GREAT AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

REFORMING THE NATION'S REMAINING LOW-PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS

A REPORT BY: Civic Enterprises
Everyone Graduates Center
at Johns Hopkins University

WRITTEN BY: Robert Balfanz, Jennifer DePaoli,
Matthew Atwell, and John Bridgeland

OCTOBER 2018

Great American High School Campaign

Reforming the Nation's Remaining Low-Performing High Schools

October 2018

A Report by:

Civic Enterprises

Everyone Graduates Center
at Johns Hopkins University

Written by:

Robert Balfanz
Jennifer DePaoli
Matthew Atwell
John Bridgeland

UCING
VS
TAXI DRIVING

Table of Contents

Executive Summary **1**

Great American High School Campaign **5**

Report Overview **8**

Section I **9**

Archetypes **22**

Section II **29**

What Works **31**

Success Stories **34**

Section III **39**

Conclusion **47**

Section IV **48**

Acknowledgements **55**

References **56**

Appendix **58**

Executive Summary

Two Educational Nations

Students in America live in two educational nations. In the vast majority of high schools with 300 or more students, the average graduation rate is already at the national goal of 90 percent or more and dropping out is a rarity. In the remaining high schools, the average graduation rate is 49 percent and on-time graduation for students is only a 50-50 proposition. In the land of opportunity, young adult success is too dependent on where they live and what school they attend. This has significant consequences for their communities and the nation. It is time to change that by drawing on the lessons in recent years and new learnings to redesign the nation's remaining low-performing high schools.

The Nation's Low-Performing High Schools

After more than a decade of progress in significantly reducing the number of low-performing high schools, there remain about 1,300 traditional high schools in need of serious improvement and redesign. All of these low-performing high schools are overwhelmingly located in distressed neighborhoods and school districts concentrated in 18 states. Most of these states need to see substantial improvement in their graduation rates in order for the nation to achieve a 90 percent high school graduation rate for all students, and 11 of those states currently have among the lowest graduation rates in the nation.

The remaining low-performing high schools sit at the fault lines of race, class, and inequality in America and many are located in areas of the country that are disconnected from the 21st century economy. As such, they serve as engines of what could be a persistent, geographically bound, underclass.

Yet, many also have a storied history that exemplify the pride of the local community and continue to generate a shared sense of attachment among their residents. This provides a community connection upon which to build.

The remaining low-performing high schools range in size from 300 to roughly 4,500 students and can be organized into broad archetypes. About one-third of the nation's remaining low-performing high schools are found in the 50 largest school districts. About another 30 percent are located in small to mid-sized urban and suburban school districts that have only one to three high schools. The remaining low-performing high schools are found in rural areas, principally in the South and Pacific Northwest, and modestly sized, formerly industrial cities of the north and Midwest.

In a country committed to equality of opportunity regardless of background, nagging equity gaps based on race, ethnicity, and income persist. Most of the remaining low-performing high schools are majority-minority schools, primarily attended by low-income Black and Hispanic students. Nearly three-fourths of the students in the typical low-graduation-rate high school are minority students, compared to 37 percent in the high schools with higher graduation rates. Low-performing high schools are located in districts where, on average, 29 percent of students live in poverty, compared to an 18 percent average for other high schools. These schools also tend to have higher than average numbers of students with disabilities, English learners, and homeless students.

Within the typical low-graduation-rate high school, student disengagement is profound. Compared to other traditional high schools, the graduation rate in low-graduation-rate high schools is, on average, 41 percentage points lower; the chronic absenteeism rate is 100 percent higher; the suspension rate is 110 percent higher; and the 9th grade retention rate is 160 percent greater. More than one in three students are chronically absent and one in six is suspended each year. At these levels, negative academic and social-emotional impacts are experienced not only by the students who are absent or being suspended, but also by their classmates as well. It is time for the nation to perform a second act of high school improvement to reform these low-performing schools.

A Path Forward: A Great American High School Campaign

The human capital and community resources available to reform high schools differ wildly among large urban centers, suburbs that have seen rapid changes in their student population, smaller cities and towns that have seen the backbone of their economy erode, and isolated rural districts. To successfully redesign low-performing traditional high schools, it is imperative that improvement strategies reflect and address the unique needs of their locales. Such redesign efforts will also require the involvement of the entire community, support and technical assistance from organizations positioned to provide it, and public and private investment guided by local decision-making.

We propose an initial focus on the approximately 800 traditional high schools that will be identified as graduating 67 percent or fewer of their students under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and hence, in need of comprehensive support and intervention. This is not to suggest that all other low-performing schools should be forgotten; rather, narrowing down the total list of low-performing high schools in this way provides a strategic leverage point by using a more targeted approach that aligns with the work states are required under ESSA to do to improve their lowest-performing high schools. We are already receiving significant demand from the states and their chief state school officers to support this work. In the report, we propose a framework for a campaign to redesign these schools with their communities in mind, understanding that the circumstances of each school may call for plans to be altered accordingly. A condensed outline of that framework, based on what has been learned from the past successes and failures of previous high school reform, is as follows:

Make it about the community's future, not past school failures

There is little hope for success if reform of the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools is cast in a negative or punitive light. Reforms should be cast in hope, optimism, and purpose. One way to do this is to make the case that these high schools need to be redesigned to provide all students with a pathway to adult success in this century by fully developing the community's young people academically, socially, and emotionally. Its goal is not just enabling all students to graduate, but to graduate prepared for postsecondary schooling and training, and provided with the supported pathways to succeed once there.

Tightly align with state ESSA plans for low-performing high schools

States are beginning to implement their ESSA plans. Central to the campaign's success will be alignment with the process states will use to support high schools identified as in need of comprehensive reform. Tight policy-to-practice coordination will enable high school redesign efforts to be viewed through the same lens at the school, district, and state levels, which is essential to ensuring strong implementation. Strong alignment will help avoid or mitigate the all too common reform phenomenon of schools receiving conflicting messages from different levels about what they should and should not be doing.

Acknowledge the obstacles – and design the campaign to address them

For this campaign to be successful, the obstacles to reforming and redesigning high schools must be acknowledged and addressed. Nearly all of the remaining low-performing high schools have been attempting, or required to engage in, reforms for the past decade or more. This leads to reform burnout and inertia, making reform a ritual, rather than the intentional, thoughtful, dynamic, and passionate work it needs to be.

Get the needs assessment right

For high schools and their communities to successfully position themselves for the 21st century, they need an accurate and shared understanding of the challenges they face and the foundations, both good and bad, from which they are starting. ESSA requires school districts to conduct a needs assessment of their high schools requiring comprehensive reform, but provides limited guidance as to what this assessment should examine. States and districts need to use best practices in conducting their needs assessments and allow for customization based on a school's history, locale, student needs, capacity, and other factors that get at the type and intensity of reforms necessary.

Attract authentic community input on high school outcomes for the 21st Century

Many of the remaining low-graduation rate high schools are the only public high school in their community, or one of just two or three. It is not uncommon for the high school to bear the name of both the school district and the city or town in which it was founded, demonstrating the vital role it has played in the community's past. Thus, it is important to go beyond the school in doing the needs assessments. If high schools are to serve as engines of economic development and social integration for their communities, it is essential to know what the community values and to provide them with an authentic means to participate in setting the vision for the redesign of their high school.

Follow the evidence to provide a foundation for local innovation and customization

We have learned much in the past 25 years about how to reform high schools and the evidence base continues to grow at an accelerating rate. ESSA requires schools in need of comprehensive improvement to use evidence-based strategies and practices to meet identified needs. Thus, high schools engaged in redesign should use the evidence base to build a solid foundation upon which they can innovate and customize to build successful high schools not only in the present, but for the future as well.

Build networks to reduce social isolation, develop capacity & spread know-how

Many of the most successful whole school design, improvement, or transformation efforts leverage the power of networks to accelerate success and sustain impact. The ability to connect schools facing similar challenges and undertaking similar reforms helps break down the isolation that typically characterizes low-performing schools. They are often cut off by reputation from some of the formal and informal learning networks in their districts, may be passed over by national networks looking for examples of success, and based on real or perceived lack of time, energy, and resources, do not seek out networks on their own. Well-functioning networks not only enable schools to learn from and share their know-how with peers, but also provide network-wide supports, keep their schools abreast of recent developments in the field, and provide professional growth opportunities. Networks also help overcome inertia to reform by highlighting principals and other leaders who are succeeding with their reforms. These examples can play a key role in keeping reforms going in the event of shifts in school leadership by providing the new leaders with rapid opportunities to see the reforms working well in similar schools. Well-functioning networks also have the ability to respond quickly when schools struggle with implementation issues or face new challenges.

Pair each network with a technical assistance provider aligned with the school's needs and community redesign vision

School improvement literature demonstrates that it is very hard for a low-performing high school that serves a high needs population to reform and maintain its improvement on its own. There is too much turnover of the adults in the building and too much on-going stress and scarcity to create the conditions under which significant school redesign can happen, much less be maintained. For this reason, it will be essential to not only create networks for the high schools redesigning themselves to succeed in the 21st century, but also to pair those networks with experienced technical assistance providers, aligned with the redesign vision, who can provide the schools with in-school support and guidance as they work to implement and institutionalize their new designs.

Use a common set of on-track-to-success indicators for improvement metrics

Under ESSA, each state will have its own accountability system with an aligned set of metrics that the redesigning high schools will need to meet. In addition, it will be important to have a common set of on-track-to-success indicators across all participating schools. This will enable rapid response when a school is not on pace to meet improvement goals and will facilitate cross-network learning by identifying what is working where. Some common metrics to consider include the ABCs (attendance, behavior and effort, and course performance), coursework quality, quality of relationships, and equitable access to and participation in postsecondary success opportunities.

Fund core school-level improvement work with ESSA School Improvement Funds

School redesign requires resources. The effort to redesign high schools to promote adult success in the economically- and socially-isolated locales that time has left behind will require public and private, as well as local, state, and national, efforts to obtain the resources needed. On the federal side, ESSA provides these resources: seven percent of Title I Funds has been set aside to support the schools in need of comprehensive and targeted reforms. These funds can support the school-based planning, training, technical assistance, and implementation costs of the school redesign. To help support the redesigned high schools to be engines of economic development and social integration for their communities, states and districts can help the schools access federal Perkins funding that supports career and technical education. Communities can also work with mayors and governors to access available federal workforce development and retraining funds. To provide the additional student supports that will be needed, local businesses and philanthropies can step forward to support non-profit youth service providers during and after school. Local businesses can also work with these high school and community colleges to build pathways to careers with growing employment prospects and provide internships or apprenticeships, job shadowing experiences, and summer jobs linked to them. To help sustain the reforms, states, districts, and schools can work together to promote the use of social impact bonds and pay for success opportunities. National philanthropy can support the network, organizational, training, state, and district capacity building, mobilization efforts, communications, and knowledge sharing, as well as capture costs of the cross-state effort.

Provide campaign-wide supports

For this effort to succeed, it will need a central hub that supports the cross-state effort and campaign to design 21st century high schools in economically- and socially-isolated communities. The hub has two critical roles to play. First, it must be a driver and coordinator of the school redesign work. It needs to be a design center for the most difficult challenges and to disseminate existing know-how about school design and evidence-based practices for high school. The hub needs to work with states to establish and define the common processes they will use and help them vet and recruit the technical assistance providers who will support each network. It also needs to serve as the overall progress monitor, by collecting, analyzing, and reporting on the common on-track-to-success metrics all the schools will be using. Finally, it needs to capture and share all the learning, successes, and challenges the schools involved in the effort are having.

A second core function is building the larger campaign around the effort. This includes: connecting with governors and mayors to gain their support and insights; helping to recruit and enable the participation of national non-profits to provide a continuum of care to the high-needs students in the schools; working to establish the policies and underlying supports like social impact bonds and pay for success that will help sustain the redesign efforts; linking the high school redesign to other related and supportive efforts, from commissions on social and emotional skills to campaigns to support out-of-school youth, to efforts to spread early warning and intervention systems.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, America embraced its high school dropout challenge and reformed many of the nation's low-performing schools. Lessons were learned, infrastructure was built and now, with ESSA, there is an historic opportunity to finish the job to redesign and reform the nation's remaining low-performing schools. We have learned much over the years on what it will take to redesign high schools from the ground up, and now we must come together to ensure that all communities – particularly those that are economically and socially isolated – have the tools and support they need to ensure all students have an equal chance to fulfill their dreams.

Great American High School Campaign:

Supporting the Highest Need High Schools and Communities

Through much of the last century, the American high school served as a driver of individual mobility and economic and social progress (Goldin, 2016). Called the "Human Capital Century," America built a secondary and postsecondary educational system second to none (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2011). The provision of universal public high schooling provided an avenue for students from modest means, and over time, discriminated communities to gain access to the well-paying jobs and economic opportunities of the modern economy. As Robert Putnam has noted, this pushed against the growing inequalities paramount in the Gilded Age and provided a means for social integration and greater economic equality.

Today, however, in too many school districts and communities, high schools are no longer fulfilling that promise. This is particularly the case where high-performing high schools and pipelines to college and employment are needed the most – in the locales that have been unable to make the pivot from the 20th to 21st century economy. As a result, from the inner city to the heartland, there are too many places with far too little hope for upward mobility. The consequences are severe.

Isolation and hopelessness are becoming increasingly intergenerational, as the current generation experiences declining fortunes, and their children see little prospect of improvement. The lack of a community institution that reliably provides the next generation with access to a quality education and a pathway to a livelihood that can support a family results in high unemployment and low rates of economic mobility, lack of social trust and cohesion, and even political upheaval and civic decline. Communities are experiencing intensifying violence in some of America's oldest cities, a skyrocketing opioid epidemic, increased rates of suicide and drug deaths among twenty-something males, and a striking lack of civic connectedness as a lack of social and institutional trust impedes a functioning democracy.

At the same time, clear rays of hope exist. Over the last two decades, the number of low-performing high schools has been cut in half, with millions of fewer students attending them. High school graduation rates have risen from 71 percent at the turn of the century to over 84 percent in 2016, which means that approximately 3 million more students have graduated over this period rather than dropping out. Such progress occurred when it became more difficult to graduate in many places. The very student populations that drove gains in high school graduation rates – African Americans and Latinos – also saw a doubling and more than doubling, respectively, of postsecondary enrollment. Although there are concerns about the quality of some credit recovery programs and alternative schools, and there are examples of schools that are gaming the system, these trends show that progress, while incomplete, is possible on a large scale.

Some distressed high schools, school districts, and communities have been able to make the pivot to the 21st century. In the last decade, a much larger evidence base has developed on what is needed and what works to give high schools and their communities the guidance and support to boost student outcomes and create pathways to adult success. We have more evidence from various fields about how children learn and develop the aptitudes, behaviors, and skills to succeed in school, the workforce, and life (Cantor, Osher, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017; National Research Council, 2005; Osher, Cantor, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2017). Emerging know-how and proof points exist to show how high schools can be redesigned to once again serve as engines of individual advancement, economic and community development, and social integration. In turn, there are exciting efforts underway to completely re-envision the American high school, with support provided to many schools and communities to build out successful models. Such efforts come right at a time when others are looking at how to bring venture capital to the middle of the country to support start-ups to create the jobs where they are most desperately needed. A functioning school to work pipeline in these areas is critical to ensuring local talent is drawn to take those jobs.

We are also learning much more about how to organize and support change and improvement in human-centered ways. Rapid advances in the learning sciences, improvement science, implementation science, and design thinking over the last generation, along with growing examples of how these advances can be applied to education, have increased the tools available to schools, districts, and communities to engineer and sustain advancement.

There is growing awareness among key stakeholders – such as mayors, governors, and business and nonprofit leaders – of the vital importance effective high schools play in the workforce development, social progress, and civic glue of their cities and states. They see the importance of having more students graduate from high school ready to enter and complete postsecondary schooling or training, enter the workforce, and be active in civic life.

The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) aligns with this emerging knowledge base. It provides an essential motivating, organizing, and funding framework, and offers the nation an historic opportunity to redesign many of its remaining low-performing high schools. Under ESSA, states must identify their remaining low-performing high schools, work with those schools and districts to identify their needs and then apply evidence-based strategies to improve them. As a result, there is already significant organic demand from many states and districts for the know-how and technical assistance to do so.

Finally, the problem is relatively targeted. Data show there are about 1,300 remaining traditional high schools, heavily concentrated in certain states, in need of serious improvement and redesign. They are overwhelmingly located in distressed neighborhoods and school districts and are the high schools where many of the nation's students who continue to fall off track and fail to graduate can be found. Within these schools, there is a subset of about 800 traditional high schools where 50 percent of the off-track Black and Hispanic students are still found.

Thus, if we can marshal and sustain the necessary energy, resources, and will power, a window of opportunity has opened to move forward with a new phase of high school reform. Using an evidence-based platform and participatory structure to enable local innovation and customization, high schools can be redesigned, so they once again provide a means of intergenerational advancement and social integration for their communities.

Our country is ripping apart, with greater divides between the "haves" and "have nots." The time is now to build upon the existing knowledge base, to organize ourselves to support the neighborhoods and communities most in need, and to redesign those high schools to become engines of development, growth, and cohesion to help bring those communities into the 21st century.

R1
Rf
+V
Vi
A
B
120

In this report, we will:

1. Briefly identify the progress made and remaining challenges in enabling all students to graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary schooling or training;

2. Document the scale, scope, and location of the remaining low-performing schools where high school redesign is most urgently needed. We will contextualize the problem by showing: a) the challenges these schools face, b) how it varies by locale in terms of size, composition, and number, and c) case study archetypes of the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools to provide deeper understanding of the challenges faced and efforts being made in these high schools;

3. Document what we know about effective and evidence-based high school reform and redesign and what they tell us about what these remaining schools and communities need to do. We will illuminate the opportunity for redesign with some examples of high schools, districts, and communities that have successfully made the pivot to meeting the needs of the 21st century;

4. Lay out a path forward for supporting high school redesign in the communities and school districts time has left behind. A “Great American High School Campaign” will look at how to both organize and support improvement and advancement within the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools and their communities, and how to mobilize the supports from schools, communities, states, and the federal government to boost outcomes for students and spread the lessons learned widely through school and state-based networks of similarly situated schools; and

5. In the appendices, we provide a) an overview of our data sources and methods, as well as their limitations, b) a brief history of high school reform efforts over the past quarter century and the lessons learned that provide the foundation for current reform efforts, and c) supplemental data.

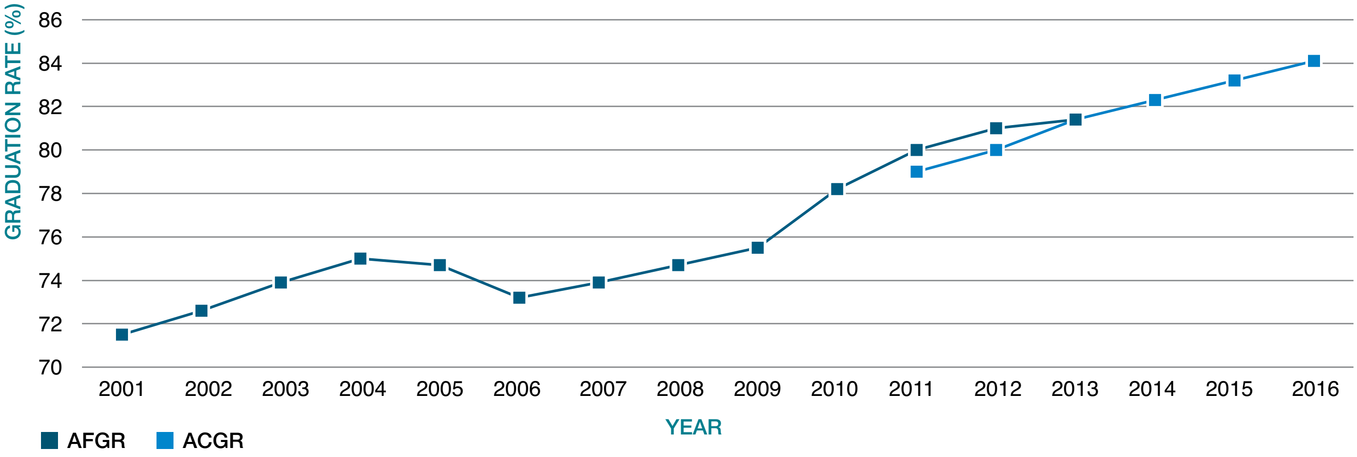
Section I:

Progress & Remaining Challenge in Improving Low-Performing High Schools

After 35 years of stagnating high school graduation rates, the nation began to turn the corner in the early 2000s. As recently as 2001, just 71 percent of students graduated on time and almost 40 percent of low-income, Black, and Hispanic students dropped out of high school. At that time, about 2,000 high schools – attended mostly by low-income and minority students – produced half of all the dropouts in the country (Civic Enterprises & The Everyone Graduates Center, 2016; DePaoli, Balfanz, & Bridgeland, 2016). Today, that picture looks much brighter. The national high school graduation rate has hit a record rate of 84.1 percent in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). These improvements resulted in roughly three million more students graduating from high school, rather than dropping out. Much of this increase has been driven by gains of Black and Hispanic students.

During that same period, college enrollment and completion also increased, indicating that gains in high school graduation rates were in fact translating to increased postsecondary attainment. Between 2000 and 2014, one million additional postsecondary degrees were earned, and as is the case with high school achievement and graduation rates, Black and Hispanic students drove much of this progress (Balfanz, DePaoli, Ingram, Bridgeland, & Fox, 2016). Hispanic college enrollment more than doubled over that time, while the enrollment of Black students nearly matched that pace. As high school graduation rates rose, and graduating classes became larger, more diverse, and less advantaged, college readiness rates remained the same. Some have argued that this indicates that gains in high school graduation rates are the result of lower standards, despite the fact that the greatest gains in high school

Figure 1. **Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) and Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), by State, 2001-2016**



Sources: Stetser, M. & Stillwell, R. (2014). Public High School Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates and Event Dropout Rates: School Years 2010-11, 2011-12, and 2012-13: First Look (Provisional Data) (NCES 2014-391). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Department of Education (2014). Provisional Data File: SY2015-16 Four-Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates.

graduation rates occurred when high school graduation requirements were increasing (DePaoli, Balfanz, Bridgeland, Atwell, & Ingram, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). What it in fact signifies is the nation was producing more college ready high school graduates than ever before, particularly among low-income and minority students. Thus, the high school classes of 2008 through 2015 were the first recent cohort of young adults to experience both rising educational attainment and the narrowing of persistent opportunity gaps (Balfanz et al., 2016).

Although these positive trends are worth celebrating, great challenges still remain, particularly for the same groups of students that have made the most progress. About 16 percent of students – mostly Black, Hispanic, low-income, special education, and English Learners – are not graduating on time with their peers, and another 17 percent of students who are graduating on time are doing so without the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary education. Thus, for about one third of its students, the current education system is not providing a pathway to the postsecondary schooling or training increasingly required to obtain a family-supporting livelihood. This is a harsh reality, given that over the past two generations or so, the school to work proposition has completely flipped – from the vast majority of jobs only requiring a high school diploma in the 1970s to more than two-thirds of the jobs today requiring some college (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013).

Improving educational success for these students would be challenging enough if they were spread throughout the roughly 15,000 regular and vocational high schools nationwide that enroll 300 or more students, but that is not the case. These students are concentrated in a small subset of high schools, primarily located in economically challenged neighborhoods and communities. Found in urban, suburban, small town, and rural areas alike, what these schools share in common is that they are essentially "islands of need." They are in socially- and economically-isolated, distressed locales with a compromised 21st century economic base, often located near areas of higher socio-economic status, and are home to high concentrations of students in need of extra academic and social-emotional supports.

These schools have either fallen out of the purview of reform efforts or improvements, or in spite of the best efforts of many, have been unable to maintain improvement efforts for reasons this report will explore. What is known is that without new evidence-based designs and greater support to enable these high schools to once again be engines of advancement within their communities and neighborhoods, the nation will be unable to reach its goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate on an equitable basis, and the potential of millions of young people will continue to be lost with increasingly devastating consequences that will influence every aspect of American life. All kids are our kids, and the nation must mobilize a second act of high school reform and commitment to ensure every child has equal access to an excellent education.

The Nation's Remaining Low-Performing High Schools

To understand the magnitude and type of school improvements that will be needed to enable all students to attend high-quality high schools, it is necessary to understand the locations and characteristics of the high schools where low graduation rates and high percentages of off-track students still persist. To do this, we explored education and poverty data to pinpoint the schools and communities at the core of existing opportunity gaps and describe the challenges they face throughout this report.

The Data Sources We Use

We integrate **five national data sources** to examine the schools where high school graduation continues to elude too many students.

First, we use **Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)**, which all high schools must report. This measure tracks individual students and captures the percent of first-time 9th graders who graduate "on time" four years later, adjusting for transfers in and out of the school.

Second, we employ the measure of **"promoting power,"** which compares a school's 12th grade enrollment to 9th grade enrollment three years prior – a metric used in our *Locating the Dropout Crisis* report from 2004 to identify the schools where large numbers of students are falling off track to graduation.

To gain a deeper understanding of the nature and magnitude of the challenges these high schools face, we draw upon three additional data sources:

- **National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core data** on enrollment, locale, percent minority, and percent free and reduced-price lunch;
- **Office of Civil Rights data** on chronic absenteeism, suspensions, 9th grade retention, teacher absenteeism, and district chronic absenteeism; and
- **Census data** to establish where students are facing the most intense forms of poverty (neighborhood concentrations of 20 to 40 percent), as well as Census data on the percent of children in poverty in the district in 2014.

Four Types of Low-Performing High Schools in Need of Improvement

By analyzing these combined data sources, we were able to identify four distinct types of low-performing high schools in need of improvement:

- **Traditional High Schools with Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates of 67 percent or Less:** These are the nation's regular and vocational high schools that meet the ESSA definition of a low-graduation-rate high school in need of comprehensive improvement. They will all be required to conduct needs assessments and use evidence-based strategies to address areas in need of reform. Traditional high schools are where nearly all students first attend high school.
- **Traditional High Schools with Weak Promoting Power:** These are regular and vocational high schools that have Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates above 67 percent, but a promoting power of 60 percent or less. This means they lose close to half their students between the freshmen and senior years. Federal and state graduation rate accountability is keyed to the graduation rates of first-time freshmen that graduate four years later and adjusts for transfers out. Schools are not held accountable if a student struggles to progress from 9th to 10th grade on time, but then transfers to another school. Schools with weak promoting power where large numbers and/or high percentages of students are falling off track are also in need of improvement and redesign. ESSA, however, may not flag some of these schools as in need of comprehensive improvement based on their graduation rate because sufficient numbers of their struggling students transfer to other high schools, resulting in the weak promoting power high school having an on-time graduation rate, among the students who remain in the school, above 67 percent.
- **Alternative Schools with Low Graduation Rates:** These are high schools designed for students who need or want different learning environments, greater flexibility around when they attend school, are seeking a second or third chance to succeed, or are re-entering after dropping out. As such, they are not typically the first high school a student attends. Alternative schools are where many students from low graduation rate and weak promoting power high schools end up. Under ESSA, alternative schools with graduation rates of 67 percent or less (and at least 100 students) will also be identified as in need of comprehensive improvement.
- **Very Large Traditional High Schools with Below Average Graduation Rates:** It is also important to improve outcomes in high enrollment high schools (with 2,000 or more students) that have graduation rates above 67 percent and promoting power above 60 percent but graduation rates well below the national average. These schools, while falling out of purview of ESSA, still produce significant numbers of four-year non-graduates. For example, a high school with 500 freshmen and a 70 percent graduation rate results in 150 students not graduating on time, while a high school with 75 freshmen and a 50 percent graduation rate results in 37 students failing to graduate.

The National Picture: How Big is the Low-Performing High School Challenge?

Taking both a wide-angle and deeper view of all these high schools paints a vivid picture. It shows where the stubborn opportunity gaps are most prevalent and makes it possible to see clear patterns of the communities that are most in need.

A Wide Angle View

Across the nation, based on 2014-2015 data, there are:

- **863 traditional high schools** with an ACGR of 67 percent or less that enroll 300 or more students. Collectively, these schools enroll **791,394 students**.
- **466 additional traditional high schools** with 300 or more students that have an ACGR above 67 percent but promoting power of 60 percent or less, and an average promoting power of 60 percent or less over the past three years. Collectively, they enroll **460,566 students**.
- **676 alternative schools**[1] enrolling 100 or more students with an ACGR of 67 percent or less. Altogether, they enroll **158,716 students**.
- **30 very large high schools** (average enrollment of 3,500 students) that are among the 200 high schools with the greatest number of non-graduates. Collectively, they enroll **105,725 students**.[2]

See Appendix 3 for state-by-state breakdowns.

Altogether, about a million and half students are still enrolled in these low-performing high schools.

Eighty-five percent of these students – more than 1.25 million – attend one of the traditional high schools with 300 or more students with an AGCR of 67 percent or less or a promoting power below 60 percent. Since our primary focus is understanding the challenges faced by the schools in the communities most in need, we center our analysis on the location and characteristics of the more than 1,300 traditional high schools that enroll 300 or more students and have either low graduation rates or weak promoting power. They are typically the first high school students enter as freshmen and usually serve a geographically-determined community.

This is not to say the low-performing alternative and virtual schools, smaller traditional high schools, or larger high schools with higher graduation rates producing large numbers of dropouts or off-track students are not in need or improvement, reform, and redesign. They most certainly are. Many will be flagged through ESSA for either comprehensive or targeted improvements.

It is the struggling traditional high school, which serves both a substantial number of students and a defined geographic region, that poses the greatest risk to the nation's progress. These are schools that are often the pride of the community, but no longer provide a reliable means for students to progress from adolescence to successful adulthood. Therefore, we focus the rest of our analysis and proposed solutions on the high schools we view as most in need of redesign for the 21st century – low graduation rate and weak promoting power traditional high schools enrolling 300 or more students.

Mapping The Location of the Most Challenged High Schools and Communities

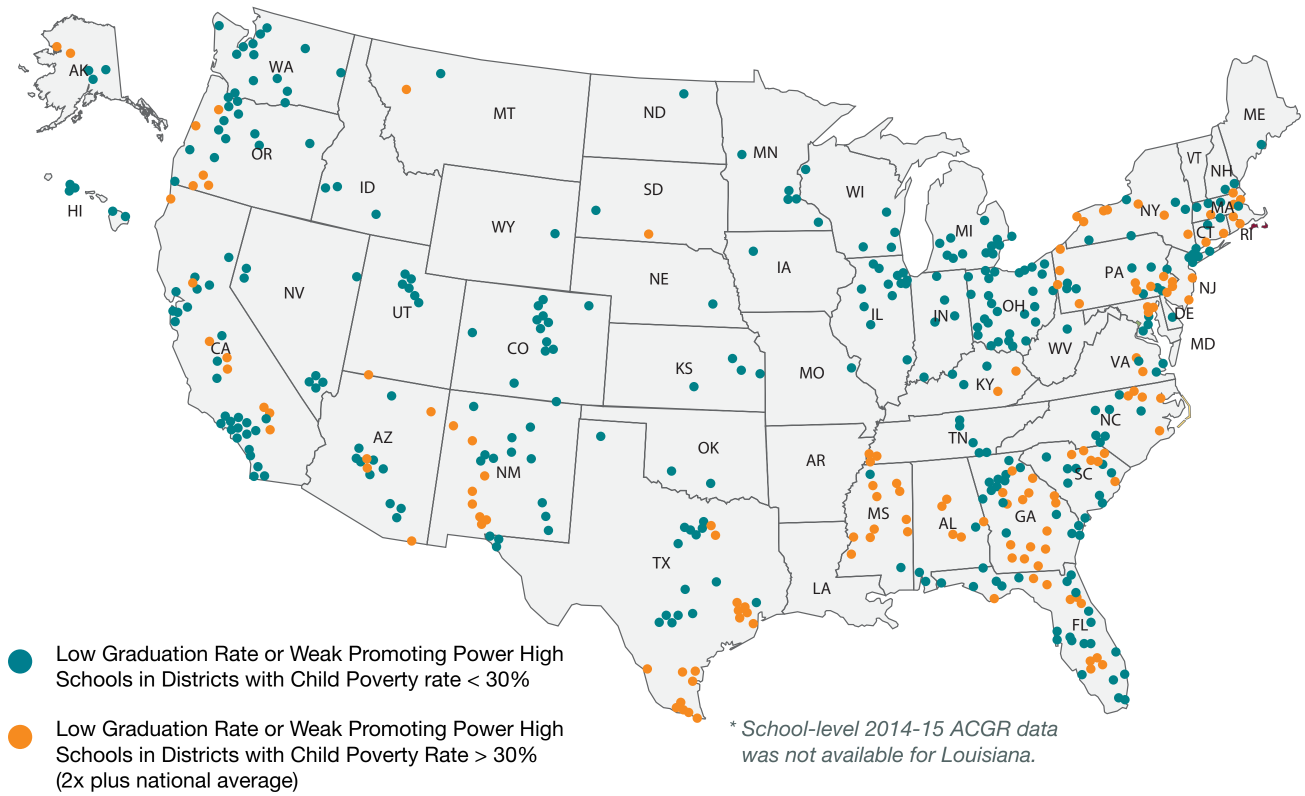
In Figure 2, we map the location of the regular and vocational high schools with 300 or more students with an ACGR of 67 percent or less or a promoting power of 60 percent or less. We also identify which of these high schools are located in districts with high rates of childhood poverty.

---

[1] Whether a school is classified as a regular, vocational, or alternative school is based on school self-selection, and as a result, there is some measurement error, in particular with schools that are, in practice, viewed as alternative schools, coding themselves as regular high schools. Thus, the total number of schools in each category should be viewed as approximations.

[2] We use a 300-student enrollment cut off for our count and analysis of regular and vocational high schools with ACGR rates of 67% and below and weak promoting power of 60% or less. We do this to both focus on what are viewed as traditional neighborhood high schools and to enable comparison with our prior analysis of "Dropout Factories" which used a 300-student enrollment cut-point because promoting power measure becomes less accurate when enrollments become small. ESSA requires all high schools that enroll 100 or more students with graduation rates of 67% or below to implement comprehensive school improvements. Although these schools are not our primary focus in the appendix where we show state level totals, we also include a column for regular and vocational high schools that enroll between 100 and 299 students. Nationally there are 572 traditional high schools enrolling between 100 and 299 students with an ACGR below 67 percent. These schools enrolled 103,477 students.

Figure 2. **High Schools with Low Graduation Rates or Weak Promoting Power by Poverty Rate (2014-15)***


AK
HI
WA
OR
CA
NV
ID
MT
WY
UT
AZ
CO
NM
ND
SD
NE
KS
OK
TX
MN
IA
MO
AR
LA
WI
IL
MI
IN
OH
KY
TN
MS
AL
GA
FL
SC
NC
VA
WV
PA
NY
VT
NH
ME
MA
CT
RI
NJ
DE
MD
● Low Graduation Rate or Weak Promoting Power High Schools in Districts with Child Poverty rate < 30%
● Low Graduation Rate or Weak Promoting Power High Schools in Districts with Child Poverty Rate > 30% (2x plus national average)

** School-level 2014-15 ACGR data was not available for Louisiana.*

Key Findings:

- **A relatively small number of high schools continue to drive much of the opportunity gap** for low-income and minority students. Overall, just 10 percent of all traditional high schools enrolling 300 or more students, 1,329 high schools, are a low-graduation-rate or weak promoting power high school.
- The remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools **are concentrated in districts with some of the highest rates of children living in poverty, as well as those facing the double burden of being low-income or poor and living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.**[3] Significant numbers of these high schools are found in high poverty areas-in the North and Midwest and throughout the Deep South, as well as in the Southwest and up the Pacific coast.
- **Half of these high schools educate essentially only minority students (90 percent minority).** Three-fourths of these high schools are majority minority. Only a quarter of the low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are majority white.
- Among the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools, **most are public and district-operated (76 percent), but nearly a quarter are charters (24 percent).**[4] In a subset of states, typically where charters are their own Local Education Agency (LEA) or part of a state-wide charter district, including California, Arizona, Ohio, Indiana, and South Carolina, a considerable number of the low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are charter schools, including large for-profit chains. In Arizona, the majority of low-graduation-rate high schools are charters.

---

[3] Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty, as defined by the US Census Bureau, are those in which 40 percent or more of residents fall at or below federal poverty limits.

[4] In 2015, 90 percent of all high schools were public and district-operated, compared to 10 percent that were charter schools.

- **The remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are concentrated in a subset of states.** Eighty-two percent of the regular and vocational high schools with ACGR rates of 67 percent or less and enrollments of 300 or more can be found in just 18 states (each has 15 or more of them). Most of the 18 states are also states that need to see substantial improvement in their graduation rates in order for the nation to achieve a 90 percent high school graduation rate, and 11 of them currently have among the lowest graduation rates of all states. Texas is the only state that has a high concentration of weak promoting power high schools that is not also included among the 18 states with high concentrations of low-graduation-rate high schools.

Taking an Equity Lens on High Schools in Need of Improvement

Our focus in this section is on the traditional high schools that continue to have low graduation rates or weak promoting power. This captures the geographic areas and communities where high school redesign is most urgent. There are, however, other equally valid and powerful ways to focus reform efforts. One alternative is to focus on the high schools that most significantly impact specific groups of students. National graduation rates continue to improve and gaps between students of different types are slowly closing, but substantial gaps remain. Black, Hispanic, and Native American students, as well as low-income students, English Learners, students with disabilities, and homeless students (in the five states that currently measure them) all continue to have graduation rates below the national average. It is possible to do the analysis used in this report, for each and all of these groups to identify the high schools where the majority of each student subgroup is falling off track. In most cases, there will be considerable, though not complete overlap with the high schools identified by our analysis for this report. Most of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are majority-minority schools, primarily attended by low-income, Black, and Hispanic students. They also tend to have higher than average numbers of students with disabilities and English Learners. For example, within the remaining 1,329 low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are schools where about one-third of the nation's Black and Hispanic students are off track to graduate. Focusing on an additional 147 of the highest attrition high schools for Black students and 50 of the highest attrition for Hispanic students (that are not among the 1,329) would capture half the Black and Hispanic students in the nation who are not making timely progression towards high school graduation. Thus, a targeted effort aimed at Black and Latino students would need to be focused on just about 800 high schools to reach half of the off-track students.

What Are the Conditions and Challenges within the Remaining Low-Graduation-Rate and Weak Promoting Power Traditional High Schools?

Overall, data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights and the U.S. Census show that the identified low-performing high schools are tasked with educating high concentrations of the neediest high school students in the nation. Comparing these schools to high schools with higher graduation rates and stronger promoting power shows that ***the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools face levels and intensities of educational challenge that are radically different from those experienced by other high schools.***

Table 1. **Characteristics of Regular and Vocational High Schools with 300 or More Students**

	High Schools with a Grad Rate of 67% or below	Weak Promoting Power High Schools with Grad Rate above 67%	All other schools
Number of Schools	863	466	11528
Enrollment	917	988	1106
2015 High School Grad Rate (ACGR)	49	81	90
Promoting Power*	72	51	86
% Chronically Absent	36	23	18
% Suspended	15	14	7
% 9th Graders Retained	21	18	8
% Teachers missing >=10 days	26	25	26
% Minority	72	69	37
% District Poverty Level (children 5-17)	29	28	18

*Promoting power compares the percentage of 12th grade students to the number of 9th grade students three years earlier. It provides an estimation of students who are "lost" between their freshman and senior years (e.g., transferring to another school, dropping out, being significantly off track to graduate in four years).

Compared to all other traditional high schools, the graduation rate in low-graduation-rate high schools is, on average, 41 percentage points lower; the chronic absenteeism rate is 100 percent higher; the suspension rate is 110 percent higher, and their 9th grade retention rate is 160 percent greater. Low-graduation-rate high schools, moreover, are located in school districts where the number of children living in poverty is 60 percent greater than for the typical high school.

It is stunning to see that when low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power traditional high schools are factored out, the average on-time high school graduation rate in all other traditional high schools is 90 percent. In other words, in the vast majority of traditional high schools enrolling 300 or more students in the United States, failing to graduate on time is uncommon. In the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools, which have an average ACGR of 49 percent, on-time graduation is by stark contrast a 50/50 proposition. Thus, in the vast majority of traditional highs schools, on-time graduation is seen as a given, but in the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools, the lived experience is that many, and often most, students do not graduate on time or at all.

The vast difference in the graduation outcomes that students experience can be highly problematic for postsecondary success as well. Recent analysis of the most current longitudinal data at the national level, which tracked students from 10th grade through early adulthood at 26, found that 10th grade expectations of postsecondary attainment had significant impacts, above and beyond demographic, socio-economic, and academic factors, in determining postsecondary outcomes and wages earned at 26 (Lauff & Ingels, 2013). This suggests that high schools with low graduation rates might exert a negative influence on upward mobility even on the students who do manage to graduate, by making high school graduation and not postsecondary success the stretch goal for students and the school.

Within the typical low-graduation-rate high school, student disengagement is profound. More than one in three students are chronically absent and one in six is suspended each year. Forty-three percent of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are located in the four percent of districts that contain half the chronically absent students in the nation. At these levels, negative academic and social-emotional impacts are experienced not only by the students who are absent or being suspended but by their classmates as well (Perry & Morris, 2014).

Ninth grade failure rates, during the critical transition year from middle school to high school, are the strongest predictor of high school graduation. On average, one in five students enrolled in 9th grade in low-graduation-rate high schools are repeating the grade for a second or even third time. High levels of grade retention are also very expensive, though the costs are hidden. When a student repeats a grade, the district in essence is spending their average per pupil expenditure on that student for a second time, for the same grade. Grade retention in high school is at least a $10,000 per student intervention with a poor track record of success. While schools at some level do not see this cost in their total budget, as they are funded per pupil regardless if a student is repeating or progressing, the opportunity costs run high as it prevents those funds from being used in more productive ways (e.g., to prevent students from falling off track in the first place or to strengthen the relevance and engagement of the curriculum). The perverse silver lining of this is that in low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools with high retention rates, much of the cost of sustaining redesign and reform could be born by repurposing the dollars currently spent on grade retention (Mac Iver & Messel, 2012).

The negative impacts on students with high academic risk who are retained, moreover, appears to be long lasting. The most recent data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:2009) shows that student disengagement, and in particular academic risk, has negative effects on postsecondary attainment. High academic risk (defined as a combination of low GPA, low test scores, and grade retention) appears particularly problematic for adult success. Tenth graders with high academic risk earned lower wages at 26, controlling for demographic, socio-economic, other academic, and regional factors.

Finally, the data show that students who attend low-graduation-rate high schools are much more likely to be minority students and students who live in poverty. Nearly three-fourths of the students in the typical low-graduation-rate high school are minority students, compared to 37 percent in the high schools with higher graduation rates. Low-graduation-rate high schools are located in districts where, on average, 29 percent of students live in poverty, compared to an 18 percent average for other high schools.

The data on weak promoting power high schools that have an ACGR greater than 67 percent show the importance of including these schools in understanding the big picture of high school reform and redesign needs across the nation. In terms of both serving high-poverty and high-minority populations, and in the levels and intensities of disengagement experienced within them, these high schools look much more like the low-graduation-rate high schools than those with higher graduation rates. They have high rates of chronic absenteeism, suspension, and 9th grade retention. Their average promoting power of 51 percent also shows that their senior class is only half the size of the freshmen class three years earlier. This indicates that many are transferring to other schools, resulting in a graduation rate for those who remain that masks the need for serious improvement or redesign.

Digging deeper into the educational conditions and challenges within the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools and comparing them to those in high schools with higher graduation rates brings into stark reality that these schools are not supporting upward mobility, economic growth, and social integration in the neighborhoods and communities most in need. Even more troubling is that in many cases they are actively working against it. These high schools, serving predominately minority and/or children who live in or near poverty, are currently schools in which the majority of students are not graduating, are disengaged, and are not succeeding in school. Among those who do graduate, many may still be having their aspirations, academic skills, and social-emotional developments curtailed due to the risk factors experienced at their high schools. The result is lower educational attainments and lower wages in young adulthood for the very communities and neighborhoods that need them the most.

Digging Deeper into the Characteristics of the Nation's Low-Graduation-Rate and Weak Promoting Power Traditional High Schools

To move from identifying the nature of the high school redesign challenge in the most impacted communities to developing solutions, it is first necessary to gain an even deeper understanding of the contours of the reform and redesign needs of these high schools and how they vary by place and circumstance.

Two of the main characteristics shaping the redesign needs and possibilities of the remaining low graduation rate and weak promoting power high schools are their size and locale.

Table 2. **High Schools with ACGR<=67%, Size and Enrollments**

Total Enrollment	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools	Number of Students enrolled in those schools and Percent of Total
300-999	916	68.9%	499,213/40%
1000-2000	309	23.3%	433,133/34.5%
2001+	104	7.8%	319,614/25.5%
Total	1,329	100%	1,251,960/100%

Traditional High Schools in Need of Redesign Come in Three Sizes

In high schools across America, enrollment varies immensely. The 1,300 low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high school are no different. They range in size from 300 to 4,500 students. This divergence matters. Improvement challenges and opportunities are very different in a high school with 300 students than in one with more than 4,000. The remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools, fall into one of three size ranges, each with its own implications for improvement strategies: 1) small to mid-sized high schools with 300 to 999 students; 2) traditional neighborhood, town, or small city comprehensive schools with between 1,000 and 2,000 students; and 3) very large high schools with more than 2,000 students. As seen in Table 2, the vast majority of remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools – nearly 70 percent – are small to medium sized, enrolling between 300 and 999 students. Twenty-three percent enroll 1,000-2,000 students, and about eight percent are very large high schools enrolling between 2,001 and 4,500 students. In terms of total number of students impacted, however, the traditional neighborhood comprehensive high schools that serve 1,000 to 2,000 and the very large high schools together enroll 61 percent of the students still attending low-graduation-rate high schools. Redesign efforts will therefore need to work across very different sized schools, from schools that have 100 or fewer incoming 9th graders to those with 1,000 or more freshmen enrolling each year.

The Different Locales of Traditional High Schools in Need of Redesign

Just as the size of a particular school brings different challenges requiring distinct reforms, so too does the locale and community make-up of the school district. The resources available to a community differ wildly between large urban centers, suburbs that have seen rapid changes in their student population, smaller cities and towns that have seen the backbone of their economy erode, and isolated, rural districts. To successfully redesign low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power traditional high schools, it is imperative that improvement strategies reflect and address the unique needs of their locales. Analysis of low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power traditional high schools finds three major groupings of these schools: big city school districts, small-to-mid-sized urban/suburban school districts, and rural districts.

Big Cities

One set of remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are found in the nation's big city school districts. Of these schools, 431 (32 percent) can be found in the 50 largest school districts. Many of these districts were at the forefront of the first wave of high school reform movements and have seen improvements in graduation rates and reductions in the number of low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools over the past decade. They are districts working on or in search of a second act of their reform efforts that effectively reaches the high schools that were impervious to the first round of reform or made some initial progress only to slip backwards over time (DePaoli, Fox, Ingram, Maushard, Bridgeland, & Balfanz, 2015).

In some big city school districts, despite considerable progress over time and continuing reform efforts, there are still large clusters of low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools, typically in their poorest neighborhoods. These include New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Memphis, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Detroit, Albuquerque, and Las Vegas, among others.

Table 3 illustrates the challenges of two big city schools with graduation rates at or below 67 percent enrolling 300 or more students. One is an example of a high school that was created as part of a district-wide high school reform effort in the mid-2000s. This small school example has a graduation rate right at the 67 percent cutoff-point, but its 70 percent chronic absenteeism rate and 55 percent 9th grade retention rate clearly indicates that it is likely not headed in the right direction. The second school is one of the four neighborhood schools that were not replaced with smaller schools. This, in part, was the result of its iconic status within the community, as it served as the first high school for Black students in the district and many notable community leaders attended it. Its 52 percent graduation rate, 78 percent chronic absenteeism rate, and 43 percent 9th grade retention rate speaks to its continuing challenges despite a decade or more of continuous, though ever-shifting, reform efforts. Across the entire district, 32 percent of children live in poverty, but both the new small school from the 2000s and the iconic neighborhood school are located in one of the most distressed neighborhoods in the city, where poverty rates are closer to 50 percent.

Table 3: **Examples of Big City High Schools with Low Graduation Rates in High Poverty Neighborhoods**

Characteristics	New Small School from 2000s	Iconic Neighborhood High School
Enrollment	312	1083
Graduation Rate	67%	52%
Percent of Students Chronically Absent (> 15 Days)	70%	78%
Percent of Teachers Chronically Absent (>10 Days)	11%	15%
Suspension Rate	18%	13%
9th Grade Retention Rate	55%	43%
Percent of Minority Students	99%	99%
School District Child Poverty Rate	32%	32%

Table 4: **Examples of Small to Mid-Sized Urban/Suburban District Low-Graduation-Rate High Schools**

Characteristics	Small Industrial City in Decline	Manufacturing Town / Demographic Shift
Total Enrollment	1,146	3,525
Graduation Rate	30%	63%
Percent of Students Chronically Absent (>15 Days)	73%	24%
Percent of Teachers Chronically Absent (>10 Days)	80%	17%
Suspension Rate	50%	25%
9th Grade Retention Rate	24%	11%
Percent of Minority Students	97%	95%
School District Child Poverty Rate	47%	29%

Small to Mid-Size Urban/Suburban School Districts

Many of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power traditional high schools are located in small to mid-sized urban and suburban school districts that typically contain one to three high schools. Some of these are small city and urban fringe districts located outside of major metropolitan areas. Many of these districts have undergone rapid social, economic, and demographic shifts among the students they educate (i.e., districts in Pennsylvania and Illinois that went from majority white to essentially all Hispanic). Others are located in small to mid-sized industrial cities and large towns, in decline after the loss of their manufacturing base.

Examples of low-graduation-rate high schools in these types of locales can be found in Table 4.

These two schools in Table 4 differ in size, locale, and student composition, but they are similar in their student outcomes and many of their challenges. They are also the only public non-selective high school in each of their districts. The first high school enrolls 1,100 students and is located in a small-to-mid-sized declining northern industrial city with intense poverty, which also happens to be a state capital. Forty-seven percent of the children in this district live in poverty – one of the highest rates in the nation. The graduation rate is an astoundingly low 30 percent, and it has a 73 percent chronic absenteeism rate, 50 percent suspension rate, 24 percent 9th grade retention rate, and an 80 percent teacher absenteeism rate. In short, it is a school where neither the students nor the teachers are showing up on a regular basis.

The second high school is located in a Midwest manufacturing town that has a challenged but still viable economic base. It is very large and with an enrollment over 3,000 and within the last decade its student body has become nearly 100 percent Hispanic. Its graduation, chronic absenteeism, suspension, grade retention, and teacher absenteeism rates, while considerably better than the first school, are still significant, and when applied to such a large population of students, produce more dropouts than the first school.

A third type of small to mid-size urban/suburban district with considerable numbers of low-graduation-rate high schools is inner ring suburban school districts that have seen large gains in the number of low-income students attending their schools. Table 5 shows the characteristics of the three regular high schools located in a school district just over the border from a major city.

Two of the high schools would qualify as low-graduation-rate high schools under ESSA, and the third would fall just above the cutoff-point at 69 percent. Several things stand out. First, a third of the students in the district live in poverty – a very high rate for a suburban district – and only minority students attend public high schools in this district. Second, all of the high schools have extremely high rates of chronic absenteeism and suspension. In fact, it is almost the normative experience in these high schools for students to miss at least three weeks of school and be suspended.

Table 5: Example of Rural High School with Low Graduation Rate

Characteristics	High School A	High School B	High School C
Total Enrollment	1,762	1,994	1,215
Graduation Rate	62%	67%	69%
Chronic Absenteeism Rate (Number of Students Chronically Absent)	74% (1,311)	75% (1,425)	N/A
Suspension Rate (Number of Students Suspended)	34% (970)	40% (759)	39% (479)
9th-Grade Retention Rate	34%	12%	28%
Percent of Minority Students	99%	99%	99%
School District Child Poverty Rate	32%	32%	32%

Rural Areas

A final group of low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are found in rural areas, mainly in the South and Pacific Northwest. These are largely found in districts that were once on the periphery of industrial America and have seen a decline in their fortunes over the past decades. Among them are the modest number of low-performing high schools that serve largely white student populations. Table 6 offers a glimpse at an example of a low-graduation-rate rural high school.

This school is a majority white school in a rural area with a high poverty rate. It suspends fewer students and more of its students attend regularly than in the other schools highlighted, but only 57 percent are graduating. It also struggles with high rates of teacher absenteeism. This district has consolidated with other rural districts over time, so it is not the only high school in the district but it is the only high school to serve its geographic area.

The Shared Challenges of the Remaining Low-Graduation-Rate and Weak Promoting Power Traditional High Schools

In addition to differences in size and locale, the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power traditional high schools also share some common features and challenges. The first is that most are located in, or serve students from, neighborhoods of high and concentrated poverty. The average child poverty rate in the districts these schools are located within is 29 percent, while more than a third of these schools exist in districts where 30 percent or more of children aged 5-17 are living in poverty. Often, poverty levels in these schools and communities are among the highest in the nation and far exceed those of neighboring schools or communities. In short, they are islands of need surrounded by seas of better off and less challenged schools. Second, they are located in communities and neighborhoods that have experienced considerable economic and social change over the past two to three decades, and in many cases, this change has left the communities and neighborhoods increasingly economically and socially isolated.

Table 6: Example of a Rural High School

Characteristics	Rural High School
Total Enrollment	511
Graduation Rate	57%
Percent of Students Chronically Absent (>15 Days)	15%
Percent of Teachers Chronically Absent (>10 Days)	39%
Suspension Rate	9%
9th Grade Retention Rate	13%
Percent of Minority Students	27%
Child Poverty Rate	31%

In addition, significant numbers of the remaining low-graduation rate high schools are in school districts with only one to three high schools-some or all of which are low graduation rate high schools. Just under a quarter of the remaining low graduation rate high schools (295) are the sole high school in their school district. Another 11 percent of low-graduation-rate high schools are in a district with just two or three high schools. It is often the case in these communities that the name of the low-graduation-rate high school is also the name of the city and the school district in which it is located (e.g., Northville High School, located in Northville City, in the Northville school district) and prominent members of the community attended it. Thus, in many cases, the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools have a storied history and continue to generate a shared sense of attachment among residents.

This points to a key defining characteristic of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power traditional high schools that has become more pronounced as the overall number of these high schools has been substantially reduced. **In most cases, the challenges the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power traditional high schools encounter are not limited to within the walls of the school but are also shaped and heightened by the challenges faced by the school district and community in which it is located.** For these high schools it seems true that as goes the community, so goes the school, and vice versa.

Thus, in developing solutions it is important to be aware not only of the redesign and reform implications of differences in the size, locale, and student compositions across the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools, but also of their commonalities. These include:

- Intense concentrations of student need;
- Limits on their organic capacity to respond to that need and bring additional resources into their schools, in part because the district, community, and school are all struggling to meet high levels of student need;
- Attempted reform without sustained success, notwithstanding external pressure to improve; and
- Proud histories.

Case Studies Illuminate Intersection of School and Community Needs and Challenges

Most of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools are located in neighborhoods and communities under significant duress. This situates them along the social, economic, and racial fault lines of our nation. To build an even greater understanding of the types and intensities of improvements that will be needed in these high schools, we developed five case studies to illuminate how in the traditional high schools in need of redesign, school need intersects with neighborhood and community need.

Among the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools, there are some clear archetypes – high schools that share a constellation of defining student composition, size, locale, and contextual conditions. A national effort and campaign to improve these high schools needs to be designed to work across these archetypes. The case studies we selected were assembled to highlight how school need and neighborhood/community contexts are interwoven across some of the most common archetypes of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools. They are: a large urban fringe high school with a heavily Hispanic student body; an iconic big city neighborhood school; a rural high school educating an increasing number of poor, white students; the only high school in an economically distressed rust belt city; and an impoverished Southern school with a totally Black student body.

Within each archetype, we have further selected schools to profile that, while typical of similar schools within their grouping, they also represent the most intense challenges within it. In "design thinking" language, these are the extreme users that will test the boundaries and strengths of the school redesign strategies adopted to transform the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools.

The case studies are based on real data, from real schools. We chose not to name these schools because the purpose of the case studies is not to focus attention on the individual schools but the reform challenges faced by the larger group of schools they represent.

Archetype 1 Large High School, High Hispanic Population

Archetype 1 HS *Fast Facts*

Enrollment: 3,758

School Demographics:	
White:	3.8%
Hispanic:	85.4%
Black:	8.9%
Low-Income:	76.2%

School Indicators:	
2015 Graduation Rate:	64%
% of Students Chronically Absent:	24.5%
Suspension Rate:	25.2%
% of 9th Graders Retained:	10.5%

This midwestern high school is located in the second largest city in its state. Historically, the city was a hub of manufacturing and industry, which brought an influx of immigrants from Europe and Mexico. Many immigrants settled in the city's east side, which quickly became more culturally diverse and working class. Primarily white, wealthy business owners built imposing homes across the river on the west side of town. The Latin American migration that began in the early 20th century continued all the way through to the 21st century. By the time of the 2010 census, Hispanic/Hispanic citizens comprised roughly 40 percent of the city's population, up nearly 27 percent from 2000.

The socio-economic divide in the city persists today, reflected by the two distinct school districts on its east and west sides. Although the city as a whole is racially diverse, roughly 85 percent of high school students in the east side district are Hispanic, compared to just over 50 percent in the west side district. Educational outcomes differ based on which side of the river a student is born on: Students in the west side school district posted an 80 percent four-year high school graduation rate and 64 percent of high school graduates went on to enroll in postsecondary institutions in 2015, compared to a four-year high school graduation rate of 64 percent and 50 percent of high school graduates enrolling in postsecondary across the river in the east side district. The side of the river a child grows up on in this city matters significantly in determining their educational future.

Due to dwindling property values on the east side of the city, the school district relies primarily on state funding. In 2015, this district received almost 60 percent of its funding from the state and just 27 percent from local funding. The proportion of state to local funding in the average school district in the state was the inverse: about 25 percent of revenue came from state funds compared to 67 percent from local taxes. State budget cuts have therefore hit the east side district particularly hard in recent years, and have left the district unable to meet basic student needs, including transportation to and from school.

The hardships confronted by the district may be most evident at the high school, where over 76 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, a rate 26 percentage points higher than the state average. In addition to low graduation rates and poor outcomes on the PARCC assessments, 25 percent of the students in the high school are chronically absent and 25 percent have been suspended. Given the high school's size – enrolling more than 3,700 students – these poor outcomes translate into extraordinarily large numbers of students in need, congregated in one under-resourced high school (i.e., 2,700 low-income adolescents, 900 chronically absent students, 900 suspended students, and around 1,200 students not graduating in four years). These challenges and struggles have occurred during a period when the high school changed principals five times in six years, making it difficult for any type of long-run vision or strategy to set in, let alone begin taking effect.

Moreover, as a continued influx of Hispanic students migrate into the district, its long-tenured teaching staff has remained largely white and is now tasked with educating a predominately low income and minority student population whose life and cultural experiences are different from their own. Of the school's 196 teachers, 73 percent have been at the school for more than 10 years and nearly 8 in 10 are white, a stark contrast to a student body in which about 9 in 10 students are Hispanic.

Yet, despite the challenging circumstances, there are bright spots in the high school. The school boasts a nationally recognized junior ROTC program.

Archetype 2 Iconic, Big City Neighborhood High School

Archetype 2 HS *Fast Facts*

Enrollment: 1,083

School Demographics:

White:	0.8%
Hispanic:	0.3%
Black:	98.3%
Low-Income:	83.7%

School Indicators:

2015 Graduation Rate:	52%
% of Students Chronically Absent:	78.6%
Suspension Rate:	13.4%
% of 9th Graders Retained:	43.4%

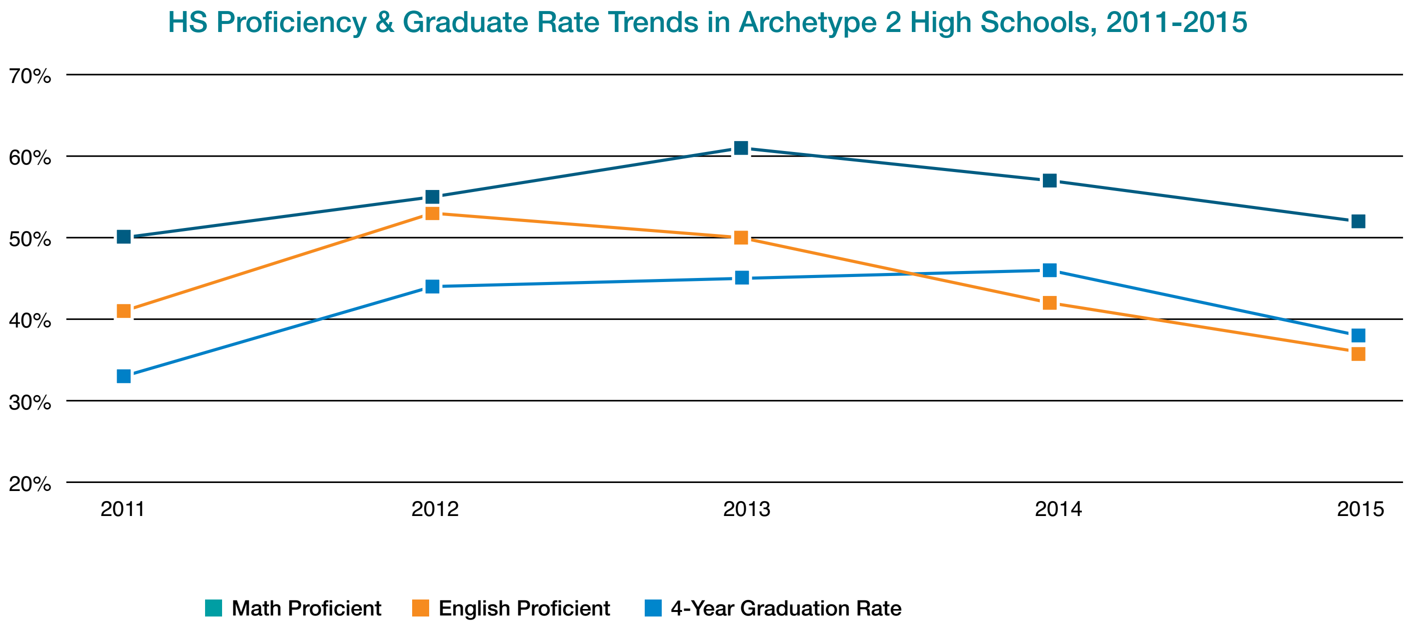
Located in a major eastern city, this high school was established in the late nineteenth century and prior to desegregation was one of only two high schools in the city that educated Black students. Prior to desegregation, it was one of only two high schools in the city that admitted Black students. The high school's storied history includes a lengthy list of notable alumnae, including civil rights leaders, federal and local justices, legislators, and jazz musicians.

Over the past quarter of century, however, the high school has fallen on tough times with years of financial challenges, administrative turnover, increasingly more high needs student populations, and declining performance. A profile of the school in 2008 showed that two-thirds of teachers were not certified, and there were high rates of tardiness, absenteeism, and truancy; a dramatically low retention rate for 9th-graders; and an exceedingly large number of students in need of remedial reading. These issues led a school once known for its educational excellence to have a four-year high school graduation rate of just 25 percent. Despite these troubling findings, hope spots remained at the high school: the school still boasted an award-winning music program and a debate team that regularly took home trophies.

After repeatedly failing to achieve the "adequate yearly progress" required by No Child Left Behind, the high school became one of 11 schools in its school district that became subject to state takeover – the first time a state attempted such drastic school takeovers under NCLB. While the state legislature eventually blocked the move, it was clear sweeping reform efforts were needed to get the high school back on track.

With the help of a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) in the 2010-2011 school year, the school district began another attempt at a turnaround effort by bringing in a new principal and replacing more than half of the school's staff. Once hired, the school's principal implemented wide-ranging reforms from things as simple as implementing new standard procedures like where to store school supplies, to developing on-track metrics to the creation of bold new programs. In the first year of the SIG program alone, the high school principal opened a night school where students could get tutoring or take credit recovery classes, and partnered with the local community college to start a dual enrollment program where high school students could earn college credit. The high school also prioritized staff development and increased planning time for teachers.

In the aftermath of these reforms, it appeared the SIG turnaround efforts were working. From 2011 to 2012, the high school saw considerable



improvement in Math and English proficiency rates, going from 32.5 percent and 40.7 percent in 2011 to 44.1 percent and 52.6 percent, respectively, in 2012. Their four-year graduation rate also rose from 49.5 percent in 2011 to 55.6 percent in 2012, still far too low but an improvement over the 25 percent rate of the mid 2000's. Math proficiency rates and graduation rates would tick up again for the 2013 school year.

The progress, however, would be short lived. When the high school's SIG funding expired following the 2013-14 school year, proficiency and graduation rates began backsliding. Moreover, after being praised for his leadership and highlighted as an example of the power of strong leadership in school turnaround efforts, the principal was forced to resign in 2014. This marked the fourth time since the close of the 2005-06 school year that the school's principal would be replaced.

Today, the high school still faces many of the problems that made it the subject of intense scrutiny from the media and policymakers. Over 78 percent of students were chronically absent and 43 percent of 9th graders were retained in 2014. In 2015, the four-year graduation rate was still hovering just above 52 percent. Math proficiency dropped to 39 percent and English proficiency rates fell to 36.5 percent, the lowest rate since 2008. One area of growth, however, can be seen in the school's teaching staff: by 2016, just 16 percent of classes were not taught by highly qualified teachers and nearly 81 percent of teachers met all state licensing and certification requirements.

Archetype 3 Rural High School, Low Income White Student Population

Archetype 3 HS *Fast Facts*

Enrollment: 718

School Demographics:	
White:	85.5%
Hispanic:	8.2%
Black:	0.4%
Low-Income:	50.5%
School Indicators:	
2015 Graduation Rate:	67%
% of Students Chronically Absent:	18.5%
Suspension Rate:	5.8%
% of 9th Graders Retained:	23.7%

This Pacific Northwest high school was established in the late 1970's in a locale whose economy revolved around the timber industry. The local timber industry has been in decline for the past twenty years, and the challenges faced by the student body in the high school have increased.

The school's demographics track closely with those of the town in which it resides. Both the school's student body and the town's residents are about 86 percent white and roughly 8 percent Hispanic. Across the District, 31 percent of children aged 5-17 lived in poverty in 2015, while 51 percent of the student body at the high school was low income in the 2014-15 school year.

After reaching a 70 percent high school graduation rate in 2011, the school's graduation rate dipped back down to 67 percent, where it has stayed the past three school years. Within the school, there appears to be two very different student experiences. For some students, the school has developed a strong program for postsecondary preparation. Through the College Now program, students at the high school can receive college credit for free by taking courses offered through a local community college. The program offers over 20 courses across a range of disciplines, spanning business, humanities, and technical training. Thanks to a wide range of AP offerings and the College Now program, the high school offers over 130 college credit options. Prior to 2017, U.S. News and World Report recognized the high school for five consecutive years for preparing students for college.

The success experienced by students in these college pathway programs, stands in contrast to the struggles of other students. Almost one in four students is so far off track in the ninth grade that they must repeat the grade. In addition, nearly one in five students is chronically absent.

The school has also put some supports in place to help its lowest-income students. The school works to help students in need through a program that accepts clean clothing in good condition that it then makes available to all students who may be in need. Students can also find school supplies and a stocked pantry through the program. The school also uses the principles of Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) to support school safety and promote positive behavior. The school credits PBIS with limiting the number of students who earn a discipline referral, and in the 2015-16 school year, less than six percent of children were suspended.

Despite these efforts, a third of the student body is not graduating on-time, at a time when jobs requiring a high school diploma or less are fading away. This school, like others that serve towns whose once thriving industries are in decline, is in need of redesign to enable all students, not just some, to achieve post-secondary success

Archetype 4 Only High School in Small Rust Belt City

Archetype 4 HS *Fast Facts*

Enrollment: 1,165

School Demographics:

White:	2.1%
Hispanic:	27.7%
Black:	62.3%
Low-Income:	100%

School Indicators:

2015 Graduation Rate:	54%
% of Students Chronically Absent:	73.2%
Suspension Rate:	49.6%
% of 9th Graders Retained:	24.4%

This high school is in a city that has served as the state capital since the early 1800s. The city's population greatly expanded in the second half of the 19th century and throughout the first half of the 20th century due to its prominence as a steel manufacturer. After the 1950s, however, its fortunes began to turn. As the population began shifting to the suburbs in the 1960s, and the 1970s brought a decline in the steel industry, the city entered a period of economic decline that has persisted to the present day.

As the backbone of the city's economy quickly eroded, the city attempted to find alternative ways to raise revenues. In the early 1970s, the city undertook a public works project designed to boost falling city incomes. The added cash flow, however, never materialized. After years of repairs, refinancing, closures, and reopening, the incinerator was sold in 2013, but not before it racked up over $300 million in debt for the county. The massive debt, along with decades of financial malpractice and corruption by the mayor, lead the City Council to attempt to file for bankruptcy in 2011. Finally, after the city passed a financial recovery plan in 2013 and two years of receivership ended in 2014, some believe that city's darkest days may be in the rearview.

Yet, as city officials steer the city away from the fiscal brink, educators at the district's only traditional public high school face an equally daunting task of turning around one of the state's lowest performing high schools.

The city's Black and Hispanic students are primarily concentrated in its only non-selective public high school. While nearly 25 percent of district's residents are white, just 2 percent of the high school's student body are non-minorities.

The fallout of the city's economic collapse also seeped into the high school. The city's poverty rate climbed to 32 percent, a 29 percent increase from 2000, while the percentage of children aged 5-17 in the school district living in poverty reached 42 percent, a 60.8 percent rise since 2000. These numbers are startling given that the statewide poverty rate is just 14 percent for all ages and 18 percent of residents aged 5-17.

Poor financial stewardship in school districts and cities, particularly those that are low income, has direct consequences for children in those areas, and this state in particular has seen its fair share of this problem. The state currently ranks near the bottom in the state share of revenues that go to education funding, making school districts overly reliant on local property taxes for funding.

The high school's performance mirrors that of the city and the district. Only about half of students managed to graduate from the high school in 2015, while just five percent were considered college ready according to the SAT/ACT College Ready Benchmark. Although achievement scores on the state accountability exam rose in 2016, still just 19 percent scored at least proficient in math, 34 percent in English, and just over 14 percent in science.

In addition to the poor academic achievement at the high school, staggering rates of chronic absenteeism make it difficult for improvement efforts to take hold. In 2015, the school's rate of chronic absenteeism climbed to 73 percent. Feeling the need for "radical" action to crack down on absenteeism and tardiness, in March 2017, the principal reported suspending nearly half of the school's students. Research, however, has shown that school suspensions are tied to poorer course performance and increased school dropout rates.

Not only does this high school deal with overwhelming rates of chronic absenteeism among students, but 82.3 percent of teachers were also chronically absent in 2015. This is a significantly higher rate than the average high school in the state.

These statistics paint the bleak picture of a school that has been left behind for far too long. As the city works to rebuild itself from the loss of its core industries, its high school needs to be redesigned to both meet the extreme level and concentration of student need that has resulted from the city and district's troubled past, and provide a pathway to future success for all its students.

Archetype 5 Southern, 100% Low-Income Students of Color High School

Archetype 5 HS *Fast Facts*

Enrollment: 1,123

School Demographics:

White:	N/A
Hispanic:	3.3%
Black:	96%
Low-Income:	100%

School Indicators:

2015 Graduation Rate:	64%
% of Students Chronically Absent:	38.8%
Suspension Rate:	22.1%
% of 9th Graders Retained:	60.4%

The high school opened in the 1960s in a southern state capital. As with many southern cities, it has a complicated history of race relations, which continue to play out today in both the city and its school system. At present, the state is being sued by civil rights groups over funding and teacher quality disparities.

As a high school that only educates low-income students of color (96 percent Black and 100 percent low-income student body), the high school is at the center of the state's complex history of race relations. The school has fared poorly across a range of educational indicators. Over the past five school years, it received two D's and three F's on the state's accountability ratings, most recently grading as an F for the 2015-16 school year. In 2015-16, just 13.8 percent of the students graded as proficient in reading, while 19.8 percent were proficient in math. Nearly 40 percent of the students are chronically absent, and 22 percent have been suspended. It is also the normative experience for students to struggle in the 9th grade, fall off track, and be required to repeat the grade, with 60 percent of ninth graders, reported as being retained. Together, this led to just 64 percent of the class of 2015 graduating in four years. The high school, however, is not alone. It is one of seven in the district, and on the most recent state report card, all of them received a D or an F and three had lower graduate rates.

The high school's challenges are impacted by the struggles of its school district. After the district received an "F" for the 2015-16 school year on the state's report card, the district's superintendent stepped down. In December 2016, the state Department of Education approved a plan for the district that detailed violations of a number of the state's accreditation standards and outlined plans to address the problems with each standard. Violations included inconsistently applying discipline policies; failure to maintain school facilities; failure of the superintendent to ensure that a "positive, safe, and secure climate exists"; many professional positions in the districts being filled by staff who do not hold the valid teacher's licenses; and issues with collecting, maintaining, and reporting student data, such as student absences. If the school district fails to meet some of the improvements outlined in the plan, the district faces the possibility of losing its accreditation and a potential state takeover.

The district, however, has recently taken steps in the right direction, launching two district wide initiatives that aim squarely at some of the high school's biggest challenges. It has created freshmen academies district wide to help incoming high school students more successfully make the transition from middle school. Students are assigned to cohorts of no more than 150 students, where they share six teachers who work exclusively with them to gain specific knowledge of students' needs and the ability to better tailor student support. The district also initiated a program to try and limit school absences across the district to less than five per year. The program also works to educate students, teachers, and parents of the negative impacts chronic absenteeism has on student success.

The archetype case studies presented here provide a framework for understanding how the struggles of low-performing high schools are firmly entrenched in those of its city or community. These high schools face deep-rooted challenges decades in the making. Reform and redesign efforts need to take into account the needs, challenges, and strengths of both the school and the community.

Section II:

What We Know About Effective High School Reform and What that Means for the Redesign of the Remaining Low-Graduation-Rate High Schools

The high school reform efforts of the past 20 years, detailed in Appendix 2, have had considerable success in improving high school graduation rates across the nation. Yet, clearly these reforms did not take root in the remaining traditional high schools with 300 or more students where on-time high school graduation is still only a 50/50 proposition or the size of the senior class is still 60 percent or less than that of the freshman class. This does not imply that these schools are destined to perform poorly forever or that they cannot be redesigned to become schools that support the upward mobility of their students as well as the economic and social development of their communities. It does mean, however, that reform efforts must move forward fully informed about the current challenges these schools face, armed with the knowledge of all that has been learned about high school improvement over the past decades to ensure that each school chooses the improvement and redesign effort right for their particular circumstance. In the second section of this report, we turn our attention to highlighting the lessons learned about high school improvement, and what it means for the campaign to redesign and improve the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools.

What Have We Learned About Improving High Schools

The good news is the effort to redesign the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools can be built upon a significant evidence base. The lessons learned over the past 20 years (detailed in Appendix A) have not produced a soup to nuts high school improvement model that will work in all low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools, but they have produced enough of a foundation to enable progress.

It is increasingly common to hear that school turnaround has not worked and by inference that real improvement in low performing high schools is not possible. Often negative viewpoints on the effectiveness or possibility of high school improvement are based on a narrow interpretation of the very few formal program evaluations that have been done of a specific type of high school reform effort during the eras of NCLB and RTTT. Each of these evaluations, in turn, had its own limitations and only analyzed a segment of the schools involved in turnaround efforts for limited durations of time. The wider evidence base tells a much different story about high school reform and improvement more broadly and gives us much from which to draw.

Many of the whole school reform models initially developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s have had positive third-party evaluations, including Talent Development Secondary and Institute of Student Achievement, as have some models developed in the mid-2000s like Green Dot and Diplomas Now. In addition, the district-wide efforts to create new smaller high schools in New York City and have teams of ninth grade teachers work collectively to raise their students on-track rates in Chicago have demonstrated significant impacts, as have a number of the early college high schools and career academy efforts. Statewide high school reform efforts in Kentucky and North Carolina have been associated with significant declines in the number of low-performing high schools in those states. School Turnaround efforts have borne fruit in New Mexico, Ohio, and California. Specific components of high school reform, including professional development strategies, the use of restorative and positive disciplinary approaches, accelerated learning and catch-up strategies, the use of early warning and intervention systems, adolescent literacy approaches, and social-emotional and behavioral intervention strategies have been shown to have positive impacts via experimental or other rigorous studies. Finally, recent advances and findings in the learning and behavioral sciences provide another foundational source of evidence on what actions support adolescent development and learning. It is from this knowledge and evidence base that a foundation for redesigning the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools can be found.

With that said, it is still the case that most of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools have been subject to reform efforts and accountability pressures over the past fifteen years and have not substantially improved. This raises the question of why some high schools have improved while others have not.

First, some of the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools may have fallen through the cracks of reform attention. Although it may seem like it would be hard for a low-performing school to go on for a decade or more without being swept up in a reform effort, it is possible. In most states, a modest amount of progress in the right year could keep schools from reaching the final stages of NCLB sanctions where the most significant reform actions were triggered. Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants were competitive grant opportunities, which required proactive efforts by states and school districts. Moreover, while many of the remaining low-graduation-rate high schools have struggled for decades, at some schools, low outcomes are a more recent phenomenon, often associated with rapid changes in student populations.

Second, reform efforts have run the gamut from district- and school-initiated to state- and federally-mandated, and within these, the efforts ranged from being dependent on initiative from school leaders and staff to being heavily prescribed. The critical resources needed to implement new reforms – time, money, and people – moreover, vary considerably across high schools and reform efforts. As a result, it is possible for there to be mismatches between school needs and capacities, and chosen reform strategies that result in limited buy in or non-sustained implementation among school staff.

Third, school leader and staff turnover can be extremely high in low-performing schools. Thus, in some cases, schools may have started on a reform journey and experienced some positive trajectory, only to lose much of the leadership and staff that helped them get there. It is not out of the ordinary for schools that have failed to improve to have three or more principals over a short time span, some of whom were interim or acting, and to see their staff change by 50 percent or more, often several times within a decade.

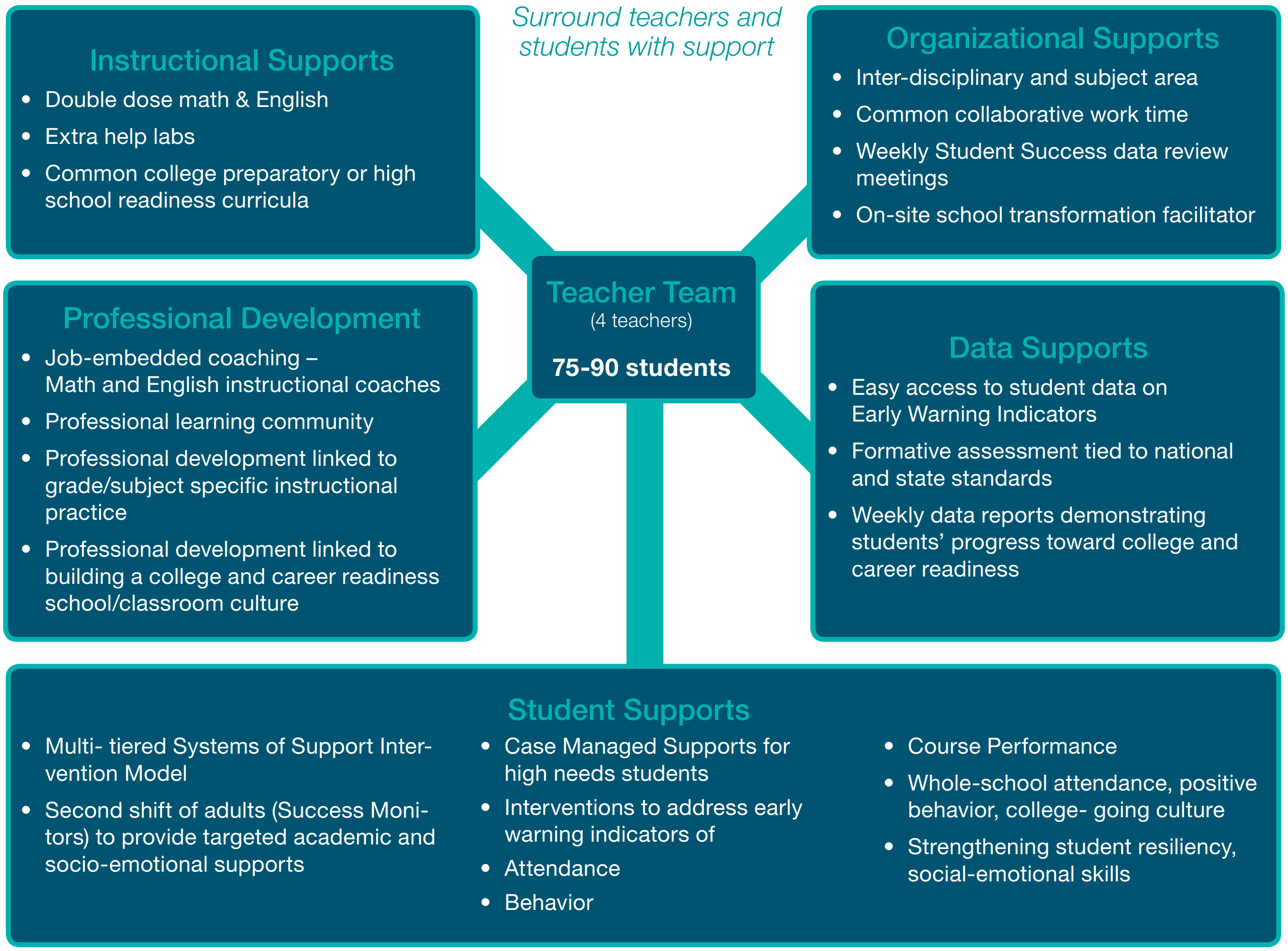
Finally, and as the data profiles and case studies of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools indicate, the reforms attempted may not have been sufficient for the intensity and scale of needs of the school and its students. It is easy, but false, to assume that all low performing high schools face similar challenges. This is not the case. The degree of difficulty can vary considerably among schools with low-graduation-rates or weak promoting power. For some of the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools, the challenges they face may go far beyond what they can handle on their own. These schools are often confronted with systemic and community-wide problems, including concentrated poverty, geographic isolation, weak economic bases, and high levels of segregation. As the data presented on the locations of the remaining low performing high schools shows, they are concentrated in school districts with some of the highest rates of concentrated poverty (neighborhoods where 40% of more of the residents are low income) in the nation. There is clear evidence of the double burden schools face in educating low-income students who live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.[5] Research from Chicago on elementary school improvement shows that schools in neighborhoods of the most intense poverty and social distress need supports beyond those that improve other schools (Byrk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). Thus, reform and redesign efforts will need to be based on the realities of these schools, and not simply attempts to apply lessons learned from prior successes.

---

[5] About 75 percent of low-income students in high schools located outside areas of concentrated poverty graduate, while low-income students in schools in concentrated poverty neighborhoods graduate at a rate of about 64 percent – a more than 10 percentage point difference. It is also known that the academic proficiency of students at one level of schools is not protective of the impacts of concentrated poverty in later levels of schooling. In a large randomized study across 30 high poverty middle schools, one third of students who were academically proficient in math and English at the end of 5th grade developed an early warning indicator just one year later in the 6th grade – they either became chronically absent, had disciplinary issues, or failed math or English. Thus, improvements in pre-k through middle schooling in a district do not necessarily translate in lower degrees of difficulty for high schools in area of concentrated poverty.

What Works in Detail

Lessons learned from **DIPLOMAS NOW**



Surround teachers and students with support

Teacher Team

(4 teachers)

75-90 students

Instructional Supports

- Double dose math & English
- Extra help labs
- Common college preparatory or high school readiness curricula

Organizational Supports

- Inter-disciplinary and subject area
- Common collaborative work time
- Weekly Student Success data review meetings
- On-site school transformation facilitator

Professional Development

- Job-embedded coaching – Math and English instructional coaches
- Professional learning community
- Professional development linked to grade/subject specific instructional practice
- Professional development linked to building a college and career readiness school/classroom culture

Data Supports

- Easy access to student data on Early Warning Indicators
- Formative assessment tied to national and state standards
- Weekly data reports demonstrating students' progress toward college and career readiness

Student Supports

- Multi- tiered Systems of Support Intervention Model
- Second shift of adults (Success Monitors) to provide targeted academic and socio-emotional supports
- Case Managed Supports for high needs students
- Interventions to address early warning indicators of
- Attendance
- Behavior
- Course Performance
- Whole-school attendance, positive behavior, college- going culture
- Strengthening student resiliency, social-emotional skills

The good news is there are identified means to mediate specific effects of concentrated poverty on school success (Moore, Lantos, Jones, Schindler, Belford, Sacks, & Harper, 2017). Individual schools and community partners, for example, have shown how to push back against the impacts of food insecurity, homelessness, trauma, asthma, chronic absenteeism, and poor eyesight, among other ways poverty directly impedes school success. A recent analysis of the low performing high schools in Massachusetts that have made the most progress indicates that what distinguishes them from other low performing high schools that have not made similar strides is the greater extent with which they have been able to build systems and responses to address student needs (LiCalsi, Citkowicz, Friedman, & Brown, 2015).

The efforts of Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities in Schools to design a Diplomas Now school improvement model for the highest needs middle and high schools (see Figure above) shows it is possible to combine evidence based whole school reform efforts, with enhanced student supports, guided by early warning systems to provide the supports and guidance high needs schools need to improve (Corrin, Sepanik, Gray, Fernandez, Briggs, & Wang, 2014; Sepanik, Corrin, Roy, Gray, Fernandez, Briggs, & Wang, 2015).

Moreover, the impact of 9th grade on-track efforts in Chicago, along with the Massachusetts findings and the Diplomas Now efforts, show that using data driven and evidence-based approaches to address student need in the most challenged schools helps establish the conditions under which school improvement and redesign efforts can succeed.

Thus, high schools in areas of intense poverty and economic and social isolation can improve and redesign themselves to enable their students to succeed in the 21st century. The climb to improvement and success, however, is steeper and slippery. Efforts to mitigate the impacts of concentrated poverty on school success and push through to improve student outcomes requires sustained organizational focus, know-how, and typically external supports, as the responses and improvements high needs schools need to implement are more intense, far reaching, comprehensive, and integrated than in less challenged schools. Given the greater reform challenge these schools face, the need for an external organizing effort to promote and sustain redesign becomes clear as without it, the imperative to improve will continue to fall upon schools and communities that in many cases are without the capacity to do so.

Building the Future: Using the Evidence Base to Create a Foundation for Innovation

Much of the school improvement literature is based on identifying key features of successful schools or schools that have witnessed significant improvement. It then distills a set of characteristics associated with that success. Schools seeking to improve are asked to replicate those characteristics and sometimes provided guidance on how to do so. This can be a useful heuristic, and in most cases, the identified characteristics are key attributes without which the odds of school improvement are small. In short, examples like the School Turnaround Principles elucidated by the US Department of Education during the Obama administration or the Chicago Five Essentials for School Improvement identify the key ingredients needed for improvement. For example, few of the remaining low performing high schools will improve if they don't have strong leadership focused on improvement and skilled teachers who base instruction on standards and guide it with aligned assessments. They will also need to use data to guide, monitor, and improve school practice, address student's needs, and thoughtfully think through how to best sequence their reform efforts to build the will and skill of their staff and students to tackle the issues at hand, while seeking outside technical assistance and community partners in a strategic manner.

The downside of the school improvement approach is that it can fall into a paint-by-the-numbers approach, where rather than learning how to paint, schools end up trying to follow a set of instructions without understanding how they interact with their school's specific challenges and circumstances, the underlying principles and goals of their actions, and the tensions between different components of the reform effort which need to be navigated. To use the painting metaphor, rather than learning how and why to create interactions of color, texture, perspective, and light to produce the painting they envision, they are painting this yellow, that green, and next to it red because that is what the instructions say. As a result, being able to build faculty commitment to sustain the reforms and knowing what to do when the proscribed plan is not working or producing continuous improvement are all limited by a lack of real understanding as to why certain reforms are needed, how they work, and how they can be effectively modified to local circumstances.

Though it may seem like an almost trivial change in nomenclature, a shift from a traditional school improvement focus to an evidence-based redesign approach rooted in addressing the specific challenges of the remaining low performing high schools may serve as a more productive path to school improvement. It could enable these schools to move from a paint-by-numbers method that has not worked for them to learning how to paint a picture of future success.

The evidence-based foundation upon which high school redesign can be built has three parts. First, an evidence-based approach can be used to identify the critical levers of student and school improvement and how to apply them. Or to follow our metaphor like light, color, texture, and perspective in painting the elements which adults in schools can manipulate to improve student outcomes, as well the key techniques on how to use them. In the case of high schools, this is organizing adults, supporting students, teaching, and learning, and providing pathways to postsecondary success. These are the areas of improvement schools can control and where the evidence base provides a common foundation upon which local innovation and customization can occur. Second, an evidence-based approach can provide implementation guidance, by illuminating the tensions and areas where schools will need to balance polarities between different elements of school improvement and an understanding of how to work with and through the human element of change. The third way an evidence-based approach can provide critical guidance is by helping schools undergoing redesign and reform to stay focused on what really matters for student success. This is particularly important in high needs schools like the remaining low-graduation-rate and weak promoting power high schools where the adults and students operate under conditions of scarcity and stress. Both of these narrow our focus to addressing immediate needs at the expense of strategic action. Having a small number of guideposts helps push actions towards strategic ends.

What Evidence Says Drives High School Student Success

The evidence base for high school improvement is rapidly growing. In its current state, it suggests that there are four fundamental drivers of student success in high needs environments, and as such these are guideposts by which schools can prioritize redesign and reform efforts, by asking and understanding how their efforts lead to improvements in;

1. **The quality and coherence of student coursework** is what builds their cognitive capacity. Postsecondary success is predicated on students developing a sufficient body of knowledge, and associated academic skills, which are typically domain specific. They also need to become self-regulated learners. Advances in the learning sciences tell us that all of this occurs through active mental processing and engagement with the material being learned. In short, it is how students are asked to think and engage with the material they are learning in school that matters. Traditionally, this has come in the form of "listen to what the teacher says, remember it, and recall it on the test." More recently, the hope has been that if standards for what students need to learn and be able to do in each grade and subject to graduate college-ready are identified and aligned with accountability assessments then the quality and coherence of coursework will improve for the better. The hard work, however, of shifting from the status-quo to designing high quality and coherent coursework for students to engage in has been by and large left to individual teachers, who are provided little support, time, or professional learning opportunities to do so.
2. **The quality of the relationships** students have with each other and with adults, as well as the supports students receive drives student motivation to attend school on a regular basis, focus in class, complete their assignments, and push through when times are tough. They play a key role in developing social and emotional capacity, which emerging evidence is showing is central to adult success. Quality relationships that provide support without pity and practical problem-solving advice have also been shown to be one of the strongest antidotes to the toxic environments students living in concentrated poverty encounter on a daily basis (Center for Promise, 2014). Finally, learning is inherently a social enterprise and when the social conditions of school are poor, when students and teachers are locked in a battle for respect and relational trust is low, neither student nor school success is likely to occur.

3. **Equitable access to the experiences that prepare students for postsecondary success,** like extracurricular activities (debate, drama, robotics, student government etc.), as well as connecting students to postsecondary pathways while in high school (CTE, Dual Enrollment, AP courses) and providing all students with good guidance on navigating post-secondary opportunities, create a sense of belonging and belief among students that the school is invested in their future and believes it includes postsecondary attainment. It also ensures all students have access to experiences which shape and build their ability to succeed in postsecondary schooling.
4. **Collective efficacy** among the teachers, administrators and other adults in the school and the ability of the school to engage in continuous improvement activities enables the school to avoid stagnating and navigate improvement challenges.

Thus, high school redesign efforts grounded by an evidence-based approach that establishes a common and solid foundation upon which local innovation and customization can occur has the potential to provide a more productive improvement pathway for high schools that have been resistant to earlier reform efforts. The good news is there are growing examples across the nation of how this works in practice. The Success Stories embedded throughout this report show both an evidence-based approach to innovation at work, and also how we are learning to engineer change at human scale by drawing on advancements in implementation science, improvement science, and design thinking.

Success Stories

As evidence continues to emerge on successful school reform strategies, examples of bright spots in implementing evidence-based reforms have risen in tandem. This section of the report will highlight some of the stories from states, districts, and schools that have successfully adapted to meet the needs of students today.

Community Engagement & Leadership

While strong school leadership and good teachers are essential components of 21st century high schools, engagement and leadership from the community are also powerful tools in school turnaround efforts. In Kentucky, the **Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence** has been a leader in developing and engaging student and community leaders since 1983. The Prichard Committee has led a number of initiatives and reform efforts that place community members and students at the center of improving their communities' education. In 1997, the Prichard Committee founded the Governor's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (GCIPL), which provides opportunities for parents and community members to develop the capacity to support and advocate for public schools by learning the value of shared decision-making in the school improvement process. To date, GCIPL has trained over 2,450 Kentucky parents and community members, many of which have gone on to serve on local school boards and councils. In addition, the Prichard Committee founded the Student Voice Team, a group of self-selected students, from middle school to college, who work to elevate the voices of students across Kentucky on the classroom impact of education issues, as well as the challenges students face to successfully transition to postsecondary education.[6]

Postsecondary Pathways

A high school diploma is now longer enough to prepare students for the demands of the today's workforce. Some postsecondary education – whether it is a high-quality credential or college degree – is needed. For this reason, it is essential that high schools in the 21st century provide stronger pathways to postsecondary education. While student GPA and course performance are the strongest predictors of postsecondary readiness and attendance, it is also important to instill in high schools a college going culture. There are a growing number of programs in schools across the country that do this by allowing students to earn credits towards a postsecondary degree or credential while still in high school. These programs make the transition to postsecondary education more seamless, while also allowing students to complete school faster, in turn making college more affordable and accessible. Moreover, some states have found success increasing postsecondary access through innovative scholarship designs aimed at students typically underrepresented in colleges, such as low-income students and students of color.

---

[6] "What We Do: Engagement – Parent Leadership," Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, retrieved from http://prichardcommittee.org/family_engagement/#.

Georgia has used **dual enrollment programs** to expand access to postsecondary education. Dual enrollment, or dual credit, programs allow a wide array of students to earn college credit, in both academically focused courses and career and technical education programs, while still in high school. Following suggestions by Georgia's 2014 Dual Enrollment Task Force, Governor Mark Deal signed two bills into law in April of 2015 that created the **Move On When Ready** (MOWR) dual enrollment program and aligned Georgia's K-12 education system with the state's postsecondary institution, allowing students to earn credit towards a college degree or technical accreditation while still in high school.[7] MOWR allows students in grades 9-12 that attend a participating Georgia high school or an approved home study program to take courses that earn college and high school credit at the same time for free. In 2016, 27,512 students participated in the MOWR program in 640 participating high schools.[8]

Dual enrollment programs continue to become increasingly popular in schools, with 82 percent of high schools reporting students enrolled in dual credit courses with over 2 million students enrolled in dual credit courses with either an academic or CTE focus.[9] As dual enrollment programs continue to expand across the country, Georgia's Move on When Ready program should be a model to other states.

Similarly, **Early College High Schools** have become an increasingly prevalent model to increase postsecondary access for typically underserved students. Early Colleges partner with colleges and universities to offer students an opportunity to earn an associate's degree or up to two full years of college credits toward a bachelor's degree during high school at no or low cost to students. They differ from dual enrollment programs as dual enrollment students are enrolled in traditional high schools while taking college courses whereas Early College students take fewer high schools classes in preparation for full college workloads. At Early Colleges, students' high school classes are often supplanted by college courses.

The Early College High School Initiative has helped to establish or redesign 280 early college schools established that serve over 80,000 students in 31 geographically diverse states plus the District of Columbia each year.[10] Seventy-seven percent of students enrolled in Early Colleges are students of color and 61 percent are from low-income families, with 56 percent representing the first person in their immediate families to attend college.[11]

---

[7] "Deal: Dual Enrollment Bills Boost Future Workforce," Office of the Governor, April 30, 2015, retrieved from https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2015-04-30/deal-dual-enrollment-bills-boost-future-workforce.

[8] Gary Mealer, "Move On When Ready Dual Enrollment Program – 2017," Georgia Department of Education, July 29, 2016, retrieved from http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Pages/Transition-Career-Partnerships.aspx.

[9] Nina Thomas et al., *Dual Credit and Exam-Based Courses in U.S. Public High Schools: 2010-11,* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, February 2013.

Data Drives Success and Whole Child Supports

From the early stages of the school reform movement, certain attendance, behavior, and course performance (the ABCs) thresholds emerged as predictive early warning indicators of students who were at-risk of dropping out of high school as early as the 3rd grade. Research surrounding the ABCs led schools, districts, and states to create Early Warning Indicator Systems (EWIS or early warning systems) to track student performance and identify those students in need of intervention. From this effort, many success stories and bright spots have emerged across the country.

Washoe County School District created a **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS),** an EWIS that uses ABC and other data to identify and intervene with students at-risk of dropping out. MTSS works to ensure each school in Washoe County fully implements and sustains a system of supports and interventions for both behavior and academics. The system provides early academic and behavioral help, as well as improved methods for how school teams can tailor interventions to meet the individual needs of each student. Washoe County uses a tiered system of supports, based on the Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) program model, depending on the needs of that particular student. Through PBIS, MTSS incorporates social and emotional learning into their interventions for at-risk students. PBIS is a framework for assisting school and district personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated curriculum that enhances social behavior outcomes for all students.[12] This in turn benefits students' academic performance. The effects of Washoe County School District's effort to implement a district-wide EWIS have paid. While the county's graduation lingers below the national average at 75 percent, that number represents a five-percentage-point increase since the 2010-2011 school year and is 4.7 percentage points higher than the graduation rate for Nevada.

Collaborating Through Networks

In an increasingly interconnected world, the opportunity for states, districts, and communities to collaborate with and learn from one another is greater than ever. Through innovative partnerships and networks, education leaders can work together by sharing lessons learned on best practices, and districts and communities within states can come together to share and analyze data to better meet students' needs. In California, the state's largest school districts have created an innovative partnership that should be used as a model to other states of what collaboration can do.

In an effort to establish system-wide SEL at both the district and state level, CASEL established the **Collaborating Districts Initiative (CDI)** in 2011 and later the **Collaborating States Initiative (CSI)** in 2016. Through the CDI, CASEL works with 11 diverse school districts across the country – in Anchorage, AK; Austin, TX; Chicago, IL; Cleveland, OH; Nashville, TN; Oakland, CA; Sacramento, CA; Washoe

---

[10] Michael Webb & Carol Gerwin, *Early College Expansion: Propelling Students to Postsecondary Success at a School Near You*, Boston, MA: Jobs For the Future, March 2014. Available at http://www.jff.org/initiatives/early-college-designs.

[11] Ibid.

[12] PBIS: Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports ,"PBIS Frequently Asked Questions," OSEP Technical Assistance Center, retrieved from https://www.pbis.org/school/swpbis-for-beginners/pbis-faqs.

County, NV; Atlanta, GA; and El Paso, TX – with the goals of developing districts' capacities to plan, implement, and monitor system-wide SEL and to document lessons learned in each of these districts that can inform future efforts to support systemic SEL implementation across the country. Similarly, CASEL is directly working with 19 states to encourage them to create a plan that would create the conditions that meet the SEL needs of students and families in that state. CASEL then provides states with tools and resources, including sharing best practices from other states, and technical assistance.

As part of an effort to improve graduation rates across the state, 10 California school districts joined together to form the **CORE Districts**. The CORE Districts committed to work together to implement and scale successful and innovative strategies and tools to help students succeed in high school and onto college or career. The collaboration was driven by three areas of work: 1) College and career ready expectations for all students through rigorous standards, assessment and instruction; 2) Differentiated recognition, accountability and support for schools through holistic measurement, and systems of mutual accountability and shared learning; and 3) Promoting effective instruction and leadership through coherence and development of professional capacity.[13]

The CORE Districts have been working together on a shared data system that helps them work within and across districts. The system collects data and holds educators accountable on both academic and non-academic measures of student success that range from on-track-to-graduate metrics such as course performance and attendance, to school climate and students' social and emotional skills.

The benefits of the CORE Districts can be seen in Fresno Unified School District. Prior to joining CORE, Fresno Unified had been plagued by unacceptably low-graduation for decades. In 2008, just 58 percent of students were graduating on time and by 2010 that number still hovered under 70 percent. By joining CORE, Fresno Unified aligned their school accountability with CORE's School Quality Improvement System, which provides districts and schools with real-time data on 10 social-emotional and academic metrics and resources to intervene with at-risk students. Thanks to the efforts of Fresno Unified and help from its partnership with the CORE Districts, Fresno Unified's graduation rate had reached 84 percent in the 2014-15 school year.

The Story of Tacoma

While each of these examples showcases effective, evidence-based strategies at turning around schools and districts, often times it takes multiple sustained initiatives to turnaround the poorest performing districts. That was certainly the case in Tacoma Public Schools.

In 2007, all of the comprehensive high schools in Tacoma Public Schools were labeled as dropout factories. Three years later in 2010, with graduation rates stagnate at 55 percent, the Tacoma community came together to form Graduate Tacoma, an organization with the goal of improving Tacoma's high school graduation rates to 85 percent by 2020. Today, Graduate Tacoma is made up of over 200 Community Partners working to build a culture of high expectations and shared responsibility for student success in high school and beyond.[14]

Graduate Tacoma uses cradle-to-career community and school indicators to highlight what's working and what should be brought to scale, as well as identify challenges that require additional focus to close gaps in opportunity and student achievement. School indicators range from developmental screenings and enrollment in quality preschool at the early stages of life, include third-grade reading and eighth grade math in the middle grades, and continue all through high school graduation and up until college completion. Community indicators include out-of-school and summer learning programs, school attendance, parent and family engagement, social and emotional supports, and ensuring safe and healthy environments for youth of all ages. Graduate Tacoma holds the entire community accountable for results by tracking progress across their indicators. Their goals of an 85 percent high school graduation rate by 2020, a 47 percent college completion rate, and closing graduation gaps between key subgroups by 2020 are guiding lights in the movement to turn around Tacoma Public Schools.

---

[13] CORE Districts, "About CORE," http://coredistricts.org/.

[14] Graduate Tacoma, "Impact," http://graduatetacoma.org/impact/.

In addition to Graduate Tacoma, several other reforms have helped turn around the district's low-graduation-rate. In 2012 Washington's superintendent named Tacoma the state's first Innovation Zone, which brought widespread reforms in the arts and STEM to schools across the district. Washington's statewide College Bound Scholars program offered additional supports to seventh- and eighth-grade low-income students and promised college financial aid to students who manage to graduate high school. Furthermore, the University of Washington-Tacoma offered students a pathway to college by offering high school students with a GPA of 2.7 or higher, and a score of 480 on each section of the SAT or a 21 on the ACT acceptance into an area four-year college.

Tacoma School District also launched the Tacoma Whole Child Initiative through a partnership with the University of Washington-Tacoma. The initiative integrated social-emotional learning into the strategic plan for the whole district. Five years after launching the initiative, 44 schools have added the development of SEL to their school action plans.

Thanks to these reform efforts by 2015, Tacoma's graduation rate had jumped to 83 percent and in 2015, 12 Tacoma schools received recognition as some of the highest performing schools in Washington State.[15]

---

[15] Tacoma Public Schools, "12 Tacoma Schools Receive Washington Achievement Awards," April 15, 2015, https://www.tacomaschools.org/news/Pages/12-Tacoma-schools-receive-Washington-Achievement-Awards.aspx.

Section III:

A Path Forward: Great American High School Campaign

The evidence is clear. For public education to meet its mission in the 21st century, it must provide all students with a pathway from Pre-K to a high school diploma and into and through postsecondary education or training. This is how public schooling continues to serve as a foundational driver of the nation's ability to fulfill its promise of equal opportunity, prosperity, and a vibrant democracy. Many of the challenges to this mission, where they persist, and the conditions that allow them to continue are evident, and so are some of the solutions. What remains is to organize, implement, and support an effort to engage the communities and neighborhoods that have either been overlooked or unsuccessful in the vital work of redesigning their high schools so they can serve as engines of economic development and social integration in this century. This involves bringing knowledge of what works to the places that need it, building their capacity to use it, and the active participation of the students, teachers, leaders, and communities in those places in redesigning their high schools and tailoring their efforts to meet local needs.

This section offers a working draft of a path forward toward these ends. It is presented with humility and recognition that challenges faced are significant and dynamic. Thus, what we offer is not a finished blueprint but an initial sketch of what a blueprint might look like. We invite active and wide participation in revising and completing it.

Focus on the Forgotten

We propose an initial focus on the approximately 800 remaining traditional high schools with 300 or more students where high school graduation, let alone strong postsecondary pathways, is not the norm. These are the high schools that historically have served essential roles within their neighborhoods and communities fostering both social integration and mobility. They are also the high schools that will be identified by ESSA as in need of comprehensive school improvements and required to implement evidence-based strategies based on a needs assessment and community input.

As noted in the report's data analysis, there are other high schools in need of significant reforms. These include high schools with graduation rates above 67 percent that either have weak promoting power where large numbers of students are falling off track or very large high schools with below average graduation rates producing large numbers of dropouts, as well as the growing number of alternative and virtual high schools with graduation rates below 67 percent. This is not to suggest that these schools be excluded from the path forward sketched out here, nor that their reform is any less urgent. Many in fact, will be flagged by ESSA as in need of either comprehensive or targeted improvements.

Rather, this plan is focused on the improvement of the set of schools we believe will provide the highest leverage to their communities, and for whom ESSA provides both an impetus to reform and resources to support redesign efforts. It is our hope that in many districts, leaders with foresight will work to improve all of the high schools in need of reform through comprehensive actions. ***But our call to the nation is to put an urgent priority on redesigning the high schools in the economically- and socially-isolated locales of the nation that no longer serve as avenues of advancement and community development.***

Why Now is the Time

The existing knowledge base on high school redesign and improvement strategies that has emerged over the past 20 years provides a sufficient foundation to build and launch a nationwide campaign. In addition, recent insights from the behavioral, learning, implementation, and improvement sciences provide guidance on how to organize, motivate, and capitalize on local participation, buy in, and insight.

The passage and implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act provides a rare window in time to align a campaign to design high schools for the 21st century with a legislative mandate to improve low-performing high schools. ESSA has within it a broad outline of how to proceed. It requires school districts to work with identified low-performing high schools to conduct an in-depth needs assessment and develop a reform plan that builds on existing strengths, is informed by community input, and employs evidence-based strategies and approaches to overcome identified weaknesses. ESSA also provides schools with the option to have a planning year, and then offers resources to help support the implementation of the reforms over an additional three years.

A campaign to redesign high schools in the places time has left behind is also aligned with Chief State School Officers focus on Equity in 2017, and in many ways, is a missing piece in the greater educational reform efforts underway. If innovation efforts, from personalized and competency-based learning to the XQ: Super School Project to the Aspen Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development are to succeed in the most challenging and highest needs schools, they will need to be integrated into fundamental redesign and transformation efforts. Efforts to increase and enhance student supports through the GradNation Campaign need to be paired with school structures and instructional designs that can fully maximize their impact. Recent advances to improve and strengthen pathways from high school to postsecondary success – including Career and Technical Education, early college, and dual enrollment – all need to rest on solid foundations of effective schools for high-needs student populations.

Perhaps most importantly, one of the strongest assets in economically- and socially-isolated communities is the potential and power of their youth. It is a potential and power, however, that too often is neither being cultivated nor supported, and as a result remains untapped. In these locales, the high school is the one institution that can both help unleash the potential of young people and serve as an engine of economic development and social integration for the community. Consequently, the time to act is now before another generation fails to be provided the supports and experiences needed to achieve their own success and help their communities thrive.

How it Could Happen

Make it about the community's future, not past school failures

There is little hope for success if reform of the remaining low-graduation rate high schools is cast in a negative or punitive light. In the locales where they are found telling administrators and staff that they must improve or face consequences has been tried and did not work. Reform should be cast in hope, optimism, and purpose. One way to do this is to make the case that these high schools were designed for, and succeeded in, another time but until now, have not had the opportunity to adapt to the needs and circumstances of the 21st century. They need to be redesigned to provide all students with a pathway to adult success in this century by fully developing the community's young people both academically and social-emotionally. This casts the redesign in an ambitious and positive light. Its goal is not just enabling all students to graduate, but to graduate prepared for postsecondary schooling and training and provided with the supported pathways to succeed in it.

To be successful, the redesign process will need stakeholder involvement, leadership, and commitment. It should be viewed as a means through which the community can improve itself and strengthen its participation in the nation's advancement. Economic and community development functions can be integrated into the high school redesign. Some examples of this include: multi-generational job training programs with local industries, business incubators, maker spaces, micro-credentialing, coding academies, community service, dual enrollment, and apprenticeships, as well as a host of other programs that engage both high school students and the community at large in building their collective future.

Tightly align with State ESSA Plans for Low-Performing High Schools

State plans for ESSA implementation are currently being developed and fine-tuned. Central to the campaign's success will be tightly aligning it with the process states will use to support high schools identified as in need of comprehensive reform. Tight policy-to-practice coordination will enable high school redesign efforts to be viewed through the same lens at the school, district, and state level, which is essential to ensuring strong implementation. Strong alignment will help avoid or mitigate the all too common reform phenomenon of school's receiving conflicting messages from different levels about what they should and should not be doing.

Acknowledge the obstacles – and design the campaign to address them

For this campaign to be successful, the obstacles to reform and redesign must be acknowledged and addressed. Most involve the human side. Nearly all of the remaining low-performing high schools have been attempting or required to engage in reform for the past decade or more. This leads to reform burnout and inertia, and seeing reform as a ritual, as opposed to the intentional, thoughtful, dynamic, and passionate work it needs to be. Related to this is distrust of outsiders or external ideas, based on both prior experiences and the natural human tendency to see each situation as unique and unknowable to those who have not experienced or witnessed it firsthand.

There is also the challenge of getting the diagnosis right or understanding why the school is currently struggling. Too often the assumption has been that all struggling schools are essentially the same and their needs are self-apparent. Misdiagnosis, however, is likely a key reason why these schools have been reforming, but not improving, for over a decade.

Another set of human challenges revolves around the need to either improve adult capacity or change adult behavior – neither of which is easy and both of which can require substantial resources and sustained effort. This is especially true in environments that continually operate under conditions of stress and scarcity, sapping the trust, motivation, and energy needed for successful reform or improvement.

Finally, schools, particularly those in high-need areas, operate in and are impacted by dynamic environments – superintendents and their priorities change, principals leave, teachers turnover, student needs evolve. All of these obstacles have the potential to hinder school reform efforts. The following represent an attempt to show how they could be mitigated.

Get the needs assessment right

For high schools and their communities to successfully redesign for the 21st century, they need an accurate and shared understanding of the challenges they face and the foundations, both good and bad, they are starting from. ESSA requires school districts to conduct a needs assessment of their high schools in need of comprehensive reform but provides limited guidance as to what this assessment should examine. While states and districts may want to customize their needs assessments based on local circumstances, there are a number of elements that existing evidence suggests needs assessments for effective re-designs should include. They are:

A. The needs assessment should be intensive and facilitated. It should be based on comprehensive data reviews, surveys, classroom visits, and include interviews and focus groups with school staff and personnel. A key mistake is to assume that the root causes of low performance are obvious and can be gleaned from simple checklists that can be applied to all schools at all levels. High schools in particular have unique organizational characteristics that distinguish their needs and challenges from elementary schools.

B. It is important to develop a deep profile of the educational needs and challenges that each cohort of entering 9th graders present. Often there is a circular nature to needs assessments in which low performance is attributed to failures among adults and deficiencies with students that leads to efforts to either replace the adults or the students – but does not address the root cause of the problematic outcomes. By focusing on the needs of entering students, rather than focusing only on what the school has or has not achieved, reform efforts take unproductive blame out of the equation. Schools must ask themselves a series of questions including: What degree of educational challenge is walking through the school's door? What is the prior history of the entering class with chronic absenteeism, behavior challenges, course failure, unmet social emotional needs, exposure to concentrated poverty, social service, or juvenile justice involvement, as well as other risk factors that contribute to students failing to graduate high school?

C. The needs assessment must map the reform history of the school. It is important to know what has been tried in the recent past. What is perceived as having worked and what has not, when and for how long have initiatives worked, and under what conditions. This is essential because often a reform strategy may have been implemented in name only, or only briefly but as a result, has left the impression that it cannot or does not work at a particular school. On the other hand, it can also be the case that a reform that worked elsewhere did not work at the school because of site-specific reasons. Without an understanding of what the history is, any attempt to try again would likely meet the same fate.

D. Compare student reports on their needs and challenges to faculty beliefs about those needs, their scale, and intensity. Often there can be a divide between actual student needs and challenges, and what the adults in the building perceive them to be. Tight alignment between student needs and challenges, and adult response, however, is essential to building relational trust between students and adults, as well as mitigating the impacts of unmet student needs.

E. Use all of the above to form a hypothesis of where the school currently rests on a spectrum from:

- **a.** locked capacity (there is more adult capacity and skill in the building than is currently being applied to the educational challenges the school faces),
- **b.** being over-matched (adults are working near full capacity and in thoughtful and coordinated fashion, but available adult capacity is not sufficient to meet student needs),
- **c.** dysfunctional (after years of locked capacity and/or being over-matched, the adult response to student needs has become dysfunctional and is making matters worse).

Where a school falls on this spectrum helps inform the intensity and type of redesign required.

Gather authentic community input into what the community values in terms of high school outcomes for the 21st Century

Many of the remaining low-graduation rate high schools are the only public high school in their community, or one of just two or three. It is not uncommon for the high school to bear the name of both the school district and the city or town in which it was founded, demonstrating the vital role it has played in the community over time. Thus, it is important to go beyond the school in doing the needs assessments. If high schools are to serve as engines of economic development and social integration for their communities, it is essential to know what the community values and to provide them with an authentic means to participate in setting the vision for the redesign of their high school. This likely will involve community forums of one type or another. One approach that could work is to build off the idea of a design charrette which is a formal process for community input, typically used more for building design, but that can be extended to high school design.

Follow the evidence to provide a solid foundation for local innovation and customization

As highlighted in the prior section, and the appendix, we have learned much in the past 25 years about how to reform high schools and the evidence base continues to grow at an accelerating rate. ESSA requires schools in need of comprehensive improvement to use evidence-based strategies and practices to meet identified needs. Thus, high schools engaged in redesign, should use the evidence base to build a solid foundation upon which they can innovate and customize.

Using the evidence base to establish effective core practices of school organization, teacher training, instructional practice, school climate, and addressing student needs in high poverty environments will enable redesigning high schools to build their innovations at the knowledge frontier, rather then expending energy to reinvent the wheel. It will also help them to avoid common missteps and focus their redesign efforts on customizing the reforms to meet the specific needs of their community. Seven states are currently partnering with the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, the Chief State School Officers, and Civic Enterprises to develop a common approach to using ESSA to support high school redesign for high schools in need of comprehensive improvement, as well as a shared set of tools to support it. Part of this work, involves organizing the evidence base for high school improvement for four areas that high schools have the ability to improve in and are essential to student success-organizing adults, student supports, teaching and learning and pathways to postsecondary success. As importantly, efforts are being made to translate the evidence base in ways that school and district leaders and staff find useful and can be digested in the limited time available to them, including videos and podcasts. These emerging efforts of the Cross-State ESSA High School Redesign Collaborative can be seen at the project's website at www.hsredesign.org.

Build and use networks to break down social isolation and inertia, develop capacity, and spread know-how

Many of the most successful whole school design, improvement, or transformation efforts leverage the power of networks to accelerate success and sustain impact. Examples range from a growing number of charter management networks, to New Visions partnerships with the New York City Department of Education, to the I-Zone and Achievement District in Memphis and Tennessee, to approaches used in Kentucky, North Carolina, and New Mexico for school improvement, and the Diplomas Now and the Talent Development Secondary improvement networks. The ability to connect schools facing similar challenges and undertaking similar reforms helps break down the isolation that typically characterizes low-performing schools. They are often cut off by reputation, from some of the formal and informal learning networks in their districts, may be passed over by national networks looking for examples of success, and based on real or perceived lack of time, energy, and resources, do not seek out networks on their own. Well-functioning networks not only enable schools to learn from and share their learning with peers, but also provide network-wide supports, keep their schools abreast of recent developments in the field, and provide professional growth opportunities. They also help overcome inertia to reform by showing principals peers who are succeeding with their reforms and can play a key role in keeping reforms going in the event of shifts in school leadership by providing the new leaders with rapid opportunities to see the reforms working well in similar schools. Well-functioning networks also have the ability to respond quickly when schools struggle with implementation issues or face new challenges.

Existing evidence indicates that effective networks can operate with 20 to 60 schools (and in a few cases, up to 100). This is the right scale for existing state level challenges in the 19 states where the vast majority of low graduation rate high schools can be found and the norm is to have from 15 to 60 low-performing regular and vocational high schools with

300 or more students. Moreover, using a network approach makes redesigning 800 high schools a less daunting effort to imagine. Twenty networks of forty schools or forty networks of twenty schools, or many combinations in between would meet the demand. In the ideal scenario, networks would be formed that brought schools from both the same state, and other states together. In the first case, this provides a shared reference point and common state conditions and in the other case, fresh perspective. The data analysis conducted for this report shows, there are natural state pairings, which share common sets of challenges in terms of the size, composition, and locale of their low-performing high schools.

Over the past decade, a growing understanding has emerged on how to manage and maintain effective improvement networks, as well as a growing number of tools and models. For example, Carnegie Endowment's Networked Improvement Communities approach has been shown to be an effective model.

Pair each network with a technical assistance provider aligned with the school's needs and community redesign vision

School improvement literature demonstrates that it is very hard for a low-performing high school that serves a high needs population to reform and maintain its improvement on its own. There is just too much churn of the adults in the building and too much on-going stress and scarcity to create the conditions under which significant school redesign can happen and be maintained. For this reason, it will be essential to not only create networks for the high schools redesigning themselves to succeed in the 21st century, but to pair those networks with experienced technical assistance providers who can provide the schools with in-school support and guidance as they work to implement and institutionalize their new designs.

The technical assistance provider selected, moreover, needs to be one that is aligned with and has experience implementing the designs that meet the schools needs and their community's redesign vision. For example, if a community indicates the desire for career academies so that all students obtain core college prep skills but also participate in a career pathway which provides multiple means to adult success through apprenticeship and postsecondary certification programs, then it will be essential that this school is in a network with a technical assistance provider who has experience helping schools establish successful school-wide career academies. As a result, a range of technical assistance providers will be needed, including state- and city-based networks, non-profit networks like New Visions, Knowledge Works, Jobs for the Future, Southern Regional Education Board, Diplomas Now/Talent Development Secondary, AIR, WestEd and existing more thematic networks like Deeper Learning and By All Means, which might be partnered with additional supplemental technical assistance providers for aspects of school improvement they do not cover.

Use a common set of on-track-to-success indicators for improvement metrics

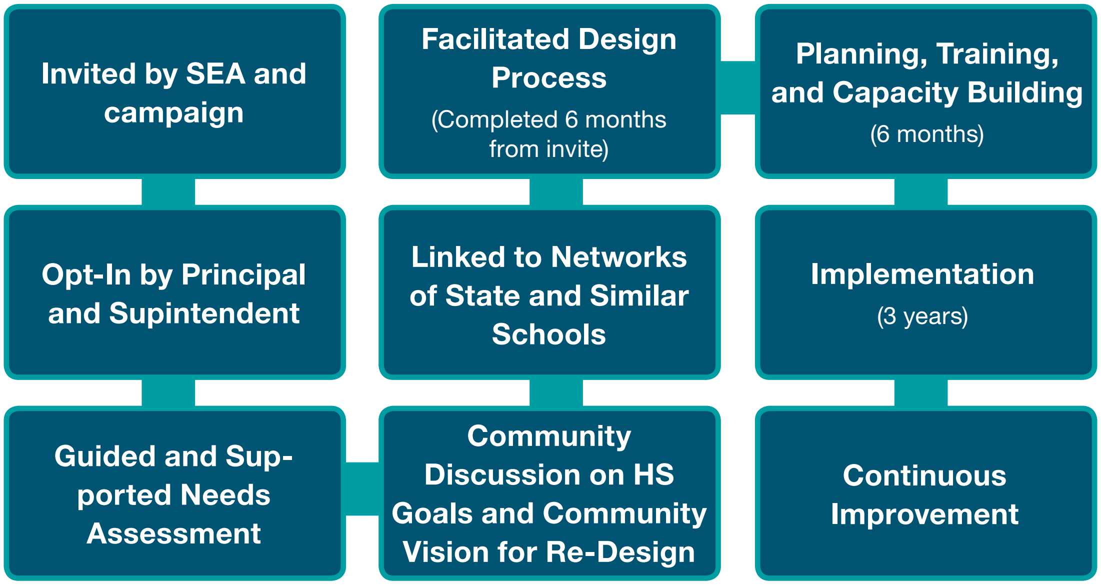
Under ESSA each state will have its own accountability system with an aligned set of metrics that the redesigning high schools will need to meet. In addition, it will be important to have a common set of on-track to success indicators across all participating schools. This will enable rapid response when a school is not on pace to improvement and will facilitate cross-network learning by identifying what is working where. Below are a series of potential on-track to success metrics that could be used in common. They are centered on some of the key drivers and indicators of student and school success.

- **ABCs:** The ABCs – attendance, behavior and effort, and course performance – are the key research-based indicators of staying on track to high school graduation and collage and career readiness. Students need to attend school and class regularly, focus, and do well in their courses to graduate high school college and career ready. Outcomes on these measures are shaped by student and adult behaviors and can be continually monitored to trigger rapid responses and analyzed to support more effective actions.

- **Quality of Coursework:** Being able to produce quality coursework in response to challenging assignments is a key driver and marker of college readiness. This can be tracked through coursework audits like those pioneered by Ed Trust-West.
- **Quality of Relationships:** Motivation, effort, commitment, and perseverance are all shaped by interpersonal relations and trust. In high poverty environments, positive adult-student and adult-adult relationships are needed as an antidote to the stress and direct effects of poverty for students and teachers alike. This can be tracked through existing survey instruments like the Chicago 5 Essentials and Tripod.
- **Equity of Access and Participation in Postsecondary Success Experiences:** It is becoming increasingly clear, the key social-emotional skills which help drive postsecondary success are developed in adolescents more through shaped experiences than direct instruction. Access to these shaped experiences is this essential to the success of all students, and too often, in the extra-curricular space where they occur, equity efforts fall short. Spots are reserved for students who are viewed as “good kids” or the most prepared or claimed by those with the strongest family supports or social capital. Participation in extra-curriculars and other shaped experiences is relatively easy to track and analyze at the school level.
- **Extent of authentic participation by adults, students, and the community in the high school redesign, implementation and continuous improvement efforts:** A sense of collective efficacy and authentic participation in improvement efforts is essential for their depth of implementation and sustainability. It is all too common for reform efforts and innovative features to live only as long as their one or two champions remain in the school. Widespread involvement and commitment is thus central to long-term success. Both the extent of participation and the sense of collective efficacy can be monitored through existing survey instruments.

Have a common launch and implementation process

Providing some common structures and processes will help establish a sense of a movement or campaign, enable cross-site learnings, and facilitate progress monitoring and project management. The following chart shows how the various steps could flow together across all the participating schools, districts, and states.


Invited by SEA and campaign
Opt-In by Principal and Supintendent
Guided and Supported Needs Assessment
Community Discussion on HS Goals and Community Vision for Re-Design
Linked to Networks of State and Similar Schools
Facilitated Design Process
(Completed 6 months from invite)
Planning, Training, and Capacity Building
(6 months)
Implementation
(3 years)
Continuous Improvement

Fund core school-level improvement work with ESSA School Improvement Funds

School redesign requires resources. The effort to design high schools to promote adult success in the economically- and socially-isolated locales that time has left behind will require public and private, as well as local and national, efforts to obtain the resources needed. On the federal side, ESSA provides these resources. Seven percent of Title I Funding has been set aside to support the schools in need of comprehensive and targeted reforms. These funds can support the school-based planning, training, technical assistance, and implementation costs of the school redesign. To help support the redesigned high schools to be engines of economic development and social integration for their communities, states and districts can help the schools access federal Perkins funding, which supports career and technical education. Communities can also work with mayors and governors to access available federal workforce development and retraining funds.

To provide the additional student supports that will be needed, local businesses and philanthropies can step forward to support non-profit youth service providers during and after school. Local business can also work with these high school and community colleges to build pathways to careers with growing employment prospects and provide internships, job shadowing experiences, and summer jobs linked to them. To help sustain the reforms, states, districts, and schools can work together to promote the use of social impact bonds and pay for success opportunities. National philanthropy can support the network, organizational, training, state, and district capacity building, mobilization efforts, communications, and knowledge sharing, as well as capture costs of the cross-state effort.

Provide campaign-wide supports

For this effort to succeed it will need a central hub that supports the cross-state effort and campaign to design 21st century high schools in economically- and socially-isolated communities. The hub has two critical roles to play.

First, it must be a driver and coordinator of the school redesign work. It needs to be a design center for the most difficult challenges and disseminate existing know-how about school design and evidence-based practices for high school. It needs to work with states to establish and define the common processes they will use and help them vet and recruit the technical assistance providers who will support each network. It needs to serve as the overall progress monitor, by collecting, analyzing, and reporting on the common on-track-to-success metrics all the schools will be using. Finally, it needs to capture and share all the learning, successes, and challenges the schools involved in the effort are having.

A second core function is building the larger campaign around the effort. This includes: connecting with governors and mayors to gain their support and insights; helping to recruit and enable the participation of national non-profits to provide a continuum of care to the high-needs students in the schools; working to establish the policies and underlying supports like social impact bonds and pay for success that will help sustain the redesign efforts; linking the high school redesign to other related and supportive efforts, from commissions on social and emotional skills to campaigns to support out-of-school youth, to efforts to spread early warning and intervention systems.

Conclusion

The need and urgency are clear. Without hope for a clear pathway from adolescence to adult success, portions of our nation are dying. The opportunity and ability to do something about this are here. The work that remains is to organize a means to enable the communities that find themselves economically- and socially-isolated from modern America to redesign their high schools to become engines of progress in the 21st century. As a nation, we have done this before with the advent of the comprehensive high school in the first third of the 20th century. Now we need to build the 21st century analog.

As a nation, we have also shown that we can have remarkable social progress in relatively short periods of time. In just a decade, we raised the nation’s high school graduation rate by over ten points – and in doing so turned close to three million students from dropouts to graduates. It is time to finish that job, and more importantly, provide all students with a clear and supported pathway to adult success. To do that, we must work together to design high schools that provide those paths in economically- and socially-isolated locales. It won’t be easy and mistakes will be made, but the time to start is now.

Section IV: Appendices

Appendix 1: Limitations of the Data

Each of the data sets used to generate a national picture has their own limitations. Solely using ACGR data to identify low-graduation-rate high schools will miss high schools in which larger numbers of students fall off track to high school graduation in the 9th grade but then transfer to other schools. In this case, the high school that may be the genesis of the problem can end up with an ACGR rate above 67 percent.

Thus, ACGR data likely produces an undercount of regular high schools in California, Texas, Arizona, Washington, South Carolina, Florida, and potentially Ohio and Michigan, that are arguably in need of reform because it misses high schools with a graduation rate above 67 percent that have succeeded in transferring their struggling students to other schools. All of these states have large alternative or virtual school sectors. Promoting power picks up many of these schools but some will fall outside ESSA parameters.

The ACGR data on schools that produce the greatest number of four-year non-graduates includes a number of schools just across the 67 percent threshold, as well as large high schools (with 2,000 or more students) with graduation rates in the low to mid-70s that lose a lot of students. They also fall outside of ESSA parameters, unless picked up by subgroup gap analysis.

Promoting power, on the other hand, will pick up many of these schools, but can miss schools in which larger numbers of students make it to the 12th grade, at least officially (i.e., they have passed based on their years of schooling, not credits earned), but do not receive their diplomas.

We chose not to include very small schools with enrollments between 100 and 299 in our main analysis because at this scale many of our measures are unstable from year to year. In a school enrolling 100 students (average of 25 students per grade), a shift of outcomes for just 5 students in a given year would dramatically change school-level results.

Appendix 2: What We've Learned from 25 Years of High School Improvement Efforts?

The Every Student Succeeds Act mandates that states identify and intervene with evidence- based strategies in their lowest performing schools – including those schools graduating 67 percent or less of their students – and to provide them with additional supports in their turnaround efforts. Turnaround strategies will now be driven by school districts, with states having the ability to monitor and intervene if the district strategy fails after a state-determined number of years (no more than four). The federal government, unlike under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race To The Top (RTTT), and School Improvement Grants (SIGs), has no direct role in proscribing school turnaround strategies and cannot intervene even if local and state strategies continuously fail. Given this continued focus on turning around schools that chronically struggle, including high schools that graduate less than two-thirds of their students in four years, the question is: what has been learned from the past 25 years of school turnaround?

Much has been learned about high school improvement, redesign and turnaround efforts that can guide a new effort to design high schools that educate high needs students in challenged communities and neighborhoods to succeed in the 21st century. We also recognize that the next era of reform will have to create an environment of continuously learning to analyze the success and challenges of various efforts in various settings. The following review briefly highlights some key elements and lessons learned.

The 1990s: The Advent of Whole School Reform Models and the Small Schools Movement

Modern efforts to redesign and improve the outcomes of high schools can be dated to the early 1990s, through the efforts of the Coalition of Essential Skills and the New American Schools corporation. The mid-1990s then saw the emergence of some state-led efforts to use the threat of reconstitution to spur local reform action in low-performing high schools, as well as whole school reform models developed by university research and development centers and non-profits specifically for high schools. These efforts include the Talent Development High School model, developed at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University, America's Choice developed by the National Center on Education and the Economy, First Things First by Jim Connell and the Institute for Research and Reform in Education, and the High Schools that Work effort organized by the Southern Regional Conference Board. Career Academies were further developed and promoted in this era by the Career Academy Network located at UC Berkley. The close of the decade saw the emergence of the efforts to create new and smaller high schools led by Deborah Meier. It also saw the launch of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Project, a federal program to support the spread of whole school improvement models.

These early efforts demonstrated that to improve low-performing high schools, the reforms needed to be comprehensive, not piecemeal or narrowly focused. To change outcomes, schools and districts had to change learning and teaching environments, school organization, teacher and student schedules, school climate, student motivations, and classroom instruction. The leaders of the whole school reform models also learned that such significant changes typically required a substantial (often year long) buy-in, planning and participation process by teachers and school leaders. In short, whole school improvement required considerable changes in adult behavior and ultimately beliefs. To succeed, investments also had to be made in creating the conditions under which the adults in the school choose and embraced the change. Moreover, the whole school reform models also demonstrated the power of technical assistance and on-site implementation support to help schools navigate the complexities of significant and integrated reforms.

The comprehensive reform models, as well as the initial small school creation efforts, finally demonstrated the power of enabling students to feel welcome, wanted and known in high school, to exercise some choice over their course of study, and to have their instruction highlight the relevance of what they were learning to their future. First ever national samples of high school dropouts also demonstrated that the lack of these elements were the very reasons they cited for disconnecting from school and eventually dropping out, as well as a lack of connections to caring adults, who knew their names or their interests. In short, schools that embraced their dropout challenge and the need to create cultures where "every student counts" confronted the anonymity, apathy, and absence with rigor, relevance, and relationships.

2000-2010: Small Learning Communities, District-Led Reform, and the Spread of the Small Schools Movement

The initial high school improvement efforts of the mid- to late-1990s that were confined to a small set of schools in pioneering states and districts were modified and scaled considerably during the 2000s. This was an era of district-led reform efforts in which districts took on the task of reforming or replacing multiple low-performing high schools at once. These efforts were spurred on and supported by two new funding sources. The first was federal Smaller Learning Communities grants that were designed to support district-led efforts to re-design and improve low-performing high schools that had 1,000 or more students by creating small learning communities within them. The second was the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's effort to support the spread of new or redesigned small high schools through district-wide efforts.

District-wide high school reform efforts added to the emerging set of evidence-based strategies, and of these, four stand out:

- First, the importance of providing teachers with professional learning communities (PLCs) and peer-based means of continually improving their craft through instructional coaching, lesson study, job-embedded professional development, and other means to ground professional development and growth tightly to the realities of a teacher's classroom.
- Second, providing a range of evidence-based means to accelerate learning among students who enter 9th grade multiple grade levels behind. No one approach emerged as the best path forward, as different strategies came with their own set of strengths and weaknesses, but broadly speaking, the importance of being able to adjust the amount and modality of instruction for students with behind grade level skills, while holding them to the same high outcome standards as other students was established.
- Third, the importance of rigor. Challenging coursework with appropriate supports and scaffolds not only provided all students with a pathway to postsecondary success but also increased student engagement. The success of early colleges, as well as district-wide efforts like those in New York City to combine a new small school strategy with an increase in standards (as a Regent diploma became required for all), demonstrated that intellectual challenge did not turn students off, but rather, along with relationships and relevance became a key engine of increased participation. Student surveys supported this proposition – even high school dropouts cited that they longed for more challenging, engaging work and felt bored in school without such rigor.
- Finally, district-wide high school reform efforts highlighted the importance of more positive and restorative approaches to student discipline, especially when juxtaposed with the negative consequence and inequities of zero tolerance approaches.

NCLB to RTTT: Federally-Driven School Turnaround

Federal legislation in the early part of the 21st century, targeted at making dramatic improvements to the lowest performing schools, engendered more widespread and systematic efforts to turnaround low-graduation-rate high schools. The 2001 renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), more commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), required states to identify consistently low-performing schools and schools where certain student subgroups did not meet annual performance targets. Schools that failed to improve after four years were then compelled to implement a restructuring plan, choosing from one of the following options:

1. Turn school operations over to the state;
2. Turn school operations over to a private operator;
3. Reopen as a charter school;
4. Reconstitute the school by replacing some or all of the teachers, staff, and administrators; or
5. "Any other" fundamental school restructuring.

NCLB also mandated that states and districts create "state systems of support" that were to include school support teams, distinguished principals and teachers, and other experts to guide schools through the restructuring and improvement process. Though all states reported creating these support systems, a lack of resources hindered their full implementation in most places. NCLB required schools, districts, and states to set high school graduation rate goals and be accountable over time for meeting them. Data was required to be disaggregated and reported by student subgroups so that achievement and graduation rate gaps could be seen and addressed. Significant progress was made in boosting achievement and graduation rates, particularly among subgroups that had historically struggled the most. Yet, serious gaps remain and many of the remaining high school dropouts remain trapped in the low-performing schools that continue to exist.

To address the remaining low-performing schools, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 directed considerable funding toward educational reform and school turnaround. The Race to the Top (RTTT) fund distributed $4.35 billion in competitive grants to states and made school turnaround a key point of focus. School Improvement Grants (SIGs) allocated $3.55 billion to states according to a Title I formula, with funds being granted out by the state to districts through a competitive process. The guidelines for RTTT and SIG both prioritized four models for school turnaround:

1. School closure;
2. Restart;
3. Turnaround; or
4. Transformation.

Similar to restructuring options under NCLB, restart compels schools to close and turn over their operations to a charter or education management organization, while turnaround forces schools to replace the principal and at least half the staff. The turnaround model under RTTT and SIGs also required a low-performing school to expand learning time, develop new governance structures, use data to guide instruction, implement new types of professional development, and provide wraparound services. Similarly, schools choosing the transformation option were required to adopt these practices, but only had to replace the principal. Under the Obama Administration's ESEA waiver package, states could also choose to follow a set of school improvement principles designed at the state level.

This era also witnessed the growth of turnaround literature, which worked to synthesis both the challenge of, and the best practices for, school turnaround. Key works include Mass Insights Turnaround Challenge, the IES Practice Guide on School Turnaround, and the writing of Public Impact and the federal School Turnaround Center.

The Learnings and Limitations of Federal School Turnaround Efforts

The legacy of the federal school turnaround efforts is complex. In disentangling it, it is important to separate out what has been learned through formal federal program evaluation and what can teased out through other data. At the federal program evaluation level, the results have not been strong – ranging from mixed to weak depending on the specific set of schools and reforms being examined. When the full body of research on the turnaround efforts, however, is examined, including strong work done in some states like North Carolina, Kentucky, Massachusetts, California, and New Mexico which extended and enriched the federal frameworks, some key learnings emerge.

- **Leadership matters but in specific ways.** Having an effective leader to guide school turnaround is critical to creating a climate and culture that can foster all other pieces of school improvement successfully. Strong leadership helps to set the direction of the school and signals the need for dramatic change (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008). "Turnaround principals" – those brought in to lead school improvement efforts – and existing principals who have lead successful turnarounds tend to have specific qualities, including having a clear purpose and setting clear expectations, being goal-oriented and data-driven, and being able to motivate teachers and staff to make necessary changes.
- **Improve instruction and access to rigorous coursework.** Schools that focused on improving instruction by using data to identify gaps in student learning, setting learning goals, and targeting specific areas of weakness were found to have greater success in raising achievement levels (Herman et al., 2008). It is also clear that setting the bar higher for students has helped in boosting outcomes. Since the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report, there has been a determined movement across the nation to ensure students leave high college and career ready by taking the right courses. Today, a growing body of research indicates that taking rigorous high school coursework increases the chances of a student graduating from high

school and is the factor most associated with students enrolling in and completing college (Adelman, 2006; Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012). In addition, offering students the opportunity to obtain college credit while still in high school or gain career experience has been proven to improve student achievement and high school graduation rates, as well as to increase postsecondary enrollment and persistence.[16]

- **Data-driven improvement and supports are key.** Data has become an integral part of school improvement, particularly in giving educators a tool to better identify students who are falling off track to graduation. The use of student-centric data through Early Warning Systems (EWS) has been one of the most effective reforms in combating the dropout crises. EWS use indicators including attendance, in-school behavior, and course performance to identify at-risk students in need of intervention or added support. One study demonstrated that indicators reflecting poor attendance, misbehavior, and course failures in 6th grade could be used to identify 60 percent of the students who will not graduate from high school (Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz, 2011). In addition, the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research found that course performance in 9th grade was the strongest predictor of student graduation, while freshman-year absences were also a powerful predictor of graduation and the strongest predictor of student course performance (Allensworth & Eaton, 2007). Realizing the power of intervening early to prevent students from dropping out, a 2008 practice guide by the Institute of Education Statistics recommended that ABC data be used by educators to prevent students from dropping out school (Dynarski, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger, & Smink, 2008). To that end, a growing number of schools throughout the country began implementing Early Warning Systems and in the 2014-15 school year, 52 percent of high schools across the country had an EWS in place (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).
- **The Right Technical Assistance can make a big difference.** All of the school reform models that have evidence of effectiveness provide extensive technical assistance to partnering schools. States that had high levels of success like Kentucky and North Carolina built on-site and continuous technical assistance into their reform strategies. Most of the case studies from Massachusetts and the federal turnaround center make not of critical roles played by the strategic use of external technical assistance. All of this speaks to the complexity of the comprehensive reforms required to achieve significant improvements in low performing high school, and how school can benefit from the additional capacity and know how the right technical assistance can bring.
- **Being Part of a Network of Schools is Important.** There are few examples of high schools that had successful turnaround that were not a part of network of schools. New Mexico, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and North Carolina all created cohorts of reforming schools that were networked together to create learning and support communities. All of the school reform models with evidence of impact networked their partner schools. This would seem to indicate that it is difficult to reform alone, and a being part of an improvement community is an essential differentiator between schools that improved and those that did not.

---

[16] See Karp et al., *The Postsecondary Achievement of Participants in Dual Enrollment: An Analysis of Student Outcomes in Two States* (St. Paul, MN: University of MN, 2007); Michael C Morrison, *The Benefits of Acceleration: Graduation Advantages* (North Iowa Area Community College, 2008); Brian P. An, "The Impact of Dual Enrollment on College Degree Attainment: Do Low-SES Students Benefit?" *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 35, 1 (March 2013): 57-75; Andrea Berger et al., *Early College, Early Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study* (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, September 2013).

What we have learned about the outcomes we need from redesigned high schools

The prior years of high school reform have help establish the specific competencies high school students need to graduate on time, prepared for the college or career pathway of their choice. It will be crucial that the next era of high school improvement employs evidence-based approaches to achieve the following:

- Ensuring students acquire knowledge and skills benchmarked to college and career readiness standards;
- Developing students' learning and self-management skills, which enables them to complete the class assignments and tests necessary to pass their courses and accrue credits, but ultimately, allows them to become a self-regulated learner;
- Developing students social and emotional skills, including persistence, motivation, and self-belief;
- Ensuring students understand the importance of attending school – and later college classes and work – on a regular basis and have an understanding of the quality and intensity of work required for success in postsecondary schooling or training;
- Particularly for students in high-poverty environments, providing students with positive developmental and supportive relationships with adults in the school, as well as the opportunities and supports to overcome the barriers to attending school regularly and succeeding in school.

Additionally, schools need to make sure that the adults – administrators, teachers, and staff, alike – in the building have the know-how to help students in these schools succeed. What we have learned over the past 25 years informs us that this includes, but is not limited to:

- Creating a welcoming, supportive, and participatory school climate and culture for students and staff, as well as parents, to build relational trust in all directions;
- Having a deep content knowledge and mastery of the craft of teaching;
- The ability to teach effectively and customize pedagogies (e.g., universal design) in classes with mixed levels of prior preparation, motivation, and learning challenges;
- Knowing how to keep improving their craft and ability to support students (including students who live in poverty and have experienced trauma), developing cultural competencies, and having access to the opportunities and supports to do so;
- Learning how to balance being perceived as demanding and caring in their expectations and interactions with students;
- Understanding how living in poverty can cause students to "act out" and developing the required trauma-informed competencies to skillfully respond;
- Knowing how to work effectively in collaborative teams – vertical and horizontal – and work collectively at both the grade-level and school-level to create a consistent environment for students in terms of academic and behavioral expectations;
- Knowing how to use formative and summative assessments to maximize student learning, rather than sorting students by "accomplishments";
- Using data, individually and collaboratively, to drive continuous improvement;
- Working collaboratively to promote good attendance among all students every day, monitoring and reacting quickly to chronic absenteeism, and at an individual level, serving as a mentor to chronically absent students or those trending towards it;
- Using and participating in early warning intervention systems, and recruiting and integrating community and non-profit partners as needed to ensure an appropriate response to the scale and intensity of students need;
- Being able to create discipline and credit recovery policies and strategies that enable earned recovery as the primary response rather than punishment or leniency.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our lead sponsor, Emerson Collective, for their leadership, creative initiatives, and support of this important work to focus the nation's attention on the country's remaining low-performing schools and to help states and districts improve them. In particular, we would like to thank Laurene Powell Jobs, Arne Duncan, Anne Marie Burgoyne, Carmel Martin, Russlynn Ali, and Beth Schmidt for their commitment to this work and to educational equity. We are also grateful for the contributions of Jamie Fasteau at EdCounsel.

We also would like to thank our longstanding partner, AT&T and the AT&T Aspire initiative, for their leadership and support over many years to awaken the nation to its high school dropout challenge and to help mobilize the country to increase high school graduation rates and college and workforce readiness through the Grad Nation campaign and other efforts across the United States. We would like to give special thanks to Charlene Lake, Nicole Anderson, Kelem Butts, Cathy Friese, and Jessica Abensour, with whom we have worked closely over many years.

A special thanks to our GradNation co-convening organizations: John Gomperts and his team at America's Promise Alliance and Bob Wise and his team at the Alliance for Excellent Education, as well as all of the partner organizations of GradNation. In particular, we express sincere gratitude for the America's Promise Alliance Trustees, without whom the GradNation Campaign would not be possible.

We also want to thank members of our teams for their significant contributions: Vaughan Byrnes and Amanda Martorana of the Everyone Graduates Center; and Bruce Reed, Erin Ingram, and Fallon Bridgeland of Civic Enterprises.

Finally, we would like to thank the many respondents from the schools, districts, and states across the country, who contributed their wisdom and expertise to help us shape particular sections of this report.

References

Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Allensworth, E.M. & Eaton, J.Q. (2007). *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in the Chicago Public Schools.* Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

Balfanz, R., DePaoli, J., Ingram, E.S., Bridgeland, J.M., Fox, J. (2016). *Closing the college gap: A roadmap to postsecondary readiness and attainment.* Civic Enterprises and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved from http://civicenterprises.net/

Bowen, W.G., Chingos, M.M., & McPherson, M.S. (2011). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at America's public universities.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bruce, M., Bridgeland, J.M., Fox, J.H., & Balfanz, R. (2011). *On track for success: The use of early warning indicator and intervention systems to build a Grad Nation.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.

Byrk, A.S., Sebring, P.B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J.Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (In press). Malleability, Plasticity, and Individuality: How Children Learn and Develop in Context. *Applied Developmental Science.*

Carnevale, T., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2013). *Recovery: Job growth and education requirements through 2020.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020/

Center for Promise. (2014). *Don't call them dropouts: Understanding the experiences of young people who leave high school before graduation.* Washington, DC: America's Promise Alliance. Retrieved from www.americaspromise.org.

Civic Enterprises & The Everyone Graduates Center. (2016). *Building a Grad Nation: Data brief.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.

Corrin, W., Sepanik, S., Gray, A., Fernandez, F., Briggs, A., Wang, K.K. (2014). *Laying tracks to graduation: The first year of implementing Diplomas Now.* New York: MDRC. Retrieved from www.mdrc.org.

DePaoli, J.L., Balfanz, R., Bridgeland, J., Atwell, M., & Ingram, E.S. (2017). *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and challenge in raising high school graduation rates.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises and The Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved from www.civicenterprises.net.

DePaoli, J.L., Balfanz, R., & Bridgeland, J. (2016). *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and challenge in raising high school graduation rates.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises and The Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved from www.civicenterprises.net.

DePaoli, J.L., Fox, J.H., Ingram, E.S., Maushard, M., Bridgeland, J., & Balfanz, R. (2015). *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and challenge in raising high school graduation rates.* Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises and The Everyone Graduates Center at the School of Education at Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved from www.civicenterprises.net.

Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., & Smink, J. (2008). *Dropout prevention: A practice guide.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

Goldin, C. (2016). Human capital. In C. Diebolt & M. Haupert (Eds.), *Handbook of Cliometrics* (55-86). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer Verlag.

Herman, R., Dawson,P., Dee, T., Greene, J., Maynard, R., Redding, S., & Darwin, M. (2008). *Turning around chronically low-performing schools: A practice guide.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Science, US Department of Education. Retrieved April 5, 2017 from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/7

Jones, S. & Kahn, J. (2017). *The evidence base for how we learn: Supporting students' social, emotional and academic development.* Retrieved from The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development at The Aspen Institute: https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/evidence-base-learn/

Lau , E., and Ingels, S.J. (2013). Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002): A First Look at 2002 High School Sophomores 10 Years Later (NCES 2014-363). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved [date] from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch

LiCalsi, C., Citkowicz, M., Friedman, L.B., & Brown, M. (2015). *Evaluation of Massachusetts Office of District and School Turnaround Assistance to Commissioner's Districts and Schools.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from www.air.org.

Long, M.C., Conger, D., & Iatarola, P. (2012). Effects of high school course-taking on secondary and postsecondary success. *American Educational Research Journal, 49*(2), 285-322.

Mac Iver, M.A. & Messel, M. (2012). *Predicting high school outcomes in the Baltimore City Public Schools.* Washington, DC: The Council of Great City Schools.

Moore, K.A., Lantos, H., Jones, R.M., Schindler, A., Belford, J., Sacks, V., & Harper, K. (2017). *Making the grade: A progress report and next steps for integrated student supports.* Bethesda, MD: Child Trends. Retrieved from www.childtrends.org.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). Course credit requirements and exit exam requirements for a standard high school diploma and the use of other high school completion credentials, by state: 2013. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_234.30.asp

National Research Council. (2005). *How students learn: History, mathematics, and science in the classroom.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (In press). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science.*

Perry, B.L. & Morris, E.W. (2014). Suspending progress: Collateral consequences of exclusionary punishment in public schools. *American Sociological Review (79)*6, 1067-1087.

Sepanik, S., Corrin, W., Roy, D., Gray, A., Fernandez, F., Briggs, A., & Wang, K.K. (2015). *Moving down the track: Changing school practices during the second year of Diplomas Now.* New York: MDRC. Retrieved from www.mdrc.org.

U.S. Department of Education. (2017). EDFacts/Consolidated state performance report, 2015-16. Retrieved from https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/

U.S. Department of Education (2016). *Issue Brief: Early Warning Systems.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development.

Appendix A: High Schools in Need of Redesign, by State and Type

	Reg. & Voc. HS Schools with 300+ Students				Reg. & Voc. HS Schools with 300+ Students and Weak Promoting Power			
State	Total Number of Schools	Number of Schools with ACGR<=67%	% of Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Enrollment in Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Number of Schools	Number of Schools with ACGR>67% but PP<=60% (2015 and 3 year average)	% of Schools with ACGR>67% but PP<=60% (2015 and 3 year average)	Total Enrollment in Schools with ACGR>67% but PP<=60% (2015 and 3 year average)
AL	328	4	1.2%	3040	328	8	2.4%	8397
AK	38	2	5.3%	1513	38	3	7.9%	969
AZ	246	33	13.4%	25019	246	10	4.1%	8458
AR	167	4	2.4%	3798	167	1	0.6%	916
CA	1192	83	7.0%	80858	1192	57	4.8%	70091
CO	222	24	10.8%	22906	222	14	6.3%	11114
CT	169	4	2.4%	3889	169	3	1.8%	2041
DE	35	2	5.7%	1867	35	1	2.9%	702
FL	494	24	4.9%	23335	494	20	4.0%	23037
GA	393	34	8.7%	52226	393	42	10.7%	45677
HI	49	5	10.2%	3097	49	4	8.2%	4981
ID	91	5	5.5%	4047				
IL	455	35	7.7%	34376	455	15	3.3%	18863
IN	349	18	5.2%	18114	349	1	0.3%	635
IA	150	2	1.3%	957				
KS	130	7	5.4%	8900	130	1	0.8%	820
KY	214	2	0.9%	1719	214	3	1.4%	3835
ME					72	1	1.4%	553
MD	207	18	8.7%	13620	207	12	5.8%	11153
MA	322	22	6.8%	17955	322	4	1.2%	1841
MI	511	22	4.3%	15673	511	27	5.3%	26158
MN	247	9	3.6%	6867	247	1	0.4%	361
MS	208	17	8.2%	13567	208	1	0.5%	1034
MO	260	10	3.8%	7749	260	4	1.5%	3613
MT	35	1	2.9%	511	35	1	2.9%	337
NE	63	1	1.6%	1741				
NV	79	16	20.3%	27334	79	1	1.3%	486
NH	61	2	3.3%	1406	61	2	3.3%	2284
NJ	373	10	2.7%	7295	373	6	1.6%	6828
NM	86	34	39.5%	28207	86	8	9.3%	9920
NY	985	169	17.2%	124025	985	41	4.2%	29588
NC	410	2	0.5%	883	410	14	3.4%	11850
ND	18	1	5.6%	511				
OH	626	79	12.6%	83421	626	60	9.6%	36103
OK	165	14	8.5%	12194	165	3	1.8%	2569
OR	160	25	15.6%	20745	160	1	0.6%	486
PA	607	37	6.1%	50518	607	11	1.8%	8722
RI	44	2	4.5%	2424	44	1	2.3%	1087
SC	199	11	5.5%	14086	199	18	9.0%	14762
SD	26	1	3.8%	408	26	1	3.8%	1893
TN	308	13	4.2%	8721	308	5	1.6%	5445
TX	928	4	0.4%	3189	928	46	5.0%	69748
UT	117	8	6.8%	7681	117	2	1.7%	3069
VT								
VA	295	4	1.4%	3196	295	3	1.0%	3670
WA	253	14	5.5%	6284	253	2	0.8%	1898
WV					106	3	2.8%	2339
WI	270	17	6.3%	15534	270	1	0.4%	1026
WY	23	1	4.3%	351				
US	12857	863	6.7%	791394	12857	466	3.6%	460566

Appendix A: High Schools in Need of Redesign, by State and Type *(continued)*

	Reg. & Voc. HS Schools with 100-299 Students				Alternative HS Schools with 100+ Students			
State	Total Number of Schools	Number of Schools with ACGR<=67%	% of Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Enrollment in Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Number of Schools	Number of Schools with ACGR<=67%	% of Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Enrollment in Schools with ACGR<=67%
AL								
AK	68	14	20.6%	2637	17	16	94.1%	6258
AZ	122	68	55.7%	10990	9	9	100.0%	1988
AR	96	4	4.2%	555	2	2	100.0%	344
CA	169	45	26.6%	8007	347	47	13.5%	10037
CO	98	19	19.4%	3574	52	48	92.3%	13136
CT	19	4	21.1%	704	4	2	50.0%	401
DE	2	1	50.0%	208				
FL	53	17	32.1%	3148	109	106	97.2%	30915
GA	30	14	46.7%	2837	10	10	100.0%	2480
HI	8	3	37.5%	524				
ID	55	4	7.3%	599				
IL	183	13	7.1%	2635				
IN	42	15	35.7%	3175				
IA	163	1	0.6%	229	7	7	100.0%	1839
KS	155	7	4.5%	1134				
KY					15	11	73.3%	2365
ME	41	1	2.4%	256				
MD	6	2	33.3%	399	9	7	77.8%	1978
MA	25	13	52.0%	2179	7	3	42.9%	480
MI	145	24	16.6%	4279	115	96	83.5%	19624
MN	153	22	14.4%	3756	28	27	96.4%	4719
MS	39	5	12.8%	1225				
MO	204	6	2.9%	1015				
MT	45	5	11.1%	788				
NE	135	2	1.5%	256				
NV	26	4	15.4%	645	10	10	100.0%	1873
NH	21	1	4.8%	152				
NJ					1	1	100.0%	266
NM	62	25	40.3%	4931	16	13	81.3%	2215
NY	168	67	39.9%	13328	23	22	95.7%	5717
NC	100	4	4.0%	644	16	8	50.0%	1184
ND	63	6	9.5%	934				
OH	200	66	33.0%	11884				
OK	169	8	4.7%	1397				
OR	88	24	27.3%	4563	14	12	85.7%	2707
PA	66	14	21.2%	2295				
RI	7	2	28.6%	364				
SC					4	4	100.0%	925
SD	45	2	4.4%	254	3	3	100.0%	757
TN	30	8	26.7%	1528				
TX	406	3	0.7%	513	126	81	64.3%	17114
UT	23	3	13.0%	560	19	17	89.5%	4418
VT	18	1	5.6%	214				
VA	21	1	4.8%	192	4	4	100.0%	1107
WA	77	13	16.9%	2092	94	71	75.5%	16729
WV								
WI	163	7	4.3%	1130	16	11	68.8%	1832
WY	32	2	6.3%	281	3	3	100.0%	447
US	3944	572	14.5%	103477	1110	676	60.9%	158716

Appendix B: Schools Among Top 200 Most Non-Grads, by State

	Schools Among Top 200 Nationally of Most Non-Grads			
State	Number of Schools	Number of Schools not included in four preceding categories	% of Schools not included in four preceding categories	Total Enrollment in Schools not included in four preceding categories
AL				
AK				
AZ				
AR				
CA	16	1	6.3%	3367
CO				
CT	1	1	100.0%	2457
DE				
FL	31	3	9.7%	6068
GA	13	1	7.7%	3738
HI				
ID				
IL	10	5	50.0%	25382
IN	7	1	14.3%	3066
IA				
KS				
KY				
ME				
MD				
MA				
MI				
MN				
MS				
MO				
MT				
NE				
NV	10	2	20.0%	2902
NH				
NJ				
NM				
NY	35	9	25.7%	30746
NC				
ND				
OH				
OK				
OR	5	1	20.0%	3227
PA	10	2	20.0%	11712
RI				
SC				
SD				
TN				
TX	5	2	40.0%	6278
UT	5	1	20.0%	2929
VT				
VA	1	1	100.0%	3503
WA				
WV				
WI				
WY				
US	200	30	15.0%	105375

Appendix C: 18 States with High Concentrations of Low-Performing High Schools

	Reg. & Voc. HS Schools with 300+ Students				Reg. & Voc. HS Schools with 100-299 Students			
State	Total Number of Schools	Number of Schools with ACGR<=67%	% of Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Enrollment in Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Number of Schools	Number of Schools with ACGR<=67%	% of Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Enrollment in Schools with ACGR<=67%
AZ	246	33	13.4%	25019	122	68	55.7%	10990
CA	1192	83	7.0%	80858	169	45	26.6%	8007
CO	222	24	10.8%	22906	98	19	19.4%	3574
FL	494	24	4.9%	23335	53	17	32.1%	3148
GA	393	34	8.7%	52226	30	14	46.7%	2837
IL	455	35	7.7%	34376	183	13	7.1%	2635
IN	349	18	5.2%	18114	42	15	35.7%	3175
MD	207	18	8.7%	13620	6	2	33.3%	399
MA	322	22	6.8%	17955	25	13	52.0%	2179
MI	511	22	4.3%	15673	145	24	16.6%	4279
MS	208	17	8.2%	13567	39	5	12.8%	1225
NV	79	16	20.3%	27334	26	4	15.4%	645
NM	86	34	39.5%	28207	62	25	40.3%	4931
NY	985	169	17.2%	124025	168	67	39.9%	13328
OH	626	79	12.6%	83421	200	66	33.0%	11884
OR	160	25	15.6%	20745	88	24	27.3%	4563
PA	607	37	6.1%	50518	66	14	21.2%	2295
WI	270	17	6.3%	15534	163	7	4.3%	1130
18 States	7412	707	9.5%	667433	1685	442	26.2%	81224
US	12857	863	6.7%	791394	3944	572	14.5%	103477

Appendix C: 18 States with High Concentrations of Low-Performing High Schools *(continued)*

	Alternative HS Schools with 100+ Students				Reg. & Voc. HS Schools with 300+ Students and Weak Promoting Power			
State	Total Number of Schools	Number of Schools with ACGR<=67%	% of Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Enrollment in Schools with ACGR<=67%	Total Number of Schools	Number of Schools with ACGR>67% but PP<=60% (2015 and 3 year average)	% of Schools with ACGR>67% but PP<=60% (2015 and 3 year average)	Total Enrollment in Schools with ACGR>67% but PP<=60% (2015 and 3 year average)
AZ	9	9	100.0%	1988	246	10	4.1%	8458
CA	347	47	13.5%	10037	1192	57	4.8%	70091
CO	52	48	92.3%	13136	222	14	6.3%	11114
FL	109	106	97.2%	30915	494	20	4.0%	23037
GA	10	10	100.0%	2480	393	42	10.7%	45677
IL					455	15	3.3%	18863
IN					349	1	0.3%	635
MD	9	7	77.8%	1978	207	12	5.8%	11153
MA	7	3	42.9%	480	322	4	1.2%	1841
MI	115	96	83.5%	19624	511	27	5.3%	26158
MS					208	1	0.5%	1034
NV	10	10	100.0%	1873	79	1	1.3%	486
NM	16	13	81.3%	2215	86	8	9.3%	9920
NY	23	22	95.7%	5717	985	41	4.2%	29588
OH					626	60	9.6%	36103
OR	14	12	85.7%	2707	160	1	0.6%	486
PA					607	11	1.8%	8722
WI	16	11	68.8%	1832	270	1	0.4%	1026
18 States	737	394	53.5%	94982	7412	326	4.4%	304392
US	1110	676	60.9%	158716	12857	466	3.6%	460566

Appendix C: 18 States with High Concentrations of Low-Performing High Schools *(continued)*

	Schools Among Top 200 Nationally of Most Non-Grads			
State	Number of Schools	Number of Schools not included in four preceding categories	% of Schools not included in four preceding categories	Total Enrollment in Schools not included in four preceding categories
AZ				
CA	16	1	6.3%	3367
CO				
FL	31	3	9.7%	6068
GA	13	1	7.7%	3738
IL	10	5	50.0%	25382
IN	7	1	14.3%	3066
MD				
MA				
MI				
MS				
NV	10	2	20.0%	2902
NM				
NY	35	9	25.7%	30746
OH				
OR	5	1	20.0%	3227
PA	10	2	20.0%	11712
WI				
18 States				
US	200	30	15.0%	105375

AT&T

CIVIC
ENTERPRISES

EVERYONE
GRADUATES
CENTER