learn well must be ongoing and continuous.

Guiding Principle
Provide all students with coursework that authentically engages them in their learning.

Action Plan:
1. Utilize the Kansas Education Resource Center to provide examples of best practice in student engagement and learning
2. Utilize the KSDE Annual Conference to further understanding of best practice
3. Host an annual conference on high school reform
4. Create models of curriculum integration that provide context and application of learning

Core Principle Three
The system must be flexible and adaptable to meet the learning needs of each student.

Guiding Principle
Provide all students the flexibility to fulfill graduate requirements that best matches their learning pace.

Action Plan:
1. Establish a high school technology work group to make recommendations on:
    a. The best use of distance learning and web based instructional models
    b. Integration of technology into classrooms
2. Provide incentives for the development of model high school programs and structures
3. Review the funding structure and make recommendations on removing barriers to providing a variety of graduation options for students
4. Improve the guidance system to assist students and their families in understanding the options available to them

Core Principle Four
Curricular and instructional decisions and corresponding policies must be based on standards, data, and research.

Action Plan:
1. Create a data set that provides a means to gauge progress on high school reform.

Appendix

Mapping a Course for Improved Student Learning: How Innovative Schools Systematically Use Student Performance Data to Guide Improvement

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) conducted a study that examined a sample of innovative high schools that are using a variety of student performance data to improve the instruction of teachers and the school organization's support for instructional improvement. The basis of the study was the No Child Left Behind focus on annual statewide assessment.

> "The(se) high stakes tests…are used as the major evidence of their effectiveness (and) are at best, only moderately useful in providing both leaders and their teachers with the instructional guidance needed to improve their school's performance on those same high-stakes tests."

CPRE found that these schools used multiple data to provide guidance to inform educators that they were moving in the right direction, while providing interactive and recursive feedback for mid-course adjustments. Thus these schools data feedback systems relied on multiple sources of data collection and analyzed these data at regular intervals. The schools they studied drew their data from three primary sources:

1. External data from the state and district—these data were viewed as useful, but limited, as state assessments lack adequate details to provide much guidance.
2. Internal data from the classroom, consisting of customized assessment systems designed to inform teacher practice—these data often consist of chapter tests, portfolios, reading and writing journals, math journals, conference logs, and other documentation techniques of student progress aimed at capturing students' learning and understanding and used to guide their teaching.
3. Internal data on a schoolwide basis used to provide interim feedback on progress toward school and grade-level goals—these data, administered systematically across groups of students whose results are aggregated and analyzed for patterns to guide school and teacher decision-making, were viewed as the most powerful but least used. Examples include running records, theme tests and in-house developed assessments that relate standards, curriculum and student performance.

CPRE surveyed the principals of these innovative schools and found that three-quarters of respondents thought that assessments developed inside the school were more useful than external assessments. Less than a quarter of the school leaders found state test results highly useful in informing instruction. The study then identified seven ways in which teachers and administrators in these schools used student performance data for instructional or organizational improvement:

1. Student performance data are used to inform instruction.
2. Data are used specifically to identify low-performing students and inform assistance plans for these students.
3. Data are used to plan professional development.
4. Data are used to set targets and goals.

5. Data are used to celebrate both faculty and student accomplishments.
6. Data are used as a visual means of reinforcing school priorities and focus.
7. Data are used as supporting evidence in conversations with parents about students.

CPRE found that these schools that systematically used multiple data sources had teachers who used data as the basis for identifying lesson objectives, that data were used to more readily identify those students who are in need of additional assistance and were used to determine professional development opportunities. However, CPRE also found that these schools needed more time, training, and technology. In the study, each school had a single individual who was assigned to collecting and monitoring the data. However, limited technological capacity was noted in most schools as was the lack of technical expertise to analyze student performance data. CPRE found that only 19% of their survey respondents felt they had the technical skills to manipulate the data in order to use it to answer questions they wanted to ask.

Diploma Plus

Another example of a high standards, competency-based education model for at-risk high school youth is Diploma Plus. This program, based in Massachusetts, incorporates college courses and work experiences as a central part of earning a high school diploma. The purpose is to help educationally disadvantaged youth earn high school diplomas and prepare these youth for a successful transition to higher education and promising careers. The nine Diploma Plus sites in this study are operated by community-based organizations that function as satellites to the public schools. The nine schools offer various programs including alternative programs operated directly by the public schools, academies within comprehensive high schools, charter school programs and a program at a community college managed by a school-to-work local partnership. All participating sites operate in partnership with their local school district and community college.

Diploma Plus is divided into two stages. The first stage features preparation in core academic competencies, other foundation skills, career pathways, as well as preparation for college and the program's second stage. Students create a "Personal Development Plan" as well as a presentation portfolio representing their best work products across core academic subjects. Students progress through Stage One by mastering competencies, rather than by seat time.

The second stage, the Plus Year, prepares students to transition to life after high school. It is a combination of small group seminar work, community college attendance and work-based learning including at least 80 hours of paid or unpaid internships or community service placements. During the senior seminar, students complete an autobiography project, a community development project, a research project, and a Graduation Portfolio.

An evaluation of Diploma Plus showed the following results:

- 71 percent of 1999 graduates were enrolled in postsecondary institutions upon graduation.
- A 1.69 average grade level increase was realized in math.
- A .67 average grade level increase was realized in English.

- 75 percent of DP students had higher academic/career aspirations now than when they began the program; approximately 90 percent are more interested in attending college.
- 80 percent of internship supervisors surveyed rated DP students highly on communication and literacy skills, organizing and analyzing information, acting professionally, and interacting with others.
- Approximately 75 percent of students taking college classes in the spring 2000 term earned a C or better in at least one college level class. This is particularly notable considering that many entry-level community college students start in remedial courses.

Changing Providence High Schools

The Providence, Rhode Island, school district wanted to create a performance-based high school that celebrates and respects the talents, characteristics, strengths, weaknesses and efforts of each student and teacher—one where all students are held to high academically rigorous standards but where every student is given the opportunity to learn at their own pace and in a manner suited to their own unique abilities.

Data on the Providence schools showed that many students dropped out during and after the 9th grade. As part of their redesign, the schools offer an introductory or first year program that provides students with avenues for self-discovery as well as opportunities to develop character skills important not only for success in high school but for success in the world beyond high school. In addition to a focus on individual learning, the schools also have a strong youth development focus. Not only does this help create individuals who achieve high academic standards, it also creates individuals who are productive citizens and members of the community. Finally, the schools also have a focus on developing strong leadership and citizenship skills as well as interpersonal and communication skills. One avenue in which the schools use to achieve this end is to have a strong role for student voices in the governance structure.

These elements of redesign are solidly grounded in the current research on the characteristics of high performing high schools. While the redesign plans for each of the high schools include these elements, the redesign took different forms in each school as they structured the elements to complement their own unique vision. These schools included the following in their learning communities:

- An individualized learning plan (ILP) for each student that is developed with the student, his or her parents, and teachers and administrators who know the student
- The provision of multiple options and pathways that guarantee every student a rigorous level of academic proficiency, while allowing each student to pursue his or her own vision of educational excellence
- High school diplomas awarded based on the achievement of clearly articulated high academic standards and not based on “seat time”
- No grouping by age or having “classes” of students moved along by grades
- “Certificates of Initial Mastery” issued to students upon the completion of a rigorous set of standards developed by the school and the district and that informs the community the student has achieved a level of expertise in a particular area

- The school day and year structured in ways that respect individualized learning needs, often requiring a longer day as well as the elimination of Carnegie units and the creation of a more accommodating daily schedule
- A longer school year to provide students with the opportunity to explore interests that do not fit within the traditional 180-day September through June schedule
- The provision of educational technology incorporated into daily academic life so that students and teachers remain in closer touch, allow for greater opportunities for individualized testing and assessment to better identify student progress and needs, allow students' access to courses on the web that meets their needs but are not available at the school and allow students to create their own individual learning portfolios
- The provision of strong and continuous professional development to ensure teachers will be the experts on "students" learning as well as provide teachers adequate common planning time for "consultations" about student's individualized needs
- A teaching staff that is selected, as well as self-selected, for their interest and ability to work in an environment in which each child's individual needs are met through a variety of teaching styles
- The incorporation of multiple methods for assessing, evaluating and reporting student performance including standardized tests such as the state assessment as well as alternative assessment methods that supplement the student and school information
- The use of standards-based report cards, which indicate achievement with respect to the various district performance and content standards, as opposed to traditional letter grades
- The incorporation of project-based learning structured around rigorous and high standards c
- Career academies or pathways organized to include a strong youth development component throughout the school but most especially in the first year or 9th grade

The Providence school district learned that by engaging in an intensive redesign process that guided their high schools toward the goal of guaranteeing high standards for all students was important. Additionally, each of Providence's high schools changed an established organizational structure and created a new high school from scratch, allowing the district to start with a blank slate unconstrained by any preexisting structures or beliefs. Finally, the high schools included in their redesign a focus on: the creation of small, caring learning communities; the inclusion of an academically rigorous curriculum that holds all students to high standards; a network of supports for all students; course offerings that are aligned and relevant; the inclusion of character and youth development programs; and a service-learning component.

Aiming High: How New Research and Model Programs are Reclaiming the American High School

The American Prospect Organization looked to educational reformers to learn from high-performing schools in poor communities. Stuart High School in Fairfax County, VA., is just such a school. With a student body that is one-third Hispanic, one-third white, 13 percent black, and 24 percent Asian and Middle Eastern, Stuart High boasts a 93 percent college admissions rate. What did Stuart do?

- Curricula have been designed to accommodate students at the education level at which they arrive, running from basic ESOL to fifth-grade reading to advanced college prep

- Every class outlines its day on the board and all homework assignments are displayed where the instruction cannot be ignored.
- Students with absenteeism receive wake-up calls from the school
- Between 400 and 500 of Stuart's 1,431 student body take mandatory after-school courses to improve their performance; another 40 percent take college-prep classes

Creating a High School Diploma that Counts

According to Achieve, Inc., "the American high school diploma signifies only a broken promise." Over the course of two years, Achieve worked with two- and four-year post-secondary faculty and front-line managers in high-growth, high-skill occupations to define the core knowledge and skills that high school graduates need in order to succeed in their organizations. They found the following challenges:

- Most high school graduates need remedial help in college. More than 70% of graduates enter two- and four-year colleges, and at least 28% take remedial English or math courses.
- Most college students never attain a degree. While a majority of high school graduates enter college, fewer than half leave with a degree. The preparation students receive in high school is the greatest predictor of bachelor's degree attainment—more so than family income or race.
- Most employers say high school graduates lack basic skills. More than 60 percent of employers rate graduates skill in grammar, spelling, writing and basic math as only "fair" or "poor."
- Too few high school students take challenging courses. While most states require a specific number of courses that must be taken, very few can ensure that the course content reflects the knowledge and skills that colleges and employers demand.

The solution is based on what state policymakers must do as well as post-secondary institutions, federal government and business leaders. Generally, the report recommends that academic standards should be anchored in the real world; all students should be required to take a quality college and workplace readiness curriculum; those things that matter should be measured and made to count; and the gap between high school and college should be bridged. Specifically, state policymakers, federal government and business leaders should do the following:

<u>States should:</u>

- Align academic standards in high school with the knowledge and skills required for college and workplace success, using the American Diploma Project (ADP) benchmarks as a starting point.
- Back-map standards to create a coherent, focused, grade-by-grade progression from kindergarten through high school graduation.
- Define specific course-taking requirements in English and mathematics for high school graduation and specify the core content for those courses
- Insist that all students are held to the same English and mathematics standards, using the same measures, regardless of whether students are in traditional schools, charter schools, small theme-based schools or other alternative programs.
- Help define how other subjects (such as science, history and the arts) can prepare students to meet college and workplace readiness standards in English and mathematics.

- Use high school graduation exams to ensure that students meet standards before earning a high school diploma.
- Ensure that the graduation "floor" is not set too low; graduation exams that primarily measure 8th and 9th grade content say little about college and workplace readiness; i.e., prevent the floor from becoming the ceiling.
- Find ways to assess graduates in addition to large-scale, paper and pencil assessments, to include such things as making oral arguments and conducting significant research projects.
- Regularly validate high school assessments as accurate predictors of postsecondary performance in terms of grades, persistence and degree attainment.
- Hold postsecondary institutions accountable for the academic success of the students they admit—including learning, persistence and degree completion—rather than allowing them to continue to place ill-prepared students in remedial, non-credit bearing courses and then replace dropouts with new students the following year.

Postsecondary institutions should:

- Use high school assessments for college admissions, placement and/or the awarding of merit scholarships.
- Provide information to high schools on the academic performance of their graduates in college, which schools can use to help improve their programs.

Federal government should:

- Provide incentives such as additional Pell grant funds for high school students to take a college and workplace readiness curriculum
- Offer resources, through the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act or other legislation, for states to align high school standards, assessments and graduation requirements with the knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary education and work.
- Require, through the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, postsecondary education institutions to report annually to students, parents and the public, evidence of student achievement, as well as rates of remediation, persistence and degree completion.
- Align the 12th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in English and mathematics with the ADP benchmarks and require all states to administer this test, as NCLB now requires for 4th and 8th grades.

Business leaders should:

- Encourage states to align standards, assessments and graduation requirements with the knowledge and skills necessary for success in postsecondary education and work—even as they grapple with implementing NCLB
- Consider evidence such as high school assessment results and transcripts in making hiring decisions, and encourage other employers to do the same.

Student Success: Statewide P-16 Systems

In this report, the authors contend that achieving the educational goals of the next generation will require policymakers and educators to view education as an integrated system, from birth through adulthood. Each of the individual elements of the educational system must be excellent in its own right, and each of them must work effectively with the others toward the systems

goal—the highest possible levels of student learning through postsecondary education and the capacity to continue learning successfully throughout life.

According to a 1998 survey published by the National Center for Educational Statistics:

- 78% of high school seniors say they definitely or probably will earn a four-year degree
- 39% say they will definitely or probably earn a two-year degree
- 22% say they will definitely or probably attend a technical/vocational schools

This report indicated that the key components of an integrated educational system should include the following:

1. Early outreach—show parents and students what is required for postsecondary educational achievement by focusing on each individual student and making clear the importance of postsecondary education.
2. Curriculum and assessment systems—specify the knowledge and skills that students need and help teachers and their students assess progress by making the college preparatory curriculum the "default" curriculum, aligning high school assessments of student ability with the qualifying examinations used by colleges and universities, and incorporating end-of-course assessments to help assure consistent rigor and essential content across classrooms.
3. High quality teaching—an essential aspect that enables students to achieve at higher levels are quality teachers who have solid preparation in the subject matter they will teach as well as the pedagogy. This can be accomplished by bringing together arts and sciences faculty, education faculty and practicing teachers to define clear curricular standards for student learning and teacher preparation as well as by providing apprenticeship and mentoring opportunities.
4. Student financial assistance—is essential as a means to enable and encourage participation in postsecondary education. Strategies include motivating students in grades K-12 to set high achievement goals and choose challenging courses to prepare them for college-level study, being well funded and highly visible particularly to low-income students, and being accountable to the goals they must meet and being evaluated by clearly defined policy goals well understood by state policymakers.
5. Data and accountability systems—allow educators and policymakers to monitor progress and guide their efforts to promote and enable greater achievement. By establishing standards for K-12 achievement that lead naturally toward the standards required for admission and success in postsecondary education and by tracking the performance of individual students throughout their educational career progress, progress can be consistently monitored.

Youth at the Crossroads: Are Today's High School Graduates Ready?

The major question the Education Trust examined was whether high school graduates are better off today than 30 years ago. In general, the data suggest the following:

- High school completion rates have remained the same for nearly 30 years.
- After decades of leading the world in high school completion, the U.S. currently ranks 17th.

- Despite some improvements in the reading skills students bring with them to high school, today's high school students are reading no better when they leave than did their peers a decade ago.
- Even in math and science, where recent gains among 17 year olds have been widely celebrated, it turns out that those gains are attributable to improvements below grade 8.
- While students are taking and completing more college preparatory courses, the effect on student learning has not been great, raising serious questions about the rigor of those courses.

All of these problems are worse for students from minority groups, as well as those from low-income families. Fortunately, the efforts of some educators and community activists around the country, found some core building blocks for rethinking a high school education. They found that it is critically important to:

- Get up front agreement on the central goal of high school education; what in other words, should a high school diploma enable a student to do?
- Eliminate curricular paths that do not equip students with the skills they need to obtain the postsecondary education they will inevitably need.
- Assure that all teachers are masters of the subject matter they are teaching.
- Require a high level of rigor in high school assignments.
- Break large schools into smaller learning environments that are more personal for both students and teachers.

Beyond defining what needs to change, the Education Trust also offered important lessons about restructuring the reform process:

- Don't tackle high schools in isolation; create a K-16 (or at least 7-16) structure to clarify goals and plot out a linked set of reforms.
- To be a genuine partner, higher education has to put its own house in order.
- Student voices must be included.
- Let the data do the driving.
- All action is not local; states must examine their role.

Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected K-12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations

The Stanford University's Bridge Project found that America's high school students have higher educational aspirations than ever before. The study cites the following statistics:

- 88% of 8th graders expect to participate in some form of postsecondary education
- 70% of high school graduates actually do go to college within two years of graduating
- These educational aspirations cut across racial and ethnic lines; in the states studied (California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon, and Texas), over 80% of African American and Latino students surveyed planned to attend some form of postsecondary education

However, the report continues, states have created unnecessary and detrimental barriers between high school and college, barriers that are undermining these students aspirations. Some of the barriers include:

- The current fractured systems send students, parents and K-12 teachers conflicting and vague messages about what students need to know and be able to do to enter and succeed in college.
- High school assessments often stress different knowledge and skills than do college entrance and placement requirements.
- The coursework between high school and college is not connected; students graduate from high school under one set of standards and, three months later, are required to meet a whole new set of standards in college.
- Current data systems are not equipped to address students' needs across systems, and no one is accountable for issues related to student transitions from high school to college.
- Inequalities exist throughout education systems in college counseling, college preparation course offerings, and connections with local postsecondary institutions.
- There is sporadic and vague student knowledge regarding college curricular and placement policies.
- Teachers are extremely important in advising students about college preparation issues.
- Students and parents often over-estimate tuition costs.
- There is an inequitable distribution of college information to parents.

The report concludes with three major recommendations to improve the current situation and offer the most promising immediate reform:

1. Provide all students, their parents, and educators with accurate, high quality information about, and access to, courses that will help prepare students for college-level standards.
2. Focus on the institutions that serve the majority of students. Shift media, policy, and research attention to include broad access to colleges and universities attended by the vast majority of students (approximately 80%).
3. Create an awareness that getting into college is not the hardest part. Expand the focus of local, state, and federal programs from access to college to include access to success in college—access to the resources and information students need to prepare well for college and to make informed decisions.

What steps should be taken to ensure states, K-12 schools and districts, postsecondary institutions and systems, and the federal government improve the transition from high school to college for all students? The report included the following steps to be followed:

- Ensure that college stakeholders are brought to the table when K-12 standards are developed. Likewise, K-12 educators must be engaged as postsecondary education admission and placement policies are under review.
- Examine the relationship between the content of postsecondary education placement exams and K-12 exit level standards and assessments to determine if more compatibility is necessary and possible.
- Review postsecondary education placement exams for reliability, validity, efficacy and the extent to which they promote teaching for understanding.
- Allow students to take placement exams in high school so they can prepare, academically, for college and understand college-level expectations.
- Sequence undergraduate general education requirements so that appropriate senior-year courses are linked to postsecondary general education courses.

- Expand successful dual or concurrent enrollment programs between high schools and colleges so that they include all students, not just traditionally "college-bound" students.
- Establish data collection standards.
- Establish federal grants to stimulate more K-16 policymaking.

Most Likely to Succeed: Policymaking in Support of a Restructured High School

NASBE's most recent report from a nationwide study group on restructuring high schools, looked at state policies and the need for states to reexamine how their current policies influence school structure. What the study group realized was that most states continue to have policies in place that support the traditional comprehensive high school model; a model that holds different expectations for different groups of students and applies rigid Carnegie unit requirements to determine advancement. Instead, the study group recommended that states implement policies that support a menu of models to address the diverse needs of all student populations. The study group also reviewed several accepted models for high school reform that suggest several key areas in which state policies can guide the implementation and outcomes of high school reform. The models include the following:

High Schools That Work: This model is built on the belief that in the right school environment, most students can learn complex, academic and technical concepts. To accomplish this, HSTW promotes: increasing access to intellectually challenging vocational and technical studies emphasizing high-level academic skills; increasing access to essential concepts from the college preparatory curriculum in addressing real-world projects and problems; challenging students to complete an upgraded academic core and a major; integrating school-based and work-based learning; structuring academic and vocational teachers time to plan and deliver integrated instruction; involving each student in a advising system that ensures the completion of an accelerated program of study with an in-depth academic or vocational-technical major; providing a structured system of extra help to complete an accelerated program; and using student-assessment and program-evaluation data to continuously improve all aspects of the school.

The Talent Development High School: This model incorporates changes in school organization, curriculum, instruction, and staff development to address the challenges posed by troubled high schools generally characterized by low achievement scores and poor graduation rates; e.g., only 70 percent of high-school students nationwide graduate from high school. Research conducted jointly by Johns Hopkins and Howard Universities point out some relatively straightforward, though tough to implement, reforms that encourage students to stay in school. The Talent Development Model now used by 50 schools nationwide, has six basic parts, including the following:

- Small communities of learning: Large ninth grade classes are divided into smaller success academies of 100 to 150 students each. Each group is assigned its own teachers, creating schools within schools.
- Double-dose courses in math and English: 90-minute classes are offered in core subjects such as algebra and reading allowing the students the ability to study a year's worth of material in six months and then move on to standard 45-minute coursework.

- Professional development for teachers: To attract the best teachers, the schools provide teacher mentoring programs, shared time to develop lesson plans as well as other strategies that invite and reward good teaching.
- Parental support networks: These schools reach out to involve parents who are stressed economically and have lower levels of education themselves.
- More flexible school days: As many poor high-school students need to work part-time, or have to take care of young children, "twilight schools" allow those students with difficult schedules to earn regular diplomas without spending a standard day in school.
- Career academies: Schools with a thematic focus, such as computer science or performing arts, provide discipline and purpose to students who may not be academic standouts.

Collaborations Between High Schools and Community Colleges: A number of models for collaboration between the high schools and community schools address a number of interests, including articulation across P-16. These include:

- K-16 Partnerships—These state-level programs, while varying from state-to-state, focus on professional development, fieldwork in the schools, local councils deciding on focus areas, and targeting and reallocating fiscal resources to support student success.
- Dual Enrollment and Concurrent Enrollment Programs—In this model, high school students earn college credits through courses taught at the college or high school. Critical to the success of such a program is how well the high school and colleges agree on the management of the program.
- Tech Prep and 2+2+2 Programs—These programs link high schools, colleges, and employers as students progress through a well-articulated, technology-focused curriculum.
- Middle College High Schools—These high schools are located on a community college or university campus with both faculties agreeing on the mission, curriculum and learning frameworks.
- Distance Learning—Technology is used to link high school and community college systems via virtual high school courses.

Small Learning Communities: separate, individualized learning unit within a larger school setting defines this model.

Coalition of Essential Schools: The Coalition represents a process built around its core principles, as follows:

- Schools focus on helping students use their minds well.
- The school's goals are simple; that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.
- The school's goals apply to all students, while the means to this end vary.
- Teaching and learning is personalized.
- The image of the school is that of student-as-worker, not teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services.
- Teaching and learning is documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks.
- The school stresses the values of unanxious expectation, trust, and decency.
- The principal and teachers perceive themselves as generalists first and specialists second.

- Administrative and budget targets include substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff, total student loads of 80 or fewer in middle and high school, 20 or fewer students at the elementary, and a per pupil cost that exceed traditional schools by no more than 10%.
- The school is nondiscriminatory and inclusive.

America's Choice: The principle goal of America's Choice schools is that all students will graduate able to meet internationally benchmarked standards in English language arts and mathematics. These schools undertake an intensive program of curricular, instructional, and organizational restructuring and professional development. Schools work on five fundamental areas: standards and assessments; learning environments; community and service supports; public engagement; and high performance management. All students graduating from an America Choice school are expected to have the knowledge and skills needed to attend college.

First Things First: This model, used in the Kansas City, Kansas, school district, promotes strengthening relationships among students and adults, improving teaching and learning, and reallocating budget, staff and time to achieve the first two goals. To achieve these goals, critical features must be in place, including the following:

For students: Providing continuity of care across the school day and year; setting high, clear, and fair standards for academics and conduct; lowering student-adult ratios and increasing instructional time in language arts and math; and providing enriched and diverse opportunities for students to learn, perform and be recognized.

For adults: Equipping, empowering and expecting all teaching staff to implement standards-based instruction that actively engages all students; giving small learning communities and schools the flexibility to redirect resources; and ensuring collective responsibility for student outcomes.

The report ends with some strategies that state policy makers could use to pursue sustainable and systemic high school reform:

1. Take the lead in identifying the need for reform and developing a broad-based response.
2. Develop an organizing vision for the reform.
3. Pursue public support for the vision.
4. Conduct a state policy audit.
5. Develop an action plan and implementation strategy.
6. Use the state university system to conduct research and evaluations of new high school models and strategies.

Supporting Principals Who Break Ranks

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) calls on high school principals to take responsibility for increasing the academic achievement of all students and for ensuring that every student has the opportunity to meet his or her dream for success. Additionally, states and districts must also facilitate and sustain reform in schools. However, there has been no standard process for the federal government, states and districts to follow in

working to improve the quality of schools. School reform requires that there be general agreement about the goals of reform. Some of the challenges that exist for school reform include the following:

- Lack of overall capacity—conflicting beliefs about the goals for reform exist as well as a lack of tools to improve teaching and learning
- Lack of experience with high school reform—requires knowledge of best practice, skill in implementing reform strategies and persistence

Despite these obstacles, NASSP offered several recommendations for districts, states and the federal government to help high school principals "break ranks." These include:

1. Collaborative leadership and professional learning communities—To develop collaborative leadership and professional learning communities, principals must build capacity and break educators sense of isolation, encourage collaboration relationships with local colleges, cultivate the next generation of school leaders, build bridges to the community and use data strategically.
2. Personalization—Learning ultimately results from the interaction of students with other individuals. To develop personalized environments, districts need to create smaller learning communities, provide more autonomy to schools and parents, and coordinate services for student learning.
3. Curriculum, instruction and assessment—A rigorous curriculum is the bedrock of learning. A rigorous curriculum is also meaningless without an effective delivery system (instruction) or method for measuring impact on student learning (assessment). To provide support to schools to improve the quality of curriculum, instruction and assessment, districts need to ensure that all students graduate prepared for college and success in life, demonstrate to students the relevance of classroom learning, enhance educator quality, and create a culture of high expectations for all.

Opening Doors: Promising Lessons from Five Texas High Schools

In a four-year study of five high-poverty high schools in Texas—schools that attained notable levels of achievement on selected academic indicators—some common strategies were used by the schools to achieve significant academic gains as noted on the Texas State Assessments. Each of the schools shared the following characteristics:

- The majority of the school's students were identified as economically disadvantaged; at two of the schools, slightly over 50% of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged; and at the other three schools, over 86% of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged.
- The school was located in a large district (over 5,000 students), served students in grades 9-12, and did not have selective admission policies.
- The school had a state of Texas accountability rating of Acceptable, Recognized, or Exemplary.
- Student achievement on at least one of the following three academic indicators was higher than the state average as reported for "all students": the Texas Learning Index, the Algebra I End-of-Course Examination, or Advanced Placement enrollment and course offerings.

The strategies identified by these schools that assisted them in improving performance and increasing educational opportunity for all students included the following:

1. Set clear goals and established high expectations for student achievement.
   - All students graduate from high school.
   - All students leave school fully prepared to succeed in college.
   - An exemplary rating in the state accountability system was earned.
   - Mastery of curriculum was measured by end-of-course exams.
   - The quality and quantity of AP course offerings was improved.

2. Used data to guide instruction
   - The timely collection, analysis and dissemination of student assessment data was ensured.
   - Data for an entire class were reviewed.
   - Data were linked it to instructional targets

3. Focused on improving instruction and individual learning
   - Students were provided the extra time needed including small group or one-on-one instruction before or after school or within the school day.
   - Students were actively encouraged to participate in more rigorous classes.
   - Students were provided an individualized approach to learning.
   - The number of AP courses, dual credit courses, and distance learning courses were expanded and were aligned to their curriculum.
   - Course schedules were modified.

4. Supported teachers and worked to enhance collaboration around the academic goals of the campus
   - Daily support was provided to teachers.
   - Time and resources were made available for training.
   - Structured time for teachers to meet in departmental and cross-departmental teams was provided.
   - Site-based teams were used to make budgetary, curricular and policy decisions.
   - Strategic community partnerships were built.

5. Fostered an environment of respect and affection for students
   - All staff demonstrated great respect and affection for their students, one in which students described their campuses as places where they felt cared about, recognized, supported and involved.
   - Staff encouraged students to take more challenging courses.
   - Strong lines of communication with students were built.
   - Student successes were recognized and celebrated.
   - Students were encouraged to be involved in extracurricular activities

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