

Organizational Structures: Introduction

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Organizational structure is the framework within which decisions are made and executed, lines of authority are defined, communication is channeled, and institutional intent is made graphic. Designing or changing organizational structure is typically the opening act when an SEA or LEA tackles the challenge of persistently low-achieving schools. Not only do the schools require structural change (or reinvention), but the SEA and the LEA must alter the way they are organized in order to initiate and manage the interventions applied in these schools.

This chapter provides explanations, references, and resources for new organizational structures at the SEA and LEA levels, creation of turnaround offices, as well as new ways in which schools are organized in keeping with the provisions of the SIG program—establishing new school models, restarting with a charter school, restarting with an education management organization, and establishing community-oriented schools. In addition, this chapter addresses the ultimate organizational change—school closure.

Because high schools are typically large, organizationally complex, multi-faceted, and inclined toward inertia, this chapter deals specifically with a variety of ways to re-organize and re-program high schools: dual enrollment, learning academies, credit-recovery programs, re-engagement programs, and smaller learning communities.

Student learning is most strongly attributable to “proximal variables”—the influences closest to the student, such as the teacher’s instructional practices and classroom management, the curriculum, the peer group, and teacher-student interactions. Organizational structure is not a proximal variable, but is a pre-condition for improving proximal variables and for sustaining the improvements.

Organizational structure signals how authority and accountability are distributed within a system of education, from SEA to LEA to school to classroom. The clear message of the SIG program is that both accountability and authority reside close to where the proximal variables for learning reside—in the classroom and in the school. The SIG program calls for greater school-level flexibility in staffing, scheduling, and budgeting; at the same time it encourages strong school-level accountability for results. Organizational structures within the SEA, LEA, and school (including those of the bodies governing the school) matter greatly in properly apportioning accountability and authority, which together create a focal point of responsibility for the learning success of each student.

Just as organizational structure can facilitate or obstruct constructive decision making and actions in the school and classroom, changes in organizational structure do not automatically lead to better learning outcomes for students. Again, a change in organizational structure is a pre-condition to improved learning but does not, itself,

produce the desired results. Operational changes must follow structural change. People must act with greater competence and with greater devotion to the job at hand. Much of the rest of this *Handbook* deals with the practices internal to a school that are linked to improved student learning. This chapter introduces several organizational structures that the SIG program proposes as likely pre-conditions to rapid school improvement.

Creating a Turnaround Office

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Emerging research indicates that states and districts are well positioned to take a lead role in enabling, driving, supporting, and sustaining school turnaround efforts through the creation of a designated turnaround office (Mass Insight Education 2007; 2009). Whether developed at the state or district level, a turnaround office should provide concentrated and coherent resources and expertise to priority schools identified due to chronic low performance. A turnaround office clusters together staff with turnaround expertise to focus their work on a set of schools included in a “zone” because they are engaged in intentional and substantial interventions to reverse their persistent low achievement. The turnaround office supports the interventions and the schools and external partners engaged in them. While the turnaround office enables the state or district to address the particular contexts and conditions of persistently low-achieving schools with strategies that are unique to rapid improvement, the offices should be connected conceptually and operationally with other state and district improvement efforts. In other words, the turnaround office provides a unique and specialized service within a coherent system of support that provides differentiated services appropriate to each school.

Examples of state turnaround offices are currently operating in Louisiana and Texas. Examples of district turnaround offices are those operating in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia. A core principle driving creation of a turnaround office is that schools assigned to the office are treated differently than other schools. For instance, they may be given additional flexibility, released from collective bargaining agreements, and assigned additional resources. They are treated differently because they are identified as a priority for the state due to their chronic low performance.

Designated turnaround offices can provide the conditions (changes in rules and resource allocation) and capacity (identifying high-quality staff and external partners) for rapid school improvement to take place, all the while communicating a single-minded focus on improving student learning. Additionally, they are positioned to effectively build parent and community support, contract with external partners, monitor fidelity of plan implementation and progress, build leadership capacity, problem solve, and maintain coordination and communication. It may also be necessary for turnaround offices to intervene if improvement efforts are unsuccessful. By design, the turnaround office functions as the lead entity driving dramatic school improvement efforts, rather than simply a compliance monitor (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

While a district turnaround office is applicable primarily in large districts with multiple schools engaging in turnaround efforts, a small district can adopt a turnaround philosophy and define roles accordingly. A recent case study (Lane, 2009) of a rural Kansas district with fewer than 300 students illustrates this point. The superintendent redefined roles, focus, and relationships with school staff by more directly monitoring classroom instruction through use of observation protocols, by setting non-negotiable expectations and objectives, and giving teachers the autonomy to find ways to meet those objectives (Lane, 2009). In a state or larger district, creating a turnaround office could involve designating one or more staff members to coordinate the SIG improvement efforts. Discussions of how larger districts, such as Chicago, New York City, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, restructured to support turnarounds may be found in Mass Insight (2007), the Mass Insight Resource Center and The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2009), and Lane (2009). When many schools in a district or a state require restructuring, establish clusters of no more than 8-10 schools, each of which is led by a strong partner whose job is to build school capacity, manage the turnaround efforts, and monitor implementation (Mass Insight, 2007; 2009). The clusters operate within partnership zones, which function as districts-within-a-district. These partnership zones have flexibility in operating conditions and strong partnerships among the schools, the district, the SEA, and any external partners. A critical aspect of establishing turnaround offices is clear expectations related to academic growth in a compressed period reflecting the high priority nature of the schools identified for rapid improvement.

Each school, district, and SEA is part of a system that requires coherence among its component parts to function optimally (Redding, 2006), so the turnaround office should not be an add-on or a stand-alone operation. Rather,

it should function in concert with other parts of the state and district administration. At the state level, this means being an integral part of the statewide system of support for districts and schools (Redding & Walberg, 2008).

Action Principles

For States Creating a State-Level Turnaround Office

1. Create a designated school turnaround office charged with directing statewide turnaround efforts (e.g., Louisiana Recovery School District).
2. Assign senior staff and required resources to direct and coordinate the state's role in school turnaround efforts.
3. Pursue needed policy changes to give districts and schools needed freedom and flexibility to implement their turnaround strategies.
4. Identify schools to receive targeted turnaround interventions.
5. Develop strategies related to specific turnaround options (e.g., turnaround, restart, or transformation).
6. Devise procedures for determining which strategy to pursue at each identified school.
7. Integrate support to districts and schools receiving School Improvement Grants into the existing statewide system of support to maximize resources and reduce duplication of effort.
8. Develop explicit goals for schools and means of holding schools or external providers working with schools accountable for measurable progress.
9. Establish partnerships with external providers where appropriate.
10. Establish regular communication with districts and schools engaged in the turnaround process.
11. Hold schools accountable for short-term progress leading to long-term academic gains.

For States Supporting Creation of District-Level Turnaround Offices

1. Identify and address barriers to creating a district-level turnaround office.
2. Prioritize resources to district-level turnaround offices demonstrating commitment and capacity to school turnaround efforts.
3. Develop guidance related to turnaround options (e.g., turnaround, restart, or transformation).
4. Provide support as needed to district-level turnaround offices.

For Districts Creating a District-Level Turnaround Office

1. Create a designated school turnaround office charged with directing statewide turnaround efforts.
2. Appoint senior leadership to direct and coordinate district's turnaround efforts.
3. Allocate resources to support turnaround office.
4. Develop strategies related to specific turnaround options (e.g., turnaround, restart, or transformation).
5. Pursue changes to formal policy and informal standard operating procedures to empower schools to implement their turnaround strategies.
6. Identify schools to receive targeted turnaround interventions.
7. Devise procedures for determining which strategy to pursue at each identified school.
8. Provide schools "the appropriate operating flexibility, resources, and support required to reduce barriers and overly burdensome compliance requirements and to enable a school-wide focus on student needs and improved achievement" (Mass Insight, 2009).
9. Establish partnerships with external providers where appropriate.
10. Establish mechanisms for keeping stakeholders informed about the turnaround process at each school.

11. Establish regular communication with districts and schools engaged in the turnaround process.
12. Hold schools accountable for short-term progress leading to long-term academic gains.

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Implementing New School Models

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An effective system of support addresses three key components of constructive change: incentives, capacity, and opportunity (Rhim, Hassel, & Redding, 2008). Incentives are inducements or motivators that encourage change, and capacity is the ability of the district and school to respond to incentives in constructive ways that improve outcomes. States and districts also need to extend the opportunity to change by providing space for new schools to be created and new ideas given wings. Examples of opportunities that allow for the introduction of new school models are strong charter school laws and state procurement policies that permit districts to hire external providers—such as education management organizations or charter management organizations—with proven track records to transform chronically low-performing schools. Examples of new school models include the Academy for Urban School Leadership, Achievement First, Expeditionary Learning Schools Outward Bound, and Green Dot Schools. Schools adopting new models will require autonomy (opportunity) to implement innovative learning environments while being held accountable for performance through renewable contracts. School options are wide-ranging and include variations such as global citizenship, entrepreneurship, talent, and gender-specific schools. Other new school model options, such as dual language academies, respond to the specific need for enhancing student outcomes for second language populations. Adoption of proven new school models is a key component of the Renaissance 2010 initiative in Chicago. Research to date indicates that some Renaissance 2010 schools are performing on par, others are lagging slightly, and some are performing slightly ahead of their counterpart schools (Akitunde, 2009). In other words, although there is not evidence of universal success, the schools are on a growth trajectory that appears to indicate movement in the right direction, and they are providing the district with a laboratory to test established whole school models as well as develop new ones. The lessons learned from the opportunity to implement new school models inform school improvement efforts across the district. The Center on Reinventing Public Education recently released a new report exploring adoption of multiple new school models as a strategy to drive district-wide school transformation and the link supplied below provides more information.

Effectively adopting new school models involves a rigorous selection process and key autonomies. A benefit of school models is that they incorporate an establish structure and control of the multitude of variables at play in a school by reducing the range of possible ways of doing things to a focused core, establishing coherence and order in a school (Redding, 2006). It is not difficult to describe an effective school or to envision space for a new school. The problem lies in the successful implementation and in maintaining the integrity of the model. Careful implementation planning is the key to success, and faulty planning is the road to failure. The failure of a school reform model to deliver the expected results can be attributed to three causes, or a combination of the three: a) the prescribed practices are not sufficiently powerful to improve student achievement; b) the practices are not organized and presented in a manner that makes successful implementation likely; and c) the practices are not implemented well (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Mascal, 2002).

Action Principles

For State

1. Revise policy and/or legislation to remove barriers that would discourage space for new schools and decrease the amount of time it takes to convert/close a school.
2. Provide autonomy for schools to operate more independently, such as with fewer duplicative reporting requirements.

For District

1. Develop a rigorous application review and selection process to identify promising or established new school models.
2. Include district teams in thorough review of potential models.
3. Develop a long-term plan to recruit and train school leaders.

4. Craft key relationship terms with new school operators to make certain they can be held accountable for key performance goals.

For School

1. Carefully craft the vision for adopting a new school model and make the case for why its approaches will produce the desired results.
2. Tend to the details of implementation by setting implementation goals, including improvement targets and timelines. Focus on closing the achievement gap and improving the learning of all students.
3. Provide broad-based orientation and professional development so that staff at all levels are fully aware of the needs and potential of the new school model.
4. Recruit a critical mass of committed support for the new school plan among key stakeholders such as parents, community organizations, local businesses, and the philanthropic community.
5. Cultivate support for the establishment of a positive learning culture among staff hired to work in the new school.
6. Develop a clear plan of action and adhere closely to the integrity of the chosen program to maintain fidelity of implementation.
7. Set goals for significant improvement by students including those who have previously failed.

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Restarting with a Charter School

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Converting schools to charter status can be an effective component of a district's portfolio of strategies for improving persistently low-achieving schools (Lake & Hill, 2009). Restarting a school as a charter school involves converting or closing an existing school and then reopening the school as a charter school. State charter school laws outline the parameters of charter school policy and practice. Depending on the relevant state charter statute, one of multiple entities (e.g., local education agencies, state education agencies, colleges and universities, mayors, appointed charter boards, and non-profits) may authorize charter schools. Consequently, the district's role related to restarting with a charter school may be as an authorizer or as a partner working closely with an alternative charter school authorizer. Factors influencing a district's ability to use the restarting with a charter school strategy include entities authorized to approve charter schools, the legal status of charter schools as independent single school districts or as part of an existing district, and the role of charter school governing boards.

Restarting with a charter school requires that district leaders, including the local school board, exercise leadership in developing, supporting, monitoring, and in some cases, approving charter schools. Research on charter school effectiveness and the experience of districts that have authorized charter schools highlights three key factors that contribute to the successful use of charter schools as an improvement strategy:

1. District leaders attend to system-level governance, including the capacity of the district to serve as a charter authorizer (CCSRI, 2009).
2. Districts articulate a clear legal relationship and a corresponding set of expectations that define the relationship between the district and the charter school, including the development of a performance-based contract that delineates the autonomy to be provided to charter schools and how schools will be held accountable (Kowal & Hassel, 2009).
3. District leaders support charter schools in accessing resources, space, and high-quality leadership and staff to meet the needs of all students (CCSRI, 2009).

State law determines the role that districts may play in authorizing and operating charter schools. In many states, state charter law allows districts to directly authorize new charter schools. District authorizers may allow charter school governing boards to operate single schools or contract with external charter management organizations (CMOs) to operate networks of schools within the district. A key success factor is the district's ability to identify and select high-quality charter school operators and to authorize and monitor charter school governing boards (CCSRI, 2009). For instance, a number of large urban districts have developed within-district "charter school offices" responsible for the administration of district charters, often as part of a portfolio approach to improving schools (Lake & Hill, 2009). Regardless of how a district chooses to authorize or manage its charter schools, research highlights the importance of a rigorous selection process that is fair, that identifies charter school developers with a research-based and proven approach to instruction, and that identifies school developers that have a solid business plan (CCSRI, 2009). The Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center and the Finance Project (2006) provide criteria for assessing a prospective contractor's organizational and financial ability to perform the necessary work. Haft (2009) and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (2009) discuss the key components of a rigorous application process and what a good contract should contain. Charter school contracts will vary according to state charter school law, but samples and links to samples at Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (n.d.) and U.S. Charter Schools (n.d.) can prove helpful.

Defining expectations and relationships among the district, the charter school governance board, and individual charter schools is critical to the success of charter schools as an improvement strategy. Kowal & Hassel (2009) frame the district/charter school relationship in terms of autonomy, accountability, and resources. Autonomy over personnel decisions, resource management, and educational programs provides the flexibility needed to engage in dramatic improvement efforts. Clearly articulated outcomes based on student achievement and other measures of a school's health (e.g., fiscal, safety, leadership stability) are used to benchmark and hold

newly formed charter schools accountable for results. Large urban districts, such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, are using performance-based contracts to formalize a relationship between the district office and charter governing boards and CMOs that promotes dramatic improvement.

Charter school founders are often faced with difficulties in securing capital financing or finding a location for the charter school and in hiring top-quality leaders and teachers. Districts experienced in supporting charter schools as an improvement strategy have found it useful to actively support newly formed charter schools with securing space and hiring staff (for instance, Chicago's Renaissance 2010). Also, research shows that effective charter school leadership is a crucial factor in the success of newly formed charter schools (CCSRI, 2009).

Action Principles

For State

1. Address policy barriers inhibiting growth of charter schools (i.e., charter caps that limit growth and expansion, inequitable funding systems, and facilities financing challenges).
2. Draft model authorizer policies and procedures.
3. Develop model charter contracts.

For District

Attend to System-Level Governance

1. Develop the capacity (internally or externally) to effectively identify, select, and monitor charter school operators. Example: Chicago's Renaissance 2010 initiative and the Office of New Schools (<http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/>).
2. Engage parents and community members to discuss the charter school option, including the parameters of converting a school to charter status.
3. Research and prioritize charter management organizations (CMOs) that may address district needs.
4. Develop and use a rigorous selection process to identify charter school applicants.
5. Develop a databank of individuals interested in serving on charter school boards.

Articulate Legal Relationship (Autonomy, Accountability, Resources)

1. Engage stakeholder groups to identify the right mix of autonomy and flexibility to be provided to prospective charter schools and to gain support for the charter school option.
2. Clearly articulate the autonomy to be provided to newly formed charter schools.
3. Develop a set of non-negotiable performance benchmarks to serve as the basis for holding charter schools accountable.
4. Allow charter schools to propose school-based performance benchmarks to supplement district and state required performance benchmarks.
5. Develop a template for performance-based contracting.
6. Outline clear and enforceable consequences for failing to meet goals (e.g., revoke or modify charter, replace management organization).

Develop Mechanisms to Support Newly Formed Charter Schools

1. Support schools with finding sites and funding for startups.
2. Cultivate a pipeline of charter governing board members and charter school leaders.
3. Empower teachers to overcome resistance to the strategy.

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Restarting with an Education Management Organization

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Education management organizations (EMOs) are for-profit or non-profit organizations that manage public schools (Kowal & Arkin, 2005; Molnar et al., 2009). In contrast to traditional vendors that are contracted to provide specific services (e.g., professional development, payroll, food services) to districts and schools, EMOs are contracted by districts to manage and run individual schools, both traditional as well as charter schools, or clusters of schools. EMOs that manage networks of charter schools are referred to as charter management organizations (CMOs). The parameters of an EMO's management responsibility are spelled out in a performance contract between the district and an EMO. Similar to restarting with a charter, restarting with an EMO can be an effective component of a district's portfolio of strategies for improving persistently low-achieving schools (Lake & Hill, 2009).

The landscape of EMOs has expanded rapidly over the past 15 years. According to the Education Public Interest Center, which has tracked the development of EMOs over the past decade, the number of for-profit EMOs expanded from 21 to 95 between 2000 and 2009 (Molnar et al., 2009). Similarly, the number of non-profit EMOs expanded from 65 to 103 between 2000 and 2009 (Miron & Urschel, 2009). Together, for-profit and non-profit EMOs currently manage over 1300 schools in 32 states (Molnar et al. 2009; Miron & Urschel, 2009). The 20 largest EMOs (e.g., the 13 largest non-profit EMOs and the seven largest for-profit EMOs) together manage approximately two-thirds of all schools managed by EMOs throughout the nation. Currently, over 90% of EMO-managed schools are charter schools (Molnar et al., 2009).

EMOs vary in terms of their focus, size, and overall capacity to manage significant numbers of schools. Some EMOs work in multiple districts and manage schools across the nation, such as the 20 largest EMOs. A growing number of small to mid-size EMOs work in regions, single states, or in a single district intentionally focusing their efforts on a particular niche, mission, or student population. Given that EMOs are an emerging type of service provider with varied capacity to manage schools, states and districts interested in contracting with EMOs to dramatically improve schools need to conduct rigorous due diligence to verify capacity and ensure that the services provided reflect those required.

Restarting with an EMO involves converting a school or closing a school and reopening the school under the control of an EMO. Similar to restarting with a charter school, restarting with an EMO entails that district leaders, including the local school board, exercise leadership in recruiting, selecting, supporting, and monitoring EMOs. Contracts with EMOs are conceptually similar to those with charter management organizations, except that there will, of course, be no references to the state laws that authorize the creation of charter schools. As with charters, some helpful resources for creating contracts and evaluating prospective contractors are the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center and The Finance Project (2006), Haft (2009), and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (2009; 2006; 2004).

The relationship between a district and an EMO typically evolves along these lines:

1. District leaders recruit potential EMOs and use a rigorous selection process to ensure that EMOs have the capacity to address identified needs (e.g., a track record with high schools or perhaps a larger percentage of children for whom English is their second language).
2. District leaders attend to system-level governance, including the capacity of the district to identify and monitor the performance of EMOs (CCSRI, 2009).
3. The district or school board enters into a performance-based contract (see for example, Denver Public Schools, 2009) with the EMO that defines the legal relationship between the district and EMO and includes:
 - a. The specific autonomies to be provided to the EMO;
 - b. A written and agreed upon delegation of responsibilities for the EMO and for the district;

- c. The performance benchmarks and indicators to be used to measure the success of the EMO in supporting school improvement, including explicit consequences for not meeting agreed upon benchmarks and outcomes; and
- d. Fiscal incentives used to hold the EMO accountable for its performance (Kowal & Arkin, 2005).

Action Principles

For State

1. Develop state-specific mechanisms that will support a district's ability to restart with an EMO. For instance, state education agencies could:
 - Cultivate the development of within-state education management organizations (EMOs), through incentives or partnerships with universities or education organizations.
 - Utilize a rigorous RFP process to recruit and identify potential EMOs to work with targeted districts and schools. For sample RFPs and performance indicators, see Chicago Public Schools (2009) and Denver Public Schools (2009).
 - Develop a model RFP process to be used by districts.
 - Develop and promote the policy conditions that will support effective use of EMOs, such as clarifying or defining:
 - ♦ How to select and evaluate EMOs.
 - ♦ The scope of autonomy (flexible and non-negotiable) to be granted to EMOs.
 - ♦ The scope of the district's and school's conditions that the EMO will be expected to address.
 - ♦ The EMO's responsibilities and expected outcomes to be included in a performance contract.

For District

Attend to System-Level Governance

1. Develop the capacity (internally or externally) to effectively identify, select, and monitor EMOs.
2. Engage parents and community members to implement the EMO option and select high-quality providers.
3. Research and prioritize EMOs that have the capacity to provide service in the district.
4. Develop and use a rigorous selection process to recruit and select potential EMOs.
5. Ensure alignment between EMO services and existing district services, as appropriate.

Contracting with EMOs—Articulating the Legal Relationship

1. Engage stakeholder groups to identify the right mix of autonomy and flexibility to be provided to prospective EMOs as a means of gaining support for the EMO option.
2. Clearly articulate the autonomies to be provided to EMOs.
3. Clearly articulate the delegation of responsibilities between the district and the EMO with respect to targeted schools.
4. Develop a set of non-negotiable performance benchmarks to serve as the foundation for holding EMOs accountable.
5. Develop financial incentives to hold EMOs accountable for ongoing performance.
6. Outline consequences for failing to meet benchmarks including modifying or cancelling the contract.

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Closing Schools

Center on Innovation & Improvement

Closing persistently low-achieving schools is one option that may be used by districts as part of an overall district improvement strategy (Kowal & Hassel, 2008; Steiner, 2009). This strategy involves closing an existing school and enrolling students who attended that school in other, higher-achieving schools. Closing low-achieving schools is an option used primarily by large urban districts as part of a comprehensive district reform effort that may also include targeted and intensive school-level interventions, strategies to improve the supply of human capital, and partnering with external charter or education management organizations.

The experience of districts that have closed schools for poor achievement (e.g., Chicago, Pittsburgh, Hartford, Denver) provides key lessons learned and guidance for districts considering closing schools (Steiner, 2009). Specifically, there are clear steps that districts can take to diminish the extent of the challenges and obstacles that will surface when closing schools. The steps, outlined by Steiner (2009) and supplemented by a set of guiding questions, are provided here.

When implementing the school closure intervention, districts should:

- 1. Establish policy context.** Strategically decide if closing schools is a feasible and necessary option by considering:
 - a. How closing low-achieving schools will contribute to the larger district reform effort.
 - b. The extent to which current (or past) school interventions have led to improved school performance in persistently low-achieving schools, and identifying those schools that have not improved despite repeated interventions and increased resources.
 - c. Which schools, if any, are having a negative impact on students' academic achievement.
- 2. Establish clear procedures and decision criteria** for closing schools, by:
 - a. Including key stakeholders, including parents, the school community, and community and business leaders, in developing criteria for closing schools (example: Denver Public Schools).
 - b. Developing a consistent and data-based method of assessing school performance, such as a performance index, that supplements state-level academic achievement data and that is uniformly applied to schools across the district.
- 3. Operate transparently.** Communicate the decision to close schools, through:
 - a. Ongoing and upfront communication with parents, the school community, and the school board or school committee members.
 - b. Keeping the district leadership and school board unified (example: asking school board members to vote on a slate of closures, rather than individual school closures).
 - c. Developing and articulating a clear rationale for the school closures, including the immediate benefit that students will receive as a result of the school closure.
- 4. Plan for orderly transition of students, staff in both the closed school and receiving schools.** Develop and implement a transition plan for students and staff by:
 - a. Creating options and ensuring immediate placement of displaced students.
 - b. Communicating directly (e.g., face-to-face) with the families of all displaced students.
 - c. Taking proactive measures to communicate with staff and plan for transitioning displaced staff.

Steiner (2009) identifies a number of implications for districts to consider when thinking about closing persistently low-achieving schools which is adapted and presented below as a set of district action principles.

Action Principles

For District

1. Assess the district's capacity to manage the closing of schools, including all of the steps involved in closing schools. Address capacity issues prior to closing schools.
2. Consider how closing schools fits or aligns with the broader district improvement strategy.
3. Prior to closing any schools, identify or develop options for students from to-be-closed schools—develop a supply of higher-performing schools.
4. Develop fair and transparent criteria for identifying schools that may be closed.
 - Engage community and business leaders in the development of criteria.
 - Access external and credible experts in the development of criteria.
5. Develop a clear rationale for why schools are being closed and how students will benefit.
6. Communicate early and often to the public the rationale for why schools are being closed and how students will benefit.
7. Work closely with the school board or school committee members to minimize challenges.
8. Develop and communicate a transition plan for students and staff that includes:
 - A dissolution plan for completing the closure process.
 - A transition plan for students that includes attention to students' safety in school and on their way to and from school.
 - A transition plan for staff and administrators.
9. Communicate directly with students and families once schools are closed to support the transition plan.
10. Communicate with receiving schools (e.g., those schools receiving students from closed schools) to ensure that incoming students are welcomed and integrated into the school community.

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Implementing Community-Oriented School Structures

Center on Innovation & Improvement

A community-oriented school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the public school and other community resources, and it is often open for extended hours and days. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and family and community engagement leads to improved student achievement and attendance, stronger and more involved families, and healthier communities (Bireda, 2009; Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003).

Each community-oriented school looks different, because each works to meet the unique needs of its students in their particular context. The concept is based on nearly a century of research that has concluded that children develop along multiple, interconnected domains, and when one developmental domain is ignored, other domains may suffer (Blank & Berg, 2006). By addressing the needs of the whole child—physical, social, emotional, and academic—community-oriented schools create environments that fulfill all the necessary conditions for learning. We also know that when the core academic curriculum is tied to the community, removing the artificial separation between the classroom and the real world, student outcomes are improved (Blank, Berg, & Melaville, 2006). “Complementary learning” involves coordinating non-school community and family resources with existing school services; co-locating these services at the school can have a positive, synergistic effect on a number of desirable outcomes for students, families, schools, and communities (Grossman & Vang, 2009).

Evaluating one model of community-oriented schools, Communities In Schools’ seven-state study shows improvement in math, reading, and graduation rates is linked to integrated service provision. Notably, the CIS Model of providing integrated student services has a stronger impact on school-level outcomes than providing services for students in an uncoordinated fashion (see <http://www.cisnet.org/about/NationalEvaluation/Normal.asp>). Research also suggests the successful engagement of urban parents and community residents on school campuses requires diverse outreach strategies, including using personal outreach methods in a familiar language and creating an inviting environment, but the strongest motivator is showing how all services/programs ultimately help the children succeed (O’Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008). Research on community-oriented schools in rural settings is sparse, although there is indication that interventions are needed in such settings (U.S. GAO, 2004).

Action Principles

For District

1. Ensure each community-oriented school has a strong academic program at its core, with all other services complementing the central academic mission.
2. Ask each partnering organization to designate an employee at each school site to operate as a contact point between the school, organization, students, families, and community members, with the goal of creating sustainable and effective partnerships.
3. Develop joint financing of facilities and programs by school districts, the local government, and community agencies.

For School

1. Ensure that all staff—administrators, teachers, and other staff—are willing to collaborate with outside organizations and are provided with training to do so effectively.
2. Involve parents, community members, school staff, and other stakeholders in planning for services to be offered at the school site.
3. Integrate in-school and out-of-school time learning with aligned standards.
4. Incorporate the community into the curriculum as a resource for learning, including service learning,

place-based education, and other strategies.

5. Conduct quality evaluations regularly, including data collected from all stakeholders, to determine strengths and weaknesses of services and programs offered to create a continuous cycle of improvement.

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Changing High School Structures and Programs (NHSC)

Changing High School Structures and Programs

National High School Center

The School Improvement Grants have expanded the funding assistance available to secondary schools, especially with the inclusion of Tier II schools (see chapter 1 and 2 for more information). As a result, states and school districts have an opportunity to put unprecedented resources toward high school reforms that would increase graduation rates, reduce dropout rates, and improve teacher effectiveness for all high school students, particularly for students who are in greatest need of high quality teaching and supports to catch up academically with their peers. Research suggests that structural changes designed to enhance learning opportunities, in combination with instructional enhancements, are critical aspects of effective high school reform (Quint, 2006). The pieces within this section provide a brief overview of five structural changes.

- Dual-enrollment gives students the opportunity to take postsecondary-level courses in high school that allow them to earn high school and college credit.
- Thematic learning academies are smaller academies within a larger school that focus on specific themes. These academies—which can be designed around academic- or career-based themes—focus on personalization, the development of college- and career-ready skills through academic and occupational curricula, and easing transitions into and out of high school.
- Credit-recovery programs allow students to recover lost credit through strategies such as afterschool or summer coursework and online portals.
- Re-engagement strategies are designed to meet the needs of youth who have dropped out of high school or are at risk for dropping out. Programs are designed to meet the unique needs of students who are poor, incarcerated, pregnant or parenting, homeless, and/or in need of special education or English language learner services.
- Smaller learning communities include a variety of strategies and structures (e.g., small schools, thematic learning academies, magnet programs) used to subdivide larger comprehensive high schools to foster student engagement and teacher involvement.

The state plays a critical role in ensuring that districts and schools make innovative structural changes to high schools and have the resources they need to fully implement and sustain these changes. Furthermore, the state

can help monitor the success of these structural changes so that effective programs are scaled up and ineffective programs are phased out. Some examples of how states can support these programs include the following:

- Establishing sophisticated but user-friendly systems for collecting, disaggregating, analyzing, monitoring, and using student data; and hold schools and districts accountable for identifying and supporting students who are struggling;
- Supporting—through policymaking and funding—district and school efforts to personalize the learning environment, to ease transitions into and out of high school, and to ensure that students are exposed to a balanced blend of academic and career-oriented learning opportunities;
- Helping districts build leadership capacity among faculty and administrators in low-performing schools to address diverse student needs; and
- Promoting district-level partnerships with the community, employers, and institutions of higher education to facilitate learning opportunities for students and their teachers and to make coursework relevant.

State and local educators and policymakers must carefully coordinate and align their efforts to implement the structural changes that research suggests can improve outcomes for high school students. This section provides background on some promising structural innovations and specific examples of how states, districts, and schools may go about implementing them. For each featured approach, a brief list of references and resources is also provided.

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Dual Enrollment/Early College High Schools

National High School Center

A strategy designed to address the challenge of improving student access to and success in college is the expansion of dual enrollment opportunities, where high school students simultaneously earn high school *and* postsecondary credit for the same course while being exposed to the demands of college-level work (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; 2004). These courses can be taken on a high school campus, the campus of a postsecondary institution, and sometimes through distance learning. Research has documented the effectiveness of dual enrollment efforts in aiding high school students not only in their transition to college, but also in graduating from college (Bailey et al., 2002; Anderson, 2001; Wechsler, 2001; Crossland, 1999).

It is becoming more common for high schools to give students some level of access to college courses. According to an Education Commission of the States database, in 2008 forty-six states had statewide policies governing at least one aspect of dual enrollment. State policies vary widely on a number of dimensions, including state oversight, target population, admissions requirements, course locations, tuition, and funding. According to an NCES study that surveyed U.S. high schools, 71% of high schools reported offering dual credit courses in 2002-03. However, dual enrollment was less available to the student populations traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions. Of the high schools with more than a 50% minority student population, only 58% reported offering dual credit or college-level classes (Waits, Setzer, & Lewis, 2005). Studies indicate that despite the relatively wide availability of college courses to high school students, the number of students taking advantage of the opportunity is fairly small (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005).

One specific effort to expand opportunities for student participation in dual credit options is the Early College High School Initiative. There are over 200 Early College Schools (ECSs) in 24 states and the District of Columbia serving a population of over 30,000 students. ECSs are designed to ensure that underrepresented, first generation college-goers can earn a high school diploma and up to two years of college credit tuition-free. While other dual enrollment options provide students with a taste of college, the goals of ECSs are to provide students with a blended and more integrated academic and social experience.

The specific designs of ECSs vary, but all agree to adhere to the initiative's core principles that include: a commitment to serving students underrepresented in higher education; a partnership between a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom accept joint responsibility for student success; a jointly developed, integrated academic program that allows students to earn one to two years of transferable college credit; a comprehensive student support system that develops the academic and social skills necessary for college success; and a commitment to advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement. A series of reports (AIR & SRI, 2006; 2007; 2008) have examined ECSs and their characteristics, and the National High School Center summarized early findings in one of its publications (National High School Center, 2007).

Action Principles

For State

1. Consider including dual enrollment as part of a larger statewide P-20 alignment effort.
2. Consider adopting statewide articulation agreements that address credit transfer for dual credit classes in both 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education.
3. Consider identifying funding streams that would help make dual credit options affordable for all students, not just those with the ability to pay for tuition, books, and other materials.
4. Consider aligning standards, assessments, and graduation requirements with postsecondary expectations.
5. Create the longitudinal data systems that can track student progress pre-K-12 through postsecondary and workplace.

6. Consider the implications for tuition assistance and campus housing for recent high school graduates transitioning to postsecondary institutions with one or two years of college credit.
7. Consider the impact that preparation for end-of-course exams might have for students who want to enroll in dual credit options.
8. Consider incentives for collaboration and communication across the educational system.

For District

1. Promote partnerships with postsecondary institutions.
2. Provide information/resources to support program design options across multiple schools and postsecondary institutions.
3. Serve as policy advisors on program implementation.
4. Help find instructors who could teach college level courses and assist with administrative planning.

For School

1. Ensure that school staff members (administrators and guidance counselors) fully understand the state's graduation and dual enrollment policies.
2. Design clear course pathways that provide students with opportunities for dual credit options, particularly for students traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions.
3. Provide course-selection guidance for students interested in and eligible for dual credit options.
4. Balance student interests with the transferability of credits when advising students on course selection.
5. Provide adequate academic and social support for student success in college-level classes.
6. Build time and incentives for cross-institutional collaboration between high schools and postsecondary institutions.

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Thematic Learning Academies

National High School Center

The transition to high school presents numerous academic and social challenges for some students, particularly ninth graders and those who are underprepared for a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006) or have difficulty acclimating to the larger, more bureaucratic environment of the typical American high school (Lee & Smith, 2001). With fewer opportunities for individualized attention, students can easily get lost in the crowd, fall behind, lose interest in school, and eventually drop out. To help address this concern, schools across the nation are implementing thematic learning academies, which tend to be smaller, focused programs within a larger high school. Popular approaches to learning academies—which include personalization as a critical element for success—are theme-based academies (e.g., leadership, arts, technology), ninth grade (or freshman) academies, and career academies. These academies focus on students' individual needs and provide them with a balanced mix of core academic preparation and opportunities to develop practical, work-based skills. The academy models are helping high schools successfully engage students and keep them on track for graduation.

Theme-based academies. Some learning academies are designed to provide a learning environment centered on a particular theme. While some of these themes can be related to a specific career field (e.g., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), other themes can be more general (e.g. leadership). Specific designs for thematic learning academies can vary. For example, these academies can be limited to students in a particular grade, or can be offered as multi-grade arrangements.

Ninth grade academies. Referred to as the “ninth grade bulge,” students in ninth grade comprise the largest percentage of the overall high school population because they are much more likely to fall behind during this critical year and not be promoted to tenth grade (Wheelock & Miao, 2005). Ninth grade academies provide specialized attention during this transitional year by helping underprepared students catch up academically, offering a more personalized learning environment, and giving teachers the opportunity to collaborate. Some ninth grade academies include a seminar on study skills, and some use a block scheduling structure that allows time for intensive development of the critical skills that students need to succeed in high school (Smith, 2007).

Other aspects of ninth grade academies may include: an advisory component that facilitates meaningful interaction between teachers and students and can help identify and respond to students' needs early on; and teacher teams that are responsible for addressing students' learning needs and responding to discipline and attendance problems in proactive ways (e.g., eliminating in-school suspension). Upper grade academies, or “houses,” provide similar supports for students beyond ninth grade.

Career academies. Designed to expose students to a rigorous core curriculum, career academies simultaneously teach college- and career-ready skills in specific fields, such as arts, business, health sciences, hospitality, and engineering. Close partnerships with the employers in the local community provide career awareness, internships, and other work-based learning opportunities for students.

Like the other academy models, an emphasis is placed on personalized learning (Smith, 2008), and career academies often involve a mentoring or advisory component. Research suggests that career academies can have a positive impact on attendance, credit accrual, graduation rates, and college attendance rates, as well as postsecondary employment prospects for young men (Kemple & Willner, 2008).

Action Principles

For District

1. Monitor student and school data to ensure that students who are falling behind and/or are at risk for dropping out receive additional supports through placement in thematic learning academies.
2. Provide support for schools developing thematic learning academies through professional development and coaching.

3. Foster collaboration between feeder middle schools and high schools to promote placement of students, including students with disabilities and English language learners, in ninth grade and other learning academies to ensure that students in need of additional support have their needs met from the first day of high school.
4. Encourage school leaders to develop and nurture partnerships with local businesses and organizations that are linked with the school's thematic academies.

For School

1. Determine and implement a structure to personalize the learning environment best suited to the school's context.
2. Provide parents with information about the purpose and outcomes of thematic learning academies.
3. Develop partnerships with local business, organizations, and government agencies and leverage these partnerships to give students hands-on learning opportunities, such as internships and job shadowing.
4. Provide professional development for all staff to help prepare them for the new school structure and to support new roles.

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Credit-Recovery Programs

National High School Center

Research has shown that students who miss or fail academic courses are at greater risk of dropping out of school than their peers. To re-engage these students researchers recommend that schools provide extra academic support (Dynarski et al., 2008). For example, schools can provide extra study time and opportunities for credit recovery and accumulation (also known as credit retrieval). These programs may be delivered in remedial classes during the regular school day or as extended learning time (e.g., before or after-school, Saturday school, or summer programs). In these programs, students can work closely with teachers either individually or in small groups to complete coursework or credits required to graduate. In other words, credit-recovery programs need to address the challenges that prevented students from previous success. This may include flexible pacing and schedules of instruction, adapting instructional methods and content to students' level of skills and learning styles, extra practice, and frequent assessments to inform instruction and to provide feedback to students. Data reported by schools suggests that credit-recovery programs may have positive effects on earning credits toward graduation, attendance rates, and passing rates on state standardized tests (e.g., Trautman & Lawrence, 2004).

Recognizing that credit recovery can be an important strategy for dropout prevention, several comprehensive dropout prevention models include this component. For example, the Talent Development High School model offers after-hours credit-recovery programs such as Twilight School and other summer and weekend activities for making up or catching up on work. This model has shown positive effects on students' average number of course credits (Kemple, Herlihy, & Smith, 2005). Additionally, an increasing number of schools use online learning options for credit recovery (Watson & Gemin, 2008). The use of technology as an alternative to traditional classroom instruction individualizes instruction and allows for scheduling flexibility. However, it also requires strategizing in order to maintain students' motivation and engagement and to help them develop independent learning skills, self-discipline, and technology-based communication skills necessary to become successful online learners. There is some initial research evidence supporting the effectiveness of utilizing technology to help students complete courses required for graduation (e.g., Cavanaugh et al., 2004; Hannafin, 2002).

Action Principles

For State

1. Set clear standards to govern credit-recovery programs.
2. Ensure programs meet minimum credit standards and are implemented with fidelity.
3. Determine the maximum number of credit recovery courses that a student can take.
4. Determine the instructional methodologies used for the credit recovery program(s) (e.g., online program, direct instruction, computer assisted instruction, etc.).
5. Certify national and state instructional programs (e.g., virtual learning courses) that can be used by districts and schools for credit recovery.

For District

1. Offer credit-recovery programs (e.g., an intensive semester of instruction in reading and mathematics, online credit-recovery programs).
2. Recommend that teachers certified in the appropriate subject oversee students trying to make up credits.
3. Establish an application process that requires parental consent for participation in a credit-recovery program.
4. Establish minimum criteria to determine eligibility for participation in the credit-recovery program.
5. Use a longitudinal data system to identify students at-risk for dropping out of school who may benefit from credit-recovery programs.

6. Use longitudinal data systems to track the outcomes of students participating in credit-recovery programs to inform decisions about retaining, re-designing, or replacing current credit-recovery programs.
7. Provide professional development and resources for teachers and others who are involved with the credit-recovery program.

For School

1. Offer mandatory support classes or after-school courses for credit-recovery for students at high risk (e.g., below 2.0 grade point average).
2. Monitor the credit-recovery program with appropriate data supports to make sure students have mastered the material before being awarded credit.
3. Convene a panel of principals and teachers to peer review each credit-recovery course to ensure it aligns with state and local standards.
4. Approve participation of a student in a credit-recovery program after review by the school leadership team, school improvement team, grade level team, or other school committee including the guidance counselor responsible for the student and a teacher in the appropriate subject area.
5. Continue to review data to help inform instructional decisions that will, over time, reduce the number of students needing credit-recovery options.

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Re-engagement Strategies

National High School Center

Re-engagement of high school dropouts (also known as school re-entry or dropout recovery) aims to give dropouts who want to return to school the help they need to graduate. More specifically, re-engagement programs aim to help dropouts remain healthy and safe; ready for work, college, and military service; ready for marriage, family, and parenting; and ready for civic engagement and service. Re-engagement programs may be housed in a wide range of offices and departments—most commonly a high school or an alternative education center. In some cases, re-engagement programs are overseen by a district central office or by specific district departments.

Some of the re-engagement programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of high school dropouts including young adults below the poverty line, pregnant youth and young parents, incarcerated youth and youth offenders, special education students, English language learners, homeless youth, and migrant youth. A number of research studies have demonstrated the positive impact of re-engagement programs on academic outcomes, employment outcomes, and health and social-emotional outcomes of these diverse populations including economically disadvantaged youth (Bloom, Gardenhire-Crooks, & Mandsager, 2009; Schochet, Burghardt, & Glazerman, 2001), migrant youth (e.g., Cranston-Gingras, 2003), youth offenders (e.g., Abrazaldo et al., 2009), and young parents (e.g., Bos & Fellerath, 1997; Quint, Bos, & Polit, 1997; Weinman, Buzi, Smith, & Nevarez, 2007).

In order to best serve the needs of these students, re-engagement programs offer a multi-dimensional approach that may include, in addition to intensive academic interventions, targeted interventions to promote responsible citizenship, life-coping skills, physical fitness, health and hygiene, job skills, parenting skills, and college preparation. The nature of the additional program components varies by model and population served. For example, in a model for youth offenders, grantees provide services in partnership with juvenile justice, education, construction, and workforce development agencies (Abrazaldo et al., 2009). A program that provides long-distance learning for children of migratory and seasonal farmworkers (Cranston-Gingras, 2003) and a model for at-risk youth (Bloom, Gardenhire-Crooks, & Mandsager, 2009) help youth transition from the program by providing vocational evaluation and counseling, career exploration, job skill development, and assistance in postsecondary placement. Instruction is often individualized to students' needs through small class sizes and tutoring services. In addition, students may receive mentoring, counseling, referral to external support systems, and incentive payments tied to length of stay, program attendance, or performance. To overcome factors that may prevent students from maintaining regular attendance, some programs also provide housing, child care, and transportation. While some re-engagement programs are non-selective, others specify eligibility criteria such as minimal scores on basic tests of mathematics and reading, no current drug use, demonstration of motivation and personal responsibility, no current gang affiliation, no records of criminal behavior, and no current psychological problems.

To recruit participants, re-engagement programs may host a hotline for dropouts who would like to learn more about the options available to them, run ads in the local media, distribute flyers, or hold fairs at local schools where students can re-enroll. Some districts or organizations may hire a specialist who works with community non-profit organizations and faith-based groups to identify dropouts, contact them, and provide information about re-engagement opportunities. In some cases, programs may recruit and train teachers, counselors, administrators, business people, parents, and other volunteers to visit students at home to encourage them to re-enroll.

Action Principles

For State

1. Identify and profile districts and schools within the state that have successfully re-engaged dropouts.
2. Communicate targets for dropout recovery and graduation rates to districts.
3. Require districts to provide administrators with professional development on practices for preventing or recovering dropouts.
4. Make available external or in-house experts on dropout recovery to districts as part of providing technical assistance and other resources.

5. Identify or provide funding sources to support dropout recovery efforts.
6. Provide guidance in how federal and state funds can be used to support dropout recovery efforts.

For District

1. Consider creating a dropout recovery office that has responsibility district-wide for identifying, tracking, and recovering students who dropped out.
2. Develop a district-wide dropout recovery database to identify and track students for dropout recovery. The database will include academic and support services provided to students, high school graduation or GED, and other student outcomes (e.g., college enrollment, job attainment).
3. Determine the ongoing staff development activities that will most directly impact the effectiveness of the re-engagement staff and provide professional development on a regular basis.
4. Collaborate with other state and municipal agencies (e.g., local law-enforcement agencies) and specific departments and offices in the district (e.g., the migrant education office) to coordinate delivery of services to recovered dropouts.

For School

1. Build awareness and obtain staff buy-in of the re-engagement program.
2. Prepare a school-specific dropout recovery plan and incorporate in the school improvement plan.
3. Assign appropriate staff to the re-engagement program, including an administrator, and define their responsibilities in the identification, tracking, recovery, and monitoring of recovered students. Identify the key qualities of staff for re-engagement programs and hire experienced teachers that have the desired qualities.
4. Establish a warm and welcoming atmosphere on the part of administrators, teachers, and staff from the time a student comes to enroll and throughout the student's stay in the program.
5. Maintain close communication and collaboration with parents/guardians of re-entry students.

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Smaller Learning Communities

National High School Center

Smaller learning communities (SLCs) refer to all school design efforts intended to create smaller, more learning-centered units of organization (Oxley, 2007). These communities serve up to a few hundred students, and are formed either by building new limited-size schools or by converting comprehensive high schools into multiple communities. The goals of creating SLCs are to increase student engagement and teacher involvement. Many educators believe that in small schools teachers know their students better; students feel less isolated and alienated; discrepancies in the achievement gap can be reduced; and teachers are encouraged to develop innovative strategies (Cotton, 2001).

Common structural approaches to SLC efforts include the following:

- Small schools break large schools into small, multi-grade, autonomous programs housed within a larger school building. Schools-within-a-school may be organized around themes. Each has their own culture, program, personnel, students, budget, and school space.
- Career academies organize curricula around one or more careers or occupations by integrating both academic and occupation-related classes. (For more information see the section on “Thematic Learning Academies” in this chapter.)
- Freshman academies, also called ninth grade academies, are designed to meet the needs of ninth grade students as they make the transition from middle school to high school. (For more information see the section on “Thematic Learning Academies” in this chapter.)
- “House” plans assign students within the school to groups, either across all grades or by grade level, each with its own disciplinary policy, student activity program, student government, and social activities.
- Magnet programs usually have a core focus (e.g., math and science, the arts) and selectively draw students from the entire district (Page, Layzer, Schimmenti, Bernstein, & Horst, 2002; Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008).

One of the most common strategies used in SLCs is interdisciplinary team teaching, which groups core teachers to share students in common for multiple years and integrate various curricula. Other personalization strategies that can often be found in SLCs include teacher advisory programs that assign teachers to a small number of students for whom they are responsible over multiple years; adult advocates or mentors who offer support and guidance to students on a regular basis over several years; and family advocate systems that bridge the gap between school and home with regular meetings of students and families with their family advocate at the school (Bernstein et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Action Principles

For State

1. Provide assistance, information, and/or support for establishing smaller learning communities.
2. Foster state-level policies and funding support strategies to promote the creation of SLCs.

For District

1. Partner with parents and community stakeholders to foster awareness and support for SLCs.
2. Provide adequate resources for developing and sustaining the SLC, including building space, financial support, staff, etc.

For School

1. View the SLC as a means to an end, not an end unto itself.
2. Ensure teachers’ support of the goals and methods of the SLC and plan for the changes in their working environment.

3. Form interdisciplinary teams of teachers that share students and planning time in common and support the development of innovative curriculum and instructional programs.
4. Provide professional development focused on SLC structure and strategies, including effective teaming practices.
5. Designate specific assignments within the SLC for school administrators, counseling staff, special educators, and remediation specialists.
6. Ensure that school admission is driven by student and teacher choice and that the SLC attracts a diverse group of students.

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