

# NORTHWEST EDUCATION

FALL 2004 / VOLUME 10. NUMBER 1.

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTHWEST REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY



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*Original photo courtesy of Explosion Illusion Photography*

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*Northwest Education* is available online in both PDF and HTML versions at [www.nwrel.org/nwedu](http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu). Look for Web exclusives, marked with 🚩.

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Statement of Purpose

*Northwest Education* aims to promote a regional dialogue and to elevate teaching and learning by giving readers the best information, ideas, and personal stories from practitioners, researchers, and other experts.

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# FORUM

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## Helping Native Students Succeed

I work with the Title VII Native program; my job consists of getting the Indian parents of our schools more involved in their child's education.

I can relate to what Miss Kara Briggs has been through ("Slipping Through the Cracks," spring 2004). I am an Apache Indian from the Southwest. Here in the urban area in which I live, there is so much stereotyping. Adults think all Native Americans are stupid, drunks, and uneducated. Our kids don't have a chance until the educators that teach our children are educated in our cultures. Our dropout rate here is at 70 percent. We have 78 tribes living in Wichita and, yes, they all have different traditions that they try to uphold.

American Indian families are seeking to improve educational opportunities for their children, including opportunities to study their own languages and traditions. With better education comes the hope of a better economic future. We can help improve our children's future—as well as ours—through mentoring and parenting that underscore the preservation of a way of life based on spirituality, sacredness, education, and social responsibility. Without children, a community would fail to thrive and it would die—a catastrophic thought and unimaginable in our cultural ways, (but) our children cannot survive and flourish without our help.

Anyway, I would just like to say thank you to Miss Kara Briggs for the article. I am so glad she made it and fulfilled her vision.

Michael Gallegos

*Wichita, Kansas*

Editor's note: Mr. Gallegos is interested in hearing from others involved in helping Native children; his e-mail address is [MGallegos@usd259.net](mailto:MGallegos@usd259.net).

## Promoting Attendance

(I'm) very happy to have found your Web site today ("Nets & Paddles," spring 2004). I am a former teacher who works in indigenous education. There are many similarities—invasion, colonialism, attempted genocide, government policies, contemporary student outcomes, land mass, indigenous populations struggling to survive in the "dominant culture," preservation of language—between your area and the Northern Territory.

My colleague and I are currently working on a project to address the poor attendance in many of the indigenous schools. Any strategies or ideas you could share with us, or directions in which you could point us, would be greatly appreciated.

Gabrielle Kennedy

*Policy Officer*

*Indigenous Education Division*

*Dept. of Employment, Education,*

*and Training*

*Darwin, Australia*

Editor's note: Ms. Kennedy welcomes readers' responses at [gabrielle.kennedy@nt.gov.au](mailto:gabrielle.kennedy@nt.gov.au). One useful resource on attendance is the May 2004 issue of NWREL's By Request series. *Increasing Student Attendance: Strategies From Research and Practice* provides examples of what schools are doing to combat absenteeism. The publication is available online at [www.nwrel.org/request/](http://www.nwrel.org/request/).

We want to hear from you! Send your letters to the editor, article ideas, and tips on places where good things are happening to [nwedufeedback@nwrel.org](mailto:nwedufeedback@nwrel.org). Letters may be edited for length or clarity.

## EDITOR'S NOTE



**We all have our memories of high school:** mine are stuck back in the late 1960s in a monstrously large urban school undergoing cataclysmic change. One of the oldest and biggest public secondary schools in Dade County, Miami Senior High drew a largely white, economically mixed student population

from the expensive high-rise condos on Biscayne Bay to the blue-collar neighborhoods on the fringes of downtown. While a small percentage of Miami High's "Stingarees" were headed for college, the majority would find their niche in the workforce, well-prepared by vocational courses offered at the school. What transcended social class and economic differences was devotion to the state-ranked football team and traditions that seemed as old as the Alhambra—the inspiration for the school's Moorish design.

Midway through my sophomore year, world politics flipped our world of pep rallies and Friday night dances upside down. A flood of refugees—some 3,600 a month—poured into Miami with the beginning of the Cuban airlift. Overnight, students who were strangers in a strange land filled the corridors, attending makeshift classes in hallways, custodial closets, and the auditorium. By the time I was a senior, almost 4,000 students jammed the school's three floors.

Today, Miami High's enrollment stands at more than 3,200 and its students are 90 percent Hispanic and 4 percent white. It earned a "D" grade in 2002 and 2003 from the Florida Department of Education based on statewide assessment tests. Though test scores are improving, only 42 percent of Miami High students scored at or above level three (on a five-point scale) in math, and just 20 percent reached that mark in reading. Graduation rates are a dismal 51 percent.

While Miami High's disappointing standings may be linked to unique circumstances, it's not an isolated case. In the 21 years since *A Nation at Risk* concluded that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a

rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people," we've struggled to make substantial strides in educational achievement, and have failed in high schools. As the National Association of Secondary School Principals points out in *Breaking Ranks II*, "With the exception of exit exams, high school policy has changed little over the last two decades, barely distinguishing high schools from other levels of schooling and continuing to track advantaged students into college and disadvantaged students into an uncertain future with few skills. As a result, although we've learned a great deal over the last couple of decades about reform in elementary schools, high school reform is still largely uncharted territory."

In this issue of *Northwest Education*, we explore some of the ways that our region is changing that territory: radically re-engineering large comprehensive high schools into smaller, more personalized academies and learning communities; encouraging all students—not just an elite few—to take Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses; tying curriculum to the world outside the classroom; using data to drive decisionmaking. It's not an easy journey. We hear the frustrations of administrators and the complaints of students. But, we also sense the exhilaration of being on the cutting edge of a movement seeking to change a model that's more than 100 years old.

It seems appropriate that in an issue centering on change, *Northwest Education* unveils some changes of its own. After nine years, we've adopted what we hope is a more reader-friendly design. You'll also find an array of new departments, including a "Research Brief" summarizing pertinent findings on our theme, some intriguing statistics in "Region at a Glance," and "Voices" that reflect what our different constituencies are thinking. Web exclusives at [www.nwrel.org/nwedu/](http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/) will allow us to bring you even more information and resources. We welcome your comments about these new features, as well as your reflections on "Transforming High School."

—Rhonda Barton, [bartonr@nwrel.org](mailto:bartonr@nwrel.org)

NORTHWEST EDUCATION **FEATURES**

# TRANSFORMING HIGH SCHOOL

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# FIVE PATHS TO SUCCESS

Throughout the region, high schools try different strategies to make learning more personal, relevant, and challenging.

**Picture 100 newly minted ninth-graders**, ready to embark on their high school career. Four years later, that same group will have noticeably shrunk: Only 67 will have completed high school and just 38 will enroll in higher education. The group snapshot contracts even further as the years roll by: Just 26 will return to classes after their freshman year and only 18 of our original 100 students will have completed a bachelor's degree within six years or an associate's degree within three years. Added to that, one of every three students going on to higher ed will take at least one remedial course in math, reading, or writing and the figure soars to three of every four new students in some urban community colleges.

Statistics like that—together with the pressures exerted by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, high-stakes testing, and the critical voices of business and higher education leaders—have combined to create a sort of “perfect storm” churning the waters of America’s high schools. The tide is so strong that it’s become increasingly difficult to ignore.

The five schools profiled in the following pages—small and large, urban and rural—are weathering the storm with a variety of approaches, from smaller learning communities to project-based learning, standards-based models, and distributed leadership. Some have more favorable socioeconomic profiles than others and not all strategies will work elsewhere. But, together they offer encouraging lessons for high schools striving to reach higher. —Rhonda Barton



18%

Estimated number of ninth-graders expected to complete higher education in a timely manner

# 1.

## WHEN BIG SEEMS SMALL

In Portland's suburbs, a large high school makes every student feel counted.

By Rhonda Barton

BEAVERTON, Oregon—If you're waiting for the bell to ring at Southridge High School, you'll wait forever: No shrill metallic sound signals the end of the class period or the close of the school day. Instead, kids take their cues from snatches of Broadway show tunes, the strains of a classical concerto, or a rock beat blasting out of the public address system. It's one small—but telling—sign that this suburban Portland high school marches to its own drummer.

Built in 1999, Southridge doesn't look like your grandmother's high school. A soaring glass atrium crowded with round lunch tables and festooned with banners and school spirit signs sits at the center of the sprawling complex. Four brightly colored wings radiate out of this thriving hub: Each is a self-contained "neighborhood" with fewer than 500 students and its own team of teachers, counselors, and other staff members. Freshmen are randomly assigned to the neighborhoods, which function as smaller learning communities and have their own identity and governance structure.

### MAKING IT PERSONAL

While the neighborhood serves as a student's home base for four years—the place where he takes language arts and social studies classes and is assigned to an advisory group—he'll travel all over the building for electives that fit neatly into seven career academies. As sophomores, students choose from one to three career academy "endorsements"—similar to college majors—to pursue in their junior and senior years. To earn the endorsements, students must take a set number of courses, fulfill a service learning requirement that links to community needs, and complete an independent senior project. A trimester system makes it easier to offer students lots of choices.

The blend of neighborhoods and academies—along with a number of other innovations that personalize learning—is a formula that seems to work for just about everyone. Less than 1 percent of Southridge's students dropped out last year; almost 80 percent enrolled in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses; and, in an independent survey, the average student said he was well known by at least

3.7 teachers. Southridge also met standards for adequate yearly progress in all areas but one (the exception being a single category where two students did not test).

Those results have brought Southridge widespread attention and catapulted Principal Sarah Boly into the national spotlight. Invited to speak in April 2004 at a prestigious national convention of education reporters in San Francisco, Boly told the group, "The barriers to changing schools are essentially systems that promote mediocrity and inhibit high schools from moving ahead."

### FREE REIN

When Boly was asked to design Southridge from the ground up, there were no such inhibitions. "I was given two documents: the floor plan of the school and *Breaking Ranks*" (the 1996 handbook published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals). Working with a cross-disciplinary team of 18 teachers and counselors from across the district, Boly spent a year researching, planning, and listening. "The community said, 'Give our children more options'; students said, 'Quit lecturing to us, quit boring us, let us design our own educational programming.' We simply listened."

Boly assures people that Southridge wasn't an overnight success. "The first year was chaotic," she recalls with a shudder. "I could feel us going sideways. We weren't talking about student work, we were talking about who stole the file cabinet and used up all the paper."



Photo by Bruce Miller

Despite “every single advantage in the world,” including a regionally and internationally diverse staff, Boly describes the data that first year as “abysmal” with huge discrepancies in achievement among the dominant population and minority students. “It wasn’t long after Columbine, so most of the data we were collecting had to do with perceptions of safety ... (and) it was awful. Only about 20 percent of our students felt like teachers respected them and 7 percent felt students respected each other. It appeared that we were headed in the direction of every other new high school that had been intent on change but hadn’t paid enough attention to school culture, including teacher culture.”

It was a wake-up call. Boly and her staff redoubled their efforts, instituting critical friends groups and concentrating on making every student feel connected. By the fourth year, when the first class of freshmen entered their senior year, the charge to “break ranks” finally paid off in higher test scores, lower dropout rates, and a narrowing achievement gap.

Adam Barbay, a senior who started at Southridge the second year it was open, remembers, “There were lots of kinks to work out—and there still are—but there are so many opportunities here.” After starring in the school’s musical, Barbay is headed for Loyola University in Chicago to study theatre, physics, business, or all three. Seventy percent of his

## THINGS THAT WORK AT SOUTHRIDGE

### Five-Fingered Votes

“Nothing happens at Southridge without 100 percent buy-in from staff,” says English teacher Sharon Larpenteur. “We might not all love it 100 percent, but it won’t happen unless all of us are willing to give it a try.” In spring, the faculty weighs in on new proposals using a “five-fingered” vote: Five fingers means you’re totally in support of the idea, while one finger means “I’m not crazy about this, but I’m willing to do it.” Raise a fist and it means you’re not willing to go along. When that happens, you’re assigned to a committee to find solutions to the issue.

### Skytime and Advisory

Named for Southridge’s mascot (the Skyhawk), Skytime is a twice weekly, 45-minute student access period. After listening to announcements, students can use the time to work on a project or “check out” to visit a counselor, make up a test, go to the library, or consult with another teacher. “Students get the other teacher to sign their planners, so I can see if they’re using their time well,” says Larpenteur. “It gives them a place where they can’t be invisible.”

The advisory program—which meets once or twice a month for 35 minutes and mixes students from different grade levels—also helps ensure that kids don’t slip through the cracks. One teacher is assigned to advise 15 students throughout the course of their high school career. “I remember when we were forecasting in my freshman year and I was trying to decide whether to take AP or IB courses,” says senior Claire Newton. “I could

get advice from upperclassmen in my advisory, as well as the teacher’s.” Junior Damon Runberg adds, “There’s so much peer pressure to do positive things, like take IB.”

### The Learning Center

When a freshman or sophomore is struggling, he can turn to the Learning Center for help. The award-winning, voluntary program provides peer tutoring one period a day with a ratio of one tutor per three students. Upperclassmen earn service learning credits for serving as tutors while vulnerable ninth- and 10th-graders find a support network. Once a semester, tutors and tutees are treated to a rope challenge course that cements relationships and builds leadership skills.

### Critical Friends Groups

Groups of six to 12 staff members meet once a month to reflect on their classroom instructional practices with a trained coach. “It’s a bonding time,” explains social studies teacher Amy Schuff. “It’s social but work gets done because (the session) is documented and we’re forced to commit to trying new things and then report back to the group. My critical friends aren’t necessarily the people I hang out with, but these are people I trust who I know will be there for me. I think this is our most significant professional development piece (and) makes a profound difference in our school culture.”

For more information: [www.beavton.k12.or.us/southridge/home.html](http://www.beavton.k12.or.us/southridge/home.html)

classmates will also go on to a four-year college while 20 percent pursue a two-year degree. That’s an enviable record in a school with a population that’s 16 percent low income and almost one-quarter minority.

“NTLB”

Boly believes that pushing students to dream—and helping them realize their dreams—can only happen in an environment where there’s distributed leadership and teacher collaboration. “It’s not just about No Child Left Behind: It’s no teacher left behind. It’s about identifying a team of teacher-leaders who can help lead the whole school,” she says. English teacher Sharon Larpenteur backs that up: “Sarah has a vision, but she’s able to reach out. She listens carefully to everyone’s opinion and crafts a solution that works for everyone.”

The ability to make things work has turned out to be a mixed blessing for Boly. Instead of retiring this year, as planned, she’s been persuaded to take on the role of Beaverton’s assistant superintendent. She’ll face the challenge of applying some of Southridge’s lessons to Oregon’s second-largest school district.

THE NUMBERS

Grades	9–12
Total students	1,950
Racial/ethnic make-up	
White	76%
African American	2%
Hispanic	5%
Native American	> 1%
Asian	16%
Free and reduced-price lunch	9%
Staff	
Teachers	91
Counselors	4
Administrators	6
Support staff	64



# 2.

## SERIOUS GOALS, PLAYFUL ENVIRONMENT

Parents fulfill a pivotal role at Coeur d’Alene, where it’s okay to be a little corny.

By Mindy Cameron

COEUR D’ALENE, Idaho—Mr. Casey strides down the hallway, a velvet cape billowing behind him, a regal cap seated firmly on his head. “Mr. Renaissance” is on the move.

In most high schools this would be an odd sight. Here there is no surprise, only smiles.

Steven Casey has been principal of Coeur d’Alene High School for 10 years. For much of that time he has been donning his Mr. Renaissance costume to bring added attention to the school’s Renaissance Recognition Program. On this morning he enters a classroom and surprises rookie-of-the-year teacher Tarraugh Carr. He congratulates her, gives her a Viking mug, and in return gets an appreciative hug.

Running a high school doesn’t have to be all business, Casey says. Having fun, even being a little bit corny, is part of his strategy for creating a successful learning environment.

A PUBLIC PLEDGE

At CHS success is a clearly stated expectation. “Our goal is to be the state academic champion by 2006,” Casey proclaims. The goal is posted on a big, bold banner in a visible spot in the cafeteria. To achieve it, every current sophomore must pass the Idaho State Achievement Test (ISAT) and graduate.

That goal is reinforced by asking each incoming freshman to sign a pledge to graduate. Signatures are posted behind glass in a hallway to remind everyone what is expected and what has been promised.

While the principal may be the most important person at any school, even the best school leader cannot do the job alone. Casey credits his leadership team, plus an unusually active parent group, for successes at CHS. When parents decided they wanted to be more than a traditional parent-teacher organization, they became the Parent Volunteer Organization (PVO) to emphasize what they do: volunteer.

PARENTS STEP UP

Parent involvement is instilled throughout the Coeur d’Alene school district by a policy that says parents must constitute 25 percent of membership on any committee. But at CHS parents do more than sit on committees. PVO president

## THINGS THAT WORK AT COEUR D'ALENE

### 90% Attendance Rule

Under a districtwide policy, if a student has 10 or more absences per semester in any class, he loses credit for that course. The student must then pass a competency exam for the class in order to get a grade and credit.

### Portfolio Diploma

At graduation, seniors are given a "portfolio diploma" that includes a description of their senior project and letters of recommendation that will assist them as they pursue their dreams beyond the walls of CHS. The senior project is a culmination of four years of work and is a requirement to pass senior English.

### Dual Enrollment

CHS juniors and seniors can enroll in courses at North Idaho College and receive both high school and college credit. To be eligible for the program, students must have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher, be at least 16 years of age, and must have successfully completed at least half of the high school graduation requirements.

For more information: [www.sd271.k12.id.us/chs/](http://www.sd271.k12.id.us/chs/)

Rene Kaufman estimates that as many as 300 actively involved parents donate thousands of hours each year. They help out with virtually every school activity, attend student council sessions and faculty meetings, raise money for mini-grants for teachers, and work in the school office. Parents support the Renaissance Program by soliciting gift certificates for students singled out for recognition and sending congratulatory cards to those students' parents.

Casey and Kaufman agree that ongoing parent involvement also helps when district voters are asked to support supplemental levies. This high school, on the outskirts of one of the fastest growing cities in the Northwest, was built in 1971. Two years ago it was remodeled thanks to a facilities levy supported by 83 percent of the voters.

"There is a direct connection between an active PVO and community support for school elections," Kaufman said. Casey puts it even more simply: "Parents are vital to our success."

CHS has a legitimate claim to the "successful school" mantle. Independent accreditation officials have named it an Idaho School of Merit in five of the last six years (Casey winces when asked about that missing year). Its college-

Photo by William M. Berg



*Principal Steven Casey takes on the role of "Mr. Renaissance."*

bound students score above state and national averages on both SAT and ACT. On the broader measure of ISAT—taken by all 10th-graders in Idaho—the school also scores above state averages. In 2000, Casey was named Idaho's Secondary Principal of the Year.

## A STUDENT VOICE

Like many high schools, CHS has had to deal with issues about student dress. According to Casey, concerns about "skin"—cleavage, short skirts, bare midriffs—bubbled to the surface. How the issue was handled says a lot about how things work at this school.

Casey first went to the students, challenging them to think about rules that were being applied elsewhere, as well as the issue of school uniforms. "I asked them what they were willing to give up to appease adults" and other critics, including some of their peers.

Students came up with ideas, as did staff and parents. A consensus proposal was put on an advisory ballot that got overwhelming student support. Among the new rules is one barring any visible underwear, including bra straps and boys' boxers that show above saggy pants. "It took a year to work it out, but it was worth it," claims Casey. "I have more clout now because I can say 'As a school we have decided,' instead of imposing my rules."

Casey is deliberate about his interaction with students. Some principals delegate the job of advising student government leaders. At CHS Casey keeps that on his task list, meeting monthly with student-elected leaders. He also holds a monthly youth forum to engage with students who are not school leaders. "We talk about anything they want to talk about," he says. If students don't have a lot on their minds that day, Casey is sure to have plenty of ideas.

# 3.

## WIRED WORLD

**In an unlikely setting, an Anchorage charter school connects kids with business and technology.**

*By Denise Jarrett Weeks*

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—It’s as if they’re in a parallel universe: those teenagers banding together along the promenades of America’s shopping malls, occupying the same lanes as the grown-ups but in a separate reality. But here on a busy boulevard in Anchorage, Alaska, there is a shopping-mall-turned-charter-school where those dual worlds happily collide.

At Highland Tech High, younger folk and older folk interact all the time, creating a richer reality together, says Principal C.J. Stiegele. She’s seen how easy it is for a teenager to go through an entire day without talking to a single adult, and she’s vowed that, at this school, that will be impossible.

Students and teachers are encouraged to think of this technology-focused school as functioning like a workplace, where collaboration and shared responsibility are expected. Everyone’s a colleague, though students are to look to their higher-ranking teachers for guidance. And guidance is abundant. Class sizes are small, so teachers can spend ample time with individual students. Every teacher and administrator serves as an advisor, working closely with students to help them craft their school careers with care.

A steady stream of adult professionals comes to the school to talk with students about their jobs, and, often as not, they become mentors to aspiring students. Students themselves are regularly out in the working world, side-by-side with adults as they participate in “job shadows” and work on community-based school projects.

### A CHANCE TO SHINE

Stiegele founded Highland Tech as a public charter school focusing on academic standards, technology, and character building. The school opened its doors in fall 2003 to 300 students seeking an alternative to large comprehensive high schools and tradition-bound teaching. All the students who arrived that autumn were bright and hopeful, yet most had struggled to show their promise in traditional school settings, says Stiegele. By the end of that inaugural year, Stiegele and her staff had reason to believe that they were doing something right.

Take the sophomores and juniors, for example. Of the 72 students who came to Highland Tech as 10th-graders, 54 percent had failed half their classes at their previous schools. And

### CONNECTING WITH FRESHMEN

In this age of high-stakes testing, school leaders are looking for new ways to create supportive learning environments. At CHS a program called IGNITE is one such approach. Incoming juniors and seniors volunteer for training in the summer to become mentors for the new class of freshmen. The idea is to “ignite” good behavior. Having 90 kids connect with freshmen and establish a sense of belonging has been “a tremendous help for the school climate,” Casey says.

Student body president Taylor Neal agrees. “There are always kids who feel they don’t belong. This school has done a great job in dealing with that.”

Another new program focusing on freshmen takes a page from research that shows the value of smaller high schools. Casey calls it a school-within-a-school: Working with middle schools, CHS staff identify incoming freshmen who are at risk of getting lost in the transition to high school. They’re placed in a different learning environment with smaller classes that meet in three-hour blocks. The student-teacher ratio is lower and a counselor is part of the teaching team.

The added cost of the program is covered by the district’s recent \$1 million “remediation” override levy. Some of the levy also is used for students who need extra help for the ISAT.

Never an easy job, running a high school today is more challenging than ever. At CHS Casey cuts through the complexity with one basic rule for administrators, staff, teachers, and students. That rule: Do the right thing.

### THE NUMBERS

Grades	9–12
Total students	1,450
Racial/ethnic make-up (districtwide)	
White	95%
African American	<1%
Hispanic	3%
Native American	<1%
Asian	1%
Free and reduced-price lunch	21%
Staff	
Teachers	71
Counselors	4
Administrators	4

Photo by Mark Standley



each of the eighteen 11th-graders had failed at least one grade level in the past. Despite this and a few new-school kinks—computers and textbooks didn't arrive until the second term—Stiegele proudly points out that 75 percent or more of the 10th-grade students passed all three sections of the state's high school exit exam in reading, writing, and math (students can take the test as early as the 10th grade). The record was even better for the 11th grade: Everyone passed all three sections.

### A STANDARDS-BASED MODEL

The school is the fruit of an idea sown by Stiegele and a group of entrepreneurs, high-tech professionals, teachers, and parents who wanted to try the Quality Schools Model—a standards-based innovation that has been very successful in rural Alaska—in a small, urban high school.

Businesses and community organizations are key stakeholders, right up there with parents, says Associate Principal Mark Standley. In fact, the Quality Schools Model was developed by the Chugach School District in close partnership with some of Alaska's leading corporations in the oil, transportation, and communications industries. It has attracted the support of such business-funded philanthropies as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle and New Tech Foundation in Napa, California, in part for its emphasis on making learning relevant to the world of work and for teaching students social skills expected in the workplace.

In the model, achievement is the constant, and time is the variable, says Standley. "We don't measure the children by how much time they spend with us, but by how much they achieve," he says.

Students advance to the next grade at their own pace when they can demonstrate mastery of a set of standards in content strands, such as reading and literature; numeric literacy; careers and content literacy; communication literacy; and

personal, health, social, and service learning. Through traditional tests, students must show their mastery of at least 80 percent of those standards to achieve proficiency—90 percent to reach an advanced level.

Moreover, students must be able to apply, at a similarly high level, at least 20 percent of those standards in a real-life context. And what could be more "real" than a poetry slam? That's precisely how some students showed their literary chops last spring, performing their own works in a national poetry slam via audio- and videoconferences with students from Alaska villages to the Bronx, New York.

### WALKING THE TALK

At Highland Tech, the teacher-student ratio is 1:22, so every teacher knows every student. Advisors help students figure out what their career interests are and how to go about achieving their goals. The school brings in other adults, too: professionals from the business world who speak to students at "business luncheons," invite students to job-shadow them at work, and serve as mentors.

### THINGS THAT WORK AT HIGHLAND TECH HIGH

#### Project-Based Studies

Students learn by actively solving problems, a process that develops their critical thinking skills. Projects incorporate relevant and current issues, as well as the core disciplines. Also, the work students do in one area can fulfill requirements in other areas. For example, a student might use the same research paper to fulfill standards in both social studies and language arts. In this way, students can move through the standards quickly.

#### Professional Development

Teachers at Highland Tech High receive ample training in the Quality Schools Model through the Reinventing Schools Coalition. Additionally, Rebecca Midles has begun training teachers in the model and helping them with curriculum development, lesson planning, and instructional strategies. Staff members get together during summer break to review the previous year and to see where they can make improvements. "It's just very fulfilling," says Midles. "You have a lot of ownership that way, too." (To learn more about the Quality Schools Model, visit the Web site of the Reinventing Schools Coalition at [www.reinventingschools.org](http://www.reinventingschools.org))

For more information: [www.highlandtech.org](http://www.highlandtech.org)

Make no bones about it, the school’s mission is to prepare these young adults to step straight from high school into promising jobs and college careers. So, at 13, 15, or 18, these young people start “walking the talk.” The dress code is “business casual.” Students take part in job shadows and internships, and work collaboratively on community-based projects. Their environment is technology-rich. Students become adept users of the technologies of today’s workplace, using Palm Pilots, laptops, multimedia programs, videoconferencing, and the like in the course of their days.

“Our students not only learn about what we call ‘employability skills’—things like responsibility, showing up for work on time, dressing appropriately, communicating with adults—but they start working on those skills in seventh grade,” says Stiegele, so that by ninth and 10th grade, they’re ready to apply those skills in a business environment. “We’re constantly working on the mindset of employability.”

#### A METAPHOR THAT WORKS

Highland Tech students are encouraged to think of themselves as employees and their teachers as their employers. But, before you get the wrong idea: “That metaphor is there on one level,” says teacher Rebecca Midles, “but it’s also there in the sense that it’s the boss that you *wish* you could work for.”

The boss here is someone who cares about your emotional intelligence as well as your performance, she says, who has an emotional connection with you and cares about your interests and well-being. “You have to have that for students,” Midles stresses, “so we don’t give that up.”

But the metaphor packs a wallop when Standley, hoping to motivate kids, likens their achieving the standards to getting paid at work. It’s an attention grabber. “If you’re not working on your standards, you’re volunteering,” he tells them.

Melissa is in 11th grade this year. She says, “One of the things that’s really nice about the standards is you really have a big feeling of accomplishment after you’ve completed a standard. That’s just so cool.”

After mastering a good share of the standards, Melissa earned a “responsibility pass” which gave her some perks. She used her pass to go off school grounds to visit the municipal library, one of Anchorage’s architectural landmarks. “It’s kind of like an incentive for passing off the levels,” she says.

#### REAL-WORLD LEARNING

In her previous school, says Melissa, she wrote paper after paper and took test after test, but didn’t do well no matter how hard she tried. She was shy and withdrawn.

“The one thing that really wasn’t working ... for me was the way that they taught everything,” she says. “I couldn’t learn it very well. ... So, when I got the test it was like, oh my gosh, I couldn’t remember anything. And my parents were getting really worried because I kept failing all these tests, and they couldn’t understand why.

“Well, here, we’re given the opportunity to do things that deal with technology. We do things like put together PowerPoints, and we do movies, and we put together skits and plays. I mean, the opportunities to show that you know something, and that you can do it, are endless.”

Melissa’s voice is full of excitement and confidence. She’s not the same girl she was a year ago, she says. Today, she has plans to be a nurse.

#### GOING PLACES

“Where you will go” is a sentiment students hear a lot in this school. It’s not enough to tell students they must master a bunch of standards levels, says Midles, you have to tell them why they should and where it will take them in life.

“Explain why you’re teaching that and how it connects to the real world, and then ... how it’s going to be assessed, what’s going to be the project, and where they are going,” says Midles. “There are a lot of students that need to have those things answered before they can relax and learn. ... You’re always relating it back to where it’s going to take them.”

#### THE NUMBERS

Grades	7–11
Number of students	244
Racial/ethnic make-up	
White	68%
African American	5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	15%
Asian	2%
Free and reduced-price lunch	approx. 50%
Staff	
Teachers	15
Administrators	5
Support staff	3



## 4.

## BUILDING ON THE PAST

An historic school in Spokane emphasizes leadership and advocacy.

By Mindy Cameron

SPOKANE, Washington—On a warm spring day, picturesque Lewis and Clark High School could be a movie set for the latest teen film. Students are enjoying their lunch break on the plaza, a few boys are tossing a football on the expansive lawn, others are milling in an adjacent garden. Around the corner, tree-filtered sunlight bathes the steep steps and grand entry of this historic school building so beautifully restored just a few years ago.

Lewis and Clark, which sits along Interstate-90 near downtown Spokane, is the oldest and most urban of the city's five high schools. While it is steeped in tradition, there's nothing old-fashioned about the approach to learning at LCHS.

After three years at the school—two of them as principal—Jon Swett is intensely focused on leadership development and “thoughtful use of data” as keys to achieving goals in two priorities: academics and advocacy. The academic goal is to close the achievement gap; the advocacy goal is to support teachers and students. “You meet the needs of students by supporting the teachers,” says Swett.

## GUIDED BY VISION

LCHS has been recognized for its Advanced Placement programs: Indeed, *Newsweek* magazine last year listed the school among the country's top 4 percent of high schools in a ranking based on the number of students enrolled in AP programs. The school also exceeds both district and state averages on WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) in all areas, including math, reading, writing, and science.

The challenge is to maintain the school's reputation for high achievement while raising the levels of all students. “What I want to hear is that we have a strategy for getting kids to standard,” emphasizes Swett. At LCHS, the precise meaning of “standard” is still being worked out, but the goal is to exceed NCLB and state standards set in the WASL. “I want the LC standard to mean something,” says Swett, “What do kids know, what can they do, what can they understand? Can they tackle a problem they have no information for and come up with a meaningful response?”

Swett has organized his leadership team to focus on the priorities. Assistant Principal Mike Malsam leads a ninth-grade initiative that serves as a pilot program for keeping kids current in core classes. Assistant Principal Paula Ronhaar heads the leadership development initiative.

Swett recruited both Malsam and Ronhaar to LCHS from other schools in the district to help him achieve his vision. “I came here specifically because of Jon's blended leadership model,” says Ronhaar. “Jon thinks outside the box, which is unusual in education, and I've been in it since 1976. He's leading a shift to instructional leaders, and everyone is expected to have a vision.”

## TEACHERS AS LEADERS

Developing a leadership team starts with the hiring process. “We need teachers with the capacity to be advocates for kids,” says Ronhaar. Swett's formula is simple: Hire teachers who love kids and their content area, and who are coachable.

The “coachable” part is essential because LCHS teachers are expected to be part of the leadership team and to commit to a common focus. “All the resources are wrapped around the teacher,” says Swett. “In the classroom, that's where the magic happens.”

One key component of staff training is an education model created by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, authors of *Understanding by Design*. The Wiggins-McTighe model stresses the importance of approaching any curriculum by beginning with the end in mind. That means asking the question, what is



Courtesy of Explosion Illusion Photography

## THINGS THAT WORK AT LEWIS AND CLARK

### Focus on Learning

Teachers are expected to post in every classroom, every day, this statement with the blank filled in: “The enduring understanding of today’s lesson is \_\_\_\_\_.” The idea is to keep teachers focused on the ultimate learning goal of whatever is happening in the classroom.

### Use of Data

The vision, goals, strategies, and programs developed by the current administrative team are incorporated into the LC Project, a 64-page document (available online at [www.spokaneschools.org/lewis\\_clark/LCProject/index.htm](http://www.spokaneschools.org/lewis_clark/LCProject/index.htm)) that includes key data that are used to measure progress and set goals.

The Spokane School District also systematically collects, disseminates, and uses data to drive decisionmaking and influence curricular decisions. By mid-September, each school in the district receives a data packet with its own assessment results displayed in multiple formats. A representative from the district’s assessment office meets with groups of teachers to delve into the data on their school and their own students.

### Advanced Placement

Lewis and Clark offers nine different AP courses and gives more than 450 AP exams each year. Thirty percent of the student body enrolls in AP, and 80 percent of seniors are college bound.

### Leadership Development

All teachers at LCHS are expected to be part of a professional learning community. They are trained in new approaches to teaching and learning, and are given time to collaborate on best practices in teaching, assessment, student advocacy, and more.

For more information: [www.sd81.k12.wa.us/lewis\\_clark/](http://www.sd81.k12.wa.us/lewis_clark/)

the “enduring understanding”—the big, important idea or concept—students should take away from a lesson?

Time for teacher training and collaboration is a challenge. At many schools the schedule provides little time for teachers to work together. Thanks to district policy, “we have the gift of time,” Ronhaar observes. In the 2004–2005 school year, all Spokane public school students will start late on Thursdays to allow teachers to work together.

Malsam uses a business analogy to explain why the school is devoting so much of that time to collaboration and leadership development among teachers. Teachers tend to be like



Photo by William M. Berg

Principal Jon Swett focuses on creating teacher leaders.

independent operators and entrepreneurs, he says. “We’re trying to turn them into collaborators because the highest failure rate in business is among start-ups by entrepreneurs. The collaborative business model is the franchise and more of them succeed.”

## FOCUS ON FRESHMEN

Changing the culture is also at the heart of the ninth-grade initiative. It grew out of the realization that the status quo wasn’t working—especially for freshmen. Malsam notes that resources are limited, so it’s important to bring a laser focus to the kids who need it the most. “We focus on the kids as they walk out the middle school door.”

Since math is often the biggest hurdle for students making the transition to high school, LCHS established the Tiger Academy, a summer program for entering ninth-graders who are identified based on middle school recommendations. Along with math, instructors also work on “soft skills”: social, emotional, and organizational. Tiger Academy is not remediation, Swett emphasizes, “It is a highly rigorous environment.”

Once at LCHS, freshman learning is carefully monitored. The first indication a ninth-grader is dropping below “standard” triggers intervention, says Malsam. The teacher calls the parent and notifies student services, which follows up with tutoring.

This “real-time” feedback loop is called a Circle of Advocacy. In 2002–2003, before the initiative was launched, a third of all freshmen were failing at least one class. At the end of the first semester of 2003–2004, the failure rate was cut to 18 percent, even though standards had been raised.

Without the layering effect of advocacy circles, you run the risk of burning out your teachers, Malsam believes. The advocacy initiative allows teachers to teach because parents and staff are quickly engaged on behalf of students who need extra support.

#### UPHOLDING TRADITION

There are many ways to tell the story of Lewis and Clark High School. It is a school with a proud history, including the recent renovation, a cadre of loyal alumni, strong AP programs, a valuable art collection, and an auditorium and pipe organ that are valued community resources.

As Swett tours the building he is obviously proud of all that. But he is looking forward to writing a new chapter of LCHS history. He cites increasing enrollment in a part of Spokane that is not growing. It is the most diverse high school in the city and is a school of choice for many students and their parents.

High expectations are as real here as the freeway just outside the school door. “We have to be good stewards of our reputation,” concludes Paula Ronhaar.

#### THE NUMBERS

Grades	9–12
Total students	2,028
Racial/ethnic make-up	
White	85%
African American	6%
Hispanic	3%
Native American	3%
Asian	4%
Free and reduced-price lunch	26%
Staff	
Teachers	101
Administrators	5
Counselors	4.5
Support staff	44



# 5.

## CLASSROOMS WITHOUT WALLS

**In Montana’s Bitterroot Valley, one high school uses experiential learning to encourage lifelong learners.**

*By Bracken Reed*

CORVALLIS, Montana—In the summer of 2000, much of the Bitterroot Valley went up in flames. Beginning in mid-July and continuing unabated until the rains of September finally allowed firefighters to regain control, wildfires blazed throughout the valley. In the end, more than 356,000 acres of private, state, and federal land had burned. More than 500 families were evacuated from their homes—many staying in emergency shelters set up in local schools—and a total of 75 homes were destroyed.

By the beginning of the school year in September, with smoke still lingering and ashes still cooling, teachers at Corvallis High School had hatched a plan to draw on these traumatic experiences. Trevor Laboski, along with his fellow science teachers, designed a class that would take students out into the field to study the effects of the fire on the Mill Creek and Bear Creek drainages—two particularly hard-hit areas on the west side of the valley, within the Corvallis School District’s boundaries.

Now in its fourth year, the project continues to involve students in a hands-on, field-based study of the effects of the fire on long-term water quality, soil erosion, and plant recovery in the area. Students visit the creek sites twice a year, develop an understanding of the scientific methods for studying water quality, and share their findings with the U.S. Forest Service. But more important, students are exposed to the idea that learning can be challenging, practical, and powerfully relevant to their lives all at the same time. As Laboski says, “You don’t have to get buy-in from students with this kind of project; it’s already there. What could be more relevant than something that just drove you out of your house?”

At Corvallis High, this was no one-time undertaking. Educational projects involving hands-on, active student involvement—much of it outside the classroom—are a staple. While many schools incorporate a project-based approach into their curriculum, few work as hard as Corvallis at making sure those projects are part of a rigorous and coherent curriculum that is closely aligned to state standards.

Principal Sarah Schumacher gives her staff a lot of freedom to pursue their passions, but she is also a hard-nosed realist who demands results. And the results are there for everyone to see: Corvallis students have consistently performed well in all areas of the state’s Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) and are particularly strong in science, with close to 90 percent meeting the proficient or advanced level in each of the last three years.

### TAKING IT OUTSIDE

Several staff members point to the dynamic leadership of Schumacher and the messianic zeal of long-time English teacher Art Rzasa for spreading the philosophy of experiential learning throughout the school.

Rzasa, called “the guru of authentic outcomes” by one of his fellow teachers, has been walking his talk for over a decade—or rather, hiking his talk, often at an elevation of 11,000 feet. Every summer Rzasa leads a group of 10 sophomores and juniors on a 30-mile backpacking trip into alpine wilderness.

The program, called Classroom Without Walls, is now in its 11th year and is the epitome of the Corvallis philosophy: It gives students ownership of their educational experience; it’s cross-curricular; it incorporates the beautiful Montana landscape; it produces practical, “authentic” outcomes that

can be used by others; and it is supported by a large number of outside agencies and businesses.

Students apply for the program in January, and the eight-day trip takes place the following July. In between, students incorporate language arts, science, and social studies into a thorough, meaningful study of the place they will visit. Each student is required to create a specific lesson plan that culminates in a peer teaching session and the creation of audiovisual teaching materials that can be used in other district classrooms. While on the trip itself, they’re required to haul a 40-pound pack, cook their own meals, and camp in tents in places like the Beartooth Mountains, the Wind River Range, and the Sawtooths—beautiful, rugged wilderness areas that form the most breathtaking classrooms one can imagine.

It’s an experience that calls out to anyone who has ever stared out a window during sophomore social studies, stricken with spring fever and daydreaming about the freedom of the great outdoors, while a well-meaning but uninspiring teacher drones on about names and dates that will be on the next test.

### DRIVEN BY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

One gets the sense that Art Rzasa was just such a student himself, and that his own experience as a nontraditional student, alienated by traditional lecture-based teaching practices, motivates him to share the power of experiential learning with all who will listen.

At Corvallis, he has found a receptive audience in many of his fellow teachers, and a principal who fully supports his efforts. Schumacher, a former English teacher at Corvallis, has been here since 1978 and has helped turn the school into a haven for passionate, adventurous teachers, who aren’t afraid to think outside traditional teaching boundaries or take their students outside the building.

“I believe that kids need to be treated with dignity and respect,” says Schumacher. “That needs to be a core value. And part of that is that they need to have teachers who are exceptional people—people who have passions and interests of their own, as well as a passion for teaching and for their subject area.”

### A DIVERGENT FLOCK

During Schumacher’s time as principal, the town and school district have grown tremendously. One result has been the creation of several new teaching positions at the school, which has allowed her to put her beliefs into action.

#### THE NUMBERS

Grades	9–12
Total students	480
Racial/ethnic make-up	
White	97%
African American	<1%
Hispanic	1%
Native American	1%
Asian	<1%
Free and reduced-price lunch:	37%
Staff	
Teachers	34
Administrators	4
Counselors	1.5
Support staff	2



## THINGS THAT WORK AT CORVALLIS

Empowering students to take control of their own learning by offering hands-on, experiential, project-based learning opportunities is the foundation of the school's curriculum. There are many exciting projects happening at the school, all of which share some common traits: They are long term; they are research driven; they include a wide variety of assessments, including student portfolios and presentations; they involve collaborations and partnerships with outside agencies; and they result in authentic outcomes that can be shared with others. They also have full district and principal support.

Here's a sampling:

### The Riparian Monitoring Project

The post-fire stream monitoring project (see main article) was a spin-off of this long-term project, which is spearheaded by Jim Striebel, a 2004 Radio Shack National Teacher Award winner. Working in collaboration with the nearby Teller Wildlife Refuge (TWR), Striebel's science students are part of a "stream team" that tests the water quality of several east valley creeks. The project involves the freshman physical science class, the sophomore biology class, and the junior chemistry class, and incorporates stream monitoring into the normal classroom curriculum. Students collect data in the spring and fall, compare it with previous years, and share it with the TWR and the U.S. Forest

Service. The data are valuable in monitoring the effectiveness of riparian habitat restoration efforts on the refuge.

### The Calf Creek Elk Project

Led by science teacher Trevor Laboski, this project involves the monitoring of deer and elk activity on a winter game range in the nearby Sapphire Mountains. Students visit the area twice a year, creating "transects": marked-off areas of 100 to 200 feet each. The students then give a detailed report of everything they find within that transect. "The object is to give an accurate snapshot of the carrying capacity of the area," says Laboski. "In other words: How many elk can this place support?" Students then share these data with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

### The Montana Heritage Project

This long-term project is a yearlong, cross-curricular course involving the English and geography departments, and is led by Phil Leonardi. Each year the project focuses on a different era of Montana history. Students conduct oral interviews with long-time community members, create audiovisual materials that are given to the local historical museum at the end of the year, and search primary documents such as census records and archives. Students also go to the state capitol in Helena once a year to give presentations on their findings.

"I didn't want to hire sheep," says Schumacher. "I didn't want to hire people who were easy to lead, necessarily, but people who had divergent ideas. So I looked at both offerings: curricular as well as other things they could bring into the mix of the school that would include more kids in extracurricular or cocurricular activities. I want the school to be a dynamic rather than a static place."

The end result, says geography teacher Phil Leonardi, has been exactly that. "This is a very dynamic place, with talented, creative people. Sarah encourages people to integrate all aspects of their lives into their teaching and to teach to their passions. For me, it's reinvigorated my career. It's given a meaning and a sense of purpose to my job."

It's the kind of statement one hears often at Corvallis High School, from teachers and students alike. In the end, what people take beyond the classroom walls here is the most valuable experience of all: the sense of being a passionate, lifelong learner. ■



Courtesy of Corvallis High

*A rural school in Washington  
doesn't let poverty and  
demographics stand in its way.*

BY BRACKEN REED

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

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MATTAWA, Washington—On a bright and blazing spring day, Principal Bob Webb sits in his cluttered corner office and reflects on his four years at Wahluke High School. A veteran administrator with experience in six different public school districts and five different states, Webb is no stranger to the realities of the education system. He's committed and driven and not afraid to go to battle for his teachers or his students, but he's also pragmatic. And he can see the writing on the wall.

A mixture of personal priorities and political struggles is bringing Webb's tenure here to an end, and there's more than a hint of wistfulness in his voice. "I really appreciate the students and the families here," he says. "These are the best, most respectful young people that I have ever worked with. They will do the right thing, and that's what contributes to their success—there's a passion for learning."

It's a sentiment that's shared throughout the building. Again and again a visitor hears testimonials about the strong character of the students at this high-poverty, four-year high school: their positive attitudes, their intelligence, their good humor, their willingness to rise to a challenge. When Webb came to the school, he wanted to tap into that energy. He wanted to challenge the students to reach higher and dream bigger.

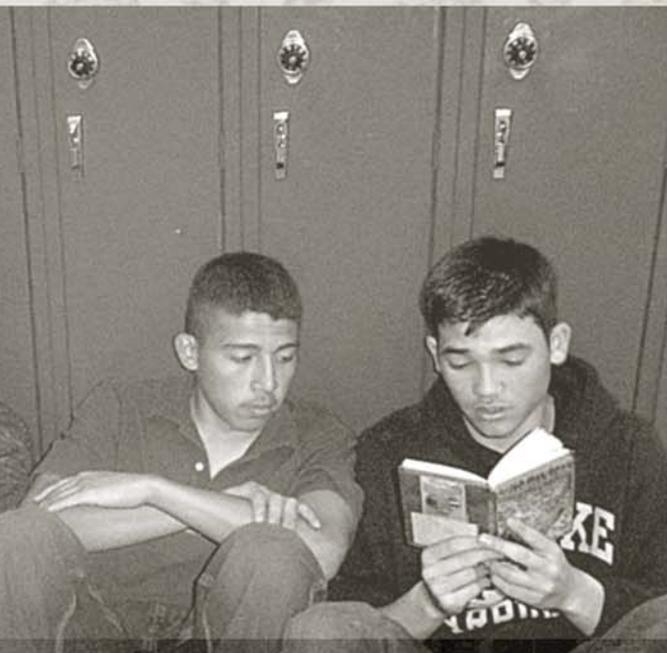
## *True grit*

Mattawa, Washington, is a hardscrabble town on the east bank of the Columbia River in Central Washington State. The desert landscape is stark and beautiful here: The river cuts a wide path through basalt cliffs and sagebrush plateaus, and the broad treeless shoulders of the Saddle Mountains form a striking backdrop to the town. Located midway between the Wanapum Dam to the north and the Priest Rapids Dam to the south, the area relies heavily on irrigation to alter the arid landscape and fuel its agriculture-based economy.

Set back from state route 243 and buffered by orchards, Mattawa is easy to miss, and must have always been that way: The name comes from the local Wanapum Indian language and loosely



*excelencia*



Courtesy of Wahluke High School

translates as “Where is it?”—a fitting name for this dusty little town with its one main street. There’s a provisional feeling here, as if a strong wind could come down the river, up over the hill, and blow it all away.

But there is also pride. Even some of the most dilapidated trailers have tidy-looking porches with pots of well-cared-for geraniums or marigolds. A tiny restaurant on the main street seems to slouch to one side, but its sign is carefully painted and the curtains in the window are colorful and homemade. There’s an air of taking care and making do—a dirt-floor town, but a well-swept one.

It’s this same sense of personal and civic pride, of grit and determination, of good humor in the face of hard labor that Bob Webb and his fellow educators recognize and appreciate in the students of Wahluke High School. And it’s this spirit that has allowed them to succeed at a level that is gaining national attention.

### *Defying the odds*

“It’s not *if* you’re going to college,” says Webb, “it’s where or when. That’s our daily talk with students. It may be a two-year school, it may be a four-year school, it might be a technical school, but we talk post-high school every single day to every kid we see. That’s our expectation and our goal.”

For some, the goal might seem too lofty. According to a 2003 report from the National Governors Association, “although 76 percent of white youth ... graduate high school after four years, the graduation rate for Hispanic youth is just 53 percent. Only 9 percent of Hispanics complete a bachelor’s degree by age 29, compared with 43 percent of whites.”

With those statistics, Wahluke High might have low expectations: More than 75 percent of the students are Hispanic, 46 percent are designated as “migrant,” and 64 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch. Districtwide, these indicators are even higher. On the 2000 census, 90 percent of Mattawa’s residents listed Spanish as the language spoken at home.

At Wahluke, teachers and administrators have refused to accept any inherent correlation between the national figures and their school’s performance. “We really see that they have the same opportunities as any other students,” says Jan Phillips, a counselor who came to the school at the same time as Bob Webb. “So, we don’t let them off the hook. The expectation is that they’re going to go to college.”

And go to college they have, in remarkable numbers. According to the most current data available, 70 percent of Wahluke’s students graduated, and 54 percent applied to college. Two years ago, 71 percent of the students applied and were accepted to college, and the school was recognized by the state college board.

Also in 2002, the Pathways to College Network, an alliance of 34 national organizations and funders, chose Wahluke High as one of six schools to study for factors that can make college more accessible for minority students. This

year, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP) featured the school in their popular publication *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*.

The hidden little town in central Washington is suddenly finding itself on the national map.

### *A community, not just a school*

What have been the keys to Wahluke High's success? First and foremost, says Webb, is a culture of support and respect. At Wahluke that starts with language: Both Webb and his vice principal, Dennis Adams, are bilingual, and every effort has been made to hire bilingual teachers.

"In an ideal situation we would have more teachers who are both bilingual and certified in several content areas," says Webb. "I've hired five bilingual teachers since I've been here and that's been a godsend. It really makes the connection with both students and parents a lot stronger, the communication and trust are there; they feel like this is a good place to be."

Upon his arrival, Webb also instituted a "prime time advisory period": Every adult in the building, except for the secretaries, has an advisory group that meets once a week. Each adult is assigned up to 15 mixed-grade students who she'll advise throughout the students' time at the school.

"It bridges a lot of gaps," says Webb. "It bridges the age gap between adults and students and between students from different grades, and it bridges any cultural gaps that might be there. Basically, it gives each student another adult advocate, another layer of support, and it helps them feel a personal, one-to-one connection with the school."

It can be a tough sell to some teachers, Webb acknowledges, but it's worth the struggle. "Sometimes teachers think it's just another role they're being asked to take on, which they don't see as part of their job description," he says. "But it works, and as they see that they become more open to it. I'm not asking them to be an 'advisor' or a 'counselor,' I'm just asking them to be a caring adult in the life of a kid—a mentor, an advocate, whatever you want to call it."

The actual "counseling" at the school is split between Jan Phillips and David Garcia, a bilingual intervention specialist. Between the two of them, they do everything they can to keep students not only in school and engaged, but also on the college track. From college fairs to financial aid nights, summer programs to after-school tutoring, bilingual parent outreach meetings to leading students on campus visits, the counseling team is tireless in its effort to keep the door of opportunity open for every student, even those without legal residency.

"It's tough," says Phillips. "In this year's graduating class 43 percent of the students are undocumented and so don't qualify for financial aid. We try to do everything we can. For those that are eligible, we encourage them to apply for

scholarships—we coach them all the time in what it takes to do that. For others we encourage them to work their way through school. A lot of us worked through college, so we know it can be done. But whatever their situation and at whatever level they can start, we push college. And they do want to go. Those that are willing to step out there and give it a shot have been successful."

### *Equal opportunity and academic rigor*

Another key to Wahluke High's success has been, perhaps surprisingly, an increase in graduation requirements. "Our district requires five credits in both math and English," says Phillips, "which is probably more than any other district in the state." The idea, she says, is to keep students engaged in core academic subjects that will ensure they have reached a college level. Too often, students have a 'senior slide' in which they won't take challenging academic classes if they're not required. "Our students often come in way under the

*"It's not if you're going to college," says Webb, "it's where or when. That's our daily talk with students. It may be a two-year school, it may be a four-year school, it might be a technical school, but we talk post-high school every single day to every kid we see. That's our expectation and our goal."*

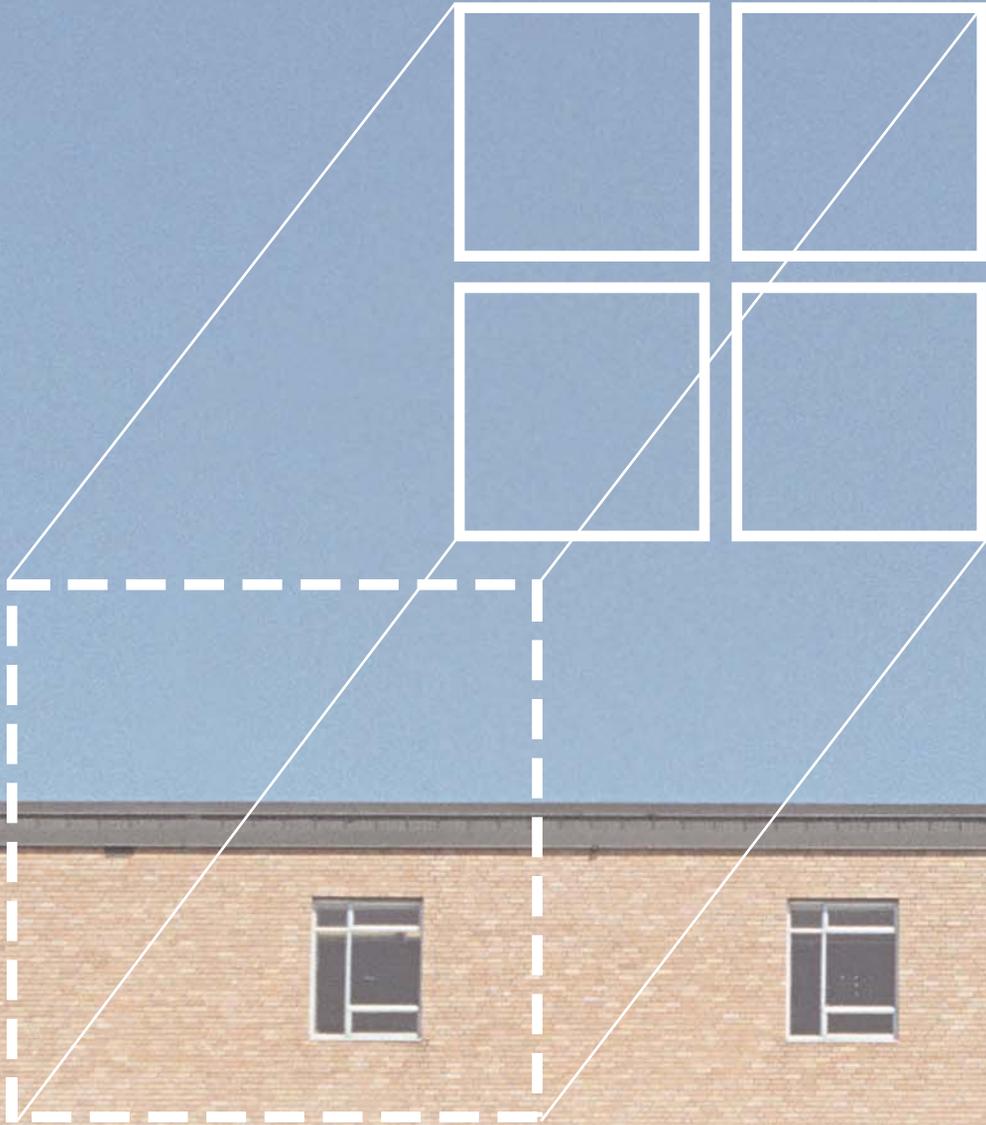
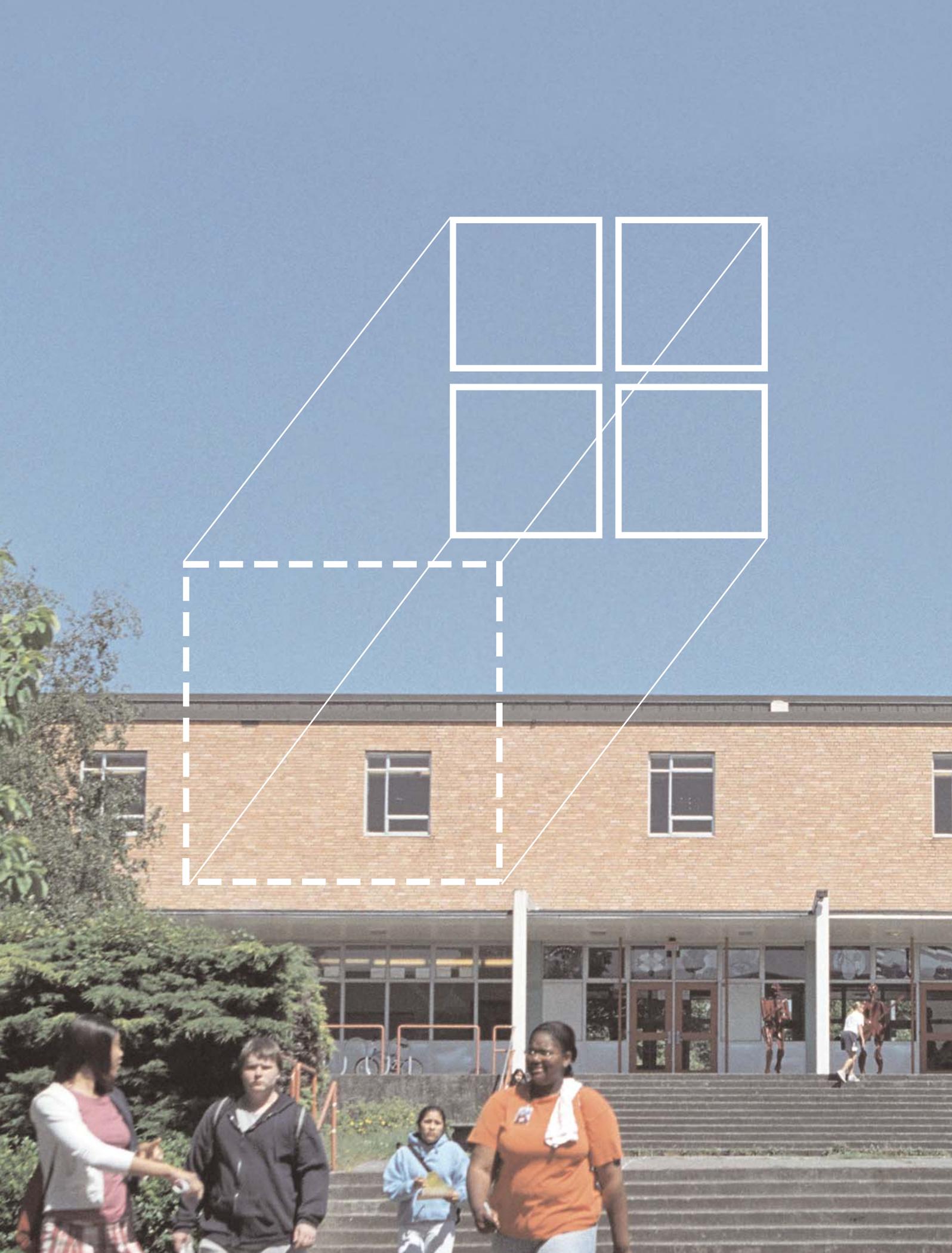
high school level in math and English, and so we felt like we needed to set those higher requirements. Not everyone will walk out of here at a college level, but we try to push it so they have to stay engaged."

Challenging all students to excel has become a way of life at Wahluke. College preparatory classes, including Advanced Placement classes, are open to all students based on "interest and effort" rather than their grades in previous classes. Prior to Webb's arrival at the school, no AP exams were offered and no AP classes were taught at the school. By the 2002–2003 school year, 64 percent of the Hispanic students were enrolled in AP English classes and 55 percent were enrolled in pre-calculus classes, a remarkable statistic for one of the poorest, most rural districts in the state.

### *A strong foundation*

At the end of the school year, Bob Webb will clean out his office, pack his bags, and head for Wyoming and the next challenge in his career. He leaves with a nagging sense of goals not yet met, but with a sense of pride not unlike that of the small town he leaves behind. Under difficult circumstances, in trying times, Webb's leadership has helped build a strong foundation for future success at Wahluke High. "For me," he says, "it's all about hope. It's about keeping kids tuned into the idea that whatever the obstacles are, I can get past them, I can succeed, I can do this."

That's a message that the tough, little town of Mattawa, Washington, can well understand. ■



# ANATOMY *of* CHANGE

A Portland high school, once full of promise, tries to reverse a long downward spiral.

STORY BY IAN MCCLUSKY. PHOTOS BY PATRICIA CORDELL

PORTLAND, Oregon—"Will John Marshall High School become known as one of the great high schools of Portland? Of the West? Of the Nation?" pondered Principal Gaynor Petrequin in the school's first newspaper, volume one, issue one. It was September 1960. That summer, the last old residential house had been moved and land cleared on a gentle hill, looking west across wooded neighborhoods some eight miles toward Portland's downtown skyline. Cement had been poured, bricks laid. Two stories tall on the uphill entrance, three stories on the downhill side. A giant brick square, with an open courtyard, and long hallways of freshly waxed floors, lined by rows of lockers stretching as far as the eye could see. Librarians had stamped and numbered books, art teachers inventoried new supplies, and eager students worked on the layout of the very first newspaper, where Petrequin issued his front-page "Call to Greatness!"

Now, 44 years later, on the last day of school in 2004, the final bell rings at Marshall. The dismantling begins. Principal John Wilhelmi wheels his desk out of the same office where Petrequin once worked. And as he dollies his desk down the halls, past the rows of endless lockers, he wonders the exact same thing as his predecessor: *Will John Marshall High School become known as one of the great high schools of Portland, of the West, of the Nation?*

Marshall—driven by dropping enrollments, poor test scores, and almost certain strictures under the No Child Left Behind Act—is reopening its doors in September 2004, not as one large public high school that Principal Petrequin would have recognized, but as four smaller academies. Each school will occupy two wings of the old brick building and has about 15 teachers and 240 students to start, with a cap of 300.

The four schools each emphasize their own area of focus: the Linus Pauling Academy explores health, science, and leadership; the Renaissance Arts Academy concentrates on visual and performing arts; PAIS, the international small school, turns to languages and global studies; and BizTech, modeled after the successful New Tech High School in Napa, California, trains students for the digital marketplace.

The transformation is backed by a \$690,000 four-year grant from the Oregon Small Schools Initiative or OSSI (see article, Page 30), which is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Meyer Memorial Trust. OSSI partners with struggling comprehensive high schools across Oregon to create "high achieving and equitable small schools." It's a project of the Employers for Education Excellence or "E3" for short. And at Marshall High during the 2003–2004 school year, "E3" became synonymous with survival.



## Marshall had picked up a bad reputation it just couldn't shake. Of the total number of potential freshmen from the two nearby feeder middle schools, Marshall lost at least half to other public schools.

With a lifeline from E3, Wilhelmi and his team of teachers and administrators are trying to reverse a long downward spiral in just one year. This is the story of how they got there.

### **DIMINISHING RETURNS**

If you went to any American high school, you could have gone to Marshall High. They had a drama club and band, a glee club and football. In 1969, they sent one of their girls to be crowned queen of Portland's annual Rose Festival. That year, they lost another four boys in Vietnam. American flags, now faded, hung over each door. There was the football field in the back and a yellow school bus out front. Each day at three o'clock the bell clamored like a firehouse. Stepping into the double glass doors was like opening an old yearbook.

Marshall was as average as they come. And that was the problem. "Back then you had a much more homogeneous student body and teaching staff," Wilhelmi explains. In 1969, he graduated from a similar public high school on the west side of Portland. "The 'one-size-fits-all' approach to education worked better then, but now we have a dramatic shift in ethnic diversity, an increased range of socioeconomic backgrounds, and far more challenges with learning disabilities and English language learners."

Marshall's student body had diversified to include Asians, Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, and a large group of Eastern European immigrants. Almost six of every 10 students qualified for federally subsidized lunches. Slowly, the data began to reveal an increasing gap between Marshall's efforts to educate and the students' academic success. Despite earnest efforts, at least 20 percent of Marshall's students still fell below state benchmark standards in math and reading. At least 20 percent dropped out.

The student body had shifted, while Marshall had not.

"All schools have dropouts," explains Wilhelmi. "It's common for the freshman class to be the largest, and then slightly smaller and smaller until the graduating seniors—but at Marshall, our largest class was the seniors." Marshall, he explains, had picked up a bad reputation it just couldn't shake. Of the total number of potential freshmen from the two nearby feeder middle schools, Marshall lost at least half to other public schools.

"The siphoning off of our best students has been excruciating," says Tim Taylor, a math teacher. "It used to be that there were always one or two trouble kids in each class—now it's just the norm."

"When you're beat down over time, it's real tough to ever get up," adds Nannette West, the school change coordinator.

She recalls one morning last spring, her students noticed through the window that Taylor and his class were launching tennis balls into the air, measuring the distance the balls traveled and the time spent in the air to calculate for velocity. One of her students muttered in disbelief, "We don't have students that smart here."

The large brick building had been built to hold 2,300 students. By the end of Marshall's 44-year run as a comprehensive school, it claimed only 949 students. "We were becoming a small school alright," says West. "Not by choice, but by default."

### **DESPITE BEST EFFORTS**

As early as 2001, Marshall hoped to curb the exodus of students. Their first attempt came in the form of "Freshman Academies," where incoming students were allowed a two-block schedule, teaming up teachers with smaller groups of students. In 2003, they expanded it to include sophomores, and built into the schedule some common time for teachers to plan.

"It began breaking the walls down between teachers of different disciplines," recalls Keri Troehler, an English teacher. "We started having math teachers talking to English teachers." But it wasn't enough. "We were doing all we could, but the only thing we could do to make students' test scores go up would be to take the test for them."

It was Troehler's second year as a teacher. She had graduated with her master of education degree from Portland State University and high hopes. She'd been warned about the "burnout" that new teachers face. But she had no idea it would be as bad.

Another budget cut, another teacher shifted, and Troehler found herself the lone warden of one of the long anonymous hallways of Marshall. She recalls a dour mood in staff meetings. The ramifications of No Child Left Behind overshadowed all talk.

When President Bush signed the 2001 law, Principal Wilhelmi saw the writing on the wall. They had to change. Not just a little, but a complete overhaul.

"We were walking down the NCLB gangplank," says Gail Whitted, Marshall's network administrator. "We had two more years to comply with regulations and we saw them coming right at us."

With the new policy in place, students could get a free bus pass, a free transfer—essentially, a free ticket to leave Marshall. "It was a 'top siphon,'" says Taylor. "Those with promise left."

Principal Wilhelmi, desperate to save his school, even wrote to President Bush, stating his case: “For every 30 students we lose, we lose a teacher. You lose teachers, and you cut programs. You cut programs, and you attract fewer students. It’s a vicious cycle downward.”

With no reply from Washington, D.C., he turned to his teachers and staff. “We can make this change for ourselves, or have it made for us. But either way—Marshall must change.”

However, Wilhelmi had come to Marshall as an interim principal, and wasn’t really in a position to make radical changes. The staff waited for direction. Wilhelmi began to research successful national models. He saw the anxiety in his teachers. Troehler remembers Wilhelmi taking her aside and saying, “Just hang in there. One more year ....”

School let out for the summer. By the end of the 2002–2003 year, more than one-third of the incoming ninth-grade class switched to other schools.

Keri Troehler went home and began searching for smaller schools. She prepared her résumé. She drafted a letter of resignation.

#### SENDING OUT THE SOFTIES

While in grad school in 1996 and 1997, Troehler had read about small schools in textbooks. “But it was on a talking level,” she describes. “It’s one thing to say, ‘Yeah, this is a good idea’—another to actually see it in action.”

On October 27, 2003, Wilhelmi, now appointed principal of Marshall, set things in motion. Based on reading such books as *High Schools on a Human Scale* by Thomas Toch, he drafted an initial proposal to convert Marshall into smaller schools. In *City Kids, City Teachers: Reports from the Front Row*, he had read: “Big buildings need not be our enemy. They can contain small schools.” Wilhelmi took those words to heart.

Three days later, he received an e-mail from the director of the Oregon Small Schools Initiative about the E3 grant, requesting Marshall’s participation.

In early November, he assembled his Stage One Fact-Finding Team, which he abbreviated to SOFFT, and affectionately referred to as his “Softies.” Within the first weeks, his Softies began disseminating basic information about the small school concept. They mailed a letter to parents in various languages and then showed presentations to sophomore and junior social studies classes and to their Freshman Academy. They presented at middle schools to eighth-graders. Then, in mid-November, using a Smaller Learning Communities federal grant to cover travel and planning, some of the Softies set off to Boston to see small schools in action.

The four-person team visited the Boston Arts Academy, Fenway High School, Mission High School, and the Frances Parker Charter School. When the team came back, everyone gathered. The plane had been delayed and they arrived at 3 a.m. By 9 a.m. they rallied everyone to share the news. “After seeing those schools, I couldn’t go back to a big school,” said Troehler. “I just couldn’t do it.”

Less than one month after Wilhelmi drafted his small school proposal, the Marshall team began brainstorming possible themes for separate smaller schools at Marshall. They polled the students for suggestions and compiled the results by early December.

Wilhelmi knew he had to gain wide support from his staff. So he sent out another dispatch of his Softies, this time to New York. They visited Union Hill High School, Morris High School, Brooklyn International School, Bronx





*With the advent of No Child Left Behind, Principal John Wilhelmi realized that Marshall High had to undergo a complete overhaul.*

International School, Wings Academy, and the Julia Richman Education Complex.

As one team returned, he sent another out, this time to California, to visit the New Tech High School, High Tech High School, and the Preuss School. Within the next week, he and another team flew down to Oakland for more site visits. By mid-December, 17 fact-finders from Marshall had visited 16 schools.

After the holidays, they dove back into planning, attending several meetings each week. At the end of January, Principal Wilhelmi, Gail Whitted, and Kara Mortimer went to Lewis & Clark College for E3 training to prepare for the grant application. They had just two weeks to write the grant, and they faced more than two dozen competitors.

On February 6th, they gathered in one room and for the entire day pored over the complex school change “rubric forms,” where they had to detail and self-assess their readiness to convert from a comprehensive high school into small schools. For the next two weeks they revised and finalized the application. In their own hearts, they knew that Marshall sorely needed the grant; by reputation, the community knew Marshall needed the help. But Whitted and the others who

helped write the grant also knew that 28 schools were competing and they had been told only four would be chosen. (In the end, E3 decided to double that to eight grants).

They submitted their application, but didn’t wait for the results to continue planning. They were united now and focused. Through the beginning of March, each of the four proposed small schools—PAIS, BizTech, Renaissance Arts, and the Linus Pauling Academy—took all-day retreats.

In mid-March, they got the call from E3. Marshall High would be getting a site visit. They had been selected as a finalist.

There was no turning back. They had a mission and a deadline. They rallied with a singular purpose of preparing for the visit. If they had been running hard since October, now they saw the finish line. They began to sprint. Meetings were held nearly every day for planning budgets, human resources, and IT changes. The BizTech team faxed an application to the New Technology Foundation, applying for funding to replicate the New Tech school model. The local newspaper started calling. Wilhelmi and a team presented at the state capital before the senate education subcommittee. Then, April 16th, E3 came to visit.

Seven short, fast-paced months had passed since Wilhelmi drafted his first small-school proposal. Seven months to



**“It’s not a question of scale,” says Troehler.  
“If we made four small Marshall High Schools, it would probably fail.  
We’re making a totally different learning environment.”**

totally overhaul a system in place for 44 years. They hadn’t gotten a lot of sleep, but they did get the grant.

#### NAYSAYERS

When the news broke that Marshall would be broken down into four small schools, students wondered if they’d get to see their friends at lunch, if they could still sign up for the elective they wanted senior year, or if the football team would dissolve.

The students were asked to rank their choice of academies. Wilhelmi divided the student body in fourths by age, gender, and socioeconomic background. All students received their first or second choice. Some grumbled. Some went to his office. Some parents called. But overall it was understood: Change had been a long time coming, and it had arrived.

“This is a cultural change,” says Whitted. “Students and parents have to get used to the idea that from now on, school is a different place.”

While each of the academies centers on a theme, Wilhelmi emphasizes that the importance is “teams, not themes.” Eighty percent of students’ courses will fulfill core requirements; the remaining 20 percent will be integrated with the subject of interest. While some worry that having to pick one school over another may limit their options, Wilhelmi counters that even in the old system students could only take a limited number of electives. “If you sign up for ceramics, you can’t take metal shop,” he says. “That’s life. You have to make choices. We’re trying to give students something good to choose between.” He adds, “If they change their mind, they can transfer after a year, like any public school.”

Eddie James, a junior enrolled in the Linus Pauling Academy shrugs. “I mean my friends are my friends, whether they’re down the hall, or in another district. When I’m at school, I’m here to learn. It’s no big deal, really.”

#### NEW MODEL, NEW HOPE

“It’s not a question of scale,” says Troehler. “If we made four small Marshall High Schools, it would probably fail. We’re making a totally different learning environment.” Cross-disciplinary courses will be redesigned around a project-based curriculum, and internships and expeditionary learning encouraged. Smaller clusters of students will spend more time with fewer teachers, with the potential to help develop longer-term relationships of tutoring and mentoring. “You know, they tried this concept a long time ago,” says Wilhelmi. “They called it Oxford University.” Indeed, under the new structure Marshall officially becomes a college preparatory school, aligning required credits for graduation to the Oregon university system.

“It puts you on the kids’ side,” says Taylor. “You don’t impart knowledge, you facilitate it.”

As much as this is a change for the students, it’s also empowering for educators. “It used to be that we were handed our marching orders from on high,” says Taylor. “Now *we’re* the on high.” In the last year, Marshall teachers who confess to once skipping or snoozing in staff meetings have found themselves spending hours preparing, drafting, revising, and collaborating.

“I finally feel like educators are being allowed to make decisions on education,” says Troehler. Nannette West adds, “I’ve been a teacher for 14 years and never talked to the school board. Now I’ve done it twice.”

Wilhelmi describes the first new year as being totally consumed with implementing the change; the next year will be revision, adjusting to what worked or didn’t; and by the third year, he hopes maybe they’ll be able to look back and see what happened.

“We will be in flux this year,” says science teacher Kara Mortimer, “but it will play out—one way or another.”

#### ANSWERING THE CALL

*This is the challenge, then, the call to greatness ...* wrote Marshall’s first leader. In 1960, Principal Petrequin wondered if John Marshall High School would become known as a great American high school, but he probably never imagined its last day in June 2004.

As summer break begins, the brick building stands silent on the hill. The floor tiles are waxed, the rows of lockers still stretch as far as the eye can see, now open and empty. A yellow school bus is parked in front of the double glass doors. Outside, a dumpster overflows with poster boards of science reports on autotrophs, wads of yarn, torn art collages, and a stray gym shoe.

Down the hall, a graduating senior writes the final article for the student newspaper, 44 years and 43 volumes since the first. Two students help Troehler take down posters. On her door, she has taped a small piece of paper with a quote by Mark Twain, advice she offers to her students as they set off into the world. It is advice that she and the teachers and administrators of Marshall High School, now known as the Marshall Campus, have taken to heart: *“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour.”*

John Wilhelmi moves the last box of files from the principal’s office. ■

 **Web exclusive: NWREL and Smaller Learning Communities**



Courtesy of E3

# LEADING A REVOLUTION:

## Karen Phillips and the Oregon Small Schools Initiative

PORTLAND, Oregon—At first glance, blonde and petite Karen Phillips may not look like the prototypical revolutionary. But as the director of the Oregon Small Schools Initiative (OSSI), she's in a position to fundamentally change the state's 200 high schools.

Phillips works for E3: Employers for Education Excellence, the organization charged with the enviable though difficult task of creating a cadre of new and restructured high schools that are small, rigorous, and personal. Backed by \$25 million from the Portland-based Meyer Memorial Trust and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation of Seattle—the largest private investment ever in Oregon's K–12 school system—the multiyear initiative will provide funding and technical support to two dozen existing or new high schools. More important, it could act as a catalyst to transform policies and practices statewide.

The first eight “Partnership Schools”—including Marshall High School (see article, Page 24)—were selected last spring. A second cadre of sites will be chosen during the 2004–2005 school year. To qualify, applicants must be new innovative public high schools or existing ones with an enrollment greater than 700 students. They must meet criteria tied to demographics and readiness to change. Perhaps most significant, the schools also must have a strong commitment to raise graduation rates and eliminate the achievement gap by breaking into autonomous institutions of fewer than 400 students; designing curriculum around active inquiry, performance assessment, and in-depth learning; and incorporating attributes of high-performing schools.

Before coming to E3, Phillips—a home-grown product of a small high school in Central Point, Oregon, and a former math teacher—helped orchestrate improvements in the much-lauded North Clackamas School District. She spoke to *Northwest Education's* Rhonda Barton about her current challenge.

**Q:** *In traveling around the country and visiting successful high schools, do you see a pattern emerge?*

We find a consistency in terms of outcomes for students and teachers, not in how they chose to put the school together. We're learning that there's no one right answer for what these high-achieving schools should look like: They might be a career-based technical school or an arts magnet or a school organized around a high-interest area like the music recording industry. But, they have common components:

- A clear mission of the school's shared vision; a collaborative decisionmaking process
- Time for teachers to work together during the school day
- Students held to high standards and required to demonstrate levels of skill through performances, portfolios, exhibitions
- Students active in their own learning

They also have commonly held beliefs regarding questions such as: Is high school just the end-all or is it the transition to the next step; and should every child be college-ready?

*Oregon is one of just four states (along with Washington, Maine, and North Carolina) where the Gates Foundation is investing in a statewide high school initiative. What role does state policy play in helping or hindering reform on such a large scale?*

It can really stop this work in its tracks. The good news is that in Oregon, our state policies and graduation requirements are incredibly supportive of innovative high schools. For instance, the policy that just passed a year and a half ago (that grants credit for learning outside the classroom) truly gives schools permission to do things in a completely different way ... away from a seat-based (system) where the only learning that counts for graduation is if you're within the four walls of a classroom with a teacher.

*I recently heard Constanca Warren of the Carnegie Corporation say that there's no way you can solve the problem with high schools "one school at a time: This is as much about district reform as it is about school reform." Would you agree?*

It's definitely a systems change we're talking about. Sometimes you can get innovative schools started, but if they are to be sustained, then you need state policy, district policy, and financial support from both of those.

*How critical is community buy-in in sustaining these schools?*

It's absolutely critical. But I would say buy-in isn't even the right word anymore if you're talking about a case where you build it and then convince me it's the right thing. We want to push it to where our community—parents, business partners, students—are actually sitting at the table when we build it, so they're authors of the changes. It's the difference between how you treat your home when you own it versus when you rent it or when you've built it from scratch.

*Your grants, based on school size and what schools need to change, run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. How tough is it for a school to make radical changes without that kind of financial support?*

It's not impossible—we've seen examples—but it will be a challenge without the extra resources to find the time (for teacher planning) and training. One way schools are addressing it is to build in two hours a week every week to use for training.

*We're seeing both revolutionary and evolutionary change these days: cases where high schools radically reinvent themselves or make smaller adjustments, a little at a time. What are the inherent advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches?*

The disadvantage with the revolutionary approach is that you're going so fast you aren't able to change the culture and give people time to gain the skills they need to be ready for this new approach. A great example is 10 years ago, many schools went to block scheduling but teachers didn't have time to learn how to teach in a period that was twice as long as what they were used to. So they took their old skills, which might be lecture-driven and might not fit the new model very well, and gave twice as many lectures. With evolutionary change, a school can build a solid foundation toward larger change, but they can also be lulled into a false sense of security (and think) "we really don't need to be doing more." The small schools supported by our initiative will run the gamut from revolutionary to evolutionary. It's our job—with our coaching, research, and professional development networks—to help them maximize the benefits and avoid the pitfalls of either approach.

*If someone were contemplating reinventing a high school, what are the key areas to focus on?*

The staff at E3 has found—through research review and school visits—that a lot of the work of high school reform takes place in four general areas:

- Addressing the structure and culture of the school, because those create the environment in which change and good teaching come about
- Addressing teaching and learning to be sure teachers have the skills they need and students are asked to do their work in more authentic, performance-based ways
- Focusing on community engagement in both designing and sustaining the school
- Developing leadership

The research for many years has told us—and still tells us—that the principal is the key piece to this work. But, we're finding it's not enough. Effective leadership really has to be distributed. The principal can't do it on his own—there's not enough time in the day to run the ship and do this as well. But also, teacher leaders, student leaders, parent leaders, and business leaders all need to have part of the responsibility as well as the power.

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For more information about the Oregon Small Schools Initiative: [www.e3oregon.org/small\\_schools](http://www.e3oregon.org/small_schools)

To learn more about the Carnegie Corporation's high school reform efforts, see *Creating a New Vision of the Urban High School* at [www.carnegie.org/pdf/urbschl.pdf](http://www.carnegie.org/pdf/urbschl.pdf)

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#### ON KAREN PHILLIPS' BOOKSHELF

Here are some of the "bibles" that Phillips and the E3 staff recommend:

*High Schools on a Human Scale* (Thomas Toch)—"The most concise view of what we mean by innovation," says Phillips.

*A Simple Justice: The Challenge of Small Schools* (William Ayers, Michael Klonsky, Gabrielle Lyon) and *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (Lisa Delpit)—"These address the issues of equity and equal outcomes, not just equal access."

*Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (National Association of Secondary School Principals and The Education Alliance at Brown University)—"This offers wonderful guidelines; everyone should have it." ■



A diploma doesn't necessarily mean Johnny can read and write. A dynamic teacher brings passion and problem solving to literacy issues.

# THE TWO R'S

LITERACY LESSONS FOR HIGH SCHOOL

STORY BY RHONDA BARTON  
PHOTOS BY MOUNT BURNS

VANCOUVER, Washington—Isaac, a blonde freshman with a football player's build, pores over a copy of *The Outsiders* at a sunlit table in the atrium of Skyview High. Urged on by teacher Erin Rogers—whose conservative black business suit is the only clue that she's not a student herself—Isaac and his classmates delve into S.E. Hinton's world of greasers and rich kids in high school, dissecting the relationships and motivations of characters like Ponyboy and Sodapop.

This could be any ninth-grade English class, but it's actually a new approach to helping high school students become more fluent, comfortable readers. At Skyview and throughout the Vancouver School District, incoming freshmen who've struggled with reading in middle school now have the opportunity to take a two-period Academic Literacy Block that focuses on the strategies skilled readers use to understand texts.



“We have really poignant letters, written to the teachers, that say ‘[the program]’s making a difference in my life; my friends need to do this too.”

Isaac’s mom, Lori Bond, knows it’s working. “His reading level has gone up, from a sixth-grade level to an eighth, and he has more confidence,” she says. “This doesn’t come off as a special education class, so he doesn’t feel marked. He can get the help he needs without feeling segregated.”

#### A DISTRICT APPROACH

To be recommended for Academic Literacy, students have to meet certain criteria: get low scores on the eighth-grade ITBS; fail to meet the reading standard on the seventh-grade Washington achievement test (WASL); earn low grades in content area classes; and have a STAR or MAP reading score of fourth to seventh grade. But make no mistake, this isn’t a “dummy class,” says Rogers. “I tell the kids they are simply lacking some skills. This class is designed to help them fill in those gaps.”

The gaps are painfully evident, both here in Vancouver and around the country. According to Vancouver’s curriculum director, Layne Curtis, district officials studied assessments and current research on reading, and came to the conclusion that they couldn’t ask high school kids to “read to learn” without giving them the tools to do so successfully. A pilot literacy program was launched at one of the district’s four comprehensive high schools during the 2002–2003 school year and then modified and expanded to serve roughly a third of all freshmen in the district.

A secondary literacy specialist, like Rogers, is assigned to each of the district’s high schools, splitting her time between the classroom and mentoring other teachers. The program, which is in addition to more intensive support for students reading below the fourth-grade level, is funded through a combination of Title V money, a Small Learning Communities grant, state Learning Assistance Program (LAP) funds, professional development allocations, and basic education funds.

While students’ progress is monitored on an ongoing basis, the most convincing proof of success comes in personal testimonials. “When the program began, a lot of students weren’t anxious to be in the class,” recalls Curtis. “But through the course of the year, students have recognized what they were gaining. We have really poignant letters, written to the teachers, that say ‘it’s making a difference in my life; my friends need to do this too.’” Although some students originally stated their intention to opt out of the course at mid-term, only a very small handful actually did. Most will continue Academic Literacy in their sophomore year.

#### WHAT THE STATISTICS SHOW

The need for high school literacy programs is clear: The 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams showed that 26 percent of high school seniors were reading at “below basic” levels. NAEP scores also reveal that while fourth-graders’ reading assessments improved significantly from 1998 to 2002, eighth-graders’ performance remained flat and 12th-graders’ achievement actually declined. In international comparisons of reading performance, America’s 11th-graders score close to the bottom, trailing students in Indonesia, Brazil, and other developing nations.

“These findings confirm teachers’ impressions that many students who read well enough in the primary grades confront difficulties with reading thereafter,” writes Stanford University Professor Michael Kamil. He points out that middle and high school teachers have traditionally viewed themselves as content specialists, believing that teaching reading is a job for elementary school instructors. One way to turn that around, he suggests, is through ongoing professional development with literacy specialists coaching content teachers on how to infuse literacy instruction in their teaching.

Pressure is building to face the issue of high school literacy head-on. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB),



every high school student must reach “proficiency” in reading/language arts (as well as mathematics) by the end of the 2013–2014 school year. In addition, 20 states—including Alaska in our region—now require high school students to pass an exit exam in order to graduate. There’s fallout from students’ poor reading and writing skills in postsecondary circles, too: 73 percent of employers rate the writing skills of recent high school graduates as “fair” or “poor” and more than a third of undergraduates participate in remedial reading and writing courses during their first two years of college.

#### MAKING READING “VISIBLE”

For Erin Rogers, the need to teach reading to high school students came as a revelation—even after seven years as an English teacher. “I didn’t realize that kids had problems with decoding,” she sighs. “For example, when I got back some WASL tests two years ago, a large proportion of them had the same question wrong. I thought it was just outside their scope of experience. But this year, when I gave my literacy kids the same WASL as a pretest, 85 percent couldn’t answer the question ‘At what *occasion* would this poem be read?’” When Rogers asked the question in class, it became apparent that the students were avoiding the word “occasion” and that it had no meaning for them. “Once you tell them it’s an event, something that’s planned, then they show they really do know the answer,” she explains. “It was that one word that held them back.”

In the Academic Literacy class, Rogers and other Vancouver School District literacy teachers lean heavily on the Reading Apprenticeship framework developed by the San Francisco, California-based WestEd. (For more on this program, see *Northwest Education* online at [www.nwrel.org/nwedu](http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu)). The model encourages students to read for recreation, gain insights into their own reading processes, and develop problem-solving strategies. It also calls on teachers to

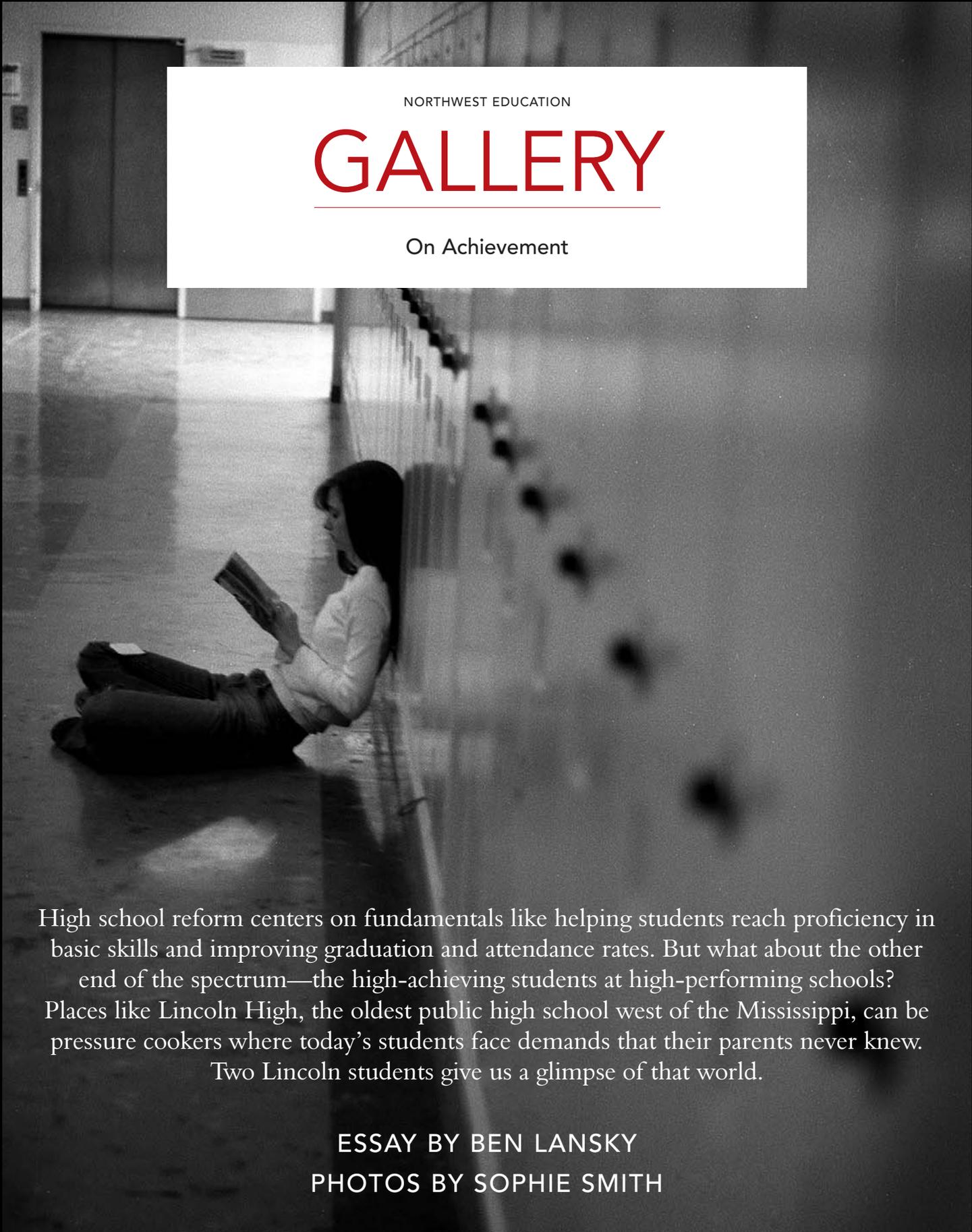
make their own reading process “visible” to students. Rogers shared with her class some of the technical texts she was reading for her graduate school courses in ESL. “I remember one sentence was full of overly technical vocabulary, but once you eliminated those words, the sentence was very simple. I read it to the kids and said, ‘Do you guys know what this means? How do we break it down?’ We diagrammed it, and I told them I use the same strategies in my studies that they’re using: highlighting, questioning, looking things up, slowing down, and trying to pick out the important pieces.”

#### SPREADING THE WORD

The Reading Apprenticeship techniques—and the writings of Colorado teacher Cris Tovani—have spilled over into Rogers’ social studies classroom and into her instruction at Lewis and Clark, an alternative school that has a satellite program at Skyview. While Lewis and Clark students can take advantage of a literacy specialist at the main downtown campus, Rogers “slips reading strategies” into their work wherever possible.

She’s also trying to convert other teachers to the need to infuse literacy lessons across the curriculum, though she admits that’s not going to happen overnight. “We’re trying to change a paradigm and a way of thinking that everyone’s not comfortable with moving to that quickly,” she admits. “I think it will happen. NCLB is forcing it to happen. It almost has to be grassroots though ... I start with a few people who trust me, and put out fingers. It might take three or four years for people to get on board, and not everyone will, but I hope I can show (them) this is the right thing to do. It’s good for kids and they really, really like it.” ■

📌 **Web exclusive: Practical Advice on Reading Across the Curriculum**



NORTHWEST EDUCATION

# GALLERY

On Achievement

High school reform centers on fundamentals like helping students reach proficiency in basic skills and improving graduation and attendance rates. But what about the other end of the spectrum—the high-achieving students at high-performing schools? Places like Lincoln High, the oldest public high school west of the Mississippi, can be pressure cookers where today’s students face demands that their parents never knew.

Two Lincoln students give us a glimpse of that world.

ESSAY BY BEN LANSKY

PHOTOS BY SOPHIE SMITH



Education is a great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery. —*Horace Mann, 1848*

In all likelihood, you were there for the good old days. The days when jocks were jocks, nerds were nerds, and high school was an end rather than a means—the days immortalized in the teen comedies of the 1970s and 1980s. It's really not so simple anymore.

In June, I graduated from Lincoln High School in downtown Portland, Oregon. For those readers unfamiliar with Lincoln, it's a public school of about 1,500 students offering a variety of “magnet” programs such as the rigorous International Baccalaureate program and the International Studies Center. The student body comes from almost homogeneously white, upper-middle-class families, and Lincoln is consistently one of the very top-performing high schools in Oregon, as measured by college acceptance rates and test scores.

For all intents and purposes, and with few exceptions, you might recognize your own high school here—the same flickering hallway lights, the same pumpkin floor tile, the same 1,500 lives spilling haphazardly out of lockers and backpacks. More significantly, you might also recognize the same tacit alignments and cliques, the same fraternity-style clusters of friends. But, even if things appear very much like they used to, something has changed.

Fierce competition for admission to the best colleges—as well as state standards and benchmarks—has created a new breed of student: the paper student. While the cluster of jersey-clad football players across the hallway may







remind you of the typical jocks you might have known in high school, you'd probably be surprised to learn that each of them volunteers several hours a week at community service organizations, most are on the honor roll, and many are involved in student clubs such as Model United Nations. And while the bespectacled "outcasts" in the computer lab might echo your own school's nerds, you may be startled to find that these are leaders in their community, politicians, and prom kings.

Particularly in an achievement-oriented school like Lincoln, résumés have become a central component of teen culture. With the swelling contention for college acceptance, even perfect grades are not enough. Each of the highest-ranked colleges and universities now reject hundreds of valedictorians every year. The secret to success when applying to colleges today has a lot to do with a person's achievements beyond academics. In order to get into the top schools, an applicant must be truly, deeply, an interesting person. Or, at least, an applicant must *appear* to be an interesting person. It is increasingly difficult for anyone to discern which students are genuine in their passion and conviction, and which students are simply going through the motions.

The truth is that, when excellence is the standard, the students who are genuinely engaged, involved, and committed are indistinguishable from those students who only present themselves to be. Achievement is a dazzling thing, on paper, and it is a simple enough thing to boast of. But what effect does this have on the individual?

In April this year, the *New York Times* ran an article entitled "New Lesson for College Students: Lighten

Up." In it, journalist Sara Rimer describes the measures that the top colleges and universities are taking to slow down their overachieving students; Harvard University, for example, offers training to graduate students in counter-perfectionism. And the need for stress relief is dramatically on the rise: at the University of Michigan, the number of students seeking counseling has risen by 22 percent in the last three years. Rimer herself says it best: "Some college officials see the contradiction inherent in their new efforts to offset stress and encourage the joys of reflection and unstructured time. After all, it was multitasking, hyperorganized, résumé-building behavior that helped some students get admitted to their schools in the first place."

How did this happen? At what point did ambition usurp interest as the measure of scholarship? I certainly don't know, but it is a frightening thing. The common characteristic alleged by each of the colleges I visited during my junior and senior years as a potential applicant was that the students "learned for the sake of learning." When that is the biggest selling point for the best schools, it seems that more attention must be paid to this philosophy at the high school level.

In a public statement in February 2001, President George W. Bush said, "You teach a child to read, and he or her will be able to pass a literacy test." And, despite his ironic grammatical misstep, that's true. But that should not be any person's rationale for teaching a child to read. Too many students have similarly lost sight of the purpose of their educations beyond what is to be achieved by them. This is not to say that genuine passion has waned, only that the rise of the résumé has clouded its distinction.

Perhaps the most important issue facing educational reform is no longer outdated textbooks or overwhelming class size, but the goal of high school itself. To many students, jocks and nerds alike, at least the last two years of high school are in fact preparation not for college itself but for the college admissions process. Moments of woolgathering, daydreaming, and improvisation are few and far between. Aimlessness, it is supposed, cannot be afforded by any student with hopes of a future. But these years should be somewhat aimless, as teenagers wrestle with the world and work out for themselves who they want to be. That all-important process must be uncompromising to be complete, and sometimes it takes more than these four years—it may take a lifetime.

*The résumés of Ben Lansky and Sophie Smith won them acceptance to Haverford College and Macalester College, respectively, where they're currently starting their freshman year.*

Andrew Yager is the kind of all-American kid any high school would be happy to claim. Student Council president, National Merit finalist, all-conference track star, and state speech and debate champion, Andrew entered the United States Naval Academy this fall. The son of a cattle rancher and stay-at-home mom in a Montana town where livestock outnumber people, Andrew has strong opinions about what makes a good teacher and about his own education at 120-student Joliet High School. He shared his views with *Northwest Education* Editor Rhonda Barton at the No Child Left Behind Rural Conference in Billings, Montana, last spring where Andrew and a group of his peers participated in a roundtable discussion:

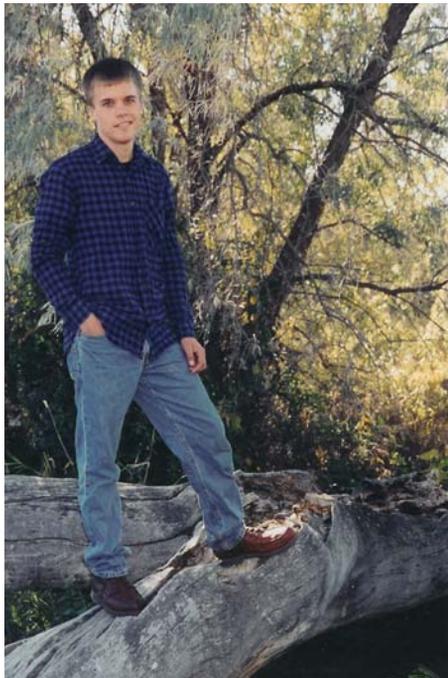


Photo by Melissa Yager

## Student Voice: My Take on Teachers *By Andrew Yager*

You can tell the difference between teachers who are excited about their job and willing to work at it, and those who aren't. Most teachers aren't. There are different things that will tell you that: Teachers who wear a tie to school, they take their job seriously. I think a lot of people, if they really saw what was going on in classrooms, would be shocked and appalled. I've had teachers who don't even come to class for days at a time. They just don't do their job.

The problem is there's no incentive for them to do their job. If they're in the union and they're tenured, it's practically impossible to get rid of them. There's a lot of apathy from administrators and state-level officials. If you're going to have a good qualified teacher, it's going to have to be a self-motivated teacher.

Instead of focusing on teaching educators to be educators, we need to teach educators to be scientists and mathematicians and they'll impart that knowledge to the kids. All the teachers who taught me something, who kept their class disciplined, were knowledgeable about their subject. I think the big solution there is money. Not just higher salaries, but pay that's based on merit, too. We should pay teachers what they're worth because you get what you pay for. When you pay \$23,000 a year, you're going to get—in most cases—a \$23,000-a-year educator.

The good teachers give you a lecture on the subject, explain how it works—relating it to your own experience, work with you personally on the subject, and then test based on that. I think a lot of teachers—partly because they're lazy, partly because they don't know their subject matter—are content just to give you paperwork out of the book. And that's not what teaches kids.

I think teachers can err on the other side of it, too. We're from the MTV generation but that doesn't mean we need to have MTV at school with hands-on projects and multi-media all the time. With a lot of hands-on education, teachers focus on the hands-on and forget the education. So, I think the teacher who can strike a balance between engaging kids and teaching kids something based on their knowledge of the subject matter is an effective teacher.

What can large urban high schools learn from small ones like Joliet? Never having been to a large urban high school, much less gone there for school, I guess I'd have to focus on the positive side of our school. I think one of the big things is the sense of community: teachers taking an interest in their students, students taking an interest in each other, and teachers and parents cooperating with each other. And, I think one of the things a lot of rural high schools have shown is that money isn't the issue. My school isn't rolling in money, but we use our resources well.

You ask whether I think I'm prepared for the Naval Academy. To be honest, I'm pretty concerned about the curriculum requirements compared to the knowledge base I have now, especially in the sciences and math. At a school like Joliet, we don't have the opportunity to take honors courses. That's one of the reasons why it's extremely important that our teachers not teach to the lowest common denominator but teach to the higher-level kids. They should expect everyone to rise to the occasion and if you can't, go for extra help. ■

# RESEARCH BRIEF

## The Challenge of Reinventing High School by Rhonda Barton

Each school day, more than 600,000 teenagers show up for classes in the Northwest's 1,500 public high schools. But for too many of them, the promise of a high school education rings hollow. "More than two-thirds of American kids aren't getting what they need or deserve in high school," declares Tom Vander Ark, the former Federal Way, Washington, school superintendent who now heads the education program of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "A third of them drop out, another third leave ill-prepared for college and work: What we're doing is a disaster."

Vander Ark isn't alone in pointing a finger at a system that's failing to meet the needs of a knowledge-based economy and a society with increased educational expectations. A report by the National High School Alliance, issued in May 2004, concludes that "as a crucial link in the K-16 pipeline, the American High School is leaking with the magnitude of the catastrophic *Valdez* spill." The Alliance, a Washington, D.C.-based partnership of more than 40 organizations, identified seven "key levers of change" to address the crisis:

- Connect K-12 and postsecondary education
- Make college preparation the "default" curriculum for all high school students
- Improve teacher preparation and professional development
- Ensure all students can read at or above grade level
- Address the high dropout rate
- Promote smaller, more personalized learning environments
- Make state academic content standards more flexible

Failure to make changes comes at a high cost in both personal and civic terms. An analysis by Professor Sam Stringfield of Johns Hopkins University shows that today's young high school dropout earns less than half as much as the average high school dropout of 25 years ago, in inflation-adjusted dollars. In addition, the economic advantage of obtaining a college education today is more than four times as great as it was 50 years ago.

On a broader level, a well-educated citizenry is needed to fuel the nation's economic growth. Economist Anthony Carnevale of the Educational Testing Service estimates that if current economic and demographic trends continue, by 2020 the nation will need up to 14 million more workers with some college training than the education system currently produces.

### THE NEW THREE R'S

In summits from Billings, Montana, to Boston, Massachusetts, the U.S. Department of Education has promulgated its own high school initiative—"Preparing America's Future"—which calls on states to identify strategies, stakeholders, and technical

assistance needed to improve the quality of high school education for *all* students. At the first of seven regional meetings, Susan Sclafani, Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education and counselor to Secretary Rod Paige, reflected on the fact that 50 years ago a high school education provided entrée to the workforce. "There were jobs for people who didn't feel motivated or who weren't successful in their education," she told an audience of several hundred at Montana State University last March. "Today there's just not a place for young people who come out of school without the requisite knowledge and skills."

The remedy, Sclafani asserts, lies in the three R's that have become a mantra of the high school reform movement: rigor, relevance, and relationships. "What we need to do," says Sclafani, "is create the communities in (our) schools that say for every child—including those who come to you not having gone through your school system or who come to you well behind grade level—figure out what they need and help them to get there."

### WHY SIZE MATTERS

Just how to make that happen is fueling a national debate: Should large schools be razed and replaced by new, smaller institutions or can they be broken apart into autonomous units coexisting under one roof? Should the restructuring happen overnight or over time? Is being small enough? And, just how small is small?

While it may take a generation or more to authoritatively answer some of those questions, research dating back as far as the 1960s supports the belief that more personal schools can make all the difference. Diana Oxley, in the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's forthcoming *Small Learning Communities: Implementing and Deepening Practice*, concludes that, "Research and experience have led small learning communities and small schools advocates to espouse a similar basic notion of small unit schooling: An interdisciplinary team of teachers shares a few hundred (or less) students in common and responsibility for their educational progress; provides instruction for a large part of their instructional day in a physical space devoted to this purpose; and exercises maximum flexibility to act on knowledge of students' needs."

Such environments are more apt to foster autonomy, competence, and interrelatedness: three qualities that consistently come out on top in studies of what people need to thrive. According to a 2001 study by Kennon M. Sheldon and his

colleagues—reported in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*—individuals need to feel that they’re the cause of their own actions; that they’re capable and effective; and that they have regular contact with people who care about them.

Kathleen Cotton’s often-quoted 1996 synthesis—*School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance*—concludes that academic achievement in small schools is “at least equal and often superior to that of larger schools.” After analyzing 69 separate studies, Cotton found that small schools exhibit more positive student attitudes and social behavior; better attendance; lower dropout rates; greater parental involvement; and higher participation in extracurricular activities.

Mary Anne Raywid has also written extensively on the benefits of small schools. In *Educational Leadership* (1997), she points out that a number of large-scale studies, involving thousands of students, document the effects of school size. “The findings of these studies reveal an unusual consistency,” she reports. Among the findings: low-income students in small schools significantly outperformed those in large schools on standardized tests of basic skills; size had more influence on student achievement than any other factor controllable by educators; and youngsters—especially disadvantaged ones—learn more in math, reading, history, and science in small schools than in large ones.

*Small Schools: Great Strides*, a two-year study of some 150 new small schools in Chicago by the Bank Street College of Education, looked at a variety of school performance indicators such as dropout rates, attendance, and standardized test scores. Patricia Wasley and her colleagues discovered that smallness in and of itself is not enough: for example, it needs to be accompanied by high-quality curriculum and instruction. However, smallness does pave the way for a variety of conditions that lead to improved student achievement.

“Consistent with nationwide findings, our research found that small schools create communities where students are known, encouraged, and supported,” the study states. “Students are aware of their value in these communities and, as a result, are more inclined to be responsive to teachers and responsible as students.” In such a setting, teachers are more satisfied professionally, likely to collaborate with colleagues, and able to build a coherent program among disciplines and across grades.

#### DEMANDING MORE

Regardless of whether students are bound for college or the workforce, a challenging curriculum is critical. “High schools can no longer act as sorting machines, preparing some students for postsecondary education and some for the world of work,” says the National Commission on the High School Senior Year in its 2001 report. “The conditions of modern life demand that all students graduate from a rigorous academic program that equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in both postsecondary education and careers.”

A strong academic curriculum in high school is the biggest factor in determining whether students earn a bachelor’s degree, according to a 1999 study by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Completing a rigorous course of study proved to be a better predictor of success than test scores, grade-point averages, or class rank. The study, which followed a national cohort of students for 13 years starting in 10th grade, also found that an intensive curriculum had the most impact for black and Hispanic youth.

The *High Schools That Work* model—designed by the Southern Regional Education Board—calls for a core of college-prep classes as well as challenging vocational/technical studies. But the courses themselves can’t exist in a vacuum. In a study of why some of their sites raised student achievement more than others, SREB found that besides “clear and high” expectations, successful schools offered an involved guidance and counseling system; focused staff development; district support; and formal alignment with both middle schools and postsecondary institutions. Students also could rely on “access to a structured system of extra help and extra time.”

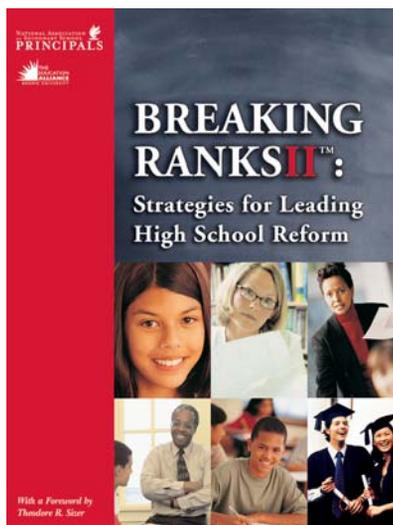
#### MAKING IT REAL

While relationships and rigor are critical components, advocates of reform argue that relevance must also be part of the formula. The American Diploma Project—launched by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation; Achieve, Inc.; and the Education Trust—is weighing in with updated requirements that align high school curricula with the demands of college and the workplace. In examining what’s needed to restore value to the high school diploma, the project suggests that “state policymakers need to anchor graduation requirements and assessments to the standards of the real world ... and in return, colleges and employers need to start honoring and rewarding student achievement on state standards-based assessments by using these performance data in their admissions, placements, and hiring decisions.”

Fred Newmann, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, argues that schools should promote “authentic” academic achievement that involves active student inquiry into real-world problems and higher order thinking rather than mere repetition of memorized facts. “To maximize the probability that students’ school achievements have adaptive benefits they must have some value beyond certifying success in school,” notes Newmann in *Issues in Restructuring Schools* (1995). In a study of 24 restructured schools, Newmann and his colleagues found that “authentic pedagogy” yields improved student performance regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

The challenge of creating a new vision for high schools—one that works for all students—is daunting. But, as the Carnegie Corporation points out, “this highly compelling and vital issue is the clarion call of our new century.” Almost two centuries after the first public high school opened in the United States, there’s more agreement than ever that it’s time to retool this critical institution. ■

# RESOURCES



*Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). Executive summary is available online at: [www.nassp.org/breakingranks/breakingranks2.cfm](http://www.nassp.org/breakingranks/breakingranks2.cfm)

Outlines strategies for reform that have proven successful in all types of high schools. A must-read for anyone involved in secondary education.

*The Comprehensive High School Today*, edited by Floyd M. Hammack (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2004).

An anthology of articles that weigh current reform efforts in their sociological and historical context.

*Crisis or Possibility? Conversations About the American High School*, by James Harvey & Naomi Housman (Washington, DC: National High School Alliance, 2004). [www.hsalliance.org/\\_downloads/home/crisis\\_or\\_possibility.pdf](http://www.hsalliance.org/_downloads/home/crisis_or_possibility.pdf)

Offers an up-to-the-minute look at the key issues involved in reforming the nation's public high schools. The National High School Alliance includes many of the major players in the national reform movement.

*Essentials of High School Reform: New Forms of Assessment and Contextual Teaching and Learning*, edited by Betsy Brand (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, 2003). [www.aypf.org/pdf/EssentialsOfHighSchoolReform.pdf](http://www.aypf.org/pdf/EssentialsOfHighSchoolReform.pdf)

Looks at reform efforts that incorporate industry-valued, career-oriented, contextual learning skills, as well as the assessments that work best with this approach.

*High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings From the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program*, by American Institutes of Research & SRI International (Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2003). [www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=4919](http://www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=4919)

Profiles the 21 high schools and 12 grantee organizations that were originally awarded funding from the Gates Foundation as part of the National School District and Network Grants program.

*Leading Effective Secondary School Reform: Your Guide to Strategies That Work*, by Mikie Loughridge & Loren R. Tarantino (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, in press).

A practical guide to effective leadership for schools undergoing reform. Emphasizes collaboration, shared decisionmaking, and the development of professional learning communities.

“Reform at the Top: Improving High Schools Calls for Comprehensive Change, Not Piecemeal Tinkering,” by Susan Black (*American School Board Journal*, May 2004: Vol. 191, No. 5, pp. 36–38). [www.asbj.com/2004/05/0504\\_research.html](http://www.asbj.com/2004/05/0504_research.html)

A concise and up-to-date introduction to the topic with a good reference list. Addresses the implementation problems that arise in many school reform efforts.

## On the Web

*Stanford University's* School Redesign Network has a great Web site that draws together a multitude of resources on redesigning large schools to create more personal learning communities. [www.schoolredesign.net](http://www.schoolredesign.net)

The *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*, a major driving force in the movement to reform the nation's high schools, has a comprehensive Web site devoted to this work. [www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/TransformingHighSchools/](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/TransformingHighSchools/)

The *Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)* coordinates assistance to schools and districts around the country that have been awarded U.S. Department of Education grants to work toward creating smaller learning communities. [www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/](http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sslc/)

📌 Web exclusive: Resource Annex

# REGION AT A GLANCE

## High Schools by the Numbers by Richard Greenough

### The Big Guys

(Data from fall 2002)

If you're looking for the largest high schools in the Northwest, you won't find them in the Seattle and Portland school districts. Metropolitan-area suburbs dominate the list of places with the biggest enrollments.

School	District	Enrollment
Marysville-Pilchuck High School	Marysville School District 25 (WA)	2,691
South Kitsap High School	South Kitsap School District 402 (WA)	2,524
Service High School	Anchorage School District (AK)	2,454
Reynolds High School	Reynolds School District 007 (OR)	2,422
David Douglas High School	David Douglas School District 40 (OR)	2,411
Eagle High School	Meridian Joint School District 2 (ID)	2,409
Auburn Senior High School	Auburn School District 408 (WA)	2,376
Pasco Senior High School	Pasco School District 001 (WA)	2,361
Westview High School	Beaverton School District 48j (OR)	2,340
Meridian High School	Meridian Joint School District 2 (ID)	2,336

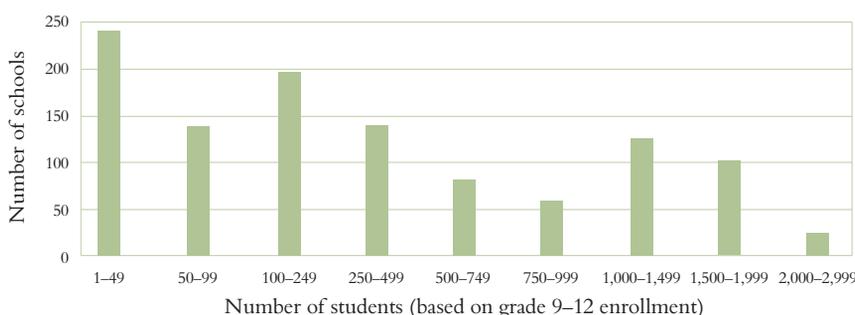
### Facts You May Not Know

(Data from fall 2002)

- More than a quarter of the schools in our region have grade 12 as the highest grade (1,501 out of 5,408 schools reporting enrollment)
- Of the 1,501 Northwest schools with grade 12 as the highest grade:
  - 1,151 are regular schools
  - 34 are special education schools
  - 10 are vocational education schools
  - 306 are other/alternative schools
- Of the 1,151 regular schools with grade 12 as the highest grade:
  - Nearly half are Title I schools
  - One-third have free or reduced-lunch eligibility rates of more than 40 percent
  - More than one in five are "majority minority" schools:
    - 186 are majority American Indian/Alaska Native (all but eight of these are in rural areas of 2,500 population or less; seven of the remaining eight are in small towns and one is in Anchorage)
    - 23 are majority Hispanic (20 of the 23 are in Central Washington)
    - 2 are majority African American
    - 30 have no single majority racial/ethnic group

### Northwest High Schools, by School Size

(Data from fall 2001)



## END NOTE



*A chapter ends Photo by Sophie Smith, Lincoln High School student*



*Northwest Education* is available online in both PDF and HTML versions.  
Look for Web exclusives.

**Up next in the winter issue:**

Online Schools: A New Frontier in Public Education

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