

High School Leadership

— *Preliminary Report* —



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Preliminary Report

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Observations from focus group participants appear throughout this document.

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The findings in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the New Hampshire Department of Education, High School Leadership Team, State Board of Education, the Education Alliance at Brown University, the U.S. Department of Education, or individual participants in the data collection process.

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I. Introduction

Educators, education policy makers, and key stakeholders in New Hampshire are calling for improvements in the overall performance and completion rates of their high school students. This report introduces the *New Hampshire Vision for High Schools* and represents a compilation of a number of stakeholder workshops, forums, and focus groups that were convened throughout 2004 and early 2005. Over five hundred representatives of nearly every high school in the state and a wide array of stakeholder groups came together in these face-to-face events to offer their perspectives, hopes, and fears about high school in New Hampshire. The purpose of this report is to inform ongoing efforts to improve high schools in New Hampshire.

Why Be Concerned About High School in New Hampshire?

New Hampshire has a great deal that is going right related to its high schools. Graduation rates have increased steadily throughout the 20th century.ⁱ New Hampshire's business and community members have long supported its high schools as they endeavor to ensure quality educational outcomes for their students. New Hampshire's citizens enjoy a relatively positive economic context—the lowest poverty rate in the nation, the fourth lowest unemployment rate, and the 7th highest per capita income.ⁱⁱ New Hampshire added over 65,000 new jobs between 1990 and 1996.ⁱⁱⁱ

That said, New Hampshire's stakeholders also recognize that the skills and knowledge needed to succeed are rapidly changing. Though graduation rates have increased throughout the 20th century, the high schools designed for the 20th century are not preparing students for success in the 21st. Over half of the jobs that New Hampshire added between 1990 and 1996 were for college-educated workers—and at least half of the projected new jobs in New Hampshire will also be for college graduates.^{iv} Despite this reality, New Hampshire's high school graduates are not as prepared for admission to college as they should be. Remediation rates among freshman entering college are significantly high. In addition, New Hampshire is 19th in the nation in the rate of postsecondary enrollments among high school graduates, thus relying on an in-migration of skilled workers to fill the most lucrative jobs.^{v,vi}

High school graduates not planning to go to college immediately need more from their high school experience. As the American Diploma project states, "Successful preparation for both postsecondary education and employment requires learning the same rigorous English and mathematics content and skills. No longer do students planning to go to work after high school need a different and less rigorous curriculum than those planning to go to college."^{vii} No matter what the level of education that students complete, those with more

education earn more than those with less. Yet, New Hampshire is 20th in the nation in its rate of high school completion.^{viii} Even more telling, fifty-two percent of high school students feel only “somewhat prepared” to enter the workforce and twenty-two percent feel “unprepared,” while forty-five percent of employers feel students are only somewhat prepared and forty-five percent believe students are unprepared for work.^{ix}

Awareness of these statistics coupled with an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement has spurred the New Hampshire impetus for creating a vision and a blueprint for high school improvement.

What Is Being Done?

The New Hampshire Department of Education convened a High School Leadership Team in 2004. With a small planning grant and technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Education, the leadership team developed a series of activities leading to the creation of a high school vision and blue print that can help to frame local high school improvement efforts. First among these activities was the engagement of education stakeholders.

The Leadership Team is comprised of a representative cross-section of New Hampshire stakeholders and advocates. Membership on the Leadership Team continues to expand as the effort gains momentum.

The data and commentary compiled in this report will be used by the High School Leadership Team as they craft a vision statement for high schools in New Hampshire. The results of this report will also be shared with additional stakeholders at the March 2005 conference on *Breaking Ranks II*, which is being organized by the New Hampshire School Principals Association and the New Hampshire Department of Education.

Out of these many gatherings of concerned New Hampshire stakeholders, a vision for New Hampshire’s high schools is beginning to take shape. Future forums and reports will continue the process of clarification and engagement so that the resulting vision statement and initiatives can best support local efforts to improve high schools.

ⁱU.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1960 Census of Population*, Vol. 1; *Current Population Reports, Series P-20*; and *Current Population Survey, unpublished data*.

ⁱⁱNHES, 1-3: *Vital Signs 1995-1998*, as presented at the 2005 New Hampshire High School Leadership Summit.

ⁱⁱⁱRoss Gittell and Brian Gottlob, *BIA presentation*, March 14, 2000, as presented at the 2005 New Hampshire High School Leadership Summit.

^{iv}Gittell and Gottlob, 2000.

^vData presented at the 2005 New Hampshire High School Leadership Summit.

^{vi}Gittell and Gottlob, 2000.

^{vii}American Diploma Project, *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts* (Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc.), 2004.

^{viii}Data presented at the 2005 New Hampshire High School Leadership Summit.

^{ix}*New Hampshire School to Work Survey*, 1999, as presented at the 2005 New Hampshire High School Leadership Summit.

II. New Hampshire Education Reform Conference: High School Reform Workshop

On May 17, 2004, the New Hampshire State Board of Education and the Department of Education convened an Education Reform Conference to gain input from stakeholders on a variety of key education issues. The intent of the Conference was to collect and analyze data from stakeholders and use that data in prioritizing the issues that state leaders would focus on to increase the achievement of *each* student in New Hampshire.

During the conference, participants had the opportunity to choose among seven concurrent workshops, one of which was on high school reform. More than one-quarter of the participants chose to attend the workshop on high school reform, indicating the importance of the topic to the community. The fifty-five participants in the High School Reform Workshop included educators, administrators, policy-makers, higher education personnel, and business people from all over New Hampshire.

In the workshop, participants responded to four sets of questions about high school reform for New Hampshire schools:

- *Why does high school reform need to occur? What are the issues?*
- *What idea or approach could change student learning at the high school level?*
- *How would these ideas or approaches change the high school?*
- *If your ideas were implemented, how would it impact cost of education in New Hampshire?*

Cross-cutting issues were identified after the conference, as members of the planning committee reviewed a transcript of the sessions and responded to the following two questions:

- What were the priority topics within each of the sessions?
- What was the general sense you got about the topic from reading all of the comments from a session?

Findings

Overall, participants painted a picture of disenfranchised high school students, largely because there is a disconnect in many high schools between learning styles and teaching methods. Workshop participants called for the promotion of student educational plans where teachers become facilitators, managers, and assessors of student learning in an environment where each student drives his or her own learning.

Participants recognized the high short-term costs of high school reform but countered that the long-term costs decline—specifically in remediation, dropout recovery, and juvenile justice—which would outweigh short-term costs.

Comments from participants are summarized below. The bolded and starred items were deemed most urgent or important by the members of the planning committee.

Why does HS Reform need to occur? What are the issues?

1. ***Students are disenfranchised both psychologically and academically.**
2. ***There is a lack of real-world connections for students.**
3. ***There is a disconnect between learning styles and teaching styles.**
4. Kids don't truly understand where learning will take them in life.
5. It is difficult to bring about change in school and in society.
6. The complexity of life is growing everyday – ie: technology.
7. The decision process for careers and higher education takes place at the wrong time in life – age 16 is too early.
8. Schools need to reach into the community to expand the support network
9. Schools need to engage students by developing exciting and relevant curriculum.
10. Education is repetitious and not relevant to students.
11. Facilities, resources, and buildings are deteriorating (time, parental involvement, etc.)

“As educators, we need to make sure we are not shutting doors on kids. In math, we have to guarantee that doors are not shut whether they are college bound or not – it’s opening up a world of possibilities for students.”

What idea or approach could change student learning at the high school level?

1. ***Student Individual Educational Plans.**
2. The Academy model, including work-based-learning, advanced credit classes, and community involvement.
3. Extra-curricular activities for credit.
4. Credit for experiential learning.
5. Student-driven learning with evaluation on performance.
6. Caring connections with adults.
7. Developing more problem-solving and critical skills learning & and assessing by multiple means.
8. Increasing choices, including learning environments and matching teachers' styles to students' styles.
9. Funding – investment in education is important.
10. A student-centered environment/personalization.
11. A richer, deeper educational experience – depth in curriculum content areas.

How would these ideas or approaches change the high school?

1. ***Teachers would be more like facilitators, managers, and assessors of student learning, and students would drive their own learning.**
2. There would be more and shared community involvement.
3. There would be a dynamic learning community invested in the results.
4. There would be fewer dropouts.
5. School would run 24/7, year-round, with a larger menu of opportunities.
6. There would be flexibility in teaching and learning structures.
7. There would be an enthusiastic infusion of resources from the community in time, money, and energy.
8. Time would be used differently.
9. The environment of school and community would include a reduction of negativity and stress.

10. There would be student-designed education (time, structure, products).
11. There would be an energized professional development program for renewal of teaching strategies.

If your ideas were implemented, how would it impact cost of education in New Hampshire?

1. **Cost would go up in the short term, but down in the long term as costs of remediation, drop out recovery, discipline, and juvenile justice went down.**
2. There would be a redistribution of money towards value-based learning, including tax credits.
3. There would be costs up front for professional development and teacher preparation programs.
4. In the long term, it would be a prevention model and would result in savings.
5. Money would be perceived as an investment in the future.
6. There would need to be a culture shift toward valuing education with money.
7. Costs could be addressed by reducing social responsibility of schools and eliminating bureaucracy.
8. To reduce classroom loads, would need to hire more teachers.

III. New Hampshire Stakeholder Feedback Groups

The New Hampshire Department of Education and the New Hampshire High School Leadership Team convened a series of sessions throughout 2004 to solicit additional input from New Hampshire's stakeholders. On April 13, 14, and 15, 2004, the Department held three forums for a total of nearly 200 high school students and staff. In the late summer and fall of 2004, the Leadership Team organized an additional series of focus groups to solicit the experience and ideas of another 100 stakeholders around high school reform.

Student/Teacher/Counselor Forums

In mid-spring 2004, 143 students, mostly seniors, from 48 of 76 New Hampshire high schools participated in forums in the North Country, the Seacoast, and the South Central areas of the state. One staff person from each high school also participated in the forums, for a total of forty-eight principals, assistant principals, teachers, and guidance counselors. While the volunteer students and staff who were engaged in the forums represent a large percentage of New Hampshire's high schools, this sample was not selected in a manner designed to ensure valid statistical inferences. Rather, the purpose of these forums was to gather descriptive information about teaching and learning methods that work best for New Hampshire from the perspective of students and the adults in their schools.

The Education Alliance at Brown University designed and facilitated the forums. The formulation of the questions posed at the forums was informed by the *Breaking Ranks II* document researched and published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Education Alliance.¹ Data were elicited in directed discussions and via a survey instrument. Results from the survey instrument were tabulated, though not analyzed for statistical significance. It is important to note, therefore, that the statistics presented below are offered as descriptive indicators of the relative importance students and staff placed on the features of high schools that were discussed.

¹National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Education Alliance at Brown University, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*, (Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals), www.nassp.org.

Findings

Among the numerous activities in each forum, students and staff were asked to indicate how important they believed five of the dimensions of effective high schools identified in the *Breaking Ranks II* document were to them and how common those practices were in their schools. After rating the importance and actual practice of these features, participants discussed the findings and explained their ratings.

Students, Parents, and Faculty Work Together to Make Good Decisions for the School

86% of students indicated students, parents, and faculty working together was very important, yet only 29% felt it was common practice in their schools. Similarly, 84% of staff felt this should be a very important feature of their schools, yet only 16% felt it was commonly practiced. When the participants discussed the survey questions in a large-group setting, they suggested that while students, parents, and faculty may have decision-making opportunities within their schools, it is rare for the three groups to work together. One participant indicated that students who want to make change sometimes get in trouble for it.

High School Staff Challenge Students as Much as They Can

81% of the students believed it to be very important for high school staff to challenge students as much as they can. However, only 34% felt high school staff actually do challenge students to high levels. Likewise, 90% of staff believed it to be very important that staff challenge students, while 52% believed high school staff actually challenge students as much as they can. In their discussion, students and teachers acknowledged that they have a mutual responsibility to create challenging learning situations, but that the course offerings and instructional strategies within the school make a difference. Forum participants recognized that not only do schools need more advanced courses, but within every classroom teachers need to understand students' learning styles and unique motivations to effectively challenge students.

Teachers Show a Sense of Caring About Their Students

87% of students and 90% of staff felt it was very important for teachers to show a sense of caring about their students so that students feel their teachers are part of the learning process. Though obviously important, just under one-half (48%) of the students sense that teachers actually care and just under two-thirds (63%) of staff felt teachers show a sense of caring about their students. In their discussions, participants offered some concrete means by which caring relationships can be fostered, such as advisory programs, teacher involvement in school activities and clubs, and smaller classes.

“Last year, I had a math teacher who had come from an elementary background. She taught so differently – she took down all of our birthdays. My birthday was on a midterm day and I was taking her midterm and she brought me a bag of goodies. She really cares about me.”

Teachers Teach Differently to Students Who Learn Differently

93% of students and staff believed strongly that teachers should teach differently to students who learn differently, while only 41% of students and 31% of staff believed differentiated instruction was evident in their schools. In their discussion, participants expressed an interest in having options and school schedules that accommodate different learning styles.

Subjects Taught in School are Like the Real World

88% of students and 83% of staff indicated it was very important that subjects taught in school are like the real world so there is a link between education and the future. As with other categories, student and staff perceptions of actual practice do not match well with their hopes and expectations. Only 27% of students and 22% of staff believed that the predominance of subjects taught in school are like the real world. While some participants wondered how realistic this goal might be, numerous participants offered examples of how these connections are currently made in some high schools for some students. One participant indicated that vocational options such as Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center Programs promote real-world education. Other examples offered for making the link between high school education and the future were college credit and internships in high school and smaller schools.

“As teachers, we have an opportunity to show the students there is true beauty. There is real world opportunity. Shame on teachers, if they do not jump on the opportunity.”

Ideas for Improvement

In addition to the survey, students and faculty had opportunities to design an ideal high school and to discuss what schools and teachers can do to make the learning environment better in both the classroom and in the school in general. Participants were very creative in designing their ideal high schools, suggesting such innovations as:

- more explicit combinations of academics with athletics, community service, the arts, internships and field trips, practical projects (such as building a house for someone in need), and the natural outdoor environment;
- integrating all subject matter concepts across all courses;
- utilizing guest speakers, mentors, and regular student debates;
- creatively changing the schedule for the school day and school year; and
- smaller classes in larger facilities.

In terms of what teachers can do to improve the learning environment, participants

suggested that teachers make themselves available both during and outside of class to review material or get extra help. They also suggested that teachers set up activities that are geared to finding out which ways a student learns best. Other suggested instructional improvements included teachers thinking up fun ways to encourage students to participate, to draw examples from current events, and to emphasize subject learning rather than assessment.

Focus Groups

From August to October 2004, the New Hampshire Department of Education and the High School Leadership Team conducted nine focus groups across the state. The more than 100 participants in the focus groups included representatives of seven stakeholder groups: superintendents; principals; Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center Program directors; special education directors; parents and employers of high school students and business partners; community-based organizations; and higher education personnel. These groups represented a wide range of demographics and a variety of regions of New Hampshire.

Focus group participants were presented with open-ended questions asking them to identify aspects of high school education that were successful and those that were unsuccessful. Participants were then asked to suggest new approaches and immediate next steps. The open-ended nature of the questions was chosen to provide maximum flexibility for participants to identify for themselves key issues of interest or concern, without being led to any particular conclusions by the way the questions were framed. The resulting comments by focus group participants are reflective of the myriad concerns evident in high school reform nationwide. Where there is overlap among focus groups, state leaders may find the unique foci for New Hampshire's high school reform initiative. Therefore, while there were many well-formed observations and concerns discussed in each focus group, this section of the report documents only those that were common across multiple groups, suggesting that the issues are potentially of concern statewide.

The raw data from the focus group sessions will be available in future reports.

Questions asked:

- What is currently working for high school students that will lead to high achievement?
- What is not working and what are the obstacles to change?
- What new approaches are needed?

- What next steps should be taken?
- What do you see as the role of your group in bringing about the changes needed?

Summary Findings

Focus group participants provided a great many comments that help to describe the expectations New Hampshire stakeholders have of their high school students and schools. Common across multiple focus groups was an interest in learning opportunities that encourage students to think beyond the school walls and that harness the motivating and educational power of learning experiences outside of the traditional classroom. Numerous focus groups acknowledged the important role of teaching practices and curricula based on the latest research about learning and the future needs of students, their employers, and their communities. This suggests that, while the traditional high school in New Hampshire remains organized around subject matter course expectations, schedules that maintain subject matter boundaries, and traditional teaching methods, state leaders might help schools to rethink their expectations, requirements, courses, schedules, and instructional strategies to better reflect the interests of the broader community.

“We need to look at public high school as basically the major or the only influence in shaping young adults. Beyond prepping, standards need to address some philosophical concerns. What are we doing to turn these kids into thoughtful, contributing members of society?”

Findings Related to Individual Questions

What is currently working for high school students that will lead to high achievement?

Collectively, participants see value in academic programs that correlate directly to work experience. The common thread throughout responses to the question is hands-on instruction coupled with work-based experience. As was evident among the students and school staff, there was a strong interest across the stakeholder groups in merging students’ in-school experience with out-of-the-classroom and work-based learning opportunities.

Participants most commonly identified the following issues as effective in their current implementation:

- **Dual Enrollment Programs** (6 of 7 stakeholder groups indicated dual enrollment programs as effective. Project Lead the Way was cited as an example.)
- **Internships, work-based learning, community service, Career and Technical Education Center Programs (CTE), apprenticeships, and career academies** (5 of 7 groups)

- **After-school co-curricular activities** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Performance- and Project-based learning and assessment** (3 of 7 groups)

What is not working and what are the obstacles to change?

Areas identified as requiring improvement included teaching methods and teacher/student ratios. In particular, participants cited a gap between the math, science, and social studies curricula and the knowledge required in today's working world as an area of great concern. Participants also commented on the prevalence of "old style" teaching methods and the disconnect between the latest research on effective learning methods and actual practices in the schools. Also included were practical obstacles that limit opportunities for students to engage in Career and Technical Education Center Programs. As with their responses to the question "What is working...", participants' visions suggested teaching methods and schools need to fit real-world needs.

Coupled with comments about the need for new instructional methods and curricula were administrative issues such as high student/teacher ratios, a lack of cohesion in education decision making, and inadequate funding.

The following issues were often noted as ineffective in their current implementation:

- **"Old style" teaching methods** (4 of 7 stakeholder groups indicated "old style" teaching methods as ineffective.)
- **Size of schools** (4 of 7 groups)
- **Obstacles to CTE programs (transportation, openings, scheduling, lack of good 9th and 10th grade CTE programs)** (4 of 7 groups)
- **Teacher-focused teaching instead of student-focused learning** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Daily schedule and early start not optimal for learning** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Teacher-student ratios too high** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Breadth of curriculum over depth** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Curriculum in math, science, and social studies does not keep pace with the world** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Students graduate high school without basic math, reading, writing skills** (3 of 7 groups)

- **Political environment in educational decision making** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Variable public school funding; money issues** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Standards for special ed teachers makes finding highly qualified teachers hard; too few:** (3 of 7 groups)

What new approaches are needed?

In response to this question, the most commonly suggested new approach was the restructuring of teacher training based on research to accommodate multiple learning styles. A key implication for many participants was that to meet the needs of students with differing learning styles and motivations, teachers should be equipped to introduce real-world skills into the curriculum. Other participants expressed in various ways a desire for a real-world curriculum that stresses relevance *while also teaching writing and analytical skills*. Some focus group participants described a need for a “fundamental restructuring” of schools and teacher training, though they did not offer specifics about what that restructuring would entail. Finally, participants called for collaborative efforts across all grades.

Participants across focus groups suggested the following new approaches:

- **Restructure teacher training (especially in learning styles)** (5 of 7 stakeholder groups indicated a restructuring of teacher training as a new approach to explore.)
- **Incorporate learning styles (interdisciplinary, experiential, competency-based, real-world)** (4 of 7 groups)
- **Interdisciplinary, experiential, competency-based and real-world learning** (4 of 7 groups)
- **Resolve adequacy and equitable funding issues** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Collaborative, multi-system thinking in P-16** (3 of 7 groups)

“Character development, responsibility, respect, curiosity, creativity... those need to be cultivated. When kids enter school with preconceptions about what they are going to learn, it becomes a culture, rather than a standard.”

What next steps should be taken?

The development of differentiated teaching and individualized education plans, including career guidance, were noted by participants as important next steps. Groups also suggested opening lines of communication with postsecondary educators in order to develop “closer and seamless connections.” Participants commonly suggested that immediate action

should be taken to resolve funding issues. Comments indicated a need to address these issues at the both state and local levels.

Participants suggested the following specific next steps:

- **Adequately fund education** (5 of 7 stakeholder groups indicated steps should be taken to adequately fund education.)
- **Dialogue w/postsecondary** (4 of 7 groups)
- **Differentiated teaching for all immediately** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Define and adopt a state vision for high school reform as Vermont and Maine have done** (3 of 7 groups)

What do you see as the role of your group in bringing about the changes needed?

Across the board, groups called for persistence in championing reform and saw their roles as advocates on the state and local levels. There were a great many individual comments related to the integration of schools and communities. Participants called for alliances between schools and communities and between high school teachers and higher-education professionals, as well as a need for teaching businesses how they can benefit from partnering with schools.

Participants most commonly see themselves in the following roles:

- **Be more than a voice at the table—policymaking, and implementation** (3 of 7 groups indicated this is a role they can play)
- **We have to keep advocating for change—political, state-level, and local** (3 of 7 groups)
- **Need to reduce the internal and external high school walls and integrate and allow integration with parents, businesses, and higher education** (3 of 7 groups)

“A truly personalized school would have to have a phenomenal communication system – with parents, with community members. That is key. How we communicate within the school and outside the school needs to go beyond progress reports and grades.”

IV. New Hampshire High School Leadership Summit

As the first step in 2005 to support the formulation of a vision statement on high school improvement for the state of New Hampshire, the state's High School Leadership Team reviewed the input from the various stakeholder forums in 2004 and determined that while the interests of New Hampshire stakeholders were substantially in line with national trends in high school reform, there were, indeed, issues that were of particular concern to New Hampshire. The Leadership Team decided to convene a statewide summit on a larger scale to test out potential approaches to the crafting of a vision statement on high school reform.

On January 25, 2005, the High School Leadership Team convened a group of more than 150 additional stakeholders in Concord, New Hampshire. Participating in the Summit were superintendents, principals, teachers, school counselors and directors, high school students, school curriculum coordinators, athletic directors, higher education personnel, at-risk youth specialists, state policy makers including legislators, State Board of Education members, local district school board members, Career and Technical Education (CTE) directors, special education, library media specialists, Tech Prep personnel, Education Union personnel, state accreditation board, state agencies and departments, higher education, members of the non-public school advisory board, and business and community partners, including New Hampshire businesses that employ high school students and/or provide internships.

In preparation for the Summit discussions, the Leadership Team not only reviewed stakeholder input, but also research and promising practices nationwide around high school improvement. The six elements of an effective high school as outlined by the National High School Alliance School & District Innovations Working Group seemed to capture the interests and concerns of New Hampshire's many stakeholders, so they were used to frame, but not limit, the Summit discussions. The six elements include:

- Personalization
- High Standards
- Academic Engagement
- Effective Leadership
- Parent & Community Partnerships
- Professional Learning Communities

After the elements and underlying philosophy of the framework were presented to all the Summit participants, attendees broke into small groups to discuss specifics of each element. The purpose of the small group discussions was to test out how well the topical areas within the framework might describe New Hampshire's vision for high school and to refine the framework to fit New Hampshire's unique context. Small-group facilitators directed discussions toward answers to the following questions:

1. How might the explanation of this topical area be refined to more accurately speak to New Hampshire's high school context? What are the most important features of this topical area?
2. What would high school in New Hampshire look like if the features of this topical area were evident throughout the state? How would these ideas change the high school experience in your community? What would you see when you visited the schools that embody this topical area?
3. What questions or concerns do you have about this concept? What potential challenges do you see in this area of change?

The group as a whole then returned to report out on over-arching topic themes, opportunities, and challenges.

While there were many well-formed observations and concerns discussed in each small group, this report documents only those that were common across multiple groups or that elicited significant discussion with the breakout groups. Further detail on the breakout discussions will be provided in forthcoming reports.

Small-Group Findings

Personalization

The concept of personalization means many things to many different people. For a principal at the New Hampshire Summit, it meant the modification of the curriculum to suit a student's abilities and ambitions; for a student it meant that a teacher remembers his birthday. In general, participants described a school in which personalization was successfully implemented as an environment where every teacher and student feels they have a place and that they are all responsible for the school. Students would have opportunities for personalized learning tied to their post-graduate plans, so that each

student would be able to shape his or her own experience. Thus, for Summit participants, a useful definition of personalization would entail at least two key concepts: personalized relationships and personalized learning.

Personalized Relationships

Participants indicated a keen interest in creating an environment that encourages the development and nurturing of relationships between students, advisors, and teachers. A truly personalized school would have an outstanding system of communication between parents and community members. Each student would feel surrounded by a community. Students and teachers would meet voluntarily: groups of students and teachers would eat lunch together because they want to, not because they have to. Advisors would be assigned to students and would work with them from day-one through graduation. Parents would be intimately connected to their child's work. Smaller classes and communities were encouraged.

A significant portion of the discussion around personalization was devoted to the kind of personal relationship that is possible between a student and a teacher. *Perception* of time was a theme that was brought up repeatedly, the idea being that the time required of staff to make personal connections with students is not an "add-on" but a more productive use of available time. Both staff and students expressed a desire for students to get to know teachers outside the context of their roles as teachers. There was also a belief that all professionals in the school should begin to assume the responsibilities of guiding students through all aspects of their high school experience. To do this well, the knowledge that guidance counselors have about adolescent and youth development must be translated to teachers as a meaningful tool to support their work.

Personalized Learning

It is significant that for the Summit participants, personalization does not deal solely with relationships, but also with individualizing teaching and learning to best meet the needs of each student. Summit participants did not suggest that personalized learning means that the students themselves decide what they will learn in high school, but rather that they will gain access to the knowledge and skills embedded in the New Hampshire standards through instructional methods that work well given each student's unique learning styles and strengths. This will require not only curricular changes, but also changes to the way teaching and the role of teachers is understood. Teachers will need to become mentors and advisors as much as instructors.

In addition, one student recommended students develop their own schedules to create a

*"When we personalize,
we all become teachers
and counselors."*

motive for achievement. Another participant suggested that students will have more at stake if they are allowed to make personal choices in the directions they want to take within a class. The idea of personalization was broadened by a third participant who asked why high school is four years rather than three or five years, depending on the needs of the individual student.

As a result of the combined emphasis on personalized relationships and personalized learning in a high school, Summit participants envisioned a place where students would no longer perceive themselves as subjects of management and instead as competent people with potential. Students would have the opportunity to decipher their own learning styles and would understand what approaches to learning content work best for them. Ultimately, students would graduate with a sense of self-worth and accomplishment.

Potential Challenges

The discussion groups identified challenges to personalization ranging from information overload in this fast-paced age to the time limits of the school day. Others pointed to the responsibility that school leaders have to develop a framework in which a personalized education can thrive. The framework—which includes everything from school cultures, expectations, schedules, instructional strategies, and staff assignments—must transcend the current programs in which teachers and students are expected to accomplish their goals. Here, the student-to-teacher ratio was identified as “one of the biggest impediments.”

“We have to make sure our children are employable for the 21st century.”

The professional preparation of teachers was also identified as a barrier. Recognizing that personalization is not a current expectation of or requirement for teachers, participants called for personalization to become part of the pre-service degree program for teachers and to be acknowledged in negotiations with teacher unions.

Summit participants were quite clear that the qualities of personalization cannot be mandated; the nature of a given faculty must be considered in attempts to create a culture of personalization. Particularly given the nature of local control in New Hampshire, participants were clear that the state must leave the implementation of personalization up to the local schools and school districts. This was as important to the student participants as to the educators. As one student noted, “This can’t be perceived by students as coming from above or it’s doomed to fail.” Participants felt that once the overarching goal of personalization is established statewide, each district can implement the philosophy in its own way.

Summary

Overall, to Summit participants, personalization seems to have promise as a guiding principle for New Hampshire's high school improvement efforts, but for the concept of personalization to be useful, it must be very clearly defined and left to those at the local level to actually implement.

High Standards

Participants in the small group sessions on high standards went back and forth between a discussion of standards as more general expectations for students and standards as a driving force in a system of assessment and accountability. Participants felt it important that when thinking about high school improvement in New Hampshire, stakeholders not focus solely on student achievement in the core content areas, but also consider more broadly what it takes for students to be productive members of their communities. This should be incorporated into the standards that define high school teaching and learning. There was a sense that because the current standards are based on Carnegie units, they do not encompass the full range of expectations stakeholders have for students. Specifically, participants cautioned that if standards focus primarily only on mathematics and English language arts, they will be too narrow. Rather, standards should encompass the range of knowledge, skills, and abilities that students need in order to succeed.

Success was primarily defined by participants in terms of employability in a new economy. In this sense, lifelong learning was mentioned as one of the "standards" that would help students to succeed, as were skills in communication, problem solving, time management, and the ability to work in teams.

Some participants also suggested that standards should address other types of goals and expectations. For example, a student participant suggested that "character development, responsibility, respect, curiosity, and creativity need to be cultivated." Another student suggested that "standards need to address some philosophical concerns. What are we doing to turn these kids into thoughtful, contributing members of society?"

The discussion of higher standards also addressed the question of increased rigor—three rather than two years of a foreign language, for instance. There was some concern that the emphasis on "high" standards might be translated simply into preparation to enter a four-year college or university. Summit participants were concerned that not every student will attend a four-year institution of higher education, thus the purpose of increased rigor

should be to ensure students are successful whatever path they choose after high school.

Participants also discussed the means by which students can demonstrate they have met the standards. One participant noted that senior projects allow students to demonstrate a variety of high-level thinking skills as well as communication skills. Yet a curriculum based on Carnegie units and seat time does not encourage such a demonstration. A student suggested that measuring performance ought to become “a culture, rather than a standard.” Participants suggested that students should play a role in deciding what is acceptable evidence for what it means to meet the standards.

When asked to talk about what schools would look like if they successfully implemented high standards, participants described counseling for students to inform them about the standards, cooperation between high schools and higher education to ensure parity in college preparatory work, and hands-on learning, tied to the standards, so that there is a synthesis of high standards and real-world applications. Schools characterized by an effective use of standards would have reward systems that move beyond letter grades and recognize the achievements of non-college-bound students.

Potential Challenges

In terms of implementation, participants felt it would be quite challenging to reconcile the need for higher expectations with the realities of differing learning styles, motivations, and future goals among students. There was a concern among participants that an emphasis on high standards might lead schools to focus on what it takes to prepare students to attend a four-year college, yet the traditional college preparatory high school experience is not necessarily what each student will need to succeed. Participants were concerned that if schools believe they can best demonstrate high standards through the number of Advanced Placement and honors courses they have and how many students with high GPAs are in their schools, it will not translate into high standards for *every* student. Participants said it was unreasonable to expect high standards in *all* things for all students. “It feels like we are trying to shove all kids through one tube,” noted a participant.

In terms of the practical implications for schools, there was concern that in the almost frantic context of schools driven by federal law, it is difficult for educators to plan a new, more relevant curriculum based on high standards. In addition, if higher standards mean piling on more requirements for students, teachers, and administrators, it will be difficult for every child to succeed. Meanwhile, teachers need more support to help struggling students or to make connections with higher learning.

Summary

The utility of using higher standards as a driver for high school improvement will depend upon how it could be defined and used. Participants very naturally centered their discussion of high standards on how student performance is assessed and how schools are held accountable. In an era of fast-paced change related to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, the use of standards in this way as a driver for high school improvement has drawbacks. When the discussion shifted to the broader expectations that stakeholders have for students, however, participants were more likely to see high standards as a useful frame for thinking about high school reform. More thought needs to be given to the purpose and nature of standards in a strategy for high school improvement.

Academic Engagement

In the Summit discussions on academic engagement, participants focused primarily on the question of "engagement" among students. When asked to describe schools characterized by academic engagement, participants portrayed places where students feel challenged; where their schoolwork is meaningful in their lives; and where they are motivated to achieve personal growth.

While some participants noted that students themselves need to increase their commitment to learning—"Students are their own clients"—most of the discussion centered around what teachers, counselors, and administrators can do to actively engage students. Their discussions centered on the kinds of teaching styles, curricula, and school organizations that lead to students being captivated by what they are learning. In a school where students are engaged academically, participants expected to see instruction that is flexible enough to accommodate different learning styles and that relates academic content areas to real-world experiences, which makes the curriculum come alive. Teachers in schools characterized by academic engagement would help students understand why they have to learn and would present content in creative ways so students respond.

One participant suggested that academic engagement is not primarily about student responsibility versus teacher responsibility, but rather begins when both the student and teacher become part of what is happening in the classroom. In this case, both students and teachers would make choices about curriculum. Teachers and students would communicate openly about academic and personal issues, leading to engagement on the part of both teachers and students.

Potential Challenges

Participants felt there was not yet a clear consensus on the definition of academic engagement. Similarly, while *rigor* seemed important to the concept of academic engagement, the definition of rigor was also unclear. Until the terms are clearly defined, Summit participants were reticent about the promise of academic engagement as a concept to motivate and inform high school improvement efforts.

Teacher training was further identified as an issue of concern, as there was little confidence that teacher preparation programs were developing among teachers an understanding of how to motivate and engage students as learners. Participants also cited a lack of ownership of the curriculum by teachers as a potential obstacle, as well as the lack of flexibility teachers have to adjust the curriculum to engage individual students.

Economic barriers were cited as another challenge, a concern echoed across numerous topics. Participants also felt that the identification of qualified leaders who are willing and able to engage students could be challenging.

Summary

The concept of academic engagement seemed to hold promise as a way to define the expectations of high school improvement, but that was seen more as a goal of than a strategy for reform. The emphasis on teaching methods and resources and school organizations that excite, motivate, and encourage students to pursue additional learning was a unique way to address the overarching topic, as it focused primarily on the definition of *engagement* and not the definition of *academic*. Participants felt a conversation about *rigor* would more likely lead to questions of the *academic* side of the concept at hand. Because participants were not clear about the definition of the key concepts, they called for a consensus on the definitions of *academic engagement* and *rigor* before they could agree whether or not academic engagement would be a useful concept in a vision for high school reform. Given this, New Hampshire may find more success in focusing this strategy area on “engagement” and subsume questions related to academics under another strategic topic. This could help to clarify how a focus on student engagement could be used to motivate and support high school reform.

Effective Leadership

The Summit's initial discussions on effective leadership focused on the definition of leadership and its application in New Hampshire schools. The point was raised that leadership is not a person; it is a process. Participants made a distinction between leaders and managers, noting that effective leaders make choices that serve the vision and mission of the school.

To Summit participants, effective leadership in New Hampshire is characterized by administrators, teachers, and students being treated as co-leaders. The issue of student leadership was especially important to discussion participants, and to them, student leadership entails not only involvement in school decision making, but also in taking responsibility for their own learning.

There was also targeted discussion about the need to reach out to community members to draw them into a relationship with the schools. Effective leaders help to engage other stakeholders and disperse the responsibility for change.

Participants pictured schools with effective leadership as institutions that not only enjoy the qualities of leadership but nurture them as well. Ongoing training and support would be evident in a school with effective leadership. Clear vision statements that all interested parties understood and embraced would be a sign of effective leadership within a school.

Potential Challenges

Participants expressed concern that the present learning environments are not characterized by long-term commitments to quality leaders. They feared that the many pressures on high school leaders will force those tasked with initiating change to move on before plans took shape. In addition to the concern about turnover, participants mentioned the lack of training and support for effective leadership as a potential obstacle. Finally, participants identified the rigid schedules of typical schools as impediments to change that may frustrate leadership efforts.

Summary

Summit participants were quite comfortable with the notion of effective leadership being included in a vision for high school improvement. They suggested that to be effective, leaders should articulate a clear vision and mission for schools and communities. They should also create environments where others are enabled to lead, as the responsibility for change goes beyond school administrators to include teachers, students, and leaders in the

“Leaders create environments that allow others to emerge as leaders.”

community. They described an immediate need for training programs and forums for community involvement in defining leadership, indicating their comfort with effective leadership as a driver for high school reform.

Parent and Community Partnerships

Summit participants felt that the primary purpose of *parent and community partnerships* is to enhance learning, yet they also acknowledged that other benefits come from partnerships, such as the benefits students gain from supervision and the belief that partnerships will help to decrease the dropout rate and resolve suspension problems. Summit participants also felt it important that the partnerships are symbiotic relationships; not only should a community support its schools, but the schools should also give back to the community. Despite the symbiotic nature of the partnerships, Summit participants felt it incumbent upon schools to be the party to initiate relationship building with parents, businesses, and institutions of higher learning.

When asked to describe what parent and community partnerships would look like in schools, participants most often described businesses partnerships with schools. However, some participants also described schools that would serve as community centers even after school hours and school-day hours that reflect typical work-day hours. Several types of relationships were given as examples of effective partnerships, such as mentoring relationships and internships within the community.

Summit participants discussed the particular relationship of parents to the school and recommended that parents partner with teachers at work and at school. Parents need to be involved "in the right way," and their rate of participation is significantly greater when they are provided specific plans and goals. To be most successful, schools need a clarification of parents' roles and the kind of parent involvement that is desired by all. Schools also need to develop methods to support parents.

Potential Challenges

Some of the challenges to parent and community partnerships identified by participants were primarily logistical in nature; participants wondered, for example, how students would be transported to their community positions or internships. Similarly, a student noted that the biggest barrier is his schedule, which does not have the flexibility to accommodate an internship.

Other challenges identified by the participants were partly logistical and partly cultural. For example, a participant posed the question, “What do you do when a student has an internship at a law firm but can’t buy the necessary clothing?”

The issue of who would coordinate responsibility for students who had internships was also raised. Participants were concerned that schools would be indirectly responsible for students’ work. They also noted the possibility that only those school districts with secure funding would succeed with this model.

Summary

Participants generally accepted the notion that parent and community partnerships will be an important component of a vision for high school improvement. The term “partnerships” captured well the participants’ notion that the relationships necessary to high school improvement are two-way. Partnerships are not solely organized to support the schools; in developing a common vision for the state, stakeholders must ask “How can the body of high school students and programs meet the community needs?” and “What will the businesses need students to know in order to work there?”

“Partnerships are symbiotic relationships; not only should a community support its schools, but the schools should also give back to the community.”

Professional Learning Communities

When talking about professional learning communities, participants primarily focused on communities of teachers and their learning processes, but they also discussed engaging the broader community, students, parents, and higher education in learning.

First and foremost, participants discussed the features of a professional learning community among teachers in a school. They spoke of the importance of trust and respect to the development of a learning community, such as the need for trust between veteran and new teachers. Trust was considered to be especially important, because many features of professional learning communities that the group valued involved teachers teaching teachers. That is, participants described ideal schools where teachers model continuous learning, observe each other’s teaching, periodically switch classes with one another, and engage in mentoring relationships where teachers have a “chance to receive ‘secrets’ from other teachers who have learned through experience the things that need to be done.”

Participants expressed hope that having professional learning communities within schools would help teachers to see their work as a team endeavor, collaborate on common tasks, and become reflective practitioners that think about their own teaching processes.

The group did expand the discussion beyond simply professional learning communities of teachers, discussing the importance of all people who contribute to the success of the students coming together. One participant gave the example of how engaging custodians in new ways that respected their role in the success of the school had tremendous benefits. Others discussed the importance of bringing the broader community into the learning communities within schools. By inviting businesses and members of the broader community into the school community, participants hoped students would see the relevance of the subjects they study to business. When they thought together about opening up professional learning communities to businesses, participants talked about how community members can serve on reviews of student portfolios or visit classrooms to help teachers “keep it fresh.” When the relationships go the other direction, teacher externships to businesses can help teachers to learn about the needs of businesses and help understand the community expectations of high schools.

Participants felt a natural extension of the creation of professional learning communities is a curiosity about whether schools are helping students to learn what businesses and higher education believe they need to know.

The question of student participation in professional learning communities was addressed specifically by the discussion groups. Participants felt it would be especially important for students to be a part of the process. Professional learning communities model learning for students. As students are engaged in the professional learning culture, teachers will find that they also learn from students. It was important to participants that students be connected to all the available services, and actively engaging students in the professional learning culture would likely lead to more open lines of communication that would promote that goal.

Potential Challenges

Participants pointed to a number of potential obstacles, most of which are challenges across the topical areas. Funding was an issue, for example, as was the time required to plan and implement measures for making schools more effective learning communities.

The group was also concerned that schools might resist change or the extra work required to establish and maintain the kind of working relationships they described. While union contracts were offered as an example of a potential hurdle, there was also an example shared of a successful negotiation between unions and schools to build in the needed time to create and sustain professional learning communities.

Other challenges include the limited flexibility that schools and teachers feel they have in

their schedules and poor communication between schools and partners, particularly colleges and the business community, which has been known to lead to a resistance to the groups working together.

Summary

The idea of developing professional learning communities as a strategy for high school improvement resonated well among the Summit participants who discussed the topic. By modeling learning, creating relationships that support effective teaching, and engaging the broader community in the learning environment, teachers, students, and the community would all benefit.

V. Conclusion

The New Hampshire High School Leadership Team is in the midst of their efforts to gather collaborative and ongoing input to set the parameters of a useful and compelling vision for improvement among New Hampshire's high schools. Stakeholders have indicated that such a vision statement would provide guidance and information to schools and school districts undertaking the challenging but critical work of high school reform. The Leadership Team will review the feedback captured in this report, as well as continue its collaboration with the New Hampshire School Principals Association in their efforts to disseminate training on the *Breaking Ranks II* model of high school improvement. It is anticipated that the experience of training and implementing the *Breaking Ranks II* model of reform will help to clarify not only a statewide vision for high school, but also potential supports that local schools and districts will need over time.

In addition to gathering and analyzing data on effective and motivating strategies for high school improvement, the Leadership Team hopes to garner resources to create a network of excellence. This may include identifying schools willing and able to engage in high school reform and become model schools and mentors for other high schools in the future. The Leadership Team has a specific goal of providing a summer institute for high schools to work on the goals that they determine will lead them to be schools of excellence.

The feedback contained in this report—particularly the hopes and expectations of New Hampshire's high school students, staff, and community leaders—will be further elaborated in forthcoming reports. For more information on New Hampshire's High School Leadership initiative, go to <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/EdReform/index.htm>.



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