

1 Key Components of Successful Small Schools

It is with our peers that we will ultimately find our voice and change our world. It is in community that our lives are transformed. Small groups can change the world.

—Peter Block

Two years ago, approximately 29 percent of the students at Central High School were dropping out before receiving a high school diploma, and daily absentee rates ran at about 20 percent. When state-mandated assessments were administered, 80 percent of the student body of 1,400 failed some portion. Students reported that they didn't feel safe at Central; educational materials such as textbooks, computers, and lab equipment were in insufficient supply; and parts of the building were in desperate need of repair. Students did not have equal access to challenging learning opportunities, creating wide disparities in achievement among groups; for example, African Americans and Latinos were three to four times less likely to be enrolled in Advanced Placement courses than were White students.

WHY SMALL SCHOOLS?

Like Central High School, many communities have been plagued by high dropout rates, increased school violence, declines in student learning,

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inadequate resources, and unequal access to challenging learning opportunities for all students. With high-stakes testing a prerequisite for high school graduation, many schools are confronting these long-term problems and seeking solutions with renewed vigor. Research indicates that large comprehensive schools, especially those serving high percentages of low-income students and students of color, need a radical overhaul if they are to be successful in raising and sustaining achievement for all students.

Educational equity is today's most crucial civil-rights issue. Progress in raising student achievement has been incremental on virtually every measure of student engagement and performance, particularly for Black, Latino, and low-income students. Many touted examples of reducing educational disparity for these groups—the Houston, Texas, school system, for example—have masked the deleterious effects of high-stakes tests on dropout and suspension rates, special-education placement, and grade-retention rates for the very students that these initiatives purport to be helping. Cultures of low expectations, negative stereotyping, and inadequate resources continue to plague public schools enrolling high percentages of Black, Latino, and low-income students. Yet, these very schools are increasingly constrained in their practices through the heavy hand of the No Child Left Behind Act.—Dan French, executive director, Center for Collaborative Education, Boston, MA

Such a radical overhaul must go beyond individual reforms like block scheduling, interdisciplinary curriculum development, and even high-stakes testing. These, and other reforms, when implemented in isolation, have had little impact on raising student achievement.

Many comprehensive high schools are choosing to form small learning communities rather than small, autonomous schools. While the trend toward small learning communities (SLC) within large comprehensive high schools may assist in creating more personalized learning cultures, much recent research points to pitfalls of SLCs that minimize their benefits. For example, a recent report by Jobs for the Future found the following:

- Small learning communities are often layered onto the existing organizational structure of large comprehensive high schools, making an already complex organization even more complex.
- In the layering model, faculty have multiple affiliations—to the SLC and to departments, for example. Students attend and teachers teach classes in both their SLC and the large school.
- The multiple affiliations and choppiness of such arrangements do not offer the heightened accountability for students and teachers that comes from students being known well by a consistent group of adults.

- Because of these pitfalls, “it is unlikely that the positive results associated with being a student in a small, autonomous school will accrue to the students and teachers experiencing such hybrids” (Steinberg & Allen, 2002).

For these reasons, we propose that the best strategy to address systemic public school ineffectiveness is to create small freestanding schools, or to redesign and transform large public schools into small, autonomous schools.

ORIGINS OF THE SMALL SCHOOLS MOVEMENT

The beginning of the small schools movement can be traced to the mid-1970s, when Deborah Meier and a group of like-minded teachers founded Central Park East Elementary School in Harlem, New York. Meier believed that putting an emphasis on the size of the school would successfully bring the rigor and challenges found in many private schools to students in low-income communities. New York City became the first urban district to approach the development of small schools as a planned strategy for school reform, followed closely by an extensive grassroots movement in Chicago. Two decades of subsequent research findings offer compelling evidence about the qualities and conditions of small schools and their effectiveness for improving the education of urban students not well served by large schools.

Small schools developed out of the fairly simple concept that schools ought to be places where each child is known, visible, and valued by at least one caring adult who takes responsibility and accepts accountability for the child’s learning. Small schools are an attempt to address systemic ineffectiveness through redesigning and transforming large public schools. The small schools movement seeks to improve dramatically educational experiences and outcomes for students and their families. In recent years several foundations, most notably the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation, have moved the small high schools strategy into the public spotlight through significant funding initiatives. This has led to a substantial expansion of small, start-up high schools and the conversion of large, comprehensive high schools to multiple small schools and small learning communities.

Backed by research and a desire to improve conditions for student learning so that all students may participate fully in our democratic society, many large urban districts such as Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco, Seattle, and Oakland have joined New York City and Chicago in this movement to create a new vision of public education. This vision calls

for maximum autonomy and flexibility in small schools planning and implementation in exchange for strong accountability to ensure that all reform efforts are successful in raising student achievement for underserved students.

A Small Schools Success Story: Boston's Pilot Schools

A central principle of our work at the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) is that schools have the best chance to successfully educate all students if they are granted autonomy over their resources in exchange for increased accountability, all within the economies of scale of a larger urban district. Boston's Pilot Schools, which CCE coordinates, best represent this concept of schooling. The result of a unique partnership among the mayor, school committee, superintendent, and teachers union, Pilot Schools were created in 1994 to promote increased choice options within the city, largely in response to state legislation creating first-time charter schools and the subsequent loss of Boston students to such institutions.

The Pilot Schools are unique among the nation's urban districts for the autonomy schools exercise over budget, staffing, governance, curriculum, and the school calendar as the result of a teachers union contract. As noted in a Boston Public Schools memo (1995), Pilot Schools were intended "to provide models of educational excellence which will help to foster widespread educational reform throughout all of the Boston Public Schools. Ultimately, we hope to dramatically improve the educational learning environment and thereby improve student performance." Starting with four new start-up schools and one school that converted from a regular school, the Pilot Schools Network has now grown to a total of twenty schools spanning grades PreK through 12 and enrolling approximately 6,500 students, or roughly 11 percent of the total Boston Public Schools' (BPS) enrollment.

At CCE, we serve as the Pilot Schools Network convener and coordinator, providing network schools with coaching, networkwide professional development, advocacy, research, and financial management.

In January 2006, CCE released a study, *Progress and Promise: A Report on the Boston Pilot Schools*, showing that Pilot Schools outpace the district average on all student performance and engagement indicators: they have higher attendance, lower suspensions and transfers, and higher achievement and college-going rates.¹ Pilot high school students have a 94 percent attendance rate as compared to an 89 percent rate for students attending regular BPS high schools; this translates to Pilot high school students attending school an average of two additional weeks per year than their peers attending regular BPS high schools. On the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests, Pilot students perform at a higher level than the students districtwide at every grade level tested (3–10), in both English and math, and at the passing, advanced, and proficient levels. And while 79 percent of Pilot graduates are attending college one year after high school graduation, only 67 percent of BPS graduates are doing so.

Pilot Schools achieve these impressive results because they control their resources, which they use to implement effective practices, such as small class sizes, low student-teacher loads, long instructional blocks, time for faculty collaborative planning, increased advisory and student support, and a personalized school culture. These are prime reasons why Pilots have among the highest wait lists for student enrollment of any district schools.

With a commitment to equity for students and families at its center, we propose a model for school change that requires that schools embrace the following four conditions to be successful.

FOUR CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SMALL SCHOOLS

1. **Smallness:** Schools are small and personalized so that students and teachers know each other well.
2. **Unifying vision:** Schools have a unifying vision of teaching and learning. That vision binds the school community and drives teaching, learning, and assessment, with the goal of creating powerful learning experiences for every student.
3. **Autonomy:** Schools must have the autonomy necessary to create unified learning communities (i.e., control over budgets, staffing, curriculum/assessment, governance, and school calendar), while also benefiting from the economies of scale that remaining within a large district affords (e.g., transportation, facilities, payroll, legal services).
4. **Accountability:** Schools must be held accountable for the quality of the education they provide to students and for student outcomes, through benchmarks and school quality reviews. Students in effective small schools are held accountable through competency-based graduation portfolios and exhibitions, in addition to mandated standardized tests.

Smallness

Increasingly, evidence suggests that small schools can be a powerful antidote to the failures of our nation's large schools. A comprehensive review of the research on small schools reveals that students in small schools do as well academically as, and often better than, those in large schools. Student attitudes are more positive about school, attendance is higher, dropout rates are lower, there are fewer discipline problems, and students participate more in extracurricular activities. All students have equal access to learning at high levels. Team teaching, integrated curriculum, cooperative learning, and other successful grouping and instructional strategies that are easier to implement in small schools are in greater evidence. Parents are more involved, and teachers report that working in small schools is more satisfying. Most important, research indicates that

school size affects student performance, particularly the performance of low-income students and students of color (Cotton, 1996).

This study reaches the following important conclusions about small schools:

- Small schools perform at least as well academically as large schools—and often their performance is superior.
- Teaching strategies that are linked with higher student performance are more often implemented in small schools.
- Student attitudes toward school are more positive in small schools.
- Small schools experience significantly fewer discipline problems and less truancy, violence, substance abuse, and gang participation.
- Levels of extracurricular participation are higher and more varied in small schools, and students in small schools gain greater satisfaction from participation.
- Student attendance is higher in small schools, while the dropout rate is lower.
- Students' confidence and academic self-concepts are higher in small schools.
- Small schools have a higher rate of parental involvement.
- Teacher attitudes towards their work and their administrators are more positive in small schools.
- Small schools are effective in combating the effects of poverty on student achievement and in narrowing the achievement gap that separates poor students from their affluent peers, as well as Black and Latino students from White students.

In addition to supporting the educational benefits of small schools, recent research challenges the notion that large schools are cost efficient. A 2000 study on high school size in New York City found that “small academies and large high schools are similar in terms of budget per graduate. Because the literature on school size indicates that small high schools are more effective for minority and poor students, the similarity in [financial costs] suggests that policy makers might do well to support the creation of more small high schools” (Stiefel, Berne, Iatarola, & Frutcher, 2000). Factoring in that high school dropouts add significantly higher future costs to society through increased crime, prison, and welfare rates and lower voter participation rates, the economic argument in favor of large schools becomes even less credible.

Unifying Vision

Our work is guided by principles of teaching and learning and a commitment to equity and access for all students. The CCE Small Schools Principles are a local version of the Ten Common Principles of the Coalition

of Essential Schools.² They grow out of the research that identifies key characteristics of successful schools. These principles provide a vision for effective small schools and guide the reform work in CCE member schools. Small schools can use the principles as a way of focusing their work as they make decisions about school governance and develop the school's vision. They ensure the principles are embedded in the school's curriculum and assessment practices. These principles are also used in annual assessments of a school's progress toward becoming an effective small school.

CCE Small Schools Principles:

1. *Equity and access.* The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to those goals will vary as students themselves vary. In particular, there should be an explicit goal of raising learning and achievement levels of low-income students and students of color.
2. *Habits of mind.* The school's central goal is to teach students to use their minds well in every area of work they undertake, to the end of becoming responsible members of a diverse, democratic community.
3. *Personalization.* The school is small and personalized, so that teachers and students know each other well. Student-teacher ratios are greatly reduced so that all faculty know their students well, with secondary ratios at no more than 80:1 and elementary ratios at no more than 20:1.
4. *Less is more.* The school's curriculum is driven by the concept of "less is more." Each student should master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.
5. *Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach.* The governing metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker and teacher-as-coach. This helps students to take responsibility for their learning. Learning should be purposeful, rigorous, and related to helping students become powerful in the real world.
6. *Assessment by Exhibition.* Assessment should demonstrate what important things students know and can do, as well as where they are in need of more help. Students should demonstrate their mastery of competencies in various ways, including exhibitions and portfolios.
7. *High expectations, trust, respect, and caring for all.* The tone of the school stresses values of high expectations, trust, respect, and caring on the part of all members of the community.
8. *Professional collaborative communities.* The principal and teachers have multiple obligations and demonstrate a sense of commitment to the

achievement of all members of the school community. Teachers work together to create a professional collaborative learning community.

9. *Flexibility, autonomy, and shared governance.* The people closest to students, including teachers, administrators, parents, and the students themselves, are the policymakers and decision makers. This calls for democratic and equitable forms of school governance and facilitative leadership. The school has maximum flexibility and autonomy, enabling decisions to be made as close to the learner as possible.

Autonomy

Autonomy enables a school to build a unified learning community and use its resources in the best manner possible to provide high-quality teaching and learning to every student. Such autonomy comes with the expectation of increased accountability on the part of the school to track and document its progress.

We believe that small schools should be granted autonomy in the following five main areas:

1. Staffing
2. Budget
3. Curriculum and assessment
4. Governance and policies
5. School calendar

Five Areas of Autonomy

1. Staffing: Small schools have the freedom to hire and excess their staff in order to create a unified school community. This includes:
 - Deciding on staffing patterns that best meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students.
 - Hiring staff that best fit the needs of the school, regardless of their current status (although every teacher hired becomes a member of the local teachers union).
 - Excessing staff (into the district pool) that do not fulfill the needs of the school.
2. Budget: Small schools have a lump-sum, per-pupil budget, which the school has discretion to spend in the manner that provides the best programs and services to students and their families. This includes:
 - Creating a lump-sum, per-pupil budget, the sum of which is equal to that of other district schools within the relevant grade span.
 - Moving the district toward itemizing all central office costs and allowing schools the option to purchase identified discretionary district services and include them in the school's lump-sum, per-pupil budget.

3. Curriculum and assessment: Small schools have the freedom to structure their curriculum and assessment practices to best meet students' learning needs. While acknowledging that all small schools are expected to administer any state- and district-required tests, these schools are given the flexibility to best determine the school-based curriculum and assessment practices that will prepare students for state and district assessments. This includes:
 - Freeing schools from local district curriculum requirements.
 - Having graduation requirements set by the school, not by the district, with an emphasis on competency-based, performance-based assessments as long as they meet or exceed the district's standards.
4. Governance and policies: Small schools have the freedom to create their own governance structure that affords increased decision-making power over budget approval, principal selection and firing, and programs and policies, while being mindful of state requirements on school councils. This includes:
 - Having the school's site council take on increased governing responsibilities, including principal selection, supervision, and firing, with final approval by the superintendent in all cases; budget approval; and setting of school policies.
 - Giving the school freedom from all district policies and flexibility to set policies that the school community feels will best help students to be successful. This includes policies on such areas as promotion, graduation, attendance, and discipline.
5. School calendar: Small schools have the freedom to set longer school days and calendar years for both students and faculty. In particular, research supports a correlation between faculty learning and increased student achievement. Scheduling that allows for summer and school-year faculty planning time contributes to a more unified school community and educational program. This includes:
 - Increasing planning and professional development time for faculty.
 - Increasing learning time for students.
 - Organizing the school schedule to maximize learning time for students and planning time for faculty (e.g., longer days Monday through Thursday in order to have half-days for students on Fridays, providing faculty a significant planning and professional development block every Friday afternoon).

SOURCE: CCE Small School Principals is used with permission of Coalition of Essential Schools. Principles based on the ten common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. The complete material from the Coalition can be read at the website essentialschools.org

Accountability

All CCE network schools are expected to document both their practices and student engagement and performance. Often this occurs through a school quality review. The school quality review process is a proactive accountability strategy for ensuring that schools are engaged in quality educational practices that lead to high student engagement and achievement. Periodic school quality reviews demonstrate the potential of

thoughtful school examinations leading to improved practice and higher student engagement and achievement. These reviews are based on a set of public benchmarks as to what constitutes the practices and policies of an effective school. They require a process of self-examination, reflection, and assessment on the part of the school and a team of external practitioners, based on the benchmarks, and the synthesis of this self-assessment into a document for public review (often, a school portfolio). This report articulates a set of strengths, concerns, and recommendations, with the recommendations effectively becoming a road map for future school improvement efforts.

LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE

From our ten years of experience in supporting the creation of the Boston Pilot Schools Network and assisting other districts with conversions from large to small schools, we have distilled some key lessons.

1. Small, personalized schools that have autonomy over their resources can produce high student engagement and achievement. Autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum, governance, and schedule is critical for creating the conditions in which schools can flourish. The model is built upon the belief that placing our trust and resources in the hands of people at the school level is the best way to create innovative, challenging, and high-performing schools. As one Pilot principal stated, “What every [school] should have are the kinds of conditions Pilots have. That’s everything from size and scale to hiring their own staff to instructional flexibility to governance, the works”(Neufeld, 1999). Ironically, this philosophy is the antithesis of the trend of most urban public school districts in response to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Act which is to increase centralization through mandated instructional practices, required textbooks, and more frequent testing.
2. Creating autonomous schools requires a transformed district and teachers union partnership. All too often, teachers unions and school districts are pitted against one another, so that little meaningful reform is achieved. The Pilot School model is a partnership of a different sort, one in which each party lets go of historical control over all of the conditions that govern a set of schools. Instead, the district and union work collaboratively to support autonomous schools.

3. Incrementalism does not lead to fully autonomous schools. Autonomy can only be gained by taking the risk to negotiate the full set of autonomies from the start. The Boston Community Leadership Academy case study (see Chapter 3) illustrates the power of giving a school a complete set of tools with which to undertake comprehensive improvement. As other school districts explore replicating the Pilot concept, it is common for them to look for ways to engage in the strategy by stages. We have discovered that seeking a side letter union agreement for rethinking a job description, or a waiver request from a textbook requirement, or permission for a schedule change will not result in attaining the full scope of autonomies, nor does it allow staff to think about how teaching and learning can be fundamentally different. In districts that have tried a slow start or incremental approach, the process has bogged down at the first stage.
4. School-level accountability is a critical piece of the autonomy equation. Autonomy should come with accompanying high expectations. Pilot Schools undertake a five-year cycle of school quality reviews, in which they conduct a self-study based on the Network benchmarks, and then host a three-day on-site review from an external team of practitioners, who submit a report of findings and recommendations to the school district and teachers union. Along with student outcomes, each school is assessed for vision, leadership and governance, teaching and learning, professional development, and family engagement.
5. Vibrant networks of schools can play a powerful role in spreading success and in influencing district practices. The Pilot Schools have collaborated over the years to influence one another's practice, through monthly leadership meetings, spring retreats, annual teacher sharing conferences, study groups, and cross-school visits. The Pilot School strategy has also led to improvements in the Boston Public Schools in significant ways:
 - The Pilot model of competency-based graduation was instrumental in shaping a new BPS graduation policy that provides multiple pathways to graduation, including one that enables a school to create its own path of courses and performance assessments.
 - The Pilot autonomies have informed the creation of a new set of district schools that can seek a policy waiver to advance their teaching and learning agendas.

- The success of the Pilot high schools was an important factor in the superintendent’s decision to convert four large BPS high schools to multiple small schools.
- 6. Third-party intermediaries can provide valuable assistance to a network of autonomous schools. CCE is the convener for the Pilot Schools Network. Serving as a “jack-of-all-trades,” CCE supports the Pilot Schools through coaching, professional development, budget negotiations, advocacy, and research.

GETTING STARTED: SMALL SCHOOLS DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

This section of the guide is a road map that may assist districts and schools in planning small, autonomous, and vision-driven schools. Each district will take its unique path to developing small schools, but there are some common elements that all districts should consider. While the steps in this section are presented sequentially, districts may choose a different sequence that suits them. Indeed, some districts may already be well on their way in small schools design and even implementation; this guide can then serve as a checklist to assess progress.

Important Considerations Before Starting

Before you begin the challenging work of either establishing a new small school or converting a large school into small schools, it is important to keep the following considerations in mind.

Be Prepared to Answer the Question, “Why Small Schools?”

As school and district leaders embark on the journey of creating effective small, autonomous, and vision-driven schools, building buy-in among all constituents for the substantial changes to be undertaken is crucial. In order to get the conversation started, leaders must be able to answer for themselves and for staff, parents, students, and community members the question, “Why small schools?” There are three good entry points that can serve to engage the larger community in this conversation:

1. Facilitate a process of articulating a community vision for the education of the students being served, much as the Small School Principles articulate a vision. Through this process, constituents may begin to understand how their desires are best accommodated in small, personalized settings.

2. Build community awareness of the research base demonstrating that small schools are safer, foster better performance by students from all backgrounds, and are more cost-efficient than large schools.
3. Gather quantitative and qualitative data on your own school, along the lines of that cited in the opening vignette of this chapter (e.g., test scores, attendance, enrollment in honors classes). In this way, constituents may find areas for improvement in their own school, and small schools may provide an answer to those challenges.

*Ensure Representation of Key Constituencies
on Leadership and Design Teams*

Small schools cannot be created in isolation from those who will be affected by them. There should be diverse representation of key constituencies on school-level Design Teams. The design of small schools will have greater integrity and strength when crafted with the input of many.

*Ensure Regular Communication
With and Opportunities for Input
From the Entire School Community*

Small schools will be successful when they build support among all the constituencies of the school community—faculty, administration, families, students, and the larger community. While representation helps to accomplish this, everyone involved needs to be regularly apprised of the process of small schools development and its benefits and have opportunities to provide input into shaping the evolving models.

*The Autonomies Are Crucial to
the Success of Small Schools*

Smallness enables greater personalization and makes high-quality teaching possible—but small alone is not enough. In order for small schools to attain their individual visions of excellence, they need to have autonomy over critical conditions of schooling, including budget, staffing, curriculum/assessment, governance and policies, and time. This flexibility enables small schools to craft educational experiences that best meet the needs of the diverse students that they serve.

*In the End, It Is All About
Learning, Teaching, and Assessment*

Smallness and autonomies enable schools to focus on the essence of the educational experience for students—learning, teaching, and assessment. Small schools strive to ensure that learning is purposeful, challenging, and has value in the world beyond school. Every student must be

Table 1.1 Small Schools Design and Implementation

At the District Level

- Establish a districtwide small schools Leadership Team to develop a district plan and to pursue small school autonomies.
- Build community support for small schools.
- Develop a district plan for small schools that includes community input.
- Deliver a clear message to the community on the district’s plan.

At the School Level

For large school conversions:

Create a Design Team to guide the conversion. Decide on the framework for the small schools (e.g., theme or philosophy), size, enrollment process, and faculty assignment process.

For Small Schools, Either Freestanding or Sharing a Facility

- Create a Design Team for each small school.
 - Develop a vision and design for the small school.
 - Decide on the enrollment process.
 - Decide on the selection/assignment process for the school leadership and faculty.
 - Design the governance and leadership for the small school.
 - Construct the curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
 - Create the schedule and student groupings.
 - Design the personalized culture of the school.
 - Design the professional collaborative culture of the school.
 - Plan family and community partnerships.
-

engaged in learning experiences that ensure students are fully prepared to be productive citizens in a diverse and democratic society.

Suggested Sequence for Small Schools Design and Implementation

Table 1.1 suggests a sequence for small school design activities to be conducted at the school and district levels. Each step is discussed in detail in the pages that follow.

Steps to Consider in Small Schools Design and Implementation at the District Level

Establish a Districtwide Small Schools Leadership Team to Develop a District Plan and to Pursue the Small School Autonomies

The five areas of autonomy—staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance and policies, and school calendar—are critical to the

success of small schools. Each district should create a District Team to pursue these autonomies for the projected small schools. The team should consist of those district staff who have authority over the five autonomies (e.g., budget director, human resources director, curriculum coordinator), teachers union representation, and representation from each of the proposed small schools (or representation from each large school to be converted into small schools). The goal is to gain the same level of autonomy in each realm for each of the proposed small schools in the district. The team will deal with some areas that need superintendent and/or school committee approval (e.g., budget, curriculum and assessment, governance and policies), while others may also need teachers union approval (e.g., some areas of the budget, staffing, and school calendar). The initial autonomies that each small school will receive should be defined by the June prior to a September start-up date.

Questions to Consider:

- Staffing: To what extent will each small school be provided with staffing autonomy to hire and excess staff and to decide on the staffing pattern that best meets the needs of the school?
- Budget: To what extent will each small school be provided with a lump-sum, per-pupil budget over which it has discretion to spend as it sees fit to provide the best services to students and their families?
- Curriculum and assessment: To what extent will each small school have freedom to set its curriculum and graduation requirements?
- Governance and policies: To what extent will each small school have increased governing authority over budget approval, principal selection and firing, and programs and policies?
- School calendar: To what extent will each small school have the freedom to set longer school days and years for both students and faculty, with a particular focus on creating greater time for faculty to meet?

Build Community Support for Small Schools

Small schools are not necessarily what most adults have experienced. Adults are most familiar with the large, comprehensive high school; they may not immediately see the benefits of small secondary schools. The district should have a plan for building community support for small schools. This could include community forums, newsletters sent to families, and business roundtables. The research on small schools needs to be shared in lay terms, and district data revealing that significant student populations are not currently being served well by large schools need to be included.

Question to Consider:

- How will this plan build community support for small schools?

Develop a District Plan for Small Schools

This plan should articulate a rationale, design, and timeline for creating small schools in the district as well as the construct and philosophy of each small school. For large school conversions, the plan should articulate the small schools to be housed within the larger school facility. There should be a defined rollout plan for each of the district's small schools.

Question to Consider:

- Is the plan clear to the public?

Deliver a Clear Message to the Community on the District's Path

In order to build momentum and commitment to the transition to small schools, a strong message needs to be given to the larger school community stating the district's intent to move to small schools (e.g., how many, in which facilities), the reasons why, the plan for district rollout of small schools, and the timeline, as well as a commitment to seek public input along the way. This message is best delivered by the superintendent and is especially critical in building faculty commitment to small schools.

Question to Consider:

- What is the critical message that you want to communicate to the community?

Steps to Consider in Small Schools Design and Implementation at the School Level for Large School Conversions

Create a Design Team to Guide the Conversion

This team should comprise representative faculty constituencies in the school, as well as district representation. The team should be responsible for deciding how many small schools there will be, the size of each small school, the student enrollment process, and the faculty selection/assignment process.

Questions to Consider:

- Design Team composition: Whom will the Design Team consist of? What constituencies will be represented? How big will the team be? How will members be selected?

- Role of the Design Team: What will be the charge of the Design Team (e.g., developing a design framework for breaking down a large school into smaller schools)?
- Communication and involvement with key constituencies. Who are the key constituencies that need to be kept informed and have opportunities for input? How will you ensure that these constituencies are regularly informed about the Design Team's progress? At what key junctures will you gain their input, and how will you do this?
- Timeline: What is the timeline for developing the design plan? For gaining input from key constituencies?
- Design framework: How many small schools will there be? What will be the size of each small school?
- Student selection: What will be the student selection process for each small school to ensure equitable enrollment across race, income, gender, special education status, and achievement? What will be the faculty selection/assignment process for each small school, to ensure each small school has a core group of faculty committed to the vision of their particular small school?

Steps to Consider in Design and Implementation for Small Schools, Either Freestanding or Sharing a Larger Facility

Create a Design Team for Each Small School

Each small school to be created should have a Design Team that guides the design phase through to the launching of the small school. This Design Team should consist of the new small schools leader, faculty who will be working in the small school, and prospective parents and students. Ultimately, the team should have 10–15 members. The Design Team is responsible for guiding all aspects of small school design through to implementation (e.g., vision, governance, teaching and learning, professional support, family and community partnerships).

Questions to Consider:

- Design Team composition: Who will the Design Team consist of?
- What constituencies will be represented? How big will the team be? How will members be selected? Are members of the Design Team automatically members of the new small school (in most cases, they should be)?
- Role of the Design Team: What will be the charge of the Design Team (e.g., developing a design for a designated small school within a large building, developing a design for a small, freestanding school)?

What are the parameters of the Design Team's task (e.g., is their role completed once the design is finished and approved)?

- Communication and involvement with key constituencies: Who are the key constituencies that need to be kept informed and have opportunities for input? How will you ensure that these constituencies are regularly informed about the Design Team's progress? At what key junctures will you gain their input, and how will you do this?
- Timeline: What is the timeline for establishing the Design Team? For developing the design plan? For gaining input from key constituencies?

Develop a Vision and Design for the Small School

Each small school should have a coherent, well-articulated vision of what the school represents and what students are expected to achieve. The vision should be shaped by and reflect the small school principles and be developed by the planning team with community input. Once developed, it should be manifest in all documents created for the school (e.g., handbook, curriculum guide, orientation material) and be present in the small school's decision-making, policy development, and instructional practices and in other planning.

Question to Consider:

- What is the vision that will drive all aspects of the school?

Decide on the Student Enrollment Process for the School

The student assignment and enrollment process should ensure equitable enrollment by race/ethnicity, income status, language, gender, and special education, resulting in enrollment of these student groups that reflects their relative percentage within the district at each grade level. For this reason, controlled choice, within a ± 5 percent range of the district averages for the grade level, is recommended. The enrollment process should include a wide distribution of information about the school so that students and families may make an informed choice about selecting the school.

Question to Consider:

- What student assignment process will be adopted that will ensure equitable enrollment among the small schools?

Decide on the Selection/Assignment Process for the School Leadership and Faculty

Ideally, the school's leadership should be selected by the governing body, with approval from the superintendent. Because this may not be

possible in all cases, there should be a process in place that ensures the leadership embraces and is committed to the vision of the school. It is preferable to have faculty voluntarily select the small school in which they will work, while ensuring in large school conversions that each small school receives an equitable distribution of faculty by race/ethnicity, academic discipline, and other local considerations. In all cases, this selection/assignment should be accomplished in concert with the local teachers union.

Question to Consider:

- What faculty assignment process will ensure a critical mass of faculty committed to the school's vision within each small school?

Design the Governance and Leadership for the Small School

Each small school should have a clear governance and leadership structure to guide it. The governance and leadership structure should reflect the principle of democratic decision making and include input and decision-making authority by the full faculty for any significant decisions that affect the small school. The leadership of the school should be clearly delineated—whether it be a principal, director, or teacher-leader. If the small school is located within a larger facility that houses multiple small schools and there is a buildingwide principal or administrator, the relationship between the small school leader and the large school leader should be clearly defined.

In addition, small schools should develop a school governing council and a Leadership Team. The school council governing body should reflect the respective state guidelines for representation (most often administration, faculty, parent, and community representation, and sometimes student representation at the high school level). This body helps guide the school in all phases, and takes on increased governing responsibilities, including principal selection, supervision, and firing (with final approval by the superintendent), budget approval, and setting of school policies. This body usually meets no more than once per month. Each small school should consider having a Leadership Team, a faculty-administration body that meets more often (twice per month) to focus more deeply and in greater detail on guiding the school's implementation in all aspects. The team should be representative of all faculty constituencies. These governance structures should ensure the access of students, faculty, and families for bringing issues forward for consideration, the making of decisions in a timely manner with sufficient input, and effective communication within the entire school community.

Questions to Consider:

- Leadership: What will be the leadership of the school (e.g., principal or some other title)? How will this person be selected? If the small school is sharing a building with other small schools, will there be a building manager, and if so, what will be the delineation of roles between the building manager and the small school leaders?
- Governing body: Who will make up the school's governing body? What constituencies will be represented? How will they be selected?
- Decision making: What will be the shared decision-making structure of the school? What decisions will the school governing body make? The head of the school? The school's Leadership Team? The faculty? Parents? What will be the process for making decisions?

Construct the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for the Small School

This process is at the heart of the small school planning and should include as many faculty that will be teaching in the small school as possible. It is recommended that schools construct their curriculum, instruction, and assessment to be competency based; that is, the goal is to have every student master a set of defined competencies and to demonstrate this mastery in a variety of ways in order to graduate from that school. The curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the small school should be driven by the school's vision.

Questions to Consider:

- Habits of mind: Will the school have overarching habits of mind that drive the curriculum? If so, by what process will they be developed?
- Less is more: How will you construct the curriculum to focus on depth over breadth?
- Student-as-worker: How will the curriculum be constructed to emphasize project-based learning, opportunities for application of learning, and students' engagement in purposeful and meaningful work?
- Assessment by exhibition: What will be the graduation requirements for your school? How will graduation requirements ensure that students demonstrate mastery of key competencies? How will portfolios and exhibitions be embedded in both graduation requirements and the ongoing curriculum?

Create the Schedule and Student Groupings for the School

The schedule and student groupings should reflect the school's vision.

Questions to Consider:

- How will the staff create teams of teachers that are responsible for and accountable to a defined group of students?
- How will the schedule ensure significant common planning time for faculty teams?
- How will the schedule accommodate longer blocks of learning time for academics in order to focus on the principles of “less is more,” “student-as-worker,” and “assessment by exhibition”?
- Will there be equity in access to a high-quality curriculum for all students and the avoidance of tracking or ability grouping?
- How will staff create student-teacher loads of no more than 80:1 at the secondary level and no more than 20:1 at the elementary level?
- Will there be sustained student-teacher relationships over time—for example, through advisories, looping, and multiage classes?
- Will special education and bilingual/English language learner (ELL) students be included in all classes?

Design the Personalized Culture of the School

A key characteristic of small schools is their ability to create personalized cultures in which each student is known well by at least one adult. This characteristic is one critical correlate to students successfully completing their school career.

Questions to Consider:

- Personalization: How will you ensure that every student is known well by at least one adult over time (e.g., advisories)? What supports will be available for students who need it (including special education), and how will the supports be managed and delivered (e.g., Student Support Teams, learning centers)?
- High expectations, trust, respect, and decency for all: How will you establish a school culture that embodies these values?

Design the Professional Collaborative Culture for the School

There are direct correlations between having a professional collaborative culture that focuses on teaching and learning and seeing increases in student achievement. Each small school should design the structures, schedule, and culture of the school to guarantee significant, sustained time for faculty to meet and discuss teaching and learning and to provide them with the support to learn and practice tools for doing so. For example, small schools may create significant blocks of time weekly for faculty

to meet in various groupings—full faculty, academic teams, Critical Friends Groups (CFGs), and study groups. CFGs, facilitated by trained teacher-leaders, meet regularly, with consistent group membership over time, to engage in collaborative practices focused on improving teaching and student learning, including looking collaboratively at student and teacher work, conducting peer observation, and engaging in action research. A formal process for supporting and assessing teacher performance should be part of the professional collaborative culture.

Questions to Consider:

- Professional collaborative communities: What structures and activities will be put in place to ensure the building of a unified professional collaborative community that is engaged in improving teacher practice and student learning (e.g., Critical Friends Groups)? When will faculty meet, how often, and in what groupings?
- Schedule: How will the schedule and staffing pattern be constructed so as to create time for teachers to meet?
- Staffing: What will the staffing pattern of the school look like?

Plan Family and Community Partnerships

Each small school should identify strategies for reaching out to families. These strategies can include involving them in ongoing efforts to improve student outcomes, engaging them in meaningful dialogue about student learning, and providing multiple roles and opportunities for families to participate in the school, particularly in its academic programs and governance. Each small school should also seek to establish substantial community partnerships that support the achievement of the school's vision.

Tool 1.1: Focus Group

Purpose: To begin a discussion about important changes in education over the years, how these changes affect what we want students to know and be able to do, and how small schools can better meet student needs. This tool leads into a “why small schools?” discussion.

Directions: As a large group, answer the following five questions. Each person should contribute. Start with a different person for each round of questions. The facilitator should take notes on chart paper.

1. What are the important changes in our world over the last 25–30 years?
2. What is now most important for our graduates to know and be able to do?
3. How will we know if our students know these things?
4. How would you change schools as they are?
5. How would you involve the community more in our schools?
6. Debrief the focus group. Use these guiding questions:
 - In what ways might small schools address the issues raised in our discussion?
 - What are some next steps our district, school, or classroom should take to move toward our vision?

SOURCE: Courtesy of Tony Wagner, codirector, Change Leadership Group, Harvard Graduate School of Education (<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/clg>)

NOTE: This activity inevitably leads participants to discussing that schools should be small and personalized.

Tool 1.2: School Visitation Protocol

Purpose: School site visits provide powerful learning opportunities. They enable visitors to create a long-term vision of what an effective school can be like and how it can be achieved. They offer concrete ideas about how good schools work. There are many school visitation protocols available, depending upon the nature and purpose of the visit. This example poses some general questions for small school visitors to consider.

Directions: A site visit to an effective small school should consist of three stages—the pre-visit, the visit, and the post-visit.

1. Pre-visit

- Plan your visit as a group, even if only one person is to represent the group during the visit. As a group, decide on the purpose of the site visit and create a list of questions you would like to ask and information you would like to collect. You may choose to begin with your own school's strengths or challenges.

2. Visit

School Climate

- What is the climate of the school? How are you greeted? Is the physical plant clean and orderly? Are there displays in the hallways?
- How is the school personalized for students?
- How do students, teachers, and parents describe the school?
- How do students interact with other students and adults in the building?
- How are desks arranged in the classrooms (i.e., rows or clusters)?

Expectations

- Are clear expectations known by all? Are they posted in some way?
- Is student work displayed in classrooms? How are students visible in their work?
- Are students comfortable asking questions of teachers and other adults?
- Is there visual evidence of expectations beyond this school?

Teaching and Learning

- What does teaching and learning look like in the school?
- How do students demonstrate what they know, understand, and are able to do?
- How do faculty work with one another around teaching and learning?
- What academic support do students who need it receive?

Facilities

- How are students using libraries, resource centers, and computer centers during and after the school day?
- Did you notice anything in particular about common rooms, such as the library, gym, auditorium, and lunchroom?
- Are computers kept in self-contained labs or in classrooms?
- In schools that share a building, how do schools divide space between them? How do they share facilities common to the building?

3. Post-visit

- Ensure that there is a post-visit conversation in which both the host and the visitors participate.
- Hold your own post-visit meeting at your school to discuss the visit. What was most memorable or impressive about the school? Did you find something you might like to try at your school? Did you notice something you are glad you do not have at your school?
- Discuss a follow-up action plan for identifying goals.

Tool 1.3: Text-Based Discussion

Purpose: To use existing research to support the rationale for small schools and expand a group's understanding of small schools research in a focused way and in a limited amount of time.

Directions: Follow directions for Tool 7.12 ("The Final Word"), using as a common text a short article about research on small schools. For example:

- Cotton, K. (2001). *New small learning communities: Findings from recent literature*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Pp. 13–20. Available from http://www3.scasd.org/small_schools/nlsc.pdf
- Hemphill, C. (2003, October). Why some small schools succeed—and some fail: Lessons from the New York City experience. Available from Insideschools.org Web site: http://www.insideschools.org/nv/NV_small_schools_oct03.php

NOTES

1. The full report text and an executive summary are available at <http://www.ccebos.org/pubslinks.html>

2. These principles are included here with the permission of the Coalition of Essential Schools. The complete material from the Coalition can be read at the Web site <http://www.essentialschools.org>