HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

“Most successes of whole-school reform efforts are not the consequence of one practice or another, but instead the gathering of many practices under one roof and the interactions among them...it is the gathering of several strategies under one roof, especially certain combinations of strategies, that matters...there is no single, correct way to implement reforms...each school must set their own goals, and then carve their own path towards meeting their objectives, using lessons from other schools but always adapting them to fit their own realities.” From Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings (1999)

The following strategies have been summarized from a variety of sources related to high school redesign and improvement. They are categorized in the following sections: Successful Comprehensive High School Reform Models; Successful Transition to High School/Freshman Year; Successful Transition to Post Secondary Education; Successful Instructional Strategies/Reading and Writing; Successful Professional Development (PD); and Fostering Independent Learning.

Successful Comprehensive High School Reform Models

- See Engaging Schools descriptions of 12 comprehensive reform initiatives and list of common strategies.

- Strategies reviewed by US Dept of Ed in Key High School Reform Strategies: An Overview of Research Findings:
  - Raising academic standards and expectations.
  - Creating small learning environments enabling students and teachers to work together.
  - Developing a structure for learning around careers and students’ interests.
  - Promoting student achievement by enhancing educators’ professional development.
  - Linking students’ out-of-school learning experiences to classroom learning.
  - Providing counseling to encourage in-depth college and career awareness.
  - Reorganizing the school day into flexible, relevant segments.
  - Assessing students’ progress by what they are capable of doing.
  - Forming partnerships with two-and four-year postsecondary institutions.
  - Forging active student support alliances involving educators, employers, parents, and communities.
Successful Transition to High School/Freshman Year

- Personalization (supplying individualized attention and personalized options that respond to students needs and choices).
- Establishing by smaller learning communities as a foundation for instructional change. SLCs are self-contained groups of students who take classes together from the same group of core-subject teachers (Team teaching).
- Having teachers meet in team daily or weekly to discuss student progress and lesson plans (teaching coach assigned to each team with a goal to help teachers to be better teachers).
- Changing school climate and structure (good relationship between students and teachers and making students feel as though this is a rerelevant preparation for high school).
- Conducting formal summer orientation events for students entering ninth grade and sponsor other welcoming events to help students feel at home from the moment they arrive.
- Stepping up counseling and mentoring for ninth-graders.
- Pairing each student is with a staff member, generally a teacher in the SLC, who meets with the student to monitor academic progress and help resolve any academic or interpersonal problems.
- Informing parents promptly when their children are not attending.
- Organizing community volunteers visit the homes of students with chronic attendance problems.
- Rewarding good attendance and good grades.
- Designing a set up data base for parents and students that detail the student’s missing assignments and absences.
- Offering remediation for kids who are behind (back-to-back remedial and grade-level courses during the school year or intensive tutoring).
- Flagging students in middle school with attendance problems and who are “at risk” for not graduating high school and provide intervention before high school.
- Making teachers available to help students before class, after class, and/or during planning period.

- Academic rigor (delivering a demanding yet accessible curriculum that engenders critical-thinking skills as well as content knowledge).
- Teacher quality (certification).
- Resource support teacher to assist the teacher to help with new ideas and resolve problems (help write lesson plans and do some team teaching).
- Strengthened graduation requirements (Students earning a higher-level diploma must take an additional course each year) overage and under credited.
- Strategies for decreasing absences (ninth-grade absences are 20 times more predictive of eventual graduation than eighth-grade test scores).
- General study skills and the vocabulary and comprehension strategies.
Successful Transition to Post Secondary

- High School teachers have different perceptions and expectations of what is needed in post secondary than do postsecondary instructors: In 11th and 12th grade English, post secondary instructors say there needs to be more emphasis on teaching reading strategies and in punctuation and grammar in writing; in math, need a rigorous understanding of fundamental concepts, vs. exposure to multiple topics; in science, need process and inquiry skills rather than science content. Depth vs. breadth.
- ACT college readiness benchmark scores: 18 on English, 22 on Algebra, 21 on Reading, 24 on Science.
- Rigorous core curriculum with specific courses required. At a minimum: 4 years of English; 3 years of math including Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II (additional advanced course preferred); 3 years (additional years preferred) of science including Biology, Chemistry, Physics; 3 years of Social Studies.
- Direct correlation exists between teacher quality and college readiness.
- Expand access to high-level course using virtual classrooms, dual enrollment, AP, IB.
- School-wide literacy: Reading across the curriculum.
- Structure of classes more similar to college: faster pace, more reading, analytical skills, writing multiple papers, self-reliance.
- School-wide syllabus review and development process.
- Student achievement results monitored at the course level.
- Postsecondary preparation strategies such as improved guidance, early involvement of students in college planning.
- Strategies to raise both ACT and GPS.
- CTE rigorously integrated with key academic subjects.
- Early monitoring and intervention system implemented jointly with middle schools.
- Longitudinal data systems in place to track student progress over time.
- Use of learning communities and personalization to improve student achievement.

Successful Instructional Strategies/Reading and Writing

- Use of literacy coaches on middle and high school level (coaches support students and teachers).
- Use of assessment results to guide teaching.
- Use of differentiated instruction, scaffolding and other student learning supports to improve reading.
- Explicit instruction for high school students on reading strategies.
- Reading across the curriculum: strategies to improve reading that work across subject matter areas.
- Emphasis on reading strategies in multiple content areas.
- Instruction in strategies for summarizing reading material, both to improve reading comprehension and to improve the ability to concisely and accurately present information in writing.
**Successful Instructional Strategies/Reading and Writing (continued)**

- Explicit instruction provided to high school students for planning, revising and editing compositions.
- Instructional arrangements in which high school students work together to plan, draft, revise and edit their writing.
- Use of word processing as a primary tool for writing for high school students.
- Instruction to high school students in how to write increasingly complex sentences.
- Engaging high school students in activities that help them gather and organize ideas for their compositions.
- Providing high school students with good models for each type of writing that is the focus of instruction.

**Successful Professional Development (PD)**

- Since higher teacher qualification is proven to correlate with student achievement, PD is important to increase qualifications and effectiveness of teachers.
- PD needs to be long term; one-shot deals not effective.
- PD should emphasize collaborative learning.
- Structures to support PD need to be in place, such as common planning time, a space to gather.
- Successful schools have leaders who empower teachers by promoting a school-wide learning community.
- Successful schools encourage a culture of collaboration between teachers, staff, families and students.
- PD should focus on student achievement.
- PD should be relevant to student and teacher needs.
- Test results should be used to show where teachers need to focus their new learning.
- PD should allow for dialog and observation of teachers’ classroom instruction.
- PD across traditional boundaries like grade level and subject matter.
- Workshops and even “hands-on” activities are less successful than teacher networks or study groups.
- Longer and more intensive programs are better than short ones.
- Activities involving teachers who work together (such as in the same grade, same subject) are better than those that do not target groups of teachers who work together.
- PD that combines subject matter content with how to teach it is critical.
- Teachers need to: a. observe and be observed teaching; b. plan classroom implementations; c. review student work; and d. present, lead and write about their craft.
- Teachers need to see professional development as supporting other activities at their school.
- Administration needs to support a culture in the school of collegiality and experimentation.
- Learning communities creating as a part of PD can lead to instructional improvements.
Fostering Independent Learning for High School Students

- Real world experiences empower and inspire student to take control of their own learning.
- Smaller learning communities may be associated with fostering independent learning.
- Creation of personal learning plans (PLPs) can foster responsibility, accountability, and independence.
- Student-led parent-teacher-student conferences, service learning and project-based learning may promote student engagement and independent learning.
- Alternative forms of assessment such as student exhibitions and portfolios can be used to gauge student progress.
- Schools should solicit student input in formal and informal ways to increase student ownership and foster responsibility, and to make school policies and coursework more relevant to student needs.