

Large to Small High School Redesign: Small Learning Community Continuum



<p><u>Organization:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encompasses only 1 or 2 grades • Student takes some of his/her classes in the house, and house classes may include a few non-house students • Teacher teaches some of his/her classes in house • Teachers generally do not have time for collaborative planning and professional development with the house team (most professional development is school-wide rather than organized by the house) 	<p><u>Organization:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encompasses 2 to 4 grades • Student takes a majority of his/her classes in the academy, but takes some classes outside the academy • Teacher teaches most of his/her classes in the academy, but also teaches a few non-academy classes • Teachers generally have some time for collaborative planning and professional development with the academy team 	<p><u>Organization:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encompasses all 4 grades – allows for continuous relationships • Student takes all of his/her classes in the small school, and classes do not include non-school students – allows for greater personalization • Teacher teaches all of his/her classes in the small school • Teachers have sufficient time for collaborative planning and professional development with the school team – allows for strong professional community, common high standards, and high-quality teaching
<p><u>Governance:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of a larger school, under supervision of the school’s principal • House staff has limited control over program design • Staff are generally assigned to the house • Schedule is determined by the larger school • Budget is determined by the larger school 	<p><u>Governance:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academy coordinator has some authority, and reports to the school’s principal • Academy staff has some control over program design • Staff are generally assigned to the academy • Schedule is determined by the larger school • Budget is determined by the larger school 	<p><u>Governance:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-governing with its own leadership (principal or teacher-director) • School staff controls program design • School staff hires, evaluates, and supports new staff • School staff creates schedule • School staff creates budget
<p><u>Physical Space:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space may not be dedicated and contiguous 	<p><u>Physical Space:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space may not be dedicated and contiguous 	<p><u>Physical Space:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical space is dedicated and contiguous; shared space is managed by building council

This chart is adapted from the work of Mary Ann Raywid (1996) and Jacqueline Ancess & CeCe Cunningham (2001). It is intended to represent a continuum; there are many small learning communities that do not fit neatly into any of these categories.

Large to Small High School Redesign: The Research on Small Learning Community Models

A 2001 U.S. Department of Education report explains why smaller learning communities must be independent and distinctive in order to realize their full potential:

“Researchers emphasize that conditions designed to simulate small schools must be authentic; that is, the more independent they are, the more likely it is that smaller learning communities will match small schools’ benefits. . . . Without a separate space, autonomous administration and budget, designated faculty, and distinctive philosophy, small school simulations likely offer diminished benefits, or none at all. . . . The conditions created by smaller learning communities offer large high schools an opportunity to improve student achievement. However, smaller learning communities deliver on their promise only to the extent that they have independent control over school budget and staffing, space, schedule, curriculum, and culture. When those conditions are met, students in smaller learning communities may derive the same kinds of benefits as students in smaller schools in terms of academic achievement, attendance, college-going rates, social behavior, attitudes, and student-teacher relations.”

Researcher Sarah Dewees (1999) makes a similar case based on a review of several studies of small learning community implementation:

“The most critical factor for success is a commitment to implementing the program fully, allowing for complete administrative separation of the subschool and the creation of a separate identity (McCabe & Oxley, 1989; McMullan, Sipe, & Wolfe, 1994; Raywid, 1996b). Without full implementation, many of the benefits of small-scale schooling, such as establishing community and symbolic identity, cannot be realized.”

While autonomy and a separate identity are important conditions for an effective small learning community, they do not by any means guarantee success. There are many factors that make a good small school, from personalization and student support to strong connections with families to well-qualified teachers, as well as many others. In addition, research suggests that if smaller learning communities are a vehicle for tracking, they will lead to increased inequity rather than success for all students.

References:

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- U.S. Department of Education. (2001). “An Overview of Smaller Learning Communities in High Schools.” Author. Available at http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SLCP/slchighschools_research_09_01.doc.