

Redesigning Large High Schools into Smaller Learning Communities

Study Group Curriculum

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**California School Redesign Network
Stanford University School of Education**

This curriculum is intended to help design teams of educators, parents, and others at large, traditional high schools think through the process of redesigning their schools by creating smaller learning communities.

It consists of twelve sessions (listed below) and includes suggested readings, sample guiding questions, and sample activities. At the end of the document is a list of recommended further reading.

This curriculum is only one resource in the school redesign process. The California School Redesign Network also can provide or connect you with design team support and professional development, such as monthly support group meetings at Stanford, critical friends, facilitation, coaching strategies, nurture and nudge strategies, and process tools (consultancies, protocol process, etc.).

- Session 1. Our Reality
- Session 2. Our Vision for the Future, Part 1
- Session 3. Schools That Work
- Session 4. Our Visions for the Future, Part 2
- Session 5. Staffing for Personalization
- Session 6. Standards and Performance Assessment
- Session 7. Authentic Teaching and Learning
- Session 8. Teachers and Their Roles
- Session 9. Families and the Community
- Session 10. Autonomy
- Session 11. The District Role
- Session 12. The Change Process

Session 1. Our Reality

Readings

- “What High School Is,” Part II, Chapter 1 of *Horace’s Compromise* by Ted Sizer (New York: Mariner Books, 1984)
- “The Shopping Mall High School,” Chapter 1 of *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* by Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David Cohen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985)
- “The Right to Learn: Why Factory-Model Schools Do Not Work,” in *Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works* by Linda Darling-Hammond

Sample Guiding Questions

What do we think of the picture of high school painted in these readings? How is it accurate? How is it inaccurate? What are the positive and negative aspects of the schools described in the readings? What does our high school look like? Who are our students? Why do they come to school? What do they get out of school? Does our school share any of the characteristics of the schools described in the readings? How would we describe our school today? What does our data (hard and soft) tell us about student learning, student engagement, teaching conditions, etc.? Strengths and areas for improvement? How could it be improved?

Sample Activities

- View and discuss video of Linda Darling-Hammond speech
- Shadow students representative of the student body by following them through their day in school
- Conduct focus groups with students, teachers/staff, and parents
- Review disaggregated data: attendance, discipline, course enrollments, grad rates, retention between grades, student work, achievement assessments, student grades, etc.

Session 2. Our Vision for the Future, Part 1

Readings

- “Teaching and Learning for Understanding,” Chapter 4 of *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work* by Linda Darling-Hammond (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997)

Sample Guiding Questions

What do we think of the vision of teaching and learning that Linda Darling-Hammond lays out in this chapter? Consider the nine features of environments that support meaningful learning (listed on p. 107): How important is each feature? To what extent to these features exist in our school today? Are there barriers or challenges that need to be addressed to make them more effective? Do we need to make changes to strengthen some of these elements at our school? If so, how could we do so? What is our vision for what teaching and learning should look like? What is our vision for the future of our school? What is the vision of others (students, parents)? How can we engage all stakeholders to establish a common vision?

Sample Activities

- View and discuss Gates video
- Engage stakeholders to understand findings of step 1 and to establish a common vision

Session 3. Schools That Work

Readings

- “Structuring Learner-Centered Schools,” Chapter 5 of *The Right to Learn*
- “The School at Work,” Chapter 3 of *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* by Deborah Meier (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995)

Sample Guiding Questions

What do we think of the school structures described in these readings? What are their advantages and disadvantages? Which elements do we think are most important? Which of these elements could help us achieve more of our vision, address our student learning concerns or professional issues? Do we think a school structured in this way would work for our students? Why or why not? Can we see our school redesigning itself to look like the schools described in these readings? If not, what are the barriers? If so, how could it happen?

Sample Activities

- Engage stakeholders
- View and discuss videos of effective schools and Gates video
- Visit web sites of effective schools
- Email/Teleconference with leaders of successful small schools
- Study tour of effective schools

Session 4. Our Vision for the Future, Part 2

Readings

- “The Breakup: Suburbs Try Smaller Schools,” by Catherine Gewertz, *Education Week*, May 2, 2001, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=33hs.h20>.
- “Small Schools: An Anti-Racist Intervention in Urban America,” by Michelle Fine and Linda Powell, in *Racial Profiling and Punishment in U.S. Public Schools*, ERASE Initiative, October 30, 2001, http://www.arc.org/erase/profiling_summ.html
- “Musings in the Wake of Columbine: What Can Schools Do?” by Mary Anne Raywid and Libby Oshiyama, *Phi Delta Kappan* online article, February 2000, <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kray0002.htm>
- “The Big Benefits of Smallness,” by Deborah Meier, *Educational Leadership* Vol. 54, No. 1, September 1996

Sample Guiding Questions

Which of the schools described in the readings – the West Clermont, Ohio schools in the Ed Week article or the urban schools described by Michelle Fine and Linda Powell – are more like our school? What do our students need from a school? What are they getting now? Would smaller schools benefit our students? Why or why not? What would the trade-offs be? What do we think of the visions for schooling described by Mary Anne Raywid and Libby Oshiyama and by Debbie Meier? Would these visions work for our students? What is our vision for what our school should look like?

Sample Activities

- Engage stakeholders
- Go on a Study Tour of effective small schools
- View and discuss videos of effective schools

Session 5. Staffing for Personalization

Readings

- “Staffing Schools for Teaching and Learning,” Chapter 6 of *The Right to Learn*
- “Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons From High-Performing Schools,” by Karen Hawley Miles and Linda Darling-Hammond, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 9-29
- “Personalization” (feature 1); “Continuous Relationships” (feature 2); and “Sample Budgets and Schedules” from *Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works* by Linda Darling-Hammond
- “No Two Are Quite Alike,” by Ted Sizer, *Educational Leadership* Volume 57, Number 1 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, September 1999)

Sample Guiding Questions

Do we think it makes sense to reallocate staff resources in our school so teachers see fewer students and have more time for collaboration and professional development? What are the potential obstacles to this reallocation? What trade-offs will we have to consider? Imagine that we have the same per pupil budget that we have now, but that we are starting a brand-new school: Ideally, how would we staff this school (ignoring the realities of our school and the specific people involved)? Now consider how our school is staffed at the moment: What are the differences between our “ideal” staffing pattern and our current staffing pattern? What are the challenges in moving from here to there? To what extent are these challenges personnel problems (e.g., poor teaching) as opposed to problems with an innovative staffing model? Do people have the capacity to work with students in new ways (e.g., special education teachers or counselors in regular classes, sharing their expertise with their teaching team)? How close to the “ideal” staffing model can we get, given the personnel we have now? What makes sense for our school? Where can we see ourselves in 5 years? What could our staffing model look like then?

Sample Activities

- Analyze our school’s current staffing model
- Create an “ideal” staffing model for our school
- Create a realistic staffing model for our school in 5 years

Session 6. Standards and Performance Assessment

Readings

- “Embracing Accountability,” by Grant Wiggins, Center on Learning, Assessment, and School Structure (CLASS), Princeton, NJ
- “Ensuring Authentic Performance,” Chapter 2 of *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance* by Grant Wiggins (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998)
- “Graduation by Portfolio at Central Park East Secondary School,” Chapter 2 of *Authentic Assessment in Action: Studies of Schools and Students at Work* by Linda Darling-Hammond, Jacqueline Aness, and Beverly Falk (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995)
- “High Standards and Performance Assessment” (feature 3) from *Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works* by Linda Darling-Hammond

Sample Guiding Questions

What do we think of Grant Wiggins’ comments on teacher accountability? Do we need to change the way we think about assessment? What do we think of the alternative assessment approaches described in *Educative Assessment* and *Authentic Assessment in Action*? Do we like these models? Do we think they could work in our classrooms and our school? What kinds of structural changes (scheduling, etc.) would our school need to make to allow a performance assessment system like these to work? Can we see this happening? What are the challenges, and what kind of support would we need to overcome these challenges?

Sample Activities

Session 7. Authentic Teaching and Learning

Readings

- “Authentic Curriculum” (feature 4); “Adaptive Pedagogy” (feature 5); and “Multicultural and Anti-Racist Teaching” (feature 6) from *Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works* by Linda Darling-Hammond
- “Less Is More: The Secret of Being Essential,” *Horace* Volume 11, Number 2 (Coalition of Essential Schools, November 1994)
- “Five Standards of Authentic Instruction,” by Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage, *Educational Leadership* Volume 50, Number 7 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, April 1993)
- “Tomorrow’s Education, Made to Measure” by Arthur Levine, *New York Times*, December 22, 2000
- “Transforming the Mainstream Curriculum,” by James Banks, *Educational Leadership* Volume 51, Number 8 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, May 1994)
- “Culturally Relevant Teaching,” Chapter 6 of *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children* by Gloria Ladson-Billings (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997)

Sample Guiding Questions

What do we think of the vision of good teaching and learning laid out by Linda Darling-Hammond? What do we think of the “less is more” approach as described in the Horace article? Do the five standards of authentic instruction described by Newmann and Wehlage make sense to us? What about Arthur Levine’s vision of 21st century schools? To what extent is the type of teaching and learning described in these readings already happening at our school? To what extent *should* these visions apply to our school? What is our vision for powerful teaching and learning? How does multiculturalism fit into that vision? What would James Banks think of our approach to multiculturalism? How about Gloria Ladson-Billings? Can we see our school moving toward more authentic teaching and learning? What challenges would we face in doing so? What support would we need to make these changes happen – from professional development to structural changes (in schedules, staffing, etc.)?

Sample Activities

Session 8. Teachers and their Roles

Readings

- “Knowledgeable and Skilled Teachers” (feature 7); “Teacher Collaboration and Professional Development” (feature 8); “Democratic Decision-Making” (feature 10) from *Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works* by Linda Darling-Hammond
- “Teaching In the Essential School,” *Horace* Volume 5, Number 2 (Coalition of Essential Schools, December 1988)
- “Earning Board Certification: Making Time to Grow,” by Karla Jenkins, *Educational Leadership* Volume 57, Number 8 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, May 2000)
- “The International Approach to School Governance: Student Empowerment Through Teacher Professionalism,” by Eric Nadelstern, Janet Lieberman, and Doug Berman, in *Insights: Thoughts on the Process of Being International* (New York: International High School, March 1990)

Sample Guiding Questions

What do we think of the vision of teaching described by Linda Darling-Hammond and the *Horace* article? Does this fit with our vision of what teaching should look like? What is teaching like at our school now? Do we want to move closer to the vision presented here, and if so, how can we do so? Do we think that National Board certification can play a role in this change process? Also consider the governance issues raised in the short article on International High School: How does the governance system at International compare to the one at our school? What are the pros and cons of each? Do we think moving closer to the International model would help improve teaching? If so, how can we accomplish this at our school? What are the challenges, and how can we overcome them?

Sample Activities

Session 9. Families and the Community

Readings

- “Family and Community Connections” (feature 9) from *Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works* by Linda Darling-Hammond
- “The Family and Essential Schools: Mobilizing Democracy Toward Equity,” *Horace* Volume 15, Number 1 (Coalition of Essential Schools, September 1998)
- “Essential Collaborators: Parents, School, and Community,” *Horace* Volume 9, Number 5 (Coalition of Essential Schools, May 1993)
- “How Community Contributes to Achievement,” by Thomas Hatch, *Educational Leadership* Volume 55, Number 8 (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, May 1998)

Sample Guiding Questions

What is the relationship between teachers and families at our school today? How does the situation at our school compare to the visions described in these readings? What can we do to create real partnerships among teachers and parents? What kinds of obstacles will we face, and what kinds of supports, in terms of both professional development and institutional changes, will we need?

Sample Activities

- Contact organizations in your community that work with parents, from CBOs to churches to community organizing groups and others
- Create parent-teacher discussion groups around school reform; focus on listening to what parents have to say and what they want for their children

Session 10. Autonomy

Readings

- “A Proposal to Accelerate the Ongoing Renewal of Manual High School: Small Schools at Manual,” 2001
- “The Transformation of One Large Urban High School: The Julia Richman Education Complex,” by Ann Cook, in Evans Clinchy, ed., *Creating New Schools: How Small Schools Are Changing American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000)
- “Downsizing Schools in Big Cities” by Mary Anne Raywid, ERIC Digest (ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 1996)
- “Converting Big High Schools . . .” by Jacqueline Ancess & Cece Cunningham, 2001, including chart with continuum
- “Questions to Consider About Conversions of Large High Schools,” Small Schools Project document, 2001

Sample Guiding Questions

Consider the two high school conversions described in these readings – Manual High School in Denver and Julia Richman High School in New York: Where does each fit on the continuum Mary Anne Raywid describes between houses and small schools? Where does each fit on the continuum that Jacqueline Ancess and Cece Cunningham provide? Does either case provide a useful model for our school? Or does our vision for change fall somewhere else on the continuum – and if so, where? What benefits of the large school do we want to preserve? What are the pros and cons of various levels of autonomy? How autonomous and distinct do we want our small learning communities to be? Why? Do we have a realistic plan for moving from here to there?

Sample Activities

Session 11. The District Role

Readings

- “Prior Agreements With the District,” Small Schools Project document, 2001
- “Request for Proposals for Creating Small Chicago Public High Schools (September 2002 starts)”, Chicago High School Redesign Initiative for the Chicago Public Schools, 2001
- “New Small Autonomous Schools District Policy,” Oakland Unified School District, 2000
- “Essential Conditions” from *Redesigning Schools: What Matters and What Works* by Linda Darling-Hammond

Sample Guiding Questions

Each of these documents includes questions or issues for districts and schools to consider as they think about creating smaller, more independent learning communities. Which of the questions or issues do we find especially applicable to our situation? What sort of district-school relationship do we think would be ideal? Why? What are the pros and cons of different approaches? Is there a model here that we could adapt to our context?

Sample Activities

Session 12. The Change Process

Readings

- “Leadership for Learning: An Action Theory of School Change,” by Tony Wagner, *Phi Delta Kappan* online article (November 2001), <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0101wag.htm>
- “Understandings About School Change,” Small Schools Project document
- “So Now What? Managing the Change Process,” *Horace* Volume 9, Number 3 (Coalition of Essential Schools, January 1993)
- “Essential Leadership in the School Change Process,” *Horace* Volume 13, Number 4 (Coalition of Essential Schools, March 1997)
- “It Isn’t the Changes That Do You In” (Chapter 1) and “How to Get Them to Let Go” (Chapter 3) from *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* by William Bridges (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991)

Sample Guiding Questions

What do we see as the major challenges in moving our school from where we are today toward our vision of a truly excellent school? What obstacles will we face? Who will oppose the change, and why? How can we bring those people along? How can we create strong relationships among all stakeholders that support constructive progress? Consider the advice for leading change that these readings provide: Does any of it seem especially useful for our school? Imagine what will happen if we begin to move forward with change: Which pieces of advice provided here could help the process move more smoothly? Which advice does not seem so useful? What does our plan for change look like?

Sample Activities

Further Reading: Recommended Books and Other Resources

William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991)

Evans Clinchy, ed., *Creating New Schools: How Small Schools Are Changing American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000)

Kathleen Cotton, "New Small Learning Communities: Findings From Recent Literature" (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001), available online at <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/nslc.pdf>

Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997)

Linda Darling-Hammond, Jacqueline Ancess, and Beverly Falk, *Authentic Assessment in Action: Studies of Schools and Students at Work* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995)

Deborah Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995)

Fred Newmann, ed., *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996)

Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985)

TheodoreSizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (New York: Mariner Books, 1984)

TheodoreSizer, *Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School* (New York: Mariner Books, 1991)

TheodoreSizer, *Horace's Hope: What Works For the American High School* (New York: Mariner Books, 1996)