



**Rethinking High School:
The Next Frontier for State Policymakers**

*Patricia W. McNeil
High School Solutions
Estes Park, CO*



The Aspen Institute Program on Education in a Changing Society

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Estes Park, CO

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INTRODUCTION

Rethinking High School: The Next Frontier for State Policymakers

by Trish W. McNeil.

As more states turn their attention to the task of improving high schools, there is much to be learned from the efforts of pioneering states. Based on an overview of four such states, Trish McNeil suggests both short-term, incremental steps that state and urban leaders can take, as well as indicating the longer-term and more radical steps to consider for creating system of multiple pathways to postsecondary education. Commissioned for the Aspen Program on Education Aspen Workshop on High School Transformation, the paper was updated for the Aspen-Chief State School Officers Chiefs Forum in January 2003.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over two decades, commissions, reformers and researchers have called attention to the problems of the American high school. The litany of shortcomings is long and well documented. On almost every statistical measure and for large groups of students, our high schools are not making the grade. At a time when the needs of our youth and the demands of society, the workplace, and life have changed dramatically, high schools have not responded. The gap in achievement, graduation, and college attendance between white high school students and minorities is growing. Colleges and employers complain that high school graduates are ill prepared for the work required. As the Education Trust has observed, “the data suggests an object at rest in a world that is rapidly rushing by.”¹ The American high school experience is sorely in need of rethinking and redesign.

While improvements have been made at the margins, most secondary schools remain impervious to significant change. It has been easier to focus attention on early childhood and K-8 education and hope that if we get that right, the problems in our high schools will take care of themselves. In addition, there appears to be no consensus among stakeholders or the general public about the purpose of high school in the 21st century. Without a clear, compelling and shared vision for high schools and a common understanding of why they need to change, it is unlikely that reform efforts will make dramatic progress in spite of state standards and in spite of the good intentions of commissions, foundations, and reform-minded initiatives

States have a significant role to play in rethinking the American high school. States set policies that have a major impact on students and their schools. Governors, legislators, chief state school officers command media and public attention when they speak on education. Even when state budgets are tight, leaders have opportunities to target limited federal and state funds toward key priority areas. In addition, the new role of states in setting standards and administering assessments has given leaders enormous influence and responsibility.

Currently, states have many policies on the books that affect high schools. Most states set graduation requirements, define the length of school year, and determine the age when a young person can legally leave school. Over the past two decades, as part of their larger accountability initiatives, states have created content standards to guide the high school curricula and adopted state assessments to measure performance. Eighteen states have statutes that require students to pass exit exams as a condition for getting a diploma. States have school construction policies that favor building large high schools and policies that govern teacher certification. Some states have even adopted no pass, no play laws or linked the right to drive to a student’s high school performance. These policies are described in the report, *All Over the Map: State Policies to Improve the High School* (Martinez and Bray, 2002) and are summarized in Appendix A of this paper.

While some states are considering or have taken actions that could support the rethinking of high school, only a few have begun to think systematically about a new vision for high school or how state policies and practice could support a new approach to the education of adolescents.

This paper looks at four states – California, Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont—that have examined the condition of their high schools, found them wanting and are attempting to do something about it. California began its reform efforts in the 1980s and made a major investment in K-12 systemic reform in the early 1990s. The other three states began their work on high schools in the mid 1990s. In all four, the current focus on high schools comes in response to the development of state standards and assessments, and a concern that high schools, in particular, are unlikely to meet the standards without help.

Lessons Learned

The four states have pursued similar paths for improving their high schools and adopted some similar strategies. Their reforms are standards based. They each appointed a state commission or task force charged with

diagnosing and explaining the problem, supporting a dialogue with the public and key stakeholders, reviewing state policies and regulations, articulating a vision, and recommending a set of goals, principles, practices and policies to support reform. They each created an organizational focal point to promote reform efforts. They marshaled resources from federal programs, pursued foundation support and invested modest amounts of state funds. They provided technical assistance and monitored results. Six significant lessons emerge from these experiences:

1. It is important to build a strong case for reform. The idea of the traditional high school is so strong in people's minds that policymakers, stakeholders and the general public need strong, compelling reasons to change. Such an effort involves compiling factual information on the conditions and performance of the state's high schools, assessing what students need to know and be able to do to meet the demands of today's society and economy, and compiling stakeholder and public perceptions of high school and what works and doesn't work.
2. Reform efforts need to be based on a clear vision for high schools of the future. Yogi Berra is reported to have said, "If you don't know where you're going, you may not get there." The four states in this study adopted a vision based on state standards, high expectations for all students and a belief that all students need to be prepared for postsecondary learning. States drew up a list of principles and practices to drive their vision, rather than describing a physical model of an ideal high school. This approach acknowledged the importance of local ownership and control and the reality that these principles and practices might be implemented in different settings—from the redesign of traditional high schools to the creation of small, innovative schools.
3. State policies need to be aligned or realigned to support the vision. State laws and regulations affecting high schools should be reviewed and revised and if necessary, new policies need to be put in place to support the vision. This review should include standards and assessments, graduation requirements, teacher certification, school construction, as well as other policies referenced in Appendix A.
4. Technical assistance is crucial to planning and implementing successful reform. To be effective, technical assistance needs to be adequately financed. It should be coordinated with and leverage other resources and technical assistance efforts. It needs to be delivered on site and be customized to meet individual or organizational needs. And it should be available when it's needed and be seen as credible by those receiving the assistance.

Several states created new Centers or offices to support technical assistance. These entities were designed to be service-oriented, unlike most state education offices where the mission is largely focused on running programs and compliance.

Based on the experience of the four states, technical assistance is critically needed in two areas: (1) building capacity to lead and manage change at the state, district, school and classroom level, and (2) improving classroom instruction. State departments of education, districts, school administrators and classroom teachers need new leadership and management skills to undertake the kinds of reforms needed to transform high schools. At all levels, administrators and staff need to develop skills in creating a vision, setting goals, analyzing and using data to drive decision making, developing budgets and revising policies to support the vision, building a team to plan and implement reforms, and managing a reform process.

Instruction must also be a priority for technical assistance. Unfortunately it is easy to get consumed by governance and restructuring issues and neglect improvements in classroom instruction. Professional development is essential if instructional practice is going to change, and it needs to be tackled on three fronts—in college and university teacher preparation programs, in re-certification programs, and in district and school in-service training. Nineteen states, including Maine, require teachers to have a major in their subject area in order to teach it. However, much more attention needs to be paid to changing instructional practice, including improving the literacy and numeracy skills of secondary students and building the capacity of teachers to analyze data and student work.

5. Additional resources are necessary to support reform, and this support is needed for at least three to five years. States are asking local schools and districts to both adopt new policies and rethink how they are spending current dollars. It costs money to make the transition to a new type of high school. These transition costs usually include professional development and capacity building, support for substitute teachers and extra compensation for administrators and teachers who work after school or during the summer to plan and implement reforms, and technical assistance to schools to develop and implement the reforms—usually in the form of coaches and other specialized support. It is also important for administrators and staff at all levels to have opportunities to visit places to see reforms in action and learn from researchers and practitioners about successful reform efforts.

The four states are primarily using federal and foundation funds to support reform. Most of the state support comes from redirecting state grants or in-kind services. Especially innovative is Maine's use of its Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) funds. Maine targets its entire CSR allotment on high schools and ties grant requirements to its secondary reform effort, *Promising Futures*. The federal Title I and professional development programs offer other sources of support for high school reform. In addition, states can encourage local districts to apply for federal Smaller Learning Communities grants, which are targeted exclusively on high schools. National and regional foundations are beginning to support state high school reform initiatives. Governors and state superintendents can play an important role in attracting this kind of private sector support.

6. Reform takes time, and states need to stay the course. Maine and Rhode Island, the two states that have made the most consistent progress on high school reform, have had long-term commissioners of education who have devoted personal attention to the high school agenda. Policymakers need to be realistic about the time it takes to get results. States are indirect influencers of reform. They may implement standards and policies and support technical assistance, but reforms themselves take place in classrooms, schools and districts. Improvements at these levels often roll-out in the following way: increases in attendance, decreases in discipline problems, increases in interest in learning and college-going, increases in graduation rates, and finally, increases in achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Attendance and behavior usually improve in the first year or two, while significant increases in test scores may take five years or more to materialize. It may be possible to get a bump in test scores in the short-term, but usually it takes much longer for a consistent pattern of improvement to emerge. It is also important to look at progress in a disaggregated way, e.g. by race, ethnicity, non-native English speakers, and economic status and by the progress of cohorts of 9th graders from freshman year through twelfth grade. If a state starts a high school reform effort, it needs to stick with it.

Recommendations

In times of tight budgets, burgeoning school populations, and demands for quality education, states must make sensible and productive policy choices. To date, high schools have not been high on the education agenda of most states, but that is beginning to change. Based on the experience of the states in this review, there are five steps other states could take to improve the quality of high school education and the prospects for high school students. A commission composed of key stakeholders can be an effective vehicle for undertaking tasks one through three. The work of such a commission should receive a high degree of visibility, status and attention by both top elected officials and education leaders, and its recommendations must be followed by action.

First, states can undertake a thorough review of their high schools, the status of adolescents of high school age (both in and out of school), and stakeholders' perceptions of what is working and not working. Through hearings, conversations, research and analysis, they can lay a solid foundation for change and engage stakeholders and the general public in a broad dialogue about high school and the changes that need to be made. They can identify the knowledge and skills graduates need to be successful in postsecondary education, employment and community life.

States need to forge a new vision for high school and identify goals, principles and practices to achieve that vision. Governors, legislators, and state education leaders can use the bully pulpit to make the case for reform, raise public awareness, rally support and celebrate successes through State of the State and State of Education addresses, policy statements, legislative hearings, awards, recognition ceremonies, and other forums.

Second, states can review their policies and regulations and align them with the new vision and goals for high schools. Among the policies and regulations that should be examined are state standards, competency-based instruction and assessment, graduation requirements, the financing of school construction and renovation, options for creating choice and multiple pathways for students and state requirements for teacher certification.

Third, states can identify resources to promote reform. Federal programs and grants such as Title I, Comprehensive School Reform, Smaller Learning Communities, and professional development resources are obvious sources. States should align grant requirements to their reform objectives. They can also seek the backing of national, state and local foundations to provide help to local schools and districts.

Fourth, states can create an organizational focal point to support reform through research, policy development, information dissemination, targeted technical assistance and networking. They should support a strong, well-financed technical assistance effort that is focused on capacity building and instructional improvement. This organization might be a new Center either inside or outside of state government or a high profile office within the state department of education. In order to provide the level of support needed to advance reforms, such an organization must have autonomy, flexibility and stature, and it must be adequately resourced.

Fifth, states need to give reforms time to develop and monitor results carefully. They should support the training of state and local staff in the use of data and data analysis to track progress. They should use on site peer review teams and evaluations to assess progress, and follow-up and act upon the results. And they need to approach oversight in a way that gains the trust of teachers, students, and the public and fosters continuous improvement.

While these steps are modest, they are doable—even in times of tight budgets—and could lay a strong foundation for changing the way we educate high school age students.

There are more dramatic ideas on the table for changing the American high school experience. Any state embarking on reform, or chartering a commission to rethink high school, should review these ideas. Many new initiatives are being piloted in various places throughout the country with the support of national foundations, most notably, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. These proposals are based on some common principles—high expectations for all students, choice, authentic assessments, agreements about what all students should know and be able to do, advancement based on demonstrations of proficiency (as opposed to seat time), creating small schools and learning communities that focus on learning and are safe, respectful and trusting, and learning based on interest and individual responsibility. The MET in Providence, Rhode Island; small schools, such as High Tech High, Expeditionary Learning, and Montessori high schools; theme-based schools; and Early College High School are some of the more innovative approaches being explored. Some of the concepts embodied in these more dramatic proposals for change have been incorporated into the reform policies of the four states, as shown in Appendix B.

Conclusion

Will the strategies and investments being pursued by the four states and recommended here actually pay off in terms of improved outcomes for students? This is a question all state policymakers must ask as they embark upon efforts to change high schools. The evidence suggests cautious optimism. Studies of the California School Restructuring Demonstration, Career Academies, the Maine experience, small schools, and the High Schools That Work initiative have found positive results. First Things First, Talent Development and America Choice are other high school improvement models that are showing promise. However, the research suggests that certain conditions must exist in order to achieve the desired results. There must be a laser-beam focus on teach-

ing and learning, on closing the achievement gap, on enhancing the capacity of administrators and teachers to bring about reforms, on aligning state and local policies to support reform, and on closely monitoring results at the state, district, school and classroom level using multiple indicators and making mid-course corrections.

Unless we pay serious attention to our high schools, a significant, and growing, number of our students—tomorrow’s citizens—will drop out or graduate unprepared for the adult world. If we are successful at the elementary and middle school level, but fail to change our high schools, then we risk losing much of what we initially achieved. States have an important role to perform in transforming our nation’s high schools, and some good examples of how to carry out that role. To date, high schools have been the weakest link in state and local school reform efforts. It is time to change that. As the late football coach, George Allen, used to say, “The future is now!”

INTRODUCTION

For over two decades, the modern school reform movement has included efforts by commissions, reformers and researchers to address the ills of the American high school. The litany of shortcomings is long and well documented. On almost every statistical measure and for large groups of students, our high schools are not making the grade. At a time when the needs of our youth and the demands of society, the workplace, and life have changed dramatically, high schools have not been able to respond. Graduation rates have hovered around 75 percent for about 30 years. The performance of 17 year olds in reading is down. Achievement of 17 year olds in math and science is up, but those gains are largely attributable to improvements between grades 5 and 8, not from gains during the high school years. And, math and science achievement falls below that of young people in most developed countries. While the gap in achievement, graduation, and college attendance between white high school students and minorities narrowed during the 1970s and 1980s, it widened again in the 1990s and the trend is continuing.¹

Students say they are bored, unchallenged, and sometimes alienated. They find school impersonal and the curriculum disjointed and lacking relevance. Teachers report increased frustration because they are expected to raise the achievement of students who seem unprepared, unmotivated and disinterested. Colleges and employers complain that high school graduates are ill prepared for the work required. As the Education Trust has observed, “the data suggests an object at rest in a world that is rapidly rushing by.”² The American high school experience is sorely in need of rethinking and redesign.

While improvements have been made at the margins, most secondary schools remain impervious to significant change. Ironically, the general public puts education high on the list of domestic priorities, but seems largely unconcerned about high schools. Public Agenda Forum found that although employers and college professors doubt that a high school diploma guarantees ‘the basics’, most teachers, parents and students disagree.³ Educators and policymakers have shied away from policies or practices which would make too great a change in an institution that so fundamentally represents a rite of passage for most Americans. This attitude may stem from a lack of knowledge about what the problem is and what to do about it or from memories of the past fondly remembered or long forgotten. Whatever the reason, parents, students, educators, policymakers and the general public seem largely resigned to high school as it was and is.

One sobering fact seems clear. There is no consensus among stakeholders or the general public about the purpose of high school in the 21st century. For example, one area being hotly debated is whether all students should be prepared for college regardless of whether they choose to attend, and as a corollary what does “being prepared for college” really mean? Most reformers believe that all students should be prepared for postsecondary learning. Some teachers, parents, policymakers, students and the general public remain skeptical. Without a clear, compelling and shared vision for high schools and a common understanding of why they need to change, it is unlikely that reform efforts will make dramatic progress in spite of state standards and in spite of the good work of commissions, foundations, and reform-minded initiatives.

For all concerned, it has been easier to focus attention on early childhood and K-8 education and hope that if we get those years right, the problems in our high schools will take care of themselves. But even though elementary and middle schools are sending students to high school with higher levels of reading, math and science skills, performance at the high school levels is not improving.⁴ One explanation: Like younger children, today’s high school students have a different set of needs and different kinds of experiences than they did 50 years ago, when the current high school design was formulated. We have incorporated new understandings of the changing social and family experience of our young children into our thinking about schooling. We have integrated the findings in brain research and learning styles into early childhood and elementary education. Now it is time to do the same for adolescent education.

States can play a significant role in rethinking the American high school. States set policies that have a major impact on students and their schools. Governors, legislators, and chief state school officers command media and public attention when they speak on education. Even when state budgets are tight, leaders have opportunities to use the bully pulpit to focus attention on high schools and target limited federal and state funds toward key priority areas. The new role of states in setting standards and administering assessments has given leaders enormous influence and responsibility. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act requires states and school districts to put policies in place to ensure that all students make adequate yearly progress (AYP). This mandate includes high school students.

Currently, states have many policies on the books that affect high schools. Most states set graduation requirements, define the length of school year, and determine the age when a young person can legally leave school. Over the past two decades, as part of their larger accountability initiatives, states have created content standards to guide the high school curricula and adopted state assessments to measure performance. Eighteen states have statutes that require students to pass exit exams as a condition for getting a diploma. States set school construction policies, most of which currently favor building large high schools. And they have policies governing teacher certification. Some states even have no pass-no play laws or link the right to drive to a student's high school performance. These policies are described in the report, *All Over the Map: State Policies to Improve the High School* (Martinez and Bray, 2002) and are summarized in Appendix A of this paper.

While some states have taken steps that support the rethinking of high school⁵, only a few have begun to think systematically about a new vision for high school and how state policies and practices could revitalize secondary education. High school reform is uncharted territory for most states.

There are a number of national projects that are focusing attention on the state role in rethinking high school. The Aspen Institute, Jobs for the Future, the National Conference on State Legislatures and the National Governors Association, with support from the Gates Foundation, have launched an initiative on *Redesigning High Schools: The Unfinished Agenda in State Education Reform*. The American Diploma Project is working on strengthening ongoing standards-based reform efforts at the state level by helping states align their high school graduation assessments in reading, writing and mathematics with the requirements of higher education, businesses and the military. The project is a joint effort of Achieve, Inc., The Education Trust and The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and five states, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nevada and Texas. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation support the project.⁶ The Aspen Institute and the Council of Chief State School Officers, with support from the Gates Foundation, are holding forums for state education chiefs on high school redesign.

This paper looks at four states – California, Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont. These states have examined the condition of their high schools, found them wanting and are attempting to do something about them. In all four states, the initiatives reflect a concern that without help, high schools are unlikely to meet the challenges posed by state standards and assessments. California began its reform efforts in the 1980s, made a major investment in K-12 systemic reform in the early 1990s, and has continued its reform efforts in the face of budget cuts and shifting priorities. The other three states began their work in the late 1990s. To date, Maine has adopted the most systemic approach of the four. All four states have used roughly the same approach: (1) create a commission or task force on high schools, (2) compile and disseminate data on performance, (3) raise awareness among stakeholders and the general public, (4) build a consensus for change, (5) develop a set of principles to guide reform, (6) disseminate information on best practice, (7) create an organization or office to serve as the point for reform efforts, (8) provide technical assistance, (9) target federal grants and foundation funds to support high school reform and (10) put special emphasis on changing teaching and learning in the classroom as an integral piece of the reforms. While these strategies are important, they are cautious. Whereas the four states have laid out a new vision for high schools and defined some new operating principles, implementation is voluntary and usually takes place one high school at a time.

However, as suggested in Appendix B, some of the more dramatic ideas for reform are reflected in the principles and practices adopted by the four states. These include small size, competency-based assessment, choice, and early college. In conversations with individuals engaged in reform in the four states, it is clear that they believe that by demonstrating the validity of cutting edge reforms in individual schools, they can lay the groundwork for more powerful changes in high schools and more significant policy changes at both the state and local level.

Part I of this paper provides a thumbnail sketch of the reform efforts in each of four states. Part II examines the commonalities across states and lessons learned to date. Part III makes recommendations on how states can influence the future of high schools. The conclusion summarizes evaluation findings on several high school reform models. The table in Appendix A summarizes state policies that affect high schools. Appendix B contains a chart comparing the principles and practices adopted by each of the four states and some of the more cutting edge high school reforms. The research for this paper is based on discussions with individuals in the four states, an examination of state websites and policy documents, a review of recent papers and reports on high schools, and conversations with researchers and practitioners knowledgeable about state policies and practices affecting high schools.

PART I – STATES ON THE LEADING EDGE OF HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont, on the one hand, and California on the other seem to represent the opposites in American life – Yankee ingenuity v. California cool, small tight knit communities v. urban/suburban sprawl, the two-lane road v. the freeway, spuds v. sprouts. These stereotypes are, of course, gross exaggerations, but the four states often conjure up very different images of America. Yet these four are among the few states that have tried to tackle the tough issues of high school reform. And, although they are at different stages of their reform efforts, they can serve as a learning laboratory for other states.

California

Ten percent of the nation's high school age students attend school in California. The state has about 870 public schools that serve over 1.7 million ninth through twelfth graders. State revenues make up over 60% of local school budgets.

High school reform in California has its roots in the 1980s. The state developed curriculum frameworks, created a performance-based assessment system, expanded its support for professional development, and launched Partnership Academies for 10th-12th graders in low-income schools. The Academies are schools-within-a-school with career themes.⁷

In 1990, the state superintendent of education, William Hoenig, created a California High School Task Force to make recommendations on how to improve the state's secondary schools. The Task Force's path breaking report, *Second to None: A Vision of the New California High School*, urged high schools "to provide a strong academic foundation in the first two years followed by demanding, yet flexible, program majors for students in grades eleven and twelve."⁸

The release of *Second to None* coincided with the launch of the California School Restructuring Demonstration Program, Senate Bill 1274, a \$113 million five year effort "to increase the ability of schools and districts to engage all students in rigorous, powerful learning."⁹ Seventy high schools in the state received planning and implementation grants under the demonstration. The Restructuring Demonstration contained the elements of what many today consider core ingredients for successful reform, including:

1. Changing instructional practice,
 2. Eliminating the learning gap associated with racial, ethnic and economic background,
 3. Setting high expectations for all students,
 4. Adopting results- and performance-based goals,
 5. Promoting the examination of student work and the creation of a culture of inquiry to determine how students were progressing and how to adjust practice to reflect what was observed,
 6. Developing strong, supportive relationships with students,
 7. Adopting more integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum and more varied instruction to meet individual student needs,
 8. Using common planning time, professional development, and summer institutes to promote teacher learning,
 9. Providing greater autonomy and decision-making at the school-level,
 10. Developing a more meaningful role for parents and students in decision-making, and
 11. Using data to drive improvements in instruction and student achievement.¹⁰
-

The California Department of Education (CDE) was charged with administering the restructuring initiative. It placed special emphasis on low-performing schools. It made efforts to align its school review criteria with the goals of the legislation and offered waivers to the Education Code to increase flexibility for participating schools. It created a Center for School Restructuring (CCSR) to support schools in their reform. The Center used the “bully pulpit” to promote reform. It also used county education offices to expand its reach and tried to build on other state-funded, reform initiatives, including the California School Leadership Academy, the Subject Matter Projects, and regional professional development consortia established by SB 1882. The Center funded school coaches, workshops and networking activities for participating schools and developed a set of tools to help schools refine their priorities and assess progress. The Restructuring Demonstration project ended in 1997. By far, this investment in comprehensive reform is one of the most ambitious undertaken with state funds. The evaluation report, *Lessons About Comprehensive School Reform*, provides important insights and should be “must reading” for all high school reformers and state policy makers. .

Individual high schools throughout the state began building their reform efforts on the idea of Partnership Academies, the recommendations in *Second to None* and the principles embodied in the Restructuring Demonstrations.

To add to the urgency of high school reform, during the 1990s, the State Board of Education adopted new content standards for language arts, mathematics, history-social studies, science and visual and performing arts. Beginning with the class of 2003-04, students will be required to complete Algebra I in order to graduate. The Board has developed a set of model Challenge Standards in such areas as career preparation and physical education, which local education agencies could adopt on a voluntary basis. It is also implementing a state high school exit exam. In addition, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, which accredits virtually all of California’s high schools, requires high schools to develop and assess Expected School-wide Learning Results (ESLR) such as problem solving, communication, and critical thinking skills in order to gain accreditation.

In the late 1990s, the California Department of Education created a High School Leadership Division with responsibility for high school reform, partnership academies, and career and technical education. Within the Leadership Division, a High School Development and Resources Office has been established to provide information, guidance and technical assistance to high schools throughout the state. The renewed focus on high school reform is driven by the state’s content standards, assessments and the potential for a new high school exit exam. The CDE believes that classroom instruction must be strengthened in order to ensure that high schools are able to deliver on the promise of high achievement for all students. It feels that past attempts have failed because they were directed from outside the school. This time around it wants to promote reform from within by providing teachers and administrators with the tools to lead their own reforms.

In 2001, the Department published a follow-up report to *Second to None*. This report, *AIMING HIGH: High Schools for the 21st Century*, is designed to help high schools implement standards-based reforms and prepare all students for postsecondary education. The report sets out 12 principles for reform and contains strategies and a Reflection Tool to be used by high schools to assess their progress and move forward in creating a standards-based, effective school. The CDE sent a copy of *AIMING HIGH* and an introductory video to all high school principals. It developed a web-based Toolkit to help high schools implement reforms. It has an on-line newsletter, maintains a list of state and federal resources to support reform, and conducts numerous workshops and an annual high school conference.

Some of the impetus for California’s most recent work on high schools can be traced to the federal government’s New American High Schools (NAHS) initiative. The principles in *AIMING HIGH* are based on the NAHS principles, and more than 20 high schools in the state were awarded NAHS status by the U.S. Department of Education. In the fall of 2001, the CDE received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education, to expand and improve high school reform efforts in the state. Five low-performing schools and a consortium of high schools are receiving funds to develop plans to improve student achievement and integrate academic and career technical education standards and curriculum.¹¹

Other state efforts to improve high school education include, the passage of Assembly Bill 620, which appropriated \$6 million to create five new High Tech High Schools¹², and the Morgan-Hart Class-Size Reduction Act that provides funds to reduce the size of selected high school classes to 20:1.¹³

California has been working on high school reform for the past 20 years, and state leadership and policy initiatives have met with some success and provided some valuable lessons. However, California has yet to mount a comprehensive, systemic, sustained statewide approach to changing its high schools that coordinates policies within its Department of Education and within the state.

During the 2002 elections, however, Governor Gray Davis and newly elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O'Connell, pledged to work on improving California's high schools. Although the state is grappling with the largest deficit in its history, AB 2531, the High School Pupil Success Act (HSPSA) may be the new vehicle to drive high school reform in the State. HSPSA is intended to facilitate increased student achievement by supporting the development of district-community partnerships, public engagement, school transformation and systemic district reform. School districts awarded grants will be required to form a "district-community partnership" with the involvement of the whole school community including parents, teachers, and pupils. The district-community partnership will develop a five-year reform and redesign plan for the development of effective high schools for all pupils in their district.

For more information on the activities of California's High School Leadership Division see <http://www.cde.ca.gov/shsd/>.

Maine

Maine has approximately 143 public high schools and applied technology schools and 10 'public-private' academies serving about 74,000 students in all. The state provides about 40% of the funding for local school districts.

Maine began its current reform efforts with the enactment of the Education Reform Act of 1984. Many of the early initiatives stemming from this act informed the development of Maine's Common Core of Learning (1990) that articulated a common vision for education in Maine by defining the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all students should possess upon graduation from high school. In turn, the Common Core of Learning provided the philosophical impetus and spirit for the creation of Maine's Learning Results, which encompass six guiding principles and content standards in eight areas. The guiding principles, adopted by the state legislature in 1996, describe the characteristics of a well-educated person. The content standards, adopted in 1997, are broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills that students should acquire in the areas of English Language Arts, career preparation, health and physical education, mathematics, modern and classical languages, science and technology, social studies, and visual and performing arts. A Critical Review Committee was established to draft content standards for each subject area. The Committee also developed a series of performance indicators to define in more specific terms the stages of achievement toward meeting the standards.

Maine has made a systematic effort to align its education policies with the Learning Results. It revised its law governing instructional requirements and graduation standards, Chapter 127. It set up an Essential Programs and Services Commission to determine what it would cost to teach students the Learning Results. And it created a series of commissions, including one on high schools, to make recommendations on how to translate the vision of the Learning Results into reality.

Revisions to Chapter 127 required that the Learning Results be measured through a state test, the Maine Education Assessment (MEA), as well as through locally developed comprehensive assessment systems. The MEA measures progress in reading, writing, and mathematics for students in grades four, eight and eleven. Local assessment systems measure progress in the eight content areas. The law prescribes that participation in the MEA can be through standard administration, "through administration with accommodations, or through alternative assessments," and that "alternative assessments shall be a component of the local assessment system." Further, the law states, "neither the MEA nor a commercially produced test may be the only measure of student

achievement.” Each district must have curriculum aligned with the eight content areas of the Learning Results, and the state encourages schools to “approach the standards from an interdisciplinary perspective when designing curriculum and planning instructional activities.”¹⁴ The state requires the acquisition of credits in content areas, but no longer requires schools to offer Carnegie unit courses in high schools. These changes create a statewide measure of achievement in core competency areas, while preserving local control. They also are designed to move from a system where performance is measured in seat time toward one where students must demonstrate learning and proficiency through a variety of assessments.

Five of the content areas are currently required for graduation: English language arts, health and physical education, mathematics, science and technology, and social studies. Beginning in 2006, contingent on funding, the high school curriculum must also include content areas for all students in career preparation, modern and classical languages, and visual and performing arts. In 2007, students will be required to demonstrate proficiency in the core areas in order to receive a diploma and will need to meet the requirements in all content areas by 2010 in order to graduate.

The Essential Programs and Services Commission determined what it costs to teach students the Learning Results and how these costs differed for special education students and English learners and for high school, elementary and middle schools. One of the objectives of the Commission’s work was to provide state officials with information to enable them to devise new criteria for making budget decisions and funding local districts, which would take into account the cost of achieving the Learning Results.

After the legislature enacted the Learning Results in 1997, Commissioner of Education, J. Duke Albanese, appointed four commissions to support their implementation. One of these, the Commission on Secondary Education was charged with examining “the quality of education provided to 14-19 year olds,”¹⁵ and reflected the Commissioner’s concern that high schools, in particular, would need support if they were going to be able to achieve the Learning Results.

The Commission “studied the nature and needs of current secondary students, the instructional and assessment practices in high schools and applied technology schools, and how these schools and their communities shape student learning, growth and aspirations. The Commission’s goal was to make comprehensive recommendations to the public education community that would enhance the quality of learning for secondary students in Maine.”¹⁶ The 27 member Commission had broad representation from business, K-12 and higher education, and communities, and included two students. It was co-chaired by Gordon Donaldson (University of Maine) and Pamela Fisher (then at the Southern Maine Partnership, now head of the high school reform initiative at the Mitchell Scholarship Institute).

The Commission released its report, *Promising Futures: A Call to Improve Learning for Maine’s Secondary Students*, in August 1998. In its report, the Commission identified six core principles that should “lie at the heart of all secondary educational planning and practice.”¹⁷ It also recommended two sets of core practices--one addressing teaching and learning activities, the other focusing on how schools should function to support these activities.

Two key decisions helped ensure that the Commission’s report would not simply sit on a shelf after its publication. First, Maine decided to devote its entire Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRSD) grant to high school improvement and tied its grant requirements to the recommendations in *Promising Futures*. Second, it created the Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education (CISE) to support research, policy, local and state reform initiatives and technical assistance to help high schools implement *Promising Futures*.

Maine received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to use its entire CSRSD allocation on high schools, “to not have to restrict portions of its allocations to school-wide Title I schools (which are typically elementary schools) and to attach elements of *Promising Futures* as program requirements for schools applying for CSRSD support.”¹⁸ By 2003, 33 high schools—23% of all secondary schools in Maine--had received CSRSD

funding, and “another two dozen high schools had developed implementation action plans in their unsuccessful bids for funding.”¹⁹ Under CSRD, each high school receives \$50,000 per year for up to three years. As a condition for receiving a grant, a school has to agree to implement several of the core practices identified in *Promising Futures*. In the first two round of funding, schools were required to ensure that (1) each student would have a personal learning plan, (2) the learning standards would be made specific and public so that students’ learning would be purposeful and regularly evaluated through demonstration and exhibitions of learning (3) teachers and students would function in teams, and (4) the scheduling of space, time, instruction, and resources would be flexible in order to respond to diverse and changing student learning goals and needs.

In the third round of funding, the state changed some of the core practice requirements based on the experience of the Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education. According to the Commissioner as the staff worked with both CSRD schools and non-funded schools, the state learned “more and more about the leverage points essential to improve student achievement, and to personalize learning and the culture of our secondary schools.”²⁰ The state decided to drop the requirement that all students have personalized learning plans, and instead require that teachers personalize learning. This subtle change appears to be the result of some pushback from the schools on the burden of doing a personalized plan for each student. In addition, some new conditions were added. Grantees had to agree to (1) “challenge learners to master the fundamentals of the disciplines and integrate skills and concepts across disciplines,” and (2) to ensure that “every student who receives the secondary school diploma has demonstrated, through performance exhibitions, knowledge, and skills at a level deemed by the school and by the state to be sufficient to begin adult life.”²¹ By tying CSRD grant requirements to the recommendations of *Promising Futures*, Maine was able to leverage change in high schools without mandating it.

The Center for Inquiry into Secondary Education was created as an arm of the Maine Department of Education, but has substantial autonomy. Most key members of its small staff served on the Commission on Secondary Education and were educators in successfully transformed Maine schools.²² This carefully chosen staff administers CSRD and provides coaches to each high school that receives a CSRD grant, publishes a newsletter, and conducts Summer Institutes on Best Practices--open to all high schools in Maine. There is a feeling among CSRD evaluators that reforms are progressing more rapidly with each new cohort of schools because coaches are getting better, the summer institutes are getting better and the opportunities to network are improving.

The Center works in collaboration with a number of other organizations in its support of high school reform. One such organization is the Southern Maine Partnership, made up of 35 school districts, two independent schools and the University of Southern Maine. The Partnership provides coaches to its member high schools, including CSRD sites. Each high school receives 40 half days of on-site coaching per year over 3-5 years. It also trains facilitators for the Professional Learning Communities at each high school, and supports networks of high school principals and teachers. The Partnership spearheaded the redesign of the teacher preparation program at the University of Southern Maine and is working on revamping in-service professional development programs. It has also developed a model for helping school districts create the local comprehensive assessment systems required under Chapter 127. The finished product gives teachers a common rubric by which to assess student progress and through that assessment to discuss instruction. The Partnership provides a related set of strong supports to Maine’s high school reform efforts.

In September 2002, Maine received a \$10 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to complement and ‘scale up’ its work on *Promising Futures*. This grant is the first statewide initiative supported by the foundation. The grant will be administered by the Mitchell Scholarship Institute under the direction of project leader, Pam Fisher, former co-chair of the commission that developed *Promising Futures*. Among other grant partners are: the Southern Maine Partnership, the Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education and the Maine School Leadership Network at the University of Maine, directed by Gordon Donaldson, the other co-chair of the Promising Futures commission. The grant will enable 10-12 high schools to receive support for reform efforts. Activities under the grant will place particular attention on personalization, school size, choice and col-

lege going. Even though Maine has few large high schools, grantees will be encouraged to break even relatively small schools up into smaller, more autonomous units to create optimal conditions for personalization and also provide students with more choice—although the band and basketball team may represent the whole school! All grantees will have a coach and participate with other high schools in regional reform networks.

Of all the states, Maine appears to have made the most concerted, systematic and sustained effort to promote a new vision for its high schools. According to an important report of the same name, “we’re from the state and we’re here to help” is an oxymoron in Maine. Yet, the state has strategically and carefully built a system of policies and technical assistance supports that are making a real difference in Maine’s high schools.²³ Observers believe that Maine’s reform efforts now have enough longevity and traction to survive changes in political and education leadership at the state and local level, and that the Gates’ grant will keep state reforms moving forward.

For more information about Maine’s Secondary Education initiative see <http://www.state.me.us/education/>. For information on the Southern Maine Partnership see <http://www.elm.maine.edu>.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island has 40 schools serving about 43,600 students in grades nine through twelve. The state provides about 40 percent of the funding for local school districts.

Rhode Island’s high school reform strategy is solidly based on the state’s accountability and school improvement efforts. Rhode Island has developed content standards, performance standards and curricula frameworks in math, science, English/language arts, family and consumer science, health education, early childhood and library and information literacy. The state requires local districts to have content and proficiency standards, but districts can select or adapt these standards from a variety of sources, including the ones designed by the state. Currently, the only assessments required by the state for high school students are for 10th graders, who must take the New Standards reference exams in English/language arts and math, as well as the Rhode Island writing assessment. In all other content areas, local districts determine what constitutes proficiency.

The Rhode Island Skills Commission has also developed content standards that form the basis for a Certificate of Initial Mastery or CIM. “The CIM is an endorsement on the high school diploma signifying that a rigorous set of academic and applied learning standards have been met. Consistent with the standards that guide RI’s statewide assessment system, the CIM is based on the New Standards performance criteria in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Applied Learning. Students demonstrate their mastery of the standards through their performance on the statewide assessments, a series of short term and long term standards based tasks, work habit indicators such as responsibility, reliability and teamwork and a capstone project.”²⁴ Ten districts are working towards awarding the CIM, and three have participated in a pilot of the CIM assessment system.

Rhode Island’s school improvement efforts compliment its work on standards. This work began in 1995, when Governor, Lincoln Almond, and Education Commissioner, Peter McWalters, convened the Rhode Island Goals 2000 Panel to develop the state’s *Comprehensive Education Strategy (CES)*. In 1996 a task force of 50 educators created a blueprint for implementing the *Comprehensive Education Strategy*. The following year, the blueprint, *School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)* and the CES were incorporated into state law under Article 31. The law, which took effect in 1999, requires schools to engage in self-study and set goals and rigorous requirements for improvement.

“SALT is based on the belief that schools should develop their own expertise to use a wide variety of information to improve teaching and learning”²⁵ with support from the district, state, families and others. SALT’s predominant purpose is to support and develop the professional judgment of those who work within schools. Its main strategy is to help schools use information to make effective changes to improve teaching and learning.

In 1999, the RI Department of Education (RIDE) developed and distributed three volumes called *SALT Works School by School, School Guides and School Resources*. The report, *SALT Works School by School*, defines the vision

of SALT, outlines the requirements of Article 31 and explains how the SALT concepts mirror and respond to the demands of Article 31. *School Guides* provides practical advice on implementing SALT, and *School Resources* contains materials to enable people to learn more about SALT.

Under SALT, schools are required to: (1) create a school improvement team, (2) conduct a self-study, (3) develop a three-year school improvement plan, (4) hold a school report night, (5) host a SALT visit every 5 years (a weeklong review by outside observers on the school's progress), and (6) develop a compact for learning (an agreement between the District and the RIDE specifying what the district and the department will do to support the school.)

The state made its initial foray into high school reform in 1996, when the legislature, through the State Board of Regents and RI Department of Education, began providing funding for the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (the MET) in Providence. The MET is a unique public high school made up of seven small schools of 100 students each. Under the guidance of an advisor, students work on independent research, community service and work-based projects and take classes at local colleges and universities. The MET is its own school district. It continues to get its funding directly from the state legislature, and it is now being replicated throughout the country with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The creation of the MET coincided with the release of *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. In response, Brown University in Providence began organizing a network of New England high schools, including some in Rhode Island, around the reform principles articulated in *Breaking Ranks*.

In November 2000, the state held a High School Summit. After the summit, the Board of Regents created a High School Restructuring Committee, chaired by Regent Colleen Callahan. The Board is unique among state boards of education in that its members come primarily from the education community. Members include school committee members, a retired principal, and teachers. The High School Restructuring Committee held public meetings and met with principals and superintendents. It then made a series of recommendations focusing on three aspects of high school reform: improving literacy, enriching graduation requirements, and redesigning high schools so that they become more attentive to the needs of individual students.

A second High School Summit was held in March 2002 to discuss the recommendations of the Restructuring Committee. This meeting was followed by another round of public meetings to discuss the Commission's ideas. In January 2003, the Board of Regents approved a series of "reforms that aim to not only change the way high schools are organized but what students will be expected to know in order to graduate."²⁶

In the area of literacy, the Board said, "beginning in September 2004, districts will annually identify all students who are not performing at grade level and report that information to the state Department of Education. Each middle and high school must have programs that help students who are below proficiency in literacy."²⁷

The Board indicated that in order to graduate students should be required to demonstrate mastery of a core curriculum that includes basic academic subjects, plus technology and the arts. The new policy does away with Carnegie units and indicates that proficiency must be displayed through at least two of the following: end-of-course exams, portfolios, senior projects, public exhibitions and a Certificate of Initial Mastery. State assessments will account for only 10 percent of all the elements that count toward graduation.

In the area of high school redesign, the Board said it expects high schools to be broken into smaller learning units, such as career academies, schools within schools or interdisciplinary teams working with small groups of students. As the state approves new construction, school districts are being encouraged to focus on small schools. It indicated that students should have options for more personalized learning, through individual learning plans, internships, work-study, service learning, and for seniors, enrollment in college courses. It also recommended that each student have a responsible adult who will follow his/her progress throughout the four years of high school.

Because Rhode Island is a local control state, the Board will use a variety of mechanisms to ensure that local districts adopt these practices. Each district will complete a self-assessment of its high schools to be submitted to the Commissioner by summer 2003. The Department will also use the three-year school improvement plans and the five-year school review process required under the SALT legislation as ways to track the progress schools and districts are making in implementing reforms. The state also holds face-to-face meetings with each district that has schools designated as “low performing” and makes recommendations on steps to be taken by both the district and the state to improve results. For example, in June 2002, Commissioner McWalters announced a series of actions that Providence will be required to take to improve its three comprehensive high schools, including establishing smaller learning communities within the large schools. These meeting will also provide a forum for promoting state strategies for school improvement. The state is in the process of developing timelines, technical assistance plans, and ways to connect its high school initiative to existing guidelines and policies. It also is reviewing a variety of federal grant programs, such as CSRD, to determine how these programs might support the reform efforts.

Although Rhode Island’s high school reform strategy has been slow to develop, it is built on a strong foundation. It reflects the state’s educational improvement philosophy that is designed to “build school capacity to do better, not to punish schools for doing what they cannot do or to reward them for what they ought to be doing.”²⁸ It is intended to support and push schools to become more accountable for their improvement efforts, provide them with good information and data, and build their capacity to make good judgments about how to improve teaching and learning. It has the support of the Board of Regents, the new Governor, and a Commissioner of Education with a long-tenure and consistent vision.

For more information about Rhode Island see <http://www.ridoe.net>.

Vermont

Vermont has 64 high schools serving about 31,600 ninth through twelfth graders. The state contributes less than 20 percent to district budgets. Most school funds come from local property taxes. Recently the state legislature approved a measure that requires localities to collect those monies and send them to the state for redistribution more equitably throughout the state.

Vermont launched its standards-based reform effort in 1990. Its purpose is to improve schools and insure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge they need to pursue a fulfilling life as an individual, family member, citizen and worker. The state’s basic strategy includes: (1) setting high standards for all students, (2) developing curricula that are aligned with those standards, (3) assessing students’ progress in meeting the standards, (4) providing students the support and opportunities they need to meet the standards, (5) providing teachers with the skills they need to teach to the standards, and (6) assessing the state of student performance and charting a course for improvements based on “best practice” to address areas where students are not meeting standards.²⁹ Vermont’s *Common Core of Knowledge* identifies the types of skills that Vermont youth should have when they graduate from high school. The state board adopted *The Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* that outlines standards for student performance, standards for school organization and opportunities that need to exist for students to achieve the standards.

In 1997 the Vermont legislature passed the Equal Education Opportunities Act that codified Vermont’s standards-based system of school improvement. Vermont currently administers state assessment to all 10th graders in language and math. A science assessment is in development.

Vermont has approached school improvement in the context of K-16 systemic reform. Its high school reform effort, like all of its K-12 work, is driven largely from the ground up and involves a high degree of community and educator involvement. The guiding philosophy has been that the only way to get teachers to change is to

involve them in the process from the beginning.³⁰ Vermont's School Quality Standards were largely generated from the grass roots. Eleven school districts held community forums to figure out the vision for reform and the standards by which the vision should be measured.

While the state made progress during the 1990s at the elementary and middle school level, high schools did not advance. High schools, while accounting for 20% of the schools in the state, constitute almost 50% of those identified in 2001 as having a student population not making sufficient progress in meeting state standards.

In April 1999, the State Board of Education created the Vermont High School Task Force. In June 2000, the Task Force issued a set of 12 principles to guide high school renewal and identified a set of "best practices" that should be incorporated by high schools engaged in reform. The 12 principles are built on the federal New American High School framework and much of the work of the Task Force and subsequent reform efforts was supported by the federal School-to-Work initiative. The task force developed an assessment rubric for use by high schools to determine their progress in implementing the 12 principles. The rubric was also adapted from the New American High School work. The High School Innovation project has prepared a document, which cross-references the 12 reform principles with Vermont's School Quality Standards, as well as with the standards of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the primary accreditation body for New England's K-12 schools.

Following the release of its report, the task force began work on the structures needed to lead and support high schools in their reform. In March 2001, it issued its recommendations and the state board directed the task force to develop and publish a document, *the Vermont Dialogue*, describing Vermont's vision for high school renewal and innovation. The Board instructed the task force to create a Center for High School Renewal to provide resources and technical assistance to high schools and vocational-technical centers. Finally, the Board asked the Task Force to work with the Vermont Department of Education (VDE) to launch a network of high schools engaged in reform. The network is called *High Schools on the Move*. The Vermont High School Task Force completed its work in October 2001, with several of its initiatives still on the drawing board for lack of funding.

One of these unfunded initiatives was the plan to create a Center for High School Renewal as a state entity. Instead, a steering group, the *Vermont Public Education Partnership*, has been formed to carry out the mission of the Center. The Partnership is composed of all the higher education institutions in the state, the state Department of Education and several other organizations. It is anticipated that, if funding can be secured, the postsecondary institutions will serve as five regional centers throughout the state. The Partnership's mission is to support the day-to-day sustainability of high school reform and provide information, identify resources, and coordinate existing school improvement strategies. The Partnership is also convening the High Schools on the Move network. In December 2002, 20 high schools participated in a Partnership meeting to develop an agenda and a list of resources to support reform efforts. These reforms put personalization at the center and incorporate the 12 principles identified by the High School Task Force. The Partnership hopes to be able to provide technical assistance to schools, facilitate regional exchanges and conduct summer institutes to advance reforms.

Vermont, like most states, is facing severe budget shortfalls. While the support of state leadership is important, the Partnership will have to rely on federal funds and foundation grants if it is going to achieve the Task Force goals.

For the past 15 years, high schools throughout the state have pursued improvement efforts using action research and vital results conferences where teachers and students come together to demonstrate teaching and learning techniques. The introduction of personalized learning plans, community based learning, senior projects and expanded career development opportunities have been hallmarks of these efforts.

Vermont's teacher colleges have partnerships with five high schools that serve as professional development centers. The graduate school curriculum is centered in the high school classroom. One of the first assignments for graduate students is to work with one highly at-risk child at the school in order to make a difference in the life of this child. The purpose is to illustrate that one teacher can make a difference and that an important part

of a teacher's work involves reaching the child. Fifty percent of Vermont's teachers are home grown so this hands-on training pays off in Vermont's classrooms. Veteran teachers have to be re-licensed every five years. The focus of the re-licensure is on instruction related to standards, and veteran teachers can mentor student teachers as part of the re-licensing process—not all do, but there is increasing interest.³¹

Currently only one of Vermont's high schools receives CSRD funding, but this appears to be changing. It is anticipated that six may apply for the next round of grants. In addition, the five schools in the state with over 1000 students intend to apply for federal Small Learning Community grants. The Vermont Department of Education has formed a partnership with the John Dewey Center at the University of Vermont to administer a Learn and Serve America grant funded by the Corporation for National Service. The grant will be used to link service learning to high school reform and support the principles of the high school task force. Vermont also received a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education to support high school reform. Under the grant, Vermont is piloting four career academies, which are implementing the 12 high school reform principles.

Part of Vermont's challenge in renewing its high schools comes from the existence of two types of high schools: traditional high schools offering college prep and general courses and vocational-technical centers which have traditionally served non-college bound youth. Traditional high schools are operated by local school districts while the vocational-technical centers are operated by the state on a regional basis. As the lines between academic and technical education have continued to blur with regard to what all students need to know and be able to do, Vermont is trying to align the work of these two institutions. The four career academies are forging links with the technical centers as part of this strategy.

Using a thoughtful approach and building on relationships between a group of individuals who have been working on school reform efforts for many years, Vermont is slowly pursuing high school redesign. The state has a long tradition of grass roots reform. Individuals involved in the reform efforts believe that the most important role the state can play is that of cheerleader for schools who dare to risk reform efforts. By using the bully pulpit to support reform, the state can provide cover for local schools and recognition for their successes. The state also can provide a valuable role in information sharing (the main purpose of the *High Schools on the Move* network) and in bringing people together to create a forum for dialogue on change, innovation, and improving practice. However, the immediate challenge for Vermont is a lack of resources to continue the momentum of reform.

For more information on Vermont's high school reform efforts see <http://www.state.vt.us/educ>

Regional Accreditation Strategies

In addition to individual state efforts, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges have been important forces for promoting high school reform. The New England association has revised its secondary school accreditation policies to reflect new concepts of high school education advocated by national and state commissions and reports. The Western association has developed Expected School-wide Learning Results (ESLR) such as problem solving, communication, and critical thinking skills, which high schools have adopted and used as part of the accreditation process.

PART II – SIMILAR APPROACHES/COMMON LESSONS

California, Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont have pursued similar paths for improving their high schools and adopted some similar strategies. Their reforms are standards based. They each appointed a state commission or task force charged with diagnosing and explaining the problem, supporting a dialogue with the public and key stakeholders, reviewing state policies and regulations, articulating a vision, and recommending a set of goals, principles, practices and policies to support reform. They each created an organizational focal point to promote reform efforts. They marshaled resources from federal programs, pursued foundation support and invested modest amounts of state funds. They provided technical assistance and monitored results.

There have been some important lessons learned from the work of the four states. In particular, valuable insights are provided by the Little and Dorph study of California's Restructuring Demonstration and the Hamann and Lane examination of Maine's strategies to promote high school reform. Six significant lessons emerge from these experiences that are especially important for other states that want to pursue high school reform.

First it is important to build a strong, compelling case for why high schools need to change. Because policymakers, educators and the general public seem largely unaware of the performance of high schools in their state or school districts, most feel little urgency to change. When people do talk about improving high schools, they tend to focus on such things as discipline or parental involvement or test scores, and they approach these issues in a compartmentalized way—not as part of a whole strategy. Therefore, the solutions suggested often deal with one piece of the problem, like drop outs, and sometimes overlook deeper issues, such as the quality of instruction or school climate, which is actually at the heart of the matter.

People need to understand the basic facts and perceptions about high schools in their state,³² and what these mean because it is the analysis of facts and perceptions that provides the real fuel for change. For example, Maine found that it was graduating the highest proportion of eligible students in the states' history, which seemed like good news, but it also learned that its graduation rate was still below three of its New England counterparts. Maine also discovered that while its fourth graders were ahead of national averages on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, its 11th graders "had lost ground in relation to their peers nationwide."³³ Recognizing these and other facts provided impetus for state action.

Stakeholder views are another important source of information. One of the first things that Maine's Secondary Education Commission did was to hold student and teacher forums to find out what they believed was working and not working in high school. They learned among other things that high school students, and to a degree staff, viewed "educational experiences as irrelevant or disengaging."³⁴ In *Promising Futures*, the Commission made specific recommendations to address these findings. Similarly, members of Rhode Island's Board of Regents held forums and public hearings around the state prior to making their recommendations on high school reform and then to get feedback on their initial ideas. By gathering and analyzing data, presenting it in a straightforward way and widely sharing and discussing it with the public, states can set the stage for creating a vision and building consensus for action. By charging a commission with this task, state leaders can create a focal point for analysis and public input and, if the membership is chosen well, foster a belief that the findings are objective and well grounded.

Second, reforms need to be based on a clear vision for high schools of the future. As Yogi Berra is reported to have said, "If you don't know where you're going, you might not get there." States and schools often leap into action, adopting the latest policy or practice. Most often they find that those initiatives fail, stagnate, or meet strong resistance if they are not part of a vision and set of goals that are shared by those they want to change or influence.

This vision must be based on facts about the current state of high schools, the needs of adolescents, and an understanding of the knowledge and skills young people will need to be successful in society and the economy once they leave high school. But it must do more. It must be convincing enough to enable people to imagine more effective ways of educating high school students and compelling enough to give people the confidence to change. The traditional view of the comprehensive high school with its Carnegie unit courses, seven period day, sports teams, prom, and so on is so ingrained in our culture and experience that it is almost impossible for people to imagine another approach. Many people, especially teachers and parents, believe that the alternatives to what we have are too risky to pursue for the majority of students. The threat of jeopardizing “my child’s chances for college” or “my job” or the band or football team looms large in the nation’s consciousness, and a new vision must be exceedingly compelling to overcome it. A new vision must also reflect some consensus among stakeholders and the public that these changes make sense and address the issues that are of most concern. The Public Agenda Forum found that parents, teachers and the public do not usually think about reform in terms of bold proposals, such as creating smaller high schools. Instead they are focused on things like discipline, unmotivated students, and class size. If they are going to be successful, Public Agenda concluded, reformers must show explicitly how their proposals will address the issues that are of most concern to stakeholders and the public.³⁵

A vision should also address the purpose of high school—although this is tricky. High schools have long been viewed as providing college preparation for some and job preparation for others. These beliefs are strongly held. Yet they deserve to be examined in the context of what students should know and be able to do when they complete high school. For example, should all students today be prepared for postsecondary learning and, if so, why and what does this mean? Finally, the vision must be sensitive to issues of local control.

In order to address these “vision” challenges, the four states based their vision on state standards, high expectations for all students and a belief that all students need to be prepared for postsecondary learning. States drew up a list of principles and practices to drive their vision, rather than describing a physical model of an ideal high school. This approach acknowledged the importance of local ownership and control and the reality that these principles and practices might be implemented in different settings—from redesigned traditional high schools to the creation of small, innovative schools. The Maine Commission, for example, noted that its high schools currently “serve many diffuse purposes and struggle to succeed at all of them.” It said the challenge for every secondary school is to “focus the primary resources and energies...on its central mission: learning; to refocus social, athletic, cultural and behavioral missions to serve this central mission in a coherent fashion.”³⁶ This new mission challenges the “all things to all people” character of today’s high schools. The six principles and 15 practices put forward by Maine’s Commission require changes in the traditional way to “do” high school. They suggest that learning can happen in many ways and in many venues, and thus they serve as a blueprint for changing the traditional notion of high school and for creating new approaches to educating adolescents. It is noteworthy that *Promising Futures* also listed a number of practices that should be discontinued in high schools.

The four case study states started their reform efforts largely in response to concerns that high schools in particular would struggle to bring all students up to state standards. Although each state requires content standards in a number of areas, most provide models to local districts and give them significant latitude in choosing the specifics. Vermont developed its state standards and assessments from the school and community level. Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont limited their state assessments to the core areas of reading, writing, and math, although local districts were required to develop and administer assessments in other content areas. Maine and Rhode Island have explicitly adopted options for alternative assessments as part of their state initiatives. These states know that standards and assessments have to be seen as useful and credible to be effective and to authentically drive other reforms. All three states have been cautious and thoughtful about standards and assessment development. All four states started their high school reforms largely to ensure that students would be able to achieve the state content standards, yet they have been continually reexamining their standards and, particularly their assessment policies, to be sure they are having the desired affect.

The importance of taking the time to build a foundation and consensus for change cannot be emphasized too strongly. Nor can the need to acknowledge the efficacy of local control. Vermont, with its tradition of bottoms up development of education policy, may have laid the strongest foundation for building school and community consensus around change. In Maine, according to Hamann and Lane, *Promising Futures* was put forth as “a voluntary framework for schools to enact.” The fact that implementation was “to be voluntary rather than prescribed gives indication of both Maine’s tradition of resistance to mandates and of the state’s pragmatic awareness of how little mandating *Promising Futures* would accomplish.”³⁷

A clear, compelling vision is central to successful reform. It must be based on an understanding of the current situation, the needs of students—current and future, the culture of the state and a good sense of the world that young people must navigate during and after high school. The public, policymakers and stakeholders must have input into, and feel ownership of, it. Building an initial consensus for change is a challenging and time consuming task. A state high school commission can be an effective way to set the stage and begin the conversation about a new vision for high school education.

Third, state policies need to support the vision. State laws and regulations affecting high schools need to be reviewed and revised, if necessary, in order to support the state’s vision. This review should include a reexamination of standards, assessments, graduation requirements, teacher certification, school construction and other policies, some of which are referenced in Appendix A. If a state, for example, envisions making its high schools smaller, then it needs to be sure that its school construction and renovation policies support that objective. Too often state policies reward districts for building bigger schools that house more students—creating a disincentive for districts to build or support small schools. State standard and assessment policies may foster the perpetuation of narrow Carnegie unit courses and the use of standardized tests as the only measure of performance, rather than encouraging mastery of knowledge and skills. Maine, for example, no longer bases graduation requirements on Carnegie units. State funding—formulas for distributing monies to local districts may also need revision. Maine created a separate commission to determine the costs of implementing its Learning Results at the elementary, middle and high school level. In addition, new policies may be needed to support the new vision for high schools. A high school commission could be charged with this task or a separate group could be appointed to advise on how policies and regulations might be changed to support the new vision.

Fourth, technical assistance is crucial to planning and implementing successful reform. Based on the experience of the four states, two areas are especially important: (1) building capacity to lead and manage change and (2) improving classroom instruction.

Little in the experience of state departments of education, districts, school administrators or classroom teachers has prepared them to undertake the kinds of reforms needed to transform high schools.

Most state education departments run programs and monitor compliance. Often many staff operate federally funded grant programs, which prescribe their duties and pay some or all of their salaries. State departments also promote, regulate and report on state standards and assessments. Few function as learning organizations or service-oriented leadership bodies.³⁹ The skills needed to lead a statewide school transformation effort are quite different from those needed to carry out federal programs or impose federal and state regulations. Maine created a new entity to promote its reforms. Its Center for Inquiry into Secondary Education is an arm of the Maine Department of Education, but has substantial autonomy. The small staff was carefully chosen for its expertise, knowledge and commitment to *Promising Futures*. It administers CSRSD, but also provides coaches to high schools that receive CSRSD grants. The Center publishes a newsletter and conducts Summer Institutes on Best Practices—available to all high schools in Maine. Center staff has regular access to the Commissioner and has built legitimacy with local schools and school districts. California originally created a Center to run its comprehensive school reform demonstration. That Center was separate from the state department of education. More recently, an office of high school leadership has been established within the departmental structure. The office staff provides some of the same services that Maine’s Center provides, although it functions in a large bureaucracy that still appears to be program and compliance oriented.

School districts face many of the same challenges as state departments. They are essentially policymaking and regulatory bodies that run a variety of programs in a largely uncoordinated fashion. When they offer technical assistance, it too seems to be provided piecemeal. Most district officials have shown little interest in high school reform. They, like many state officials, have focused their attention on elementary and middle grades. The *No Child Left Behind* legislation increases the incentive to stay focused on K-8 grades in the short term—although a longer-term view of the legislation suggests that high schools shouldn't be neglected. The legislation requires states to have a plan for ensuring that all students K-12 make adequate yearly progress. Researchers who evaluated California's restructuring demonstration noted that "(d)istricts do matter—they create an environment in which change is stimulated or suppressed, and they are instrumental in forging specific policies or practices that affect the conditions of teaching and learning."⁴⁰ These researchers found, however, that the districts often "treated 'restructuring' as one of many school improvement projects"⁴¹ and district support for restructuring tended to diminish over time. Districts control school budgets, class size, staffing, bus schedules and other critical decisions that affect school operations. There are many examples of high schools that have embarked on ambitious redesign efforts, only to be stopped in their tracks by the redeployment of key staff or by new district-wide initiatives that take precedent over restructuring. Local school board members, superintendents and district personnel all need help in learning how to lead and manage change within their high schools. They need to know how to create a vision, set goals, use data driven decision making, develop budgets, revise policies and regulations, and support local school leaders and teachers in the change process. Rhode Island develops a compact for learning with its districts specifying what the district and the department will do to improve low performing schools. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform has created a toolkit for districts interested in providing a quality education to their students and helping local schools support comprehensive reform. The kit includes a five-step analysis districts can use to evaluate how they can deliver better supports to schools.⁴²

Administrators at the school level are similarly ill equipped to lead and manage a reform process. Typically, principals and their assistants are consumed by the daily business and crisis of school. Their training, formal and on-the-job, usually focuses on building management, discipline, budgeting, personnel issues, scheduling and the like. More recently, the new role of "instructional leader" has been added to the list of responsibilities, usually on top of everything else. Creating a vision, setting goals, leading change, building a team to plan and implement reforms, managing a reform process, using data to inform decision-making and finding time to engage in these activities are skills that need to be developed and nurtured in school administrators. Rhode Island requires schools to engage in self-study and set goals and rigorous requirements for improvement. The state believes that schools should develop their own expertise to improve teaching and learning with support from the state and districts. It has published a series of *School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)* guides to support and develop the professional judgment of those who work within schools. State-sponsored teams visit schools every five years to review the school's progress. The Southern Maine Partnership and the Maine Center for Inquiry into Secondary Education provide coaches to high schools in order to build the capacity of both administrators and teachers to implement and sustain improvements.

Instruction must also be a priority for technical assistance. Comprehensive reform is an extremely complex undertaking. It is easy to get consumed by governance and restructuring issues and neglect improvements in classroom instruction. In the California demonstration project, researchers found that schools often adopted new governance structures and practices such as portfolios, student advisories, and project-based learning. However, changes in instructional practice and the use of student work to drive improvement by in large were not realized despite the fact that these were key objectives of the legislation and one of the four pillars of the technical assistance effort. Researchers concluded that "more might have been gained both within sites and in the productive exchange across sites by a single-minded focus on student learning and student assessment, letting the other goals and issues follow more directly from that one."⁴³ In Maine and Vermont, technical assistance providers have used practices such as the development of individual learning plans for students and the engagement of teachers in creating local assessments as important strategies for getting schools and teachers to

focus on changing instructional practice and analyzing the quality of student work. The key lesson seems to be that improving classroom instruction needs to be a primary objective of technical assistance, and the adoption of new structures or practices, such as student advisories or portfolios, must be seen as a vehicle for supporting that objective, not as ends in and of themselves. Researcher in the California Restructuring Demonstration concluded that the “*quality of teachers and teaching and building capacity for meaningful assessment and accountability* will afford the greatest leverage on improvements in student learning and school performance.”⁴⁴

Professional development is essential if instructional practice is going to change—this finding is true for both teachers who are currently in the classroom and new teachers coming into the profession. Professional development needs to be tackled on three fronts—in college and university teacher preparation programs, in re-certification programs, and in district and school in-service training. There are some examples, especially in Vermont and Maine, of methods for addressing all three of these challenges in ways that create the kinds of teachers needed to support high school reform.

Many states are looking at increasing credentialing requirements for teachers, especially more preparation in key subject areas. Nineteen states, including Maine, require teachers to have a major in their subject area in order to teach it. However, the experience of the four states suggests that if reforms are going to increase student achievement, much more attention needs to be paid to changing instructional practice in the classroom, including building the capacity of teachers to use engaging teaching methods and to analyze data and student work. These efforts need to permeate teacher preparation, re-certification and in-service programs.

Researchers have found that in order to be effective, a state’s technical assistance effort must be well funded, focused, customized, delivered on site and seen as credible by those it is trying to help. It should be coordinated with, and leverage, other resources and technical assistance efforts. And it must also be delivered at all four levels—classroom, school, district and state.

California’s researchers found that the \$8 million earmarked for technical assistance was not sufficient to support the ambitious objectives of its comprehensive restructuring demonstration program, and the technical support wasn’t provided in a way that was most advantageous to schools. They noted that

school staff were most likely to praise the quality of support where they reaped the benefit of context-specific, on-going, on-site contact (sometimes defined as ‘coaching’) as well as productive participation in the networking and reporting activities in the region or state...The largest disappointments lay in the scarcity of school-level assistance, the unfulfilled promise of regional networking, and the still-primitive uses of electronic communication.”⁴⁴

They also found that “many schools were weakly equipped and weakly supported to investigate the effects of their restructuring choices on students and to adjust practice on the basis of what they found.”⁴⁶ They concluded: “schools required support that was more locally accessible, timely, context-specific, and directly targeted to questions of teaching and learning.”⁴⁷

“Crucial to change,” say Hamann and Lane, “is congruence between the message, the messenger, and the message recipient.”⁴⁸ They report that Maine’s reforms

are crucially enabled by the orientations, interactive skills, vision and energy of the small group of professional educators who have led the initiative. Though not infallible, these leaders instinctively understand that high school reform requires learning—both their own learning and learning on the part of school-based personnel.⁴⁹

The state-based change agents have succeeded, to a large degree, at being credible to the personnel in the Maine high schools attempting change. Their individual credibility, however, has only been part of the equation. The ‘curriculum’ they have been promoting (i.e., *Promising Futures*) and the structures within which they have been operating (i.e., the Center for Inquiry on Secondary Education) have

both been deemed sufficiently credible by school-based teachers and administrators.⁵⁰

Fifth, additional resources are necessary to support reform, and this support is needed for at least three to five years. States are asking local schools and districts to both adopt new policies and rethink how they are spending current dollars. Making this kind of transition costs money. These transition costs usually include: professional development and capacity building, support for substitute teachers and extra compensation for administrators and teachers who work after school or during the summer to plan and implement reforms, and technical assistance to schools to develop and implement their reforms—usually in the form of coaches or other specialized support. It is also important for administrators and staff at all levels to have opportunities to visit places to see reforms in action and learn from researchers and practitioners about successful reforms.

States that are promoting high school reform are doing so in a climate of scarce resources. To deal with this situation, the states in this study are using federal dollars in new ways to support their efforts. For example, Maine targets all of its Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) funds on high schools and ties grant requirements to the recommendations in *Promising Futures*. Vermont used funds from the federal School to Work program and federal professional development resources. Vermont, Maine and California are actively encouraging local school districts to apply for federal Small Learning Communities grants, which are targeted specifically on high school. The identification of ways in which existing federal and state funds could support high school change should be an important part of a high school commission's mandate. National and regional foundations are beginning to support state initiatives to redesign high schools. Governors and state superintendents can play an important role in attracting this kind of private sector support.

There are some important cautions for states as they put resources into reform efforts. Researchers examining the California's Restructuring Demonstration concluded that when schools undertake reforms in a context where basic resources are scarce—as is true in most states today—funds designed to support reform are often diverted to pay for basics, such as professional staff time, computer equipment and other instructional resources. States need to be aware of the demands on local schools and districts and provide assistance to help them utilize their resources efficiently and wisely in ways that support their redesign objectives.

Finally, reforms take time, and states need to be willing to stay the course. Both Maine and Rhode Island, the two states that have made the most consistent progress on high school reform, have had long-term commissioners of education who have devoted personal attention to high school agenda. Policymakers need to be realistic about the time it takes to get results. States are indirect influencers of reform. They may implement standards and policies and support technical assistance, but reforms themselves take place in classrooms, schools and districts. Maine, Vermont and California have found that the impact of restructuring efforts appeared to be greatest when technical assistance and reform networks became more sophisticated and when schools had been pursuing reforms over a longer period of time.

States need to have realistic indicators of both short and long term expectations for improvement. Experience, and some research, suggests that improvements often roll-out in the following way: increases in attendance, decreases in discipline problems, increases in interest in learning and college-going, increases in graduation rates, and finally, increases in achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Attendance and behavior usually improve in the first year or two, while significant increases in test scores may take five years or more to materialize. It may be possible to get a bump in test scores in the short-term, but usually it takes much longer for a consistent pattern of improvement to emerge.

School-wide aggregate data is not a good indicator of success. It is important to look at progress in a disaggregated way, i.e. by race, ethnicity, non-native English speakers, and economic status; at the progress of cohorts of 9th graders from freshman year through twelfth grade; and at outcomes for students who enter as ninth graders and stay to graduate compared to those who enter and leave during the course of the high school experience.

If a state starts a high school reform effort, it needs to stick with it and recognize that it is unlikely that reforms will be realized if policy or budget situations change dramatically without regard to their impact on reform.

PART III – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATES

In times of tight budgets, burgeoning school populations, and demands for quality education, states must make sensible and productive policy choices. To date, high schools have not been high on the education agenda of most states, but that is beginning to change. Based on the experience of the states in this review, there are five steps other states could take to improve the quality of high school education and the prospects for high school students. A commission composed of key stakeholders can be an effective vehicle for undertaking the first three steps. The work of such a commission should receive a high degree of visibility, status and attention by both top elected officials and education leaders, and its recommendations must be followed by action.

First, states can undertake a thorough review of their high schools and develop a vision, goals and principles to guide reform efforts. Such a review should include an assessment of high schools and student performance throughout the state, the status of adolescents of high school age—both in and out of school—and stakeholders’ perceptions of what is working and not working. Through hearings, conversations and research and analysis, states can lay a solid foundation for change and engage stakeholders and the general public in a broad dialogue about high school and the changes that need to be made. They should also identify the knowledge and skills graduates need to be successful in postsecondary education, employment and community life. Governors, legislators, and state education leaders can use the bully pulpit to make the case for reform, raise public awareness, rally support and celebrate successes through State of the State and State of Education addresses, policy statements, legislative hearings, awards, recognition ceremonies, and other forums.

Second, states can review their policies and regulations and align them with the new vision and goals for high schools. Among the policies and regulations that should be examined are state standards, competency-based instruction and assessment, graduation requirements, the financing of school construction and renovation, options for creating choice and multiple pathways for students and state requirements for teacher certification. States can also work with regional accreditation agencies to develop new approaches to high school accreditation.

Third, states can identify resources to promote reform. Federal programs and grants such as Title I, Comprehensive School Reform, Smaller Learning Communities, and professional development resources are obvious sources. Where possible, states should align grant requirements to support reform objectives. They can also seek the backing of national, state and local foundations to provide help to local schools and districts. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Kellogg Foundation are supporting high school reform efforts in Maine and in a number of local communities. In so doing, they have often encouraged investments of regional and local foundations.

Fourth, states can create an organizational focal point to support reform through research, policy development, information dissemination, targeted technical assistance and networking. A strong, well-financed technical assistance effort should be particularly focused on capacity building and instructional improvement. The organizational focal point might be a new Center, either inside or outside of state government, or a high profile office within the state department of education. In order to provide the level of support needed to advance reforms, such an organization must have autonomy, flexibility and stature, and be adequately resourced.

Fifth, states need to give reforms time to develop and monitor results carefully. They need to support the training of state and local staff in the use of data and data analysis to track progress. They can use on site peer review teams and evaluations to assess progress, and follow-up and act upon the results, and approach oversight in a way that gains the trust of teachers, students, and the public.

While these steps are modest, they are doable—even in times of tight budgets--and could lay a strong foundation for changing the way we educate high school age youth.

There are, however, more dramatic ideas on the table for changing the American high school experience. Many of these initiatives are being piloted in various places throughout the country with the support of national foundations, most notably, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. These ideas are based on some common principles—high expectations for all students, choice, authentic assessments, agreements around what all students should know and be able to do, advancement based on demonstrations of proficiency (as opposed to seat time), creating small schools and learning communities that are focused on learning and are safe, respectful, and trusting environments, and learning based on interest and individual responsibility.

The MET in Providence, Rhode Island, described earlier, offers one new approach to learning. Students work with an advisor, learn through research projects, internships and community service, and take classes on college campuses rather than at a high school. Some small innovative schools, such as High Tech High, Expeditionary Learning, Montessori high schools, and themed-based schools are some other innovative approaches being explored.

Mark Tucker, President of the National Center for Education and the Economy, has long advocated a version of the Danish model of high school, wherein all students achieve a certificate of initial mastery at about the end of tenth grade. Through tenth grade students pursue a common curriculum based on a set of common standards, culminating in a set of common examinations (using multiple forms of assessment). Students who don't complete their work by the end of tenth grade can stay on longer. After tenth grade students would follow multiple pathways. Some might choose to stay at their local high school and take advanced placement courses or the International Baccalaureate program or other rigorous courses. Some might choose to go to a technical or community college, and some might advance to a college or university.⁵¹

The Early College High School model puts some of Tucker's ideas into action. The model would enable students to earn both a high school diploma and an associate's degree or two years of college credit upon graduation from high school. Bard College in New York opened Bard High School Early College in 2001, and Simon's Rock College in Massachusetts has been operating a similar program to students age 16 and up since 1966. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of American, The Ford Foundation, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation are supporting a \$40 million effort to create 70 small high schools on the early college model.

Some of the concepts embodied in these more dramatic proposals for changing high school have been incorporated into the reform policies of the four case study states, as shown in Appendix B. For example, Maine, Vermont and Rhode Island are promoting competency-based assessments and the use of multiple forms of assessment, and Maine and Vermont are encouraging schools to use individualize learning plans and student interests to inform classroom instruction. Any state embarking on reform, or chartering a commission, should consider the broad range of ideas currently being discussed. All warrant consideration as part of rethinking the high school experience for America's youth.

CONCLUSION

Will the strategies and investments being pursued by the four states actually pay off in terms of improved outcomes for students? This is a question all state policymakers must ask as they embark upon efforts to change high schools. The evidence suggests cautious optimism. Studies of the California demonstration, Career Academies, the Maine experience, small schools, and the High Schools That Work initiative have found positive results. However, the research also suggests that certain conditions must exist in order to achieve the desired results.

The California Restructuring Demonstration evaluation found that “restructuring did strengthen the learning conditions for some students by boosting expectations and support for academic achievement.”⁵² Based on a series of case studies, the researchers concluded that the payoff was greater for high achievers and native English speakers, suggesting that even if funds are targeted on low performing schools, attention must be paid to low performing students within those schools. Researchers also concluded that grades and test scores don’t tell the whole story and that improvements in student achievement don’t always follow “a steady trajectory.”⁵³

A random assignment, longitudinal study of Career Academies, which are like California’s Partnership Academies, being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) showed early gains for participating students, especially for at-risk students. The most recent report (December 2001) indicated that for students at the greatest risk of dropping out of high school, the program increased the number of years they stayed in school, their attendance rate, and the number of academic and career-related courses they completed. Further, they reported that Academy students achieved high school graduation and post-secondary education enrollment rates comparable to the national average and higher than those in large urban high schools. However, they also found that one year out of high school, these accomplishments did not represent an improvement over the performance of the study’s control group of non-Academy students. Researchers suggest that increasing “the emphasis on meeting academic standards and providing more intensive guidance and support for college entrance” could improve student performance and outcomes.⁵⁴

A growing body of evidence suggests that small schools can create the conditions for student success, especially when there are high expectations and standards. (Fine, 2000). A study by Bank Street College also indicates that reconfiguring large urban schools into smaller schools is having a positive impact on student performance, school climate, and parent satisfaction. (Bank Street College, 2000). Further, research is finding that students in small schools have lower levels of negative behaviors such as truancy, vandalism, aggressive behavior, theft, substance abuse and gang participation. (Raywid, 1995; Klonsky 1995) Adolescent health is also better in schools that foster an atmosphere in which students feel fairly treated, close to others and a part of the school. (Adolescent Health Study, NIH, 1997)

The High Schools that Work (HSTW) project of the Southern Regional Education Board has kept careful records and done significant analysis of improvements in student achievement in schools in its network. Using an individualized version of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, HSTW has documented impressive achievement gains for students it identifies as “career bound” in schools that eliminated the general track, provided extra time and help for students, and offered rigorous college preparatory level coursework.

First Things First, America’s Choice and Talent Development are other high school improvement models that are showing some promising results.

As noted earlier, the findings of these and other studies suggest both optimism and caution. We should be optimistic because there is evidence that sustained efforts to transform high schools can make a difference in the lives of young people. We should be cautious because certain conditions need to exist in order to make a

lasting impact on achievement. These conditions include a laser-beam focus on teaching and learning, on closing the achievement gap, on enhancing the capacity of administrators and teachers to bring about reforms, on aligning state and local policies to support reform, on closely monitoring results at the state, district, school and classroom level using multiple indicators, and on being willing to make mid-course corrections.

Unless we pay serious attention to our high schools, a significant, and growing, number of our students—tomorrow’s citizens—will drop out or simply drift through school. If we are successful at the elementary and middle school level and fail to change our high schools, we risk losing much of what we initially achieved. States have an important role to perform in transforming our nation’s high schools, and some good examples of how to carry out that role. To date, high schools have been the weakest link in state and local school reform efforts. It’s time to change that. As the late football coach, George Allen, used to say, “The future is now!”

ENDNOTES

- 1 Haycock, Kati and Sandra Huang, "Are Today's High School Graduates Ready?" *Thinking K-16*, Education Trust, Vol. 5, Issue 1, Winter 2001, pp. 1-7
 - 2 Ibid. p. 3.
 - 3 Public Agenda Survey sponsored by Education Week and the Pew Charitable Trusts, November 1999.
 - 4 Haycock and Huang op cit., p. 1.
 - 5 For example, Martinez and Bray found that Pennsylvania and Minnesota have aligned graduation requirements to state standards, rather than simply relying on course credits. Maryland has partnership agreements with Baltimore and Prince Georges County that channel extra funds to these districts to support improvements in low performing schools, including high schools. Oregon has adopted competency-based Certificates of Initial Mastery and Certificates of Advanced Mastery for high school students. In Oregon, State Senator Peter Courtney proposed SB38 during the 71st Legislative Assembly to encourage school districts to operate schools with no more than 400 K-5 students, 500 6th-8th graders, and 800 high school students. The bill was passed by the Senate, but failed in the House. In Maryland, Delegate David Rudolph has been working on legislation to promote small schools. His bill H.R. 1328 was introduced in February 2001. It would require the state to pay a certain amount of costs in addition to the maximum state construction allocation for the construction and renovation to create small schools.
 - 6 Five states, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nevada and Texas, are partners in The American Diploma Project.
 - 7 In FY2001, California invested almost \$20 million annually in 290 funded academy programs.
 - 8 *Second to None: A Vision for the New California High School*, High School Task Force, California Department of Education, 1992.
 - 9 Little, Judith Warren and Rena Dorph, et.al. *Lessons About Comprehensive School Reform: California's School Restructuring Demonstration Program*, (University of California, Berkeley, December 1998), p. 1.
 - 10 Ibid. p. 1-5.
 - 11 The federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program (CSRSD) could be a source of funding for high school reform. However, only a few high schools in the state receive CSRSD grants. The School Improvement Division within CDE administers the program and there appears to be no concerted effort to use CSRSD funds to support the high school reform work of the High School Leadership Office.
 - 12 AB 620 compliments a grant to High Tech High in San Diego from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to replicate this model in California and other states.
 - 13 Morgan-Hart provides funds to Local Education Agencies to reduce the size of English classes and one other 9th grade course required for graduation. Some districts may use funds to reduce class size for 10th-12th graders as well. In 2000-01, \$116.97 million was provided under this act.
 - 14 See sections 4 and 7 of Chapter 127, Instructional Program, Assessment and Diploma Requirements.
 - 15 *Promising Futures*, Executive Summary, Maine Commission on Secondary Education, Maine Department of Education, August 1998, p.1.
 - 16 Ibid.
 - 17 Ibid. p. 2
 - 18 Hamann, Edmund T. and Brett Lane, "We're From the State and We're Here to Help:" *State-Level Innovations In Support of High School Improvement*," (The Education Alliance, Brown University, Providence, RI. 2002), p. 6.
 - 19 Ibid. p. 21.
 - 20 Memorandum from J. Duke Albanese, Commissioner to Superintendents, Curriculum Coordinators, and Secondary School Principals re: Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Grant Applications, March 26, 2002.
 - 21 Ibid.
 - 22 Hamann. and Lane, Op.cit. p. 15.
 - 23 Hamann. and Lane, Op. cit.
 - 24 *RI Skills Commission Awards First RI Certificate of Initial Mastery*, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Public Information, Press Release, February 25, 2002.
 - 25 *SALT WORKS – School by School*, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, p.5,
 - 26 *Regents chalk up school reforms*, Providence Journal, Providence, RI, January 10, 2003.
 - 27 Ibid.
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- 28 Unpublished paper prepared by the Commissioner of Education for the Aspen Institute/Council of Chief State School Officers Forum, Miami, Florida, January 31-February 1, 2003.
 - 29 “High School Innovation: The Vermont Career Academies Pilot,” Grant Application to the U.S. Department of Education from the Vermont Department of Education, 2001. Vermont Department of Education website.
 - 30 Conversation with John Clark, consultant, Education Alliance at Brown University. June 2002.
 - 31 Ibid.
 - 32 Data should include the number of adolescents of high school age in the state, the number in public and private schools, the number of out-of-school youth who have not graduated from high school, the projected number of students in the pipeline, the demographic mix, the number and type of high schools and alternative programs, performance of students on standardized tests, state graduation rates and so on. The data should be compiled for the state as a whole, by district, by school and disaggregated by income, sex, race, and ethnicity. The idea is to paint as clear a picture as possible of the state of the state’s high schools.
 - 33 Hamann and Lane, op.cit. p. 11.
 - 34 *Promising Futures*, op. cit. Executive Summary, pg. 3..
 - 35 Jennings, Jean. op cit. p. 45.
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APPENDIX A

STATE POLICIES TO IMPROVE HIGH SCHOOLS

APPENDIX A

State Policies to Improve High Schools'

(continues next page)

State	80-94% graduate	75-80% graduate	70-75% graduate	57-70% graduate	Leaving Age 18	Graduation based on state standards	Requires more 20 credits to graduate	State pays 60% or more of local costs	State pays 51-60% of local costs	State pays 41-50% of local costs	Major in subject area required to teach	Requires district to offer alternative schooling	More than 50% CSRD grant to high schools	20-50% CSRD grant to high school	Have exit exam in place before 2000	Right to extra-curricular linked to student performance	Right to drive linked to student performance
AL				x			x	x						x		x	
AK			x				x	x						x			
AR			x				x		x			x				x	
AZ				x			x			x	x				x		
CA			x		x											x	
CO			x						x		x			x			
CT	x				x		x				x						
DC				x	x		x				x						
DE		x			x		x				x						
FL				x			x		x						x		x
GA				x				x			x				x		x
HA			x		x		x				x				x		
IA	x								x		x						
ID		x					x										x
IL	x										x					x	
IN			x		x		x		x						x		x
KS		x			x		x		x								
KY			x				x					x					x
LA				x			x		x			x			x		
MA	x				x					x					x		
MD		x					x								x		
ME		x						x					x				
MI		x						x									
MN	x				x	x									x		
MO		x					x					x					

1 Adapted from Monica Martinez and Judy Bray, *AllOver the Map: State Policies to Improve the High School*, National Alliance on the American High School, May 2002.

APPENDIX A

State Policies to Improve High Schools

(continued from previous page)

State	80-94% graduate	75-80% graduate	70-75% graduate	57-70% graduate	Leaving Age 18	Graduation based on state standards	Requires more 20 credits to graduate	State pays 60% or more of local costs	State pays 51-60% of local costs	State pays 41-50% of local costs	Major in subject area required to teach	Requires district to offer alternative schooling	More than 50% CSRSD grant to high schools	20-50% CSRSD grant to high school	Have exit exam in place before 2000	Right to extra-curricular linked to student performance	Right to drive linked to student performance
MS				x			x	x							x	x	x
MT	x						x		x								
NC				x			x									x	x
ND	x							x					x				
NE	x										x						
NH			x									x					
NJ	x						x				x				x		
NM				x			x	x							x		
NV				x			x				x				x		
NY											x			x			
OH					x					x					x		x
OK		x			x		x										x
OR				x	x		x		x			x					
PA	x					x					x			x			
RI					x		x			x							
SC			x				x								x		x
SD		x					x							x			
TN				x			x			x					x	x	x
TX				x						x					x	x	x
UT					x		x										
VA					x		x								x		x
VT	x																
WA			x		x			x									
WI	x				x				x								x
WV							x									x	x
WY										x							

APPENDIX B

PRINCIPLES ADOPTED BY STATES TO GUIDE HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

APPENDIX B

Principles Adopted by States to Guide High School Reform

(Items that are starred* incorporate a principle in cutting edge reform proposals.)

Principle	California	Maine ¹	Rhode Island ²	Vermont
High expectations for all students*	All students are expected to master the same rigorous academic material.	Adults hold high universal expectations of all students and provide a variety of pathways for students as they strive to meet these expectations. (Principle 2)		
Challenging standards	Curricula are challenging, relevant and cover materials in depth.	Every teacher challenges learners both to master the fundamentals of the disciplines and to integrate skills and concepts across the disciplines to address relevant issues and problems. (Practice 3)	High schools make the state assessments matter- for example, by having the state scores count toward part of student's grade	Each student is expected to demonstrate that he or she has met challenging standards based on Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities
Competency-based Assessments*	Students should demonstrate proficiency in subjects through portfolios and exhibitions of their work*	Frequent assessment of student learning and reviews of these assessments among student, teacher, and parent so that all can share responsibility for planning and caring out learning activities. (Principle 3) Every student who receives the secondary school diploma has demonstrated, through performance exhibitions, knowledge and skills at a level deemed by the school and by the state to be sufficient to begin adult life* (Practice 8)	Students prove they have mastered skills through a variety of means, including portfolios of work, senior projects, and the use of technology*	

1 Maine has adopted a set of six principles and 15 practices to guide reform. The practices noted here are those required to receive a grant under the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program.

2 Rhode Island's Board of Regents has developed a set of draft principles that will be presented for public hearing in September 2002. Final Board action is anticipated in November 2002.

APPENDIX B

Principles Adopted by States to Guide High School Reform

(Items that are starred* incorporate a principle in cutting edge reform proposals.)

Principle	California	Maine ¹	Rhode Island ²	Vermont
Engaged Learners		Teaching and procedures honor and build upon the unique contributions and needs of each learner so that all students will make full use of their opportunities to learn. (Principle 4)	Schools would be broken into smaller learning units, either by creating career academies, or schools within a school, or learning plans for each student.	Students are engaged learners who are responsible for and actively involved in their own learning
Multiple Pathways*				The high school provides each student a variety of learning opportunities and multiple pathways to meet graduation requirements
Personalized Learning/Small Schools*	Schools create small, highly personalized and safe learning environments. Students get extra support from adults.	A safe, respectful, and caring environment assures that every student can attend fully to her and his central mission: learning (Principle 1) Every teacher tailors learning experiences to the learner's needs, interests, and future goals. (Practice 2) Every student employs a Personal Learning Plan to target individual as well as common learning goals and to specify learning activities that will lead to the attainment of those goals. (Practice 6) Students and teachers belong to teams that provide each student continuous personal and academic attention and a supportive environment for learning and growth. (Practice 9)		The high school creates small, personalized and safe learning environments, that enable students to get stable support from adults, have caring connections to mentors and have a sense of belonging

APPENDIX B

Principles Adopted by States to Guide High School Reform

(Items that are starred* incorporate a principle in cutting edge reform proposals.)

Principle	California	Maine ¹	Rhode Island ²	Vermont
Flexible Structures	Periods of instruction are longer and more flexible.	Learning governs the allocation of time, space, facilities, and services. (Practice 10)		The high school's schedule and organization are flexible to allow time for varied instructional activities and to provide an integrated learning experience. Learning is the constant and time is the variable.
Real Life Experiences	Students learn more about careers and college opportunities through real life experiences.		Encourage internships, work-study, service learning, and dual high school-college enrollment.	Students learn about careers and college opportunities through real life experiences and adult interaction including work-based learning, service learning, job shadowing, and career academies
Technology	Technology is integrated into the classroom to provide high-quality instruction and students have the opportunity to gain computer and other technical skills.			
Instructional Leadership*		Active leadership by principals and others inspires and mobilizes staff, students and parents to work toward the fulfillment of the school's mission and, within it, their own learning and life goals. (Practice 15)	Make every high school teacher a teacher of reading and writing.	Adults in the school are skilled leaders and teachers who utilize research based practices, and effective administrative and instructional strategies to support increased student performance.

APPENDIX B
Principles Adopted by States to Guide High School Reform
(Items that are starred* incorporate a principle in cutting edge reform proposals.)

Principle	California	Maine ¹	Rhode Island ²	Vermont
Alignment	All core learning activities concentrate on student learning and achievement, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, scheduling, staff development, hiring and student advisement	Internal coherence among school mission, goals, actions, and outcomes so that the efforts of students, staff and community result in fulfillment of the mission and goals. (Principle 6) Every teacher makes learning standards, activities, and assessment procedures known to students and parents and assures the coherence among them. (Practice 7)		The high school aligns its curriculum, instruction and assessment with the Vermont School Quality Standards and is supported by research based professional development.
Vision and Mission				Every high school adopts and publicizes a compelling vision and mission that utilizes a results oriented approach to promote continuous improvement.
Continuity	Strong partnerships are forged with middle schools and colleges.			The high school is a member of a PK-16 education system and is a partner with elementary, middle schools, colleges and post-graduation training programs to help students make successful transitions.

APPENDIX B

Principles Adopted by States to Guide High School Reform

(Items that are starred* incorporate a principle in cutting edge reform proposals.)

Principle	California	Maine ¹	Rhode Island ²	Vermont
Professional Development*	Staff development/planning emphasize student learning and achievement.			
Parental/ Student Participation	Schools form active alliances with families, employers, community members, and policymakers to promote student learning and ensure accountability for results.	Staff, parents, and especially students are engaged democratically in decisions about learning and the conduct of the school so they learn civic responsibility and skills and so that respect and equity are assured among all members of the school community (Principle 5)		Parents are active participants in their young adult's education and are provided varied opportunities to volunteer, serve on decision making groups, assist students to set learning goals and monitor results and to support learning at home.
Community Partnership	Schools form active alliances with families, employers, community members, and policymakers to promote student learning and ensure accountability for results.			Every high school forms active partnerships with parents, community members, post-secondary institutions, business people, civic leaders and policy makers to ensure fiscal support and to expand student learning opportunities.



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