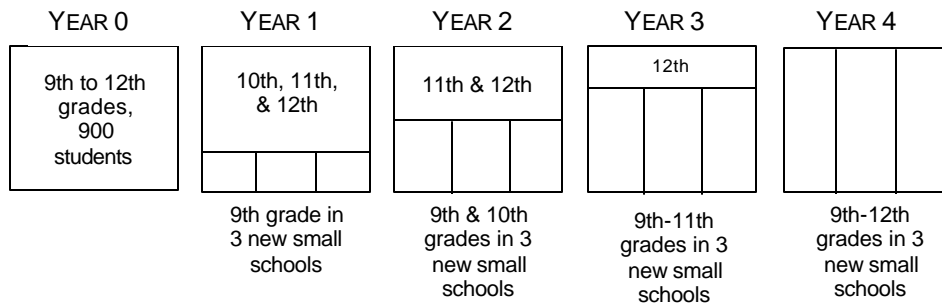


Large to Small High School Redesign Strategies

Four promising strategies that large high schools across the country are using to redesign themselves into smaller schools are outlined below. These models are intended to stimulate thinking and promote discussion; in many cases, a large school's best strategy for moving toward small schools may be a hybrid of two or more of these models.

Strategy #1: Phase In By Grades

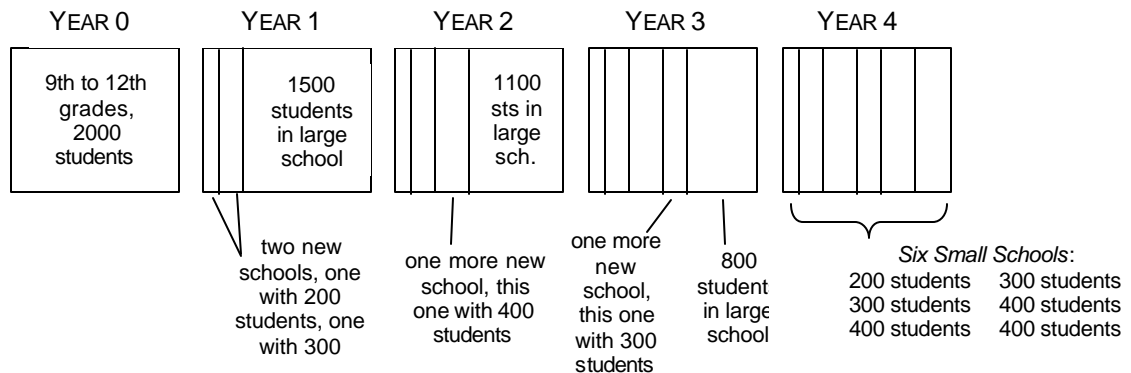
The "Phase In By Grades" strategy for redesigning a large high school involves phasing in small schools one or two grades at a time, starting with the ninth grade and expanding over several years to include grades 9-12. The upper grades remain as part of the existing traditional school until they have graduated. For example, imagine that an existing school with 900 students decides to redesign itself using this method into three schools with 300 students apiece.



The "Phase In By Grades" strategy has the advantage of allowing small schools to develop slowly, grade-by-grade, and to become progressively more sophisticated and independent as they grow. One of the challenges with this strategy is the need to ensure that the small schools do indeed develop into independent schools, rather than remaining as houses or academies within a large comprehensive high school.

Strategy #2: Phase In By Schools

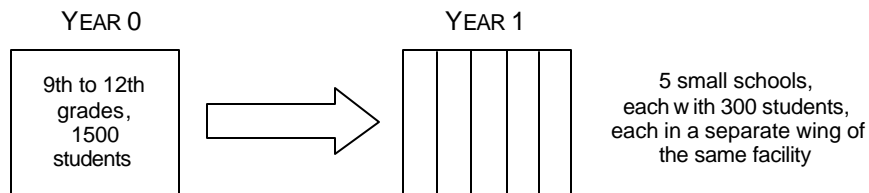
The "Phase In By Schools" strategy for redesigning a large high school involves phasing in small schools one or two at a time. For example, imagine that an existing high school with 2000 students decides to redesign itself using this method into six small schools of varying sizes. In year 1, one or two of the new small schools might open, each serving students in grades 9 through 12. The large school would still exist in the same building, but its enrollment would decline by the number of students now attending the small schools. In each subsequent year, a few more of the small schools would open, until every student was attending a small school.



The “Phase In By Schools” strategy has the advantage of allowing teachers (and perhaps even students) who are more prepared for the small school redesign to lead the way and move more quickly than others who are less ready. However, schools must take care to ensure that the entire school community is in fact committed to the redesign, and that the small schools are not tracked.

Strategy #3: Convert All At Once

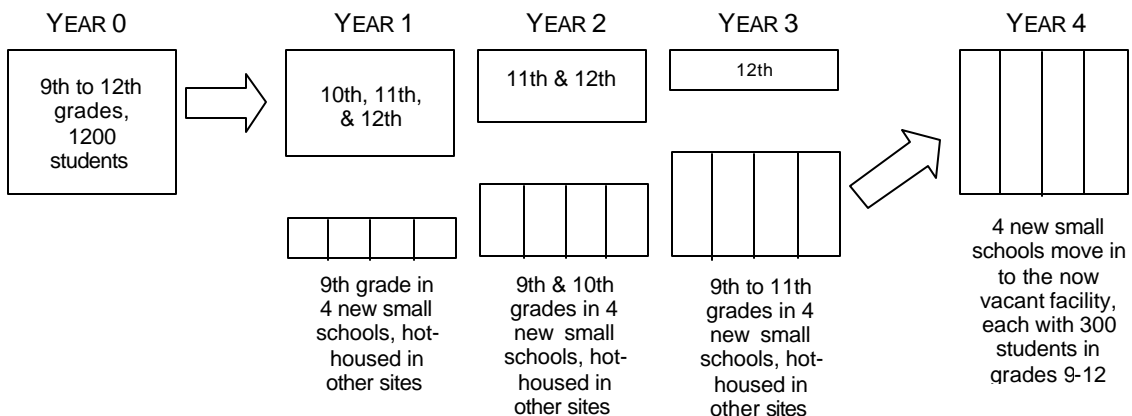
The “Convert All At Once” strategy for redesigning a large high school involves converting the school all at one time from a large traditional school into several small schools. For example, imagine that an existing high school with 1500 students decides to redesign itself using this strategy into 5 small schools of 300 students apiece. The school would end the school year in June as one large school and reopen in the fall as 5 separate small schools, as follows:



The “Convert All At Once” strategy has the advantage of being fast and not leaving any students behind as part of a “phase-out.” If a school community is ready to move quickly, this is a feasible option, but obviously one that requires extensive planning.

Strategy #4: Phase Out and Start New

The “Phase Out and Start New” strategy for redesigning a large high school involves shutting down the high school, usually by phasing the school out of existence grade-by-grade over four years, and replacing it with new, smaller schools, which are usually “hot-housed” in other sites (or vacant wings of the same site) until the existing school building is empty and has been renovated to accommodate the new small schools. For example, imagine that an existing high school with 1200 students decides to redesign itself using this strategy into 4 small schools of 300 students apiece. Starting in year 1, the existing school does not accept incoming ninth graders; instead, these students attend new small schools at other sites. By year 4, all of the students from the phased-out school have graduated, and the new small schools move into the facility.



The “Phase Out and Start New” strategy for redesigning a large high school tends to be successful because it most closely resembles the process of starting freestanding new schools and avoids the challenge of guiding an existing faculty and staff through a radical change process. Because it involves shutting down an existing school, however, it may be the least politically feasible of the strategies described here.

School Redesign Network at Stanford University 2002. Strategies and diagrams adapted from the work of the Small Schools Project at the University of Washington.