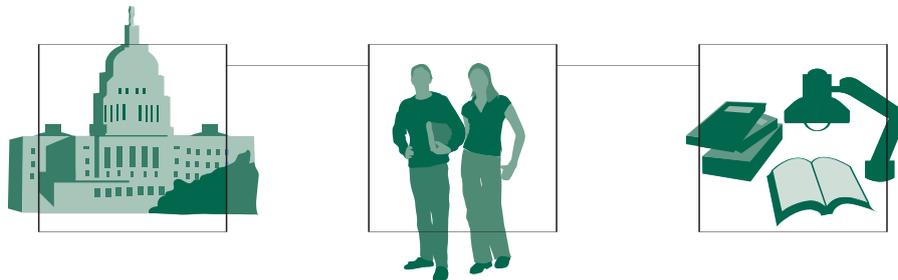


# Enhancing High School Reform: Lessons from Site Visits to Four Cities

**By Betsy Brand  
November 2005**

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BRIDGING YOUTH POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH



AMERICAN YOUTH POLICY FORUM

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## About American Youth Policy Forum

Bridging Youth Policy, Practice, and Research

*Mission: To improve opportunities, services and life prospects for youth, we provide learning experiences for national, state, and local policymakers and practitioners.*

The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), a nonprofit, nonpartisan professional development organization based in Washington, DC, provides learning opportunities for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working on youth issues at the national, state, and local levels. AYPF's goal is to enable participants to become more effective in the development, enactment, and implementation of sound policies affecting the nation's young people by providing information, insights, and networks to better understand the development of healthy and successful young people, productive workers, and participating citizens in a democratic society. AYPF does not lobby or advocate for positions on pending legislation. Rather, we believe that greater intellectual and experiential knowledge of youth issues will lead to sounder, more informed policymaking. We strive to generate a climate of constructive action by enhancing communication, understanding, and trust among youth policy professionals.

Founded in 1993, AYPF has interacted with thousands of policymakers by conducting an average of 40 annual events such as lunchtime forums, out-of-town field trips, and foreign study missions. Participants include Congressional staff; federal, state, and local government officials; national nonprofit and advocacy association professionals; and the press corps. At forums, these professionals interact with renowned thinkers, researchers, and practitioners to learn about national and local strategies for formal and informal education, career preparation, and the development of youth as resources through service and skill development activities. Study tour participants visit schools undergoing comprehensive reforms, after-school and community learning sites, and youth employment and training centers, where they learn experientially from the young people and adults in the field. AYPF publishes a variety of nationally disseminated youth policy reports and materials. Many of these publications may be found on our website, [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org).

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Sincere thanks are due to the many individuals who hosted the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) field trip groups at many different sites. Bringing a group of 20 plus individuals into schools and youth programs can be very intrusive and disruptive, particularly if the schools or programs are small. Our hosts were always gracious and accommodating and willing to share their struggles and triumphs with our group openly in the hopes of changing policy and minds. They deserve our thanks for their day-to-day work with youth.

I would also like to thank the individuals who participated in the field trips for taking the time out of their schedules to visit these programs, to learn what is working or not working, for always asking penetrating questions, and for sharing their thoughts and ideas on what policies are needed to help improve high schools.

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Betsy Brand  
November 2005

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## Executive Summary

The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) took groups of national policymakers to visit effective and innovative high schools and to meet with reform-minded leaders as a way to become familiar with the challenges and possibilities of high school redesign. This report summarizes the best practices and policies that were successful in the transformed high schools visited by national policymakers.

AYPF conducted site visits to San Diego, California in May 2003; Cleveland, Ohio in December 2003; New York City, New York in January 2004; and Boston, Massachusetts in May 2005 to study high school reform efforts. These visits enabled U.S. Congressional and Department of Education staff and senior staff from national policymaking organizations to see firsthand how certain cities are approaching the difficult issues of improving outcomes for high school-aged youth.

Many of the lessons learned from the site visits relate to practice and school-level policies. But these lessons can help inform a conversation about national and state policies to improve high school students' outcomes. A number of policy issues were identified as follows:

First, **policies affecting secondary schools need to be flexible.** Legislation, regulations, guidance, and program designs need to be flexible to ensure that schools and districts can meet the needs of their students to ensure positive outcomes. Schools frequently need to add, adapt, or change programs to meet special needs of students. Laws and regulations that are too prescriptive can prevent districts and schools from responding quickly to meet emerging student needs and changing student populations. Flexibility with regard to staffing, personnel, union agreements, budgeting, curriculum, and assessment are necessary to ensure personalized and individually responsive education for all students. Just as one size does not fit all students, one size does not fit all schools and districts.

Second, public policy should **support building the capacity of teachers, administrators, and educational leaders** so that they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the challenge of educating all students to high levels. One of the first capacity-building needs is to equip leaders to have the kinds of conversations needed with regard to high school reform. Often, policy and education leaders (at the national, state, and local

levels) have not been exposed to the best thinking, research, exemplary practices, or various visions of effective high schools. A first step is to help develop this leadership capacity. Capacity building must also focus on helping teachers gain the skills to implement a rigorous curriculum. Educators also need to develop the capacity to work together as part of professional learning communities, and more professional development should be teacher- and school-driven.

Third, **accountability systems need to take into consideration the contributions of other public programs as well as various ways of measuring success.** Systems need to be developed that measure the skills, knowledge, and health and well-being of students in addition to standardized test scores. Successful schools have strong community partnerships, and communities should measure their schools based on the health and success of these partnerships.

Fourth, to create these community accountability systems, it is necessary to have **data systems that keep track of where students are and how they do**, as well as to determine their longer-term outcomes. Policymakers can help provide the framework for a more systematic and comprehensive data collection system that crosses programs and agencies. While there is some resistance to collecting data based on a single student identifier, policymakers need to realize that they will not be able to answer questions about the long-term effectiveness of publicly-supported programs without knowing the long-term outcomes of students. Policymakers can be instrumental in bringing together the various agencies and programs that need to be involved in creating an integrated data system, to ensure that definitions across programs are consistent, and to promote shared information.

Fifth, **policymakers should ensure that funds follow students** based on their educational choices. If students drop out of public school and then return to an alternative education venue outside the public school system, the public dollars often do not flow to that program. As a result, many alternative education programs struggle to provide adequate services to students who need help. Dollars should flow to institutions students attend. Along the same lines, with the increased number of high school students taking college courses, questions are also being raised as to how to pay for those courses, and which system should support the cost. Transparent and consistent funding policies can support high school students' access to such opportunities. This flexibility might also be achieved by guaranteeing that all students have access to an amount of funds for 12 to 16 years of education and to allow the student to decide how, when, and where to use the allotted money for education.

In addition to these policy implications, our visits led us to identify five essential elements evident in many of the schools we visited, all of which have been identified by other reform literature. They are:

1. **School leaders held high expectations for students and teachers, matched with accountability standards and ongoing assessment.**
2. **Schools emphasized creating small and personalized learning communities.**
3. **High school reform included sustained professional development for teachers and principals.**
4. **Schools have established close links with the community.**
5. **Schools have flexibility over hiring, budgets, curriculum, and scheduling and the freedom to adapt and change their strategies based on what is being learned and on the needs of the students.**

The report provides numerous, explicit examples of how the programs, schools, and districts we visited adopted and implemented these elements.

Part II of the publication provides a more complete portrait of four of the schools we visited and shows how the elements are integrated.

While these five essential elements are necessary for schools to be successful, we also learned that they are only part of the work to be done in creating high schools that support all students in their learning. A number of other important issues need attention from education reformers and policymakers.

First, **context matters.** The community context for change is extremely important in understanding what policies are successful and which ones are met with resistance. Trying to insert a high school reform effort or model into a community, without community support or an understanding of the environment, is most likely doomed to fail. Also, reform models need to be adaptable to meet local needs and goals, and reform model developers and technical assistance providers need to be flexible and willing to adapt and change their model to meet local concerns and realities.

Second, reformers must ensure a **focus on teaching and instruction at the same time that structural changes are being made.** Improving teaching and instruction has to be the most difficult change for schools to make (akin to changing or creating a specific school culture), which is why it is usually one of the last areas dealt with. Changing the structure of schools, which is where many reformers begin, may be necessary, but it does not automatically translate into or result in significant instructional or curricular changes. Changes to instruction and teaching need to be made along with structural changes, not after the fact.

Third, **schools and communities must find ways to provide a differentiated education and learning options to meet each student's particular needs.** Students literally have hundreds of different needs and circumstances that can interfere with their learning. Schools need to partner with other community organizations, particularly health and mental health facilities, to ensure that young people are in the right frame of mind and able to learn. Teachers need to determine the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student and develop appropriate learning strategies. Every

community can and should create alternatives to the traditional high school that provide better matches to each students' learning style and needs, and they need to draw upon community resources to meet the family and health needs of students.

Fourth, **the culture of the school determines the quality of learning.** If the school culture is not one of high expectations and respect, students will not be challenged and engaged learners. Changing attitudes and behaviors is one of the hardest things to accomplish and requires strong, consistent leadership that models the desired behavior.

Fifth, the **community, not just the school district, must be held accountable for the health and well-being of high school-aged youth.** Education policymakers must begin to envision a broader system of

supports for youth that includes other city or county government services, health and mental health providers, family and community services, youth programs, faith-based organizations, employers, and voluntary youth-serving organizations.

These are not new ideas, but policymakers seem hesitant to consider them, and even fewer policymakers are pressing for their adoption. But without significant policy shifts, our secondary education system will continue to perpetuate the failures of the past. The schools described in this report have tried to create mechanisms to deal with many of the issues raised here, but they are often bound by strict regulatory and legislative mandates that stifle innovation, or they lack supportive legislative or regulatory frameworks to allow new forms of learning to emerge.

## Part I: Lessons from Site Visits

### The Need for High School Reform

Many American high schools are failing to meet the needs of our youth. Almost one-third of students entering high school never complete it, with rates of graduation varying widely for different ethnic and racial groups of students. White students graduate from high school at the rate of 78 percent, compared to 51 percent for African American students and 52 percent for Latino students.<sup>1</sup>

After high school graduation, entrance to and continuation in postsecondary education continues to be a problem. Of youth who graduate from high school, about 66 percent enroll in a postsecondary education institution immediately following high school, but only about 25 percent earn a Bachelor's degree. Students from various backgrounds and ethnicities enter postsecondary education and experience success at different rates. The college-going rate is 86 percent for Asian students, 76 percent for White students, and 71 percent for African American and Latino students.<sup>2</sup> At relatively select four-year colleges and universities, only half of first-year students earn a bachelor's degree within six years and fewer than 40 percent of African American and Latino undergraduates complete a degree, compared to 66 percent of White and Asian students.<sup>3</sup> There is also an alarming trend of students entering postsecondary education who need remediation. Almost one-third of all students continuing their education require at least one remedial course,<sup>4</sup> and at one community college 85 percent of entering students need at least one remedial course.<sup>5</sup> It is evident that many of these problems can be attributed to poor high school preparation.

In large urban districts, the sheer numbers of high school-aged students compound the problems for educators. In New York City, 300,000 students attend 240 high schools, more than the total number of students in 37 other states. Only 50 percent of those entering ninth graders graduate from high school four years later, according to Michele Cahill, Senior Counselor to the Chancellor, NYC Department of Education.

In large state systems, similar challenges are also evident. Of the 1.73 million high school students in California, 46 percent are eligible for free and reduced price school lunches, and about 20 percent of all high school freshmen are English language learners. The statewide dropout rate from ninth to twelfth grade is 40 percent, and that percent is higher in large urban school districts.

While poor academic performance is a serious concern, there is also reason to be concerned about the ultimate outcome for these students: success in the labor market. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 80 percent of the fastest-growing jobs in the United States require some sort of postsecondary education after high school, and many of these jobs require a strong foundation in math and science. With high dropout rates and poor performance in basic skills, many high school students are simply not prepared for work.

Information about poor outcomes and vast discrepancies between high school student groups has begun to reach national, state, and local policymakers, but most have little context for understanding the challenges facing high schools and lack information about effective or innovative policies. Most policymakers lack the time to do their own investigations across various school

<sup>1</sup> Greene, Jay P. and Greg Forster. 2004. *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States*. New York: Manhattan Institute, Center for Civic Innovation.

<sup>2</sup> Adelman, Cliff. 1999. *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment*. U.S. Department of Education: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

<sup>3</sup> Education Trust. 2001. *Youth at the Crossroads: Facing High School and Beyond*. Washington, DC: Education Trust.

<sup>4</sup> Kazis, Richard, Joel Vargas, and Nancy Hoffman (eds.). 2004. *Double the Numbers: Increasing Postsecondary Credentials for Underrepresented Youth*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

<sup>5</sup> (Lumina Foundation newsletter, <http://www.luminafoundation.org/newsroom/newsletter/July2005/AtDPhase2.html>).

systems to learn what is working, yet there is clearly a need to begin a conversation about the appropriate roles for national, state, and local policy in helping to turn around secondary education in the United States.

The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) took groups of national policymakers to visit effective and innovative high schools and to meet with reform-minded leaders as a way to become familiar with the challenges and possibilities of high school redesign. This report summarizes the best practices and policies that were successful in transforming high schools observed by national policymakers during their site visits to four cities.

### Site Visits

AYPF organized and conducted site visits to San Diego, California in May 2003; Cleveland, Ohio in December 2003; New York City, New York in January 2004; and Boston, Massachusetts in May 2005 to study high school reform efforts. These visits enabled U.S. Congressional and Department of Education staff and senior staff from national policymaking organizations to see firsthand how certain cities are approaching the difficult issues of improving outcomes for high school-aged youth.

For each visit, AYPF identified innovative school programs and the leaders and partner organizations involved with the reform efforts. It then developed an agenda for participants that allowed them to see a range of effective programs, including those outside of the traditional K-12 system that span transition points between systems or grades, as well as to learn about the management supports needed to ensure reform occurs throughout an entire system. Each visit included time for participants to meet and talk with a range of individuals with differing perspectives, including students, teachers, administrators, employers, parents, and community leaders, and to visit non-traditional schools and youth programs. AYPF also provided a state policy context for the visit by including presentations or discussions of relevant

state laws, regulations, policies, or practices. By creating the opportunity for policymakers to visit effective schools and to speak with the leaders and community partners, AYPF enabled policymakers to see what is working at the school, community, and district levels and the policies needed to implement and support such change.

The site visits also enabled policymakers to engage in discussions with colleagues from different agencies, ideologies, and programmatic areas with whom they might not normally interact in an effort to discover common ground. The participants, representing various perspectives, had a chance to share their views with each other and discuss the impact of certain policies.

Participants in the trips included U.S. Congressional staff from the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, House Education and Workforce Committee, Senate and House Appropriations Committees, and various Senate and House of Representative offices; senior staff from the U.S. Department of Education; senior staff from national policymaking organizations such as the National Governors Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, National School Boards Association, and Council of Chief State School Officers; and members of the education media.

This report summarizes the best of the innovative programs AYPF visited in an effort to provide insights to those working in the area of high school reform. It presents common trends across the four cities, describing what educators and observers agree is working in the complex area of high school reform. Common elements indicate what can be replicated in other cities and schools to address the pressing problems associated with educating high school-aged youth and preparing them for positive futures in the workforce. This report also highlights four schools to allow policymakers and practitioners to see the possibilities of new approaches to secondary school education and provides policy implications of this work.

Detailed reports for each trip are available at:

San Diego, CA: <http://www.aypf.org/tripreports/2003/tr052403.htm>

Cleveland, OH: <http://www.aypf.org/tripreports/2003/tr120203.htm>

New York City, NY:

<http://www.aypf.org/tripreports/2004/tr010804.htm>

Boston, MA: <http://www.aypf.org/tripreports/2005/tr053105.htm>

## Essential Elements of Successful High Schools

In visiting close to 20 schools and youth programs and in speaking with a host of school administrators, educators, state education officials, and community leaders, AYPF learned what is working to enhance high school reform. Among the lessons learned are five essentials common to all of the schools, programs, and districts undergoing reform. In addition to the five essentials, we have also identified a number of items that high school reformers need to address in future work in order to ensure success and implications for policy. The five essential lessons are briefly described here, followed by examples from the site visits.

1. **School leaders held high expectations for students and teachers, matched with accountability standards and ongoing assessment.** Expectations about achievement were communicated clearly and early in students' careers. In creating a climate for learning at schools, there was always an emphasis on student achievement and providing ways to assess student performance and ensure student success. Schools assessed student performance frequently to improve curriculum and instruction, particularly in core subjects.
2. **Schools emphasized creating small and personalized learning communities.** These small learning communities sought to engage and retain students in part by offering various learning options and student choice. Small learning communities also allowed strong and positive bonds to develop between students and teachers or other caring adults. Smaller size increased educators' ability to meet a variety of student needs, created a climate of learning to engage students, and worked to improve student achievement.

3. **High school reform included sustained professional development for teachers and principals.** The nature of the professional development was, at times, nontraditional and changed in response to the evolution of the reform effort and needs of teachers. However, all efforts to improve student achievement and to personalize learning included some form of ongoing professional development.
4. **Schools have established close links with the community** to gain support from parents and community groups, build partnerships with local businesses and organizations, raise financial support for school programs, and access additional services from the community to meet student needs.
5. **Schools have flexibility over hiring, budgets, curriculum, and scheduling and the freedom to adapt and change their strategies based on what is being learned and on the needs of the students.** Along with increased flexibility and freedom comes increased accountability, which schools were willing to accept.

**1. School leaders held high expectations for students and teachers, matched with accountability standards and ongoing assessment.** These expectations, standards, and assessments were evidenced in various ways at the different sites.

In California, state efforts to increase expectations and student achievement were apparent. Patrick Ainsworth, Director of the High School Leadership Division, California Department of Education, explained that the state has adopted a number of strategies to increase expectations for student performance, improve adolescent literacy, and influence adult attitudes about students and their levels of achievement. A large part of what is needed, said Ainsworth, is to "change the way adults think about their expectations for all high school students. It's a problem with adults who think these students aren't capable; it's not a problem with the kids."

Having high expectations for students and teachers includes having a system for account-

ability. A cornerstone of California's accountability system is the Academic Performance Index, which reflects a school's performance on standardized tests and end-of-course exams, disaggregated by subgroups. Scores range from 200 to 1000 with schools placed in comparison groups according to their size. California allows alternative schools to report on categories other than standardized reading and math scores given the transient nature of the student population; these schools have developed other ways to determine progress. Garfield High School, an alternative high school in San Diego, uses student suspension and attendance records as two indicators for the performance index, as well as a quantitative measure of reading skills.

California state law also requires students to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which measures competency in English and mathematics. Also, the University of California system has made its entrance requirements, known as the "A-G Requirements," available to all high schools so that their curricula can be aligned and students can meet entrance requirements upon completion of high school. All of these efforts are increasing expectations for students.

Moving to the district level in San Diego, Kathe Neighbor, High School Reform Manager for San Diego City Schools, described the city's reform strategy, the Blueprint for Student Success in a Standards-Based System. Part of the Schools for a New Society Initiative, it has been implemented with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Blueprint calls for changing the organizational structure of district schools and the entire system to support high-level teaching and learning for all students. It places a heavy emphasis on literacy and math development for students in grades K-12. At the high school level, the strategy focuses on the dual purposes of enabling all students to read and do math with facility and to meet the requirements for graduation and entrance to postsecondary education.

The Preuss Charter School in San Diego is a middle/high school chartered under the San Diego Unified School District to help students eligible for free and reduced price lunch prepare for college. The school of 650 students uses 150 tutors per semester from the University of California at San Diego, along with community volunteers, to provide mentors for students. An advisory program works with students to help them prepare for college, learn about financial aid, and begin thinking of themselves as college material. Principal Doris Alvarez says that the school "seeks to create connections to help students envision their future."

In Ohio, Joseph Johnson, Special Assistant to the Superintendent of Public Instruction Susan Zelman, Ohio Department of Education, discussed the Ohio State Board of Education's Task Force on Quality High Schools for a Lifetime of Opportunities. Johnson said that Ohio has been moving toward more rigorous curriculum and assessments over the past several years. The existing Ohio Proficiency Test, which is a relatively easy end-of-eighth grade test, is being replaced with the Ohio Graduation Test, which will measure competencies at the end of tenth grade. All students beginning with the Class of 2007 will be required to pass all five sections of the test in order to graduate. Johnson explained that only 11 percent of African American students of that class currently demonstrate proficiency in the five sections: reading, math, social studies, science, and writing. The Board realizes that closing the achievement gap and ensuring students are prepared to pass the new state proficiency tests and enter college and the workforce is a challenge and has discussed various statewide strategies to help districts and schools meet this challenge.

The Cleveland Scholarship Programs (CSP) is another initiative focused on high expectations for students. President and CEO Maria Boss explained that the program was begun when benefactors offered to pay for college for needy students, but could not find enough such students who were prepared to do college-level work. As a result, CSP prepares first-generation students for college while they are still in high school. CSP began in 1967 by placing two part-time college and financial aid advisors in five Cleveland high

schools. Today, CSP serves 50 public and parochial high schools with 18 advisors. Realizing they needed to begin working with younger students, CSP now begins working with students in the first through eighth grades on curricular choices and college awareness. Boss said that 86 percent of the students who participated in CSP activities stay in college and that 82 percent of CSP students return to northeast Ohio after college graduation. Clearly having high expectations for students from the early grades has helped this program improve student outcomes.

In New York City, the New Century High Schools Initiative (NCHSI) is designed to create new small high schools to help students meet high standards of academic and personal success. The New York City Department of Education (DOE) and three private foundations – the Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Open Society Institute – have invested \$30 million to transform large, comprehensive high schools into multiple small schools. Each school has its own identity and combines rigorous academic programs with innovative teaching. In these high schools, all students are prepared to take the Regents exams and to enter college as the smaller school size helps improve the climate for learning.

Former Principal Shael Suransky of Bronx International School, one of these new small high schools, said that he started working at Morris High School, a large neighborhood high school, in the Bronx in 1997. At the time only 80 students from a freshman class of 600 graduated, and by tenth grade, half of them had already left. The underlying problem, Suransky said, was that Morris High School was never designed to prepare 100 percent of students for college or high-wage careers; rather, it was structured to help only high achievers. The new high school now contains five smaller schools designed to meet the special needs of students, from English language learners to students who are significantly below grade level.

Boston is also participating in the Schools for a New Society (SNS) Initiative funded by the Carnegie Corporation and the Gates Foundation to support district-wide high school

reform in that city. Boston developed a long-term strategic plan to support high performing high schools, and a piece of that strategy is the development of a range of small high schools. One school, Boston Community Leadership Academy (BCLA), is a public pilot school allowed to operate with many of the freedoms of a charter school. It was originally a large, low-performing, comprehensive high school that was converted to pilot status as a way to reinvent itself, especially in terms of its academic expectations. BCLA is designed to prepare students for future success in college and responsible citizenship in a democracy. To advance this mission, the school design team created a rigorous academic curriculum that also promotes teamwork, community service, and citizenship.

BCLA adopted Core Values called ROAR, based on 1) everyone is Respected and valued; 2) everyone has Ownership; 3) everyone is Accountable; and 4) everyone does Rigorous work. The school also adheres to guiding principles for teaching and learning, which include personalization, academic rigor, authentic assessment, data-driven decision making, and shared leadership. The principal of BCLA, Nicole Bahnam, said, “It’s a matter of creating a culture that accepts that there is nothing wrong with the kids, but it’s the adults who must change.” To encourage students to keep working until mastery, the school operates on the grading principle of “A, B, C or not yet.” Bahnam said that since 2002, BCLA has shown dramatic increases in the percentage of students passing the Grade 10 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test in Mathematics and English Language Arts, and they hope to experience continuing improvement.

## **2. Effective high schools emphasized creating small and personalized learning communities.**

These small learning communities seek to engage and retain students in part by offering various learning options and student choice. Small learning communities allow opportunities for strong and positive bonds to be created between students and teachers or other caring adults. Often these are created by breaking large high schools into smaller schools with special themes or learning inter-

ests, but a specific learning community can also be created inside a large school.

San Diego City Schools (SDCS) has specified personalization of the learning process as one of the three guiding principles of its Blueprint for Student Success and has begun creating smaller schools. Even within larger high schools, there is an effort to provide personalized programs. Garfield High School, an alternative high school of 600 students with an average age of 17 and average reading level of fifth grade, is an example of how a school is creating personalized learning to meet students' needs.

Garfield High offers a variety of programs through extended day or regular classes to keep students engaged in their schooling. These programs include a middle college high school program, Oracle Independent Study Program, the Pregnant Minor Program and a Hospitality Restaurant Program. In the Oracle Independent Study Program, students fulfill the same requirements as a traditional school, but they have the opportunity to work one-on-one with a teacher who specializes in customizing courses. Students meet with a teacher once a week to develop a strategy to earn credits. Courses are taken one at a time, and usually 20 days of course work equals one credit. Students sign a contract and agree to stay on task by completing the work of five classes each week. Another program, the Pregnant Minor Program for pregnant teens and teen mothers, helps girls learn parenting and child development, language arts, and science while their children attend the child care center in the school.

In Ohio, the Cleveland municipal school system received a \$2 million grant from the Gates Foundation and the KnowledgeWorks Foundation to help transform their nine large high schools into smaller schools. The goal is to have all high school students attending classes in buildings with three or four separate schools, geared toward a particular academic interest, within five years.

Glenville High School in Cleveland is one of the first schools to receive funding to convert to small schools. Funding will help to cover planning time for teachers and staff to develop and organize the new small schools. The new Glenville Academic

Complex opened in 2004 and houses four new schools: The School of Fine and Performing Arts; the School of Business and International Affairs; the School of Science, Technology and Engineering; and the School of Leadership, Health and Wellness. The schools will function as individual schools with their own budgets, staff, calendars, instructional models, and principals. While initially hesitant about moving to small schools, teachers became convinced about the need to change after hearing from students how much better block scheduling and small learning communities were for them.

Kathleen Freilino, former Assistant Chief for Secondary Education, Cleveland Municipal School District, and former principal, James Ford Rhodes High School, another comprehensive high school slated for small school conversion, was an early supporter of block scheduling, small learning communities, and a focus on adolescent literacy. Freilino said that when block scheduling and ninth grade academies were introduced at James Ford Rhodes High School, they saw positive results. Freilino also developed an accelerated program for over-age ninth grade students at Rhodes, allowing students to gain two years of knowledge in one year and a summer.

The KnowledgeWorks Foundation assists schools and school districts in their efforts to create small schools through the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI). Program Director Harold Brown said OHSTI's work is fundamentally about "redoing high schools" with a focus on changing relationships between people within the schools. Small schools set the conditions for change, which include strong school leaders, well-prepared teachers, accurate data collection and analysis, and communities working together.

With the support of the KnowledgeWorks and Gates Foundations and the Ohio Department of Education, the OHSTI is providing assistance to 17 of the 21 large urban school districts in Ohio. Grants will support the development of reconfiguring large high schools to create smaller autonomous schools of approximately 100 students per grade level, or 400 within the learning

community. The KnowledgeWorks Foundation has funded each grantee for one year of planning with coaches and then selected certain schools for implementation. Implementation grants will provide \$765 per student to assist with the conversions. The Cleveland School District is the only district in which all of the high schools will receive conversion grants; the district is also receiving support for six to ten freestanding small high school startups.

Tom Payzant, Superintendent of Boston Public Schools, noted high schools are in various stages of reform in Boston. Payzant said the reason for small schools and small learning communities is to create an improved climate for teaching and learning and to better connect adults and students. At the present time, five large comprehensive, neighborhood high schools (Burke, Brighton, Charlestown, East Boston and English High Schools) have been directed to move to small learning communities, not small schools. Putting small learning communities into a building with one headmaster who oversees them is a more traditional approach than creating a number of independent small schools each with its own headmaster. With multiple small learning communities, students often share some of the same core academic requirements, and some classes are open to all students, regardless of their learning community.

A successful example of a comprehensive high school conversion into small schools is described in more detail in Part II (see Morris High School Campus, Bronx, New York).

**3. Successful high school reform included sustained professional development for teachers and principals.** In the discussions and research about transforming America's high schools, there is recognition that administrators, principals, and teachers need sustained and targeted professional development to be successful in improving student outcomes.

San Diego City Schools (SDCS) Instructional Leader Jack Fleck said that the district is investing heavily in the development of current principals as instructional leaders and is continuing to seek ways to develop new principals. To accomplish

this, principals receive at least one day of training a month. SDCS can remove principals who are not focused on improving instruction. Fleck describes the challenge as "transforming principals from plant managers to instructional leaders." Principals are also given training on how to assess their teachers. This ongoing professional development has helped the principals develop a strong sense of collaboration and a shared vision. Fleck also said that the district ensures that newly-hired teachers are prepared to emphasize literacy across the curriculum. They encourage teachers to act like coaches to engage students in learning. *(Note: Some of these initiatives are now on hold due to the recent change in superintendency.)*

At Southwest High School (SWHS) in the Sweetwater Union School District three miles from the border of Mexico, former Principal John DeVore urge principals to work "on" the system, not "in" the system to effect change. "I'm the teacher's first coach, and I spend 45-50 percent of my time in the classroom. Principals should be in the classroom developing his or her teachers. I'm interested in how all classes are doing, not just the AP chemistry class," said DeVore. Professional development for the past four years has been focused on improving student competencies in reading and writing. The school uses its Title I money for reading and writing coaches, professional development, and the creation of classroom libraries with materials of interest to adolescents.

SWHS also has received state funds to improve student outcomes by creating teams of teachers to better understand how to develop instruction and curriculum in order to meet the A-G requirements. Common preparation periods for teacher teams are scheduled and nine academic coaches were hired to help teachers use guided practice and checking for understanding. The coaches do not evaluate the teachers; rather they help them improve their teaching. The school also often reassigns the best teachers to work with ninth grade students.

High Tech High (HTH), a public charter school in San Diego, serves 600 students in grades 7-12. Most teachers are young and come to HTH with strong academic content knowledge. The school's

schedule has been designed so that teachers meet 45 minutes every day before the students arrive to focus on curriculum, team teaching, review of student work and other professional development activities. As a result of this intensive, school-based professional development, HTH received an exemption from the State of California, thus allowing HTH to fully credential their teachers.

Jacqueline Bell, Principal of Glenville High School, Cleveland, and her staff indicated that ongoing professional development has been a key ingredient to ensure staff support for the recent changes. The school uses outside experts and has sent its staff to visit other schools to learn about new models, but Bell indicated “the best resources are in-house.” Teams of teachers are now reviewing student work and sharing information and insights on why students are succeeding or failing and are improving their understanding of how to use assessments, such as the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT), to improve instruction.

In New York City, the small school design allows teachers to work collaboratively. “We are a learning community. We want to learn from each other and share best practices from each school,” said Suransky, Principal of Bronx International School located on the Morris High School Campus. A small faculty allows the principal to know and work closely with the teachers. “With a small school and fewer faculty members, you can get coherence that pushes for student achievement. You can create an opportunity for instructional focus and leadership and push teachers and help them grow.”

Robert Hughes, President, New Visions for Public Schools, an intermediary organization that provides leadership and technical assistance to new small high schools, said that one goal for the principals and teachers is to ensure ongoing discussions and review of student work and instructional practice. He said that rather than providing outside professional development to accomplish this, “reflection by the teachers on their students’ work is probably the most profound professional development, so we need to determine how that can happen in an intentional way.”

Michele Cahill at the New York Department of Education (DOE) pointed out the challenge of finding leaders for new small schools: there are not enough well-trained and visionary leaders. The DOE offers a leadership academy for aspiring new small schools principals. New Visions also recognizes the challenge of developing a cadre of qualified leaders for the new schools, assigning each principal a mentor as well as hosting networks to allow principals to share information across the city.

The New York City DOE recognizes that the school is the agent of instructional change, but that the district facilitates school reform by building the capacity of local schools to meet their students’ needs, by providing targeted assistance based on the needs of the school, and by focusing on system-wide problems like adolescent literacy.

In Boston, Superintendent Payzant stated that helping teachers change their instructional practice is a challenge not just in high schools but throughout grades K-12. The Collaborative Coaching and Learning model (CCL) is the district’s preferred model for professional development. The model, which takes time to develop and become routine, encourages teachers to work together and develop rubrics for evaluating student work. Once teachers begin to review and observe each other and to reflect on practice, they begin to develop professional learning communities. Although the Boston Teachers Union initially fought the use of CCL, they now support it. Teachers must participate in classroom visits and observations, but the CCL assessments cannot be used to rate teachers for performance or pay, only for improving instructional practice.

Whether professional development follows a traditional model or a more collaborative one, it is essential that it be ongoing and structured to improve student achievement. In all cities and districts visited, professional development is an essential part of high school reform efforts.

**4. Successful schools have established close links with the community** to gain support from parents and community groups, build partnerships with local businesses and organizations, raise financial support for school programs, and access

additional services from the community to meet student needs.

Although local schools and district level administrators spearhead the reform efforts, the greatest success occurs when ties to the community are strong in numerous ways. Community “buy-in” is essential before reconfiguring schools, as is listening to what students have to say. For example, when building curriculum and career pathway programs, local businesses and community colleges can provide their expertise.

In California, Kathe Neighbor described the process for involving the community in the development of a reform plan for San Diego high schools. The district started the conversation by sharing student outcome data with the public. When the community learned that of 9,000 incoming ninth grade students, only 6,000 were likely to graduate based on previous experience, people flocked together to solve the problem. The district shared this information with principals and teachers and asked them for input and feedback. The school district also reached out to business leaders and held student and parent focus groups. The voice of the students, however, was possibly the strongest in leading to changes to increase student engagement and academic rigor.

Some new schools in California were created specifically to address a community need. For instance, Preuss Charter School was created in 1999 to ensure that there would be diversity in California colleges by preparing children of color for postsecondary education. High Tech High was created to address the need for a qualified workforce in the high technology field. From the beginning, these schools have enjoyed close links with their communities.

In Ohio, Glenville High School Principal Jacqueline Bell described community “buy-in” as an important first step in the process to build consensus as their high school was divided into four smaller learning communities. Students also provided valuable guidance and input in determining and selecting the themes for the four schools.

The KnowledgeWorks Foundation (KWF) includes community involvement as one of its

non-negotiable attributes for grantees to adopt as they start the school reform process. KWF provides technical assistance to the school districts and helps them develop a stakeholder advisory group to provide input on the conversion process. KWF also offers a leadership institute three to four times a year and identifies centers of strength within the community for the schools.

Kathleen Freilino from the Cleveland Municipal School District recounted an experience involving community, families, and students in the change process of East High School, a low-performing high school. New school leaders were brought into the school to make the curriculum more academically oriented. Parents wanted a vocational focus for the school as they considered it the best “training” for their children. Faced with this standoff, the district used a process known as the Appreciative Inquiry Process, working collaboratively with community leaders to help them see the potential of a more rigorous program. Another community organization, the Federation for Community Planning also helped reach out to the community in support of the district’s reform plans.

In New York City, the South Bronx High School Campus involves community organizations and businesses in the academic program in innovative ways. The campus includes three small high schools: the New Explorers High School, Mott Haven Village Prep High School, and the Academy for Careers in Sports.

Mott Haven Village Prep has 75 students per grade and serves lower-performing students, those who are considered a Level 1 or 2 on a scale of 1 to 5 used to indicate student proficiency. The curriculum integrates humanities and natural sciences with community service and environmental awareness. Students spend time off-campus and in the community involved in research projects and internships. Mott Haven’s community partner is the East Side House Settlement which provides a counselor, social worker, and support services during the school day and after-school activities such as homework assistance, tutoring, and recreation. The East Side House Settlement provides a

weekly workshop with outside speakers on the importance of college as a way to raise the students' expectations of themselves and prepare them for college, and they also assist with college visits and finding financial aid. In another show of collaboration, when the school's principal must be gone for training or travel, the Executive Director of East Side House Settlement fills in as principal for a day.

The mission of the Academy for Careers in Sports' is to integrate sports and sports-related fields, such as marketing, management, law, medicine, journalism, and broadcasting, into an enhanced and challenging high school core curriculum. All students take the core curriculum, and once they pass the Regents Examination, the curriculum becomes more focused on sports careers. Principal Felice Lepore said that teachers are expected to make special efforts to reach out to families of students, and each staff is required to contact the families of a certain number of students. Teachers not willing to take on this responsibility are asked to work elsewhere. The school's community partner is Take the Field, which donated sports fields valued at \$2.7 million.

Students at the Academy for Careers in Sports are required to participate in an internship and mentorship, both central pieces of the program and part of the graduation requirements. Students take career classes three times a week to explore careers in sports. During junior or senior year, they participate in an internship one-half day a week with employers such as CBS, FOX, ESPN, Madison Square Garden, and the Hospital for Special Surgery.

In New York City, New Visions for Public Schools tries to energize and direct the reform process for creating new small high schools. Jennie Soler-McIntosh, Senior Program Officer at New Visions, said that the role of her organization is to tap into the interests, resources, and passions of those in the city who are interested in creating a new small school and to support an open process for proposals. Interested parties can submit a concept paper and can qualify for a planning grant of \$5,000 to \$10,000. New Visions ensures that the design of each new school will support a rigorous

curriculum, personalization, and a strong role for community partners, including demonstrating how the school will capitalize on the resources and strengths of the partner.

New Visions is also working systematically to create a support system for the new schools. The organization works with the regional education offices to help build their capacity through technical assistance, and it provides professional development and advice on clarifying the role of the community partner and how to effectively engage the community in the design and implementation process. Each region is also provided funds to support an office for small high schools, which is staffed with experts in community engagement, partnerships, and curriculum.

Constancia Warren, Senior Program Officer at the Carnegie Corporation and a member of the Core Governing Team in New York City, described the New Century High Schools Initiative, an effort supported by several foundations to create new small high schools that have a clear theme and mission and strong connections and partnerships with the community. Warren said that the requirement of a strong school-community partnership forces the prospective grantees during the planning process to develop close working relationships and build capacity along the way, which results in stronger schools.

One pillar of success in high school reform has been partnerships with colleges to provide students with rigorous and challenging learning experiences. LaGuardia Community College's Middle College High School is an example of a program that helps to make connections for youth on a college campus. Currently, it is evolving into the early college high school model. The early college model is designed to allow students to earn a high school diploma and two years' worth of post-secondary credit within a five-year period. Extra support is provided to help students master the high school curriculum, prepare for postsecondary experiences, and enroll in college, at no expense. College tuition is waived for students, and college textbooks are provided. While the middle college model allows students to take college classes when they desire or are ready, the early college

model is structured with the intention of helping all students earn a high school diploma and two years of postsecondary credit in five years through a more defined course structure.

In Boston, Paul Reville, Executive Director, The Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, discussed the importance of strong relationships with the community in his study *Head of the Class: Characteristics of Higher Performing Urban High Schools In Massachusetts*. One community in Massachusetts wanted to scale up high school reform in their city's schools based on the model of the successful University Park Campus School, a partnership with Clark University that is described in *Head of the Class*. Reville said that there is a problem in making change in homogeneous high schools where some students are performing well. "The community does not recognize the need to change, but high schools cannot be changed without community support and involvement," he said. "We are a long way from recognizing what Bill Gates said about high schools being obsolete—we're battling lots of inertia."

**5. Successful high schools have flexibility over hiring, budgets, curriculum, and scheduling and the freedom to adapt and change their strategies based on what is being learned and the needs of the students.** Many districts noted that creating effective smaller learning communities requires having flexibility over personnel, budgets, and curriculum. While all schools recognize the need to meet standards for performance, they noted that having the ability to adapt strategies to meet those standards and to help their students succeed is key.

Morris High School in the Bronx, New York, once a comprehensive high school, now houses five small schools. Each is autonomous with its own principal and staff, a parent coordinator, and a guidance counselor, and is designed to meet the needs of their student body. There is no longer a principal or administrator for the entire school complex, but the principals of each school work on joint administrative issues as needed.

The new small schools at the South Bronx High School Campus take advantage of the school-based hiring option for new teachers, which

allows a team of union representatives, principals, and parents to select teachers, without using the New York City's central hiring system. This has allowed the schools to hire teachers with the same philosophy and approach as each small school.

In Boston, the public school system and the Boston Teachers Union decided to develop the Pilot school model within the public system with much of the operating flexibility of charter schools. As such, these schools have the freedom to: hire and remove excess staff in order to create a unified school community; spend the per pupil budget in the manner that provides the best programs and services for students; create their own governing structure with increased power over budget approval, principal selection, and programs and policies; and set their own policies including promotion, graduation, attendance, and discipline policies, including longer school days and years.

In Cleveland, KnowledgeWorks Foundation encourages large comprehensive high schools to develop small schools, because they help to create the conditions for change: strong school leaders, well-prepared teachers, data collection and analysis, and communities working together. One of the non-negotiable attributes each grantee must ensure is the autonomy of a school with regard to curriculum, budget, leadership, and staffing.

Cleveland's Municipal School District leaders are struggling with how best to design and structure the leadership component for small schools. The district would like to have completely autonomous small school leaders, but it is unclear whether the small schools need a whole-building leader or campus manager. With support from the Cleveland Education Foundation, the district is bringing the principals of the nine conversion schools together to discuss leadership issues and to study ways to develop new leaders and structure new relationships.

Two Cleveland high schools, Glenville and Rhodes, started their reform efforts with small changes supported by federal grants. They continued to grow and expand their reform strategies as the staff and teachers became more comfortable with changes and when the positive impact upon

the students became clear. Glenville's first steps toward creating small learning communities began in the 1990s when they created a ninth grade academy and moved to block scheduling. They added a Twilight Academy to help students who were unsuccessful in the day program. Glenville formed tenth grade academies the next year and the Glenville Academic Complex with four new schools opened in school year 2004-2005. The school continues to adapt its programs as it learns how to meet student needs.

At New Explorers High School in the South Bronx High School campus, Despina Zaharakis, Principal, explained that she and others wanted to create a school where students who wanted to learn could learn by doing and making connections. Zaharakis said, "New Explorers is a work in progress. If something is not going right, we change it. It's not a rigid bureaucracy that never adapts."

### More Work Ahead – Issues That Need Attention

The districts, schools, and programs described and those included in Part II should be lauded for their success in developing effective learning opportunities that result in increased academic outcomes and life chances for the young people they serve. Changing high schools is difficult, takes a long time, and requires constant attention to the changing environment. Leaders need to be persistent and committed, yet flexible and innovative.

While it is important to embed the essential elements described in this publication into schools as part of a reform strategy to ensure improved student outcomes, this is only part of the work that needs to be done. As school leaders become more involved in the reform process, other important issues need to be dealt with. Many of these second order issues do not receive much attention in the reform literature, but without serious thought given to them, reform efforts are unlikely to be successful and sustainable. Based on the site visits and knowledge of effective high school reform

efforts, AYPF believes that the following issues need greater focus and attention by policymakers and reformers.

First, **context matters**. The community context for change is extremely important in understanding what policies are successful and which ones are met with resistance. For instance, in Cleveland, school district leaders described the difficulty they had in redesigning a high school with a highly skeptical community. The school district spent a year working with parents and community groups and leaders to convince them of the value of the change, but the parents and community groups had a very deep-seated mistrust of the school district and public officials and disagreed with the proposed changes. Despite the outreach, the community continued to disagree with the school district's proposed changes, and high school redesign efforts have been slow-going. Trying to insert a high school reform effort or model into a community, without community support or understanding the environment, is most likely doomed to failure. Additionally, reform models need to be adaptable to meet local needs and goals, and model developers and technical assistance providers need to be flexible and willing to adapt and change their model to meet local concerns and realities.

Second, reformers must ensure a **focus on teaching and instruction at the same time that structural changes are being made**. In the hierarchy of making difficult change, improving teaching and instruction has to be near the top (next to changing or creating a school culture), which is why it is usually one of the last areas dealt with. Changing the structure of schools may be necessary, but it does not automatically translate into or result in significant instructional or curricular changes. Changes to instruction must be made deliberately and intentionally, with great focus of mind and resources. Structural and instructional changes must be aligned and support each other. Postponing instructional change until structural

"We are flying this plane as we are building it. You need to have an aggressive plan to make change, and then change becomes the culture of the school." — Jack Fleck, San Diego Instructional Leader

changes have been made can result in mismatched and possibly contradictory strategies that lead to the very real issue of teachers being exhausted by and resistant to change. This is where capacity building becomes so important.

Third, **schools and communities must find ways to provide a differentiated education and provide learning options to meet each student's particular needs.** Students have literally hundreds of different needs and circumstances that can limit their learning. Schools need to partner with other community organizations, particularly health and mental health facilities, to ensure that young people are in the right frame of mind and able to learn. Teachers need to determine the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student and develop learning strategies to help. Opportunities should exist in communities for students to attend high performing comprehensive high schools, small schools, schools within schools, charter schools, high quality alternative education programs (managed by the school district or community based organizations), postsecondary institutions, and to participate in on-line learning opportunities and in community-based learning opportunities like service-learning, work-based learning, internships, and apprenticeships. While some school districts, particularly rural districts, may have difficulty in providing a wide range of choices for youth (distance education can provide more options), every community can and should create alternatives to the traditional high school that provide better matches to each student's learning style and needs, and they need to draw upon community resources to meet the family and health needs of students.

Fourth, **the culture of the school determines the quality of learning.** If the school culture is not one of high expectations and respect, students will not be challenged and engaged learners. Changing attitudes and behaviors is one of the hardest things to accomplish and requires strong, consistent leadership that models the desired behavior. Creating a positive, respectful culture takes time and must include steps to reach every adult in the building (i.e. school safety officers and administrators, not just teachers). Schools and adults must also support authentic youth voice, a meaningful

role for youth in decision-making, and a democratic environment.

Fifth, the **community, not just the school district, must be held accountable for the health and well-being of high school-aged youth.** Education policymakers must begin to envision a broader system of supports for youth that includes other city or county government services, health and mental health services, family and community services, youth programs, faith-based organizations, employers, and voluntary youth-serving organizations. Because students are in school for a limited period of time, and because students have more than just educational needs, accountability systems should look at how the entire community develops and supports its young people. Using academic measurements of success is only one way to measure the health and well-being of adolescents and young adults. Communities need to build data and accountability systems that track college and career outcomes, and that measure outcomes such as teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol use, mental health, and labor market attachment.

### Implications for Policy

Many of the lessons learned from these site visits relate to practice and school-level policies. But these lessons can help inform a conversation about national and state policies to improve high school students' outcomes. A number of policy issues are identified as follows:

First, **policies affecting secondary schools need to be flexible.** Legislation, regulations, guidance, and program designs need to be flexible to ensure that schools and districts can meet the needs of their students to ensure positive outcomes. Schools frequently need to add, adapt, or change programs to meet special needs of students. Laws and regulations that are too prescriptive can prevent districts and schools from responding quickly to meet emerging student needs and changing student populations. Flexibility with regard to staffing, personnel, union agreements, budgeting, curriculum, and assessment are necessary to ensure personalized and individually responsive education for all students. Just as one size does not fit all students, one size does not fit all schools and districts.

Flexibility in legislation and regulations should include recognition of the need to cross traditional boundaries in education such as those from middle school to high school and from high school to postsecondary education. Schools and districts need more flexibility of funding streams and staffing requirements when creating or supporting programs that bridge middle, high, or postsecondary education. Many funding streams are strictly limited to only secondary schools or postsecondary education, creating barriers when educators try to create blended programs. Also, staffing requirements at the different levels can make it difficult for schools and districts to find the most highly qualified and knowledgeable individuals to teach at multiple levels.

Second, public policy should **support building the capacity of teachers, administrators, and educational leaders** so that they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the challenge of educating all students to high levels. The first capacity-building need is to equip leaders to have the kinds of conversations needed with regard to high school reform. Often, policy and education leaders (at the national, state, and local levels) have not been exposed to the best thinking, research, exemplary practices, or various visions of effective high schools. A necessary first step is to help develop this leadership capacity.

Capacity building must also focus on helping teachers gain the skills to implement a rigorous curriculum. The act of requiring students to take more rigorous or higher level courses does not necessarily mean that teachers know how to teach these classes. An example is the current interest in expanding Advanced Placement courses, which is a good strategy. But, one must ask the question: Do schools have the teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills to teach these higher level classes to populations of students who may need extra help to succeed? Guidance counselors are another group in need of professional development, particularly as they are often the gatekeepers in middle and high schools to prerequisites and college-level courses. Helping them understand the importance of having all students take college-level or rigorous classes is critical.

While a great deal of funding is currently available to school districts to provide professional development, much of it could be used more effectively to identify where leaders, teachers, and administrators need knowledge and then intentionally providing programs designed to deal with those needs. Educators also need to develop the capacity to work together as part of professional learning communities, and more professional development should be teacher- and school-driven.

Third, **accountability systems need to take into consideration the contributions of other public programs as well as various ways of measuring success.** Systems need to be developed that measure the skills, knowledge, and health and well-being of students in addition to standardized test scores. Successful schools have strong community partnerships, and communities should measure their schools based on the health and success of these partnerships.

For instance, some partners provide health and mental health services to teens, thereby reducing impediments to learning and increasing attendance and student performance. Other schools have partnerships with postsecondary institutions, which result in increased attendance, student performance, and entry to college. Partnerships with employers can lead to better job opportunities and paid internships. These are important relationships and result in positive outcomes for youth, which should be considered as policymakers rank and rate the effectiveness of public school systems.

Fourth, to create these community accountability systems, it is necessary to have **data systems that keep track of where students are and how they do**, as well as to determine their longer-term outcomes. Policymakers can help provide the framework for a more systematic and comprehensive data collection system that crosses programs and agencies. While there is resistance to collecting data based on a single student identifier, policymakers need to realize that they will not be able to answer questions about the long-term effectiveness of publicly-supported programs without knowing the long-term outcomes of students. Policymakers can be instrumental in bringing together the various agencies and programs that

need to be involved in creating an integrated data system, ensuring that definitions across programs are consistent and promote shared information. Policy leadership at the national and state levels is particularly important in designing these data frameworks, collecting non-duplicative data, and supporting the development of such systems.

Fifth, **policymakers should ensure that funds follow students** based on their educational choices. If students drop out of public school and return to an alternative education venue outside the public school system, the public dollars often do not flow to that program, and, as a result, many alternative education programs struggle to provide adequate services. Dollars should flow to the institution the student attends. Another funding issue is raised by the increasing numbers of high school students taking college courses. Questions are raised as to how to pay for those courses, and which system should support the cost. Transparent

and consistent funding policies can support high school students' access to such opportunities. Another possible funding policy change would be to guarantee that all students have access to an amount of funds for 12-16 years of education and allow the student to decide how, when, and where to use the allotted money for education.

These are not new ideas, but policymakers seem hesitant to consider them, and even fewer policymakers are pressing for their adoption. But without significant policy shifts, our secondary education system will continue to perpetuate the failures of the past. The schools described in the next section have tried to create mechanisms to deal with many of the issues mentioned in this report, but they are still bound by strict regulatory and legislative mandates that stifle innovation, and they lack supportive legislation or regulatory frameworks to allow new forms of learning to emerge.

## Part II: Variations on a Theme: How Four Secondary Schools Are Helping Youth Succeed

During AYPF site visits, policymakers had opportunities to see numerous reform initiatives. Part II of this report will focus on four secondary schools that illustrate the essential elements of effective student learning and serve as examples to others seeking to improve secondary schools.

### The Gary and Jerri-Ann Jacobs High Tech High, San Diego, California

High Tech High (HTH) is an independent public charter school designed to serve 600 students in grades 7-12 in San Diego. Gary Jacobs, Chairman of the Board and Founder, said that the school was conceived by a group of San Diego high technology business leaders and local educators to address the high-tech industry's problems of finding qualified people to fill the growing number of job opportunities in San Diego. The design is based on three key principles: Personalization, Adult World Connection, and Common Intellectual Mission. Innovative features include performance-based assessment, daily shared planning time for staff, state of the art technical facilities for project-based learning, internships for all students, and close links to the high tech workplace.

The school was started in 2000 and currently enrolls approximately 450 students. Students are accepted through a lottery process and reflect the demographics of San Diego. Eight percent of the students qualify as special education students, which is a relatively high number for a charter school. Larry Rosenstock, CEO and Principal, said that because of the personalized nature of the education at HTH, the school has a good reputation for serving special education students, so more and more apply. The Title I money the school receives, based on the student enrollment, is used to help improve reading.

Rosenstock served as project director of the New Urban High Schools, which studied urban high schools that were using school-to-work strategies as a lever for whole school reform. The design also grew from the concept of academic-occupational integration of coursework, espoused by the

Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. Concepts of student internships, access to an adult milieu, and engaging in relevant work were later drawn from the National School-to-Work Opportunities Act.

Rosenstock said HTH has integrated vocational education and academics. "The methodology of vocational education and the ideology of content are married here. This is exactly how Perkins money should be used," he said. HTH receives funding from the Perkins Act, but, Rosenstock added, "You aren't able to tell if this is a technical school, an academic school, or an art school."

HTH does not use tracking or ability grouping. All students are educated to exceed the California A-G university entrance requirements. Teachers design their courses to meet the standards, but have great flexibility, which allows teachers and students to explore their passions. All courses are approved by the University of California or accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. HTH has a five-period day, but some periods meet for two hours, while others are combined.

Teachers do not have tenure; they are on one-year contracts. Of the 25 existing contracts at the end of the 2002-03 school year, 23 were reoffered, and 21 were accepted. For the handful of openings, HTH had 250 applicants. Rosenstock said there is a good dynamic between the teachers and that teachers are not asked back if they do not get along with others. Teachers generally are young and have deep content and strong academic knowledge. They come from all over the United States, but to teach at HTH, they need to be certified by the State of California. Because this has been an issue in hiring, HTH has been granted an exemption by California to fully credential their own teachers. HTH received this exemption because the

"The whole proposition of high school is to engage kids and treat them with respect," Larry Rosenstock, CEO and Principal, High Tech High School

school provides 45 minutes of professional development every day before the students arrive.

Teachers teach no more than 50 students. This encourages the unit of accountability to be between the teacher and students. Advisories of one adult and 12 to 13 students are formed, and advisors also conduct home visits and family interviews.

As a performance-based school, students can move through the school at their own speed, taking three, four, or even five years to graduate. Every student creates a digital portfolio, which provides a comprehensive look at his or her work and learning. Each digital portfolio includes a personal statement, resume, work samples, and information about projects and internships. The digital portfolio is mapped to the traditional high school transcript to ensure that HTH's students can demonstrate their learning and educational achievements in ways that fit the standard measurements of student achievement used by the state and colleges and universities. For projects, students have built robots, a hovercraft, and a submarine, and one produced a video on Japanese internment during World War II.

HTH's emphasis on project-based learning as a teaching strategy helps students develop a personal connection with their work. Students explore their individual interests and passions and collaborate with adults to produce work with deeper meaning than that of a graded course. Every student completes at least one term-long internship outside of school as a junior or senior.

All of HTH's graduates to date have gone to college. The school's API score is 10 (the highest) compared to all similar schools in California and

in San Diego. HTH also has the highest test scores for Latinos and for disadvantaged youth in California. This is possible, Rosenstock said, not because they "teach to the test," but because they prepare their students to think critically and analyze, by engaging them in their learning. In 2004, HTH will open an international studies program for high school students and expand to a middle school.

As a charter school, HTH receives a \$5,500 per pupil expenditure (the San Diego per pupil expenditure is \$7,600), and the operating budget to educate a student at HTH is \$6,200. Additional funds come from the school's foundation. The school also receives funds for facilities, separate from the per pupil expenditure, and has recently received a \$6.4 million replication grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support HTH's technology-based education programs and to establish nine additional HTH sites in the United States.

This charter school has developed a program with clear expectations and mission, founded on small and personalized learning communities. They have integrated professional development into the daily schedule and built strong roots in the community. As a charter school, it also has flexibility and autonomy in its work to accommodate students' needs.

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## James Ford Rhodes High School, Cleveland, Ohio

James Ford Rhodes High School is a large, comprehensive school that went through a number of changes to emphasize personal learning communities and improve outcomes for students. The school, built in the 1930s, is a traditional-looking high school showing its age. There are 1,763 students: 676 freshmen, 486 sophomores, 333 juniors, and 268 seniors. As a neighborhood school, the student body represents the demographics of the community: 60 percent White; 21 percent African American; 17 percent Hispanic, and one percent Asian and multi-racial respectively. One hundred percent of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. In addition to being a neighborhood school that draws about 1,000 students locally, about 700 students from the rest of the city attend Rhodes to participate in one of the special programs at the school.

Rhodes was the first comprehensive high school in Cleveland to begin reform efforts and switch to a block schedule, as a way to combat problems with attendance, class participation, and low student performance. The culture of the school had been one that allowed students to fail on a regular and persistent basis with little being done to help students succeed. For example, in the mid 1990s, if students were late in the morning, they were locked out of their first-period class and directed to sit in the gym, where they obviously were not learning. Many ninth graders were 17 and 18 years old, repeatedly held back because of low skill levels. Of a class of 600 ninth graders in the mid-1990s, only 88 went on to graduate.

When Kathleen Freilino became the new principal at Rhodes in 1996-97, she encouraged the staff to ask, "What do we need to do to help students succeed?" This caused the staff to inspect everything about the school and determine where the weaknesses were, what was irrelevant to success that could be jettisoned, and what resources and knowledge the staff needed to help students succeed. At the same time, the district instituted a requirement for each school to develop, with staff input, an academic achievement plan.

In 1997-98, following the change in leadership and with a staff-approved academic achievement plan in place, a ninth grade academy was implemented for 100 students with four teachers, a critical friends group of teachers (to allow them to discuss and explore instructional improvement strategies) was formed, more intensive and focused professional development was provided to teachers, and staff began discussing moving to small learning communities.

The following year, the school created several small learning environments. The Ford Academy of Manufacturing Sciences (FAMS), which uses an elective curriculum developed by Ford Motor Company and offers a paid apprenticeship for five weeks during the summer at a Ford-affiliated manufacturing firm, was instituted with an enrollment of about 100 students. A Naval Junior ROTC program, a re-entry program for former dropouts and students behind grade level, and a teacher education academy were also implemented. Concurrently, the academic rigor of the ninth grade academy was increased, and more honors and AP classes were added in the upper grades. More frequent and intensive professional development was offered to teachers, organized site visits to schools that had already instituted some of the changes were organized for all staff, and more critical friends groups among teachers were established. That year, Rhodes High School also was a recipient of a federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR/D) grant, which helped support the ninth grade academies and programs for at-risk students. Finally, the staff began serious consideration of moving from horizontal teams (each grade as a team) to vertical teams (including teachers from grades 9-12).

By 1999-2000, the school implemented a new four-by-four block schedule, in which students complete four full credits during the first half of the year, and then take four more courses in the second half of the year. A freshman core curriculum and a twilight school, which provides classes after school and in the evening, were implemented, and professional development was provided in partnership with the Talent Development program at Johns Hopkins University and Cleveland State

University (CSU). The school district also developed the Masters in Urban Secondary Teaching program (MUST) with CSU to help prepare new teachers for urban schools. The program offers summer classes, places the prospective teacher in a classroom to watch and learn for a year, begin teaching part-time, and finally take over the classroom under the guidance of an experienced teacher. The school now has about 20 MUST interns each year along with CSU professors who come into classrooms to provide extensive assessment of instruction.

In 2000-2001, the school implemented a sophomore academy and the High Tech Program, a math-based program that links with local colleges to provide higher level math. An interactive math and video tutorial for Algebra 1 and 2 is provided by the Cleveland Community College (CCC). Students can also take courses at CCC for college credit without having to pay, although because of budget concerns, CCC may have to begin to charge high school students. The high school's calculus class is electronically connected to CSU, and 17 students earned college credit for math classes taken online. For students who do not plan to study math as a major in college, the High Tech Program allows them to complete all their college math credits while in high school, if they desire.

In 2001-2002, the staff and administrators decided to discontinue the sophomore academy and move to smaller, themed schools. Further reforms included a version of a "daytime" twilight academy to help students make up credits during the day, an extended day program, and the addition of a CISCO academy (programs that offer coursework for a complete range of software networking concepts by providing basic through advanced training in a "real world" lab setting). Classes and curriculum were sequenced school-wide for greater alignment and to help better prepare students for upper level work.

With school year 2002-2003, planning started for the transition to three small schools within the building, which will be implemented in school year 2004-2005. When the school breaks into small schools, there will be three separate entrances, one for each school, which will create a very different feel for the large school.

Every year has brought additional programs and approaches to help meet the needs of every student. For example, Marok said teachers found that many students needed alternatives to the regular day classes for a variety of reasons. While the school initially provided a twilight academy with individualized learning and small classes for students who were disruptive and low-achieving, they decided to expand it to

The former principal, Wayne Marok, said that the journey from the large high school to one that is focused on student learning and greater personalization has been about finding ways of "shaping the school to fit the students."

any student who needed help outside the regular classroom structure. This includes students who transfer in from other school districts in the same grade level but need to make up credits. The twilight academy is

structured to allow students flexibility to take one, two, or three classes, and if they want to earn more credits, they can take a block class from the regular schedule. The twilight academy has 266 graduates and is hoping to reach 300 by the end of the year.

A gateway program designed for ninth graders who are off-track and low in credits was also implemented. It focuses on basic skills and offers no electives. In partnership with Johns Hopkins University, the gateway program provides double periods of English and math along with courses in world history and science. This, said Marok, is another example of how the school has adjusted to meet the needs of its students. However, Marok added that there is a cultural difference between the educational approach of the twilight school, which is very individualized and flexible, and the regular day classes, which are more standard.

Marok indicated that many of the changes have resulted in an improved reputation for the school, as well as improved indicators for students. Currently, the school has a waitlist of 1,300 students for the FAMS and ROTC programs, and selections are made based on grade point average and attendance requirements. Attendance rates have increased from 76 percent in 1999-2000 to 87 percent in 2000-2001 to 95 percent in 2001-2002. The failure rate has decreased similarly from 38 percent in 1998-1999 to 13 percent in 2001-2002. Marok indicated that Rhodes High School is the only comprehensive high school in Ohio that is a School of Promise, which means it is closing the achievement gap.

As this case study shows, a gradual approach to reform can be successful when the educators are learning and adapting as they make changes.

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## Morris High School Campus, Bronx, New York

When New York City began the process of breaking their large comprehensive high schools into small schools, Morris High School was selected as a prime target. Morris High School was one of the lowest-performing high schools in the Bronx and one of the hardest to reform, said Shael Suransky, former Principal of Bronx International School, one of the new small schools in the Morris building. Suransky started working at Morris High School in 1997. Suransky said then only 80 students from a freshman class of 600 graduated. The underlying problem, Suransky contended, was that the school was never designed to prepare everyone for college or high-wage careers; rather, it was structured to help only high achievers. As a result, district leadership selected Morris as one of the first high schools to be transformed into a community of small schools.

Morris High School began its transition to smaller learning communities with the opening of four small schools in 2002: the Bronx Leadership Academy II, High School for Violin and Dance, School for Excellence, and Bronx International High School. As these schools were phased in, the remaining students in the comprehensive school formed a fifth school that will eventually be replaced by another new small school. The transition from the comprehensive school to the new small schools is taking place over a period of four years, starting with the freshman class with the addition of one grade each year. There are approximately 850 students in the four new small schools on the Morris campus, with 700 students attending the “old” Morris High School program.

Each school is completely autonomous with its own principal and staff, parent coordinator, and a guidance counselor. There is no longer a principal or administrator for the entire school; rather, the principals of each school work on joint administrative issues as needed. The schools share a bilingual psychologist and a clinical social worker, as well as the biology lab, but each school has its own curriculum and biology teacher. Common spaces, such as hallways, the gymnasium, and cafeteria are also shared.

To graduate from high school, all students must now pass five New York Regents exams, including English, Math, U.S. History, Global History, and Science. Given that many of the students who attend the schools on the Morris campus perform below the sixth-grade level in math and English, the schools face a great challenge in raising student achievement. As the schools are only in their second year of operation, student outcome measures are still limited.

Paulette Franklin, Principal of the Bronx Leadership Academy II, a New Century High School (NCHS), located on the second floor of the building, said her students explore the curriculum through the lens of scientific inquiry and are being prepared for ongoing studies in the science disciplines. Partnering with the South Bronx Churches, the school works to provide a challenging, safe, and creative learning environment to awaken students’ natural curiosity about their surrounding environment. Currently the school has 158 ninth and tenth graders who come to school professionally dressed in a uniform of dark slacks or skirts and white shirts. There is strong parental involvement with over 75 percent of parents attending parent-teacher conferences.

Joe Sherman, former Principal of the High School of Violin and Dance, came to Morris High School in 1998. The curriculum is based on music education, and violin and dance are viewed as fundamental disciplines. Students are accepted to the school if they have an interest in violin or dance; they need not demonstrate a level of proficiency in either area. Sherman believes that if a student can learn how to play the violin, he or she can master any curriculum.

The School for Excellence, a NCHS, has 225 students, said Wade Fuller, Principal. This school grew from a program at Morris High School before the conversion, and then became a small school. The school focuses on arts integration, has instructional teams with 75 to 85 students each, and has extended day activities such as tutoring, chess, and academic and social clubs. Ongoing professional development is critical to success, and Fuller said his teachers use various strategies, such as critical friends and a constant examination

of the curriculum, to determine how art can be included. The school's partner is the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), a non-profit organization that works with high schools to enable at-risk students to stay in school, graduate, and go on to college or a career. ISA provides coaches to teachers and administrators and has funded trips to college campuses and college fairs for students beginning in ninth grade.

Because 90 percent of the students come into ninth grade below grade level in English and math, Fuller said the school invested in small classroom libraries and a teacher who can ramp up reading, in accordance to the Department of Education requirement. ISA helped teachers integrate reading and writing into all courses and projects. For example, students keep a journal in every class, they read to elementary school students on a regular basis, and they have 25 minutes of sustained reading every day. English language learners are given extra help as needed.

Interdisciplinary teams are being created to better understand which reading strategies or diagnostics are most effective, to simplify the teaching of reading, and to share the knowledge with teachers across the system. Fuller said that by using some of these interventions, they have learned how to increase students' reading levels from the second grade to the sixth grade in four semesters.

Suransky described the Bronx International High School, which serves an immigrant population from 30 different countries. Students who score at or below the 20th percentile on the Language Assessment Battery and have been in the United States less than four years are the target population. Students are allowed to use their native language as needed to help them understand content information. Suransky said students are usually ready to move to full-time English instruction in five to six months. The key components of the school's design include: project-based interdisciplinary curriculum, English as a Second Language development methodology infused in all content

areas, heterogeneous collaborative groupings, extended class periods in core academic subjects, and autonomous teacher teams that collaborate to serve small cohorts of students.

One way to help create this supportive environment is to develop trust among the principals of the small schools. Each week, a building council of the principals meets to discuss issues relating to common space and student performance. As a sign that the small school design is having a positive impact, the number of students graduating from the "old" high school has increased from 77 to 220. Staff believe that as the "old" high school is getting smaller, students are benefiting from the small school environment, and the culture of the school building is changing to one of high expectations and support for all students. One positive indicator is that each school has at least a 90 percent attendance rate, and the number of students who want to attend one of the schools has increased over previous years.

In a group discussion, the principals agreed that other positive changes are a result of moving to small schools: the building is calmer and quieter, even though there are more students; there is a better learning atmosphere and higher attendance; security problems have been alleviated; and security and administrative costs have been reduced.

Creating high expectations for students, building small learning communities, integrating professional development and collaboration, working closely with community, and being given flexibility and autonomy has paid off for the new schools created at the Morris High School Academy Campus.

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"It's the job of all the adults in the building to make sure all students are successful,"  
 Shael Suransky, former Principal, Bronx International High School

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## Boston Day and Evening Academy, Boston, Massachusetts

Meg Maccini, Head of School, Boston Day and Evening Academy, explained that Boston Evening Academy (BEA) began as the Downtown Academy in 1995 two years later becoming a Pilot school. In 1998, BEA then became a Horace Mann Charter School and the first diploma-granting, public evening high school in Boston. Horace Mann status allows the school to remain “in district” through a unique partnership with the Boston Public Schools (BPS), but gain a high degree of independence and innovation similar to that of a charter school. Within this agreement, BPS provides a facility to Horace Mann charters.

Teachers in Horace Mann charter schools are union members, but the school has freedom in curriculum and hiring. Boston Day and Evening Academy must apply for a recharter after the first five years, the second five years, and subsequently every ten years.

In September 2004, Boston Evening Academy expanded and became Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA), serving 305 students with classes running morning through evening. The new day school operates Monday through Friday during day-time hours and serves overage students who have not yet reached the eighth grade benchmarks set by the district. BPS sees the day academy as a safety net program for low-performing eighth graders. The day program enrolls students who are experiencing high school for the first time and who are overage for grade level, while the evening program serves a population of 16 to 23 year olds who are also overage for grade level and already dropped out of high school.

The mission of both programs is to serve students who have not been well-served by other schools. Many of the students are teenage parents and work

to help support their families. BDEA encourages academic achievement through deep and meaningful relationships between adults and students. Student attendance can be very sporadic due to the life circumstances of the students, Macinni said, “So we have to work hard to tailor programs around their needs.” The average daily attendance for the day program for the 2004-2005 school year was approximately 90 percent, which is high for an alternative school. BDEA offers three meals a day and other important services, including a nurse available 12 hours a day and counseling.

Emily Steele, the Chairwoman of the School’s Board of Directors, was for years a tireless advocate for the school and the options it presented to students who faced barriers in the traditional school system. She summarized the school’s approach to working with the youth in this way: “We turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones.”

The academic program is based on the common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Students have multiple learning styles and ways of demonstrating what they know and can do. To facilitate optimal learning opportunities and academic growth, each student has an individual learning plan. Students demonstrate their mastery

“Our philosophy is to accept students for who they are, not who we want them to be,”  
Meg Macinni, Head of School, Boston Day and Evening Academy

of the school’s competencies through the use of portfolios, exhibitions, and other measures.

This year, 49 of 92 day students will “step up” to a higher competency level based on their attendance, commitment to the school community, and academic achievement in each competency area. Students will attend the Massachusetts College of Art, the University of Massachusetts, local community colleges, and the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. BDEA’s success rate is comparable to alternative education schools across nation. “We admit we are not successful with all students,” Maccini said. “We have to address many barriers to academic achievement. We can’t solve all the issues alone. We need to partner with many other organizations to help these young people succeed.”

Lindsa McIntyre, Assistant Head of the Day Academy, said a critical component of the school is to establish relationships with each student's family. McIntyre called it the "art of the home visit." Teachers and staff visit each student at home to make connections and earn the support of the family or caregivers. Adults in the school act as advocates for each student. "We want to show we care about our students," McIntyre said. Teachers provide differentiated, individualized learning to meet each student's needs. As a result, there is a marked improvement in attendance.

Karen Cowan, Assistant Head of the Evening Academy, said the program is very similar to the day program, but it provides a more adult environment because the students are generally 18 years or older. Many students already are parents living on their own, and some work 20 hours per week. BDEA provides help with housing and child care to the extent possible, and it also offers independent online learning for those students who cannot attend school due to family, child, or job responsibilities.

Both the day and evening schools credit good professional development for teachers as a key reason for their success. Teachers use the individual learning plans to determine how best to meet learning objectives, as students arrive at BDEA with varying skill levels. Most students take core classes of math, reading, and writing, with electives in addition to advisory. Advisory is a core component of both programs and provides students with a teacher advisor/advocate and curriculum designed to address their learning and non-academic needs (financial literacy, problem-solving, health and wellness, etc.). Some students arrive with enough credits to enter BDEA as seniors. To earn a high school diploma, students must demonstrate competency in the school's Habits of Mind and content areas, pass the MCAS, and in their senior year complete an internship, conduct a senior research project, create and maintain a digital portfolio to showcase the student's most challenging and difficult and most successful work, and make a formal senior presentation that is judged by faculty and staff.

Susan Werbe, Director of the Office of Institutional Development, said BDEA receives the same per pupil expenditure of \$7,100 as other district high schools, but that amount is not enough to cover the costs of working with and educating the students at BDEA, because they have so many needs. She said the real cost is close to \$11,000 per student, and BDEA must raise funds privately to help make up the difference (as a Horace Mann charter it has the authority to raise additional funds.) BDEA also receives Title I funds. This, however, does not trigger the adequate yearly provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act because the school is so small and, as an alternative school, is held to different outcomes.

Looking ahead, Maccini said BDEA has plans to create an alumni services program to help students who leave the program to achieve success. The school would also like to start a residential program for students who plan to attend college and who need transitional housing their senior year of high school.

Although the Boston Day and Evening Academy enrolls students with significant needs, it reflects the traits common to successful high schools. The staff have high expectations for the students which are clearly stated, they have established small learning communities with individualized learning plans, they have developed strong links with community organizations to provide services and funding, and they have autonomy to make decisions concerning budget, hiring, and curriculum.

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