Building a System of Excellent High Schools:

A FRAMEWORK AND TOOL FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION

Developed by Michelle Feist, Francine Joselowsky, Rochelle Nichols-Solomon and Alethea Frazier Raynor

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Annenberg Institute for School Reform
AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

The Academy for Educational Development and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.

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2007

Acknowledgments

This publication is a product of the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University (AISR), who together with Carnegie Corporation of New York formed the Technical Support Team for the Carnegie *Schools for a New Society* initiative. In our work with sites, the team operated collaboratively, in the belief that a learning community can work more effectively than any individual or single organization. This publication was a similarly collaborative enterprise.

The authors—Michelle Feist, Francine Joselowsky, Rochelle Nichols-Solomon and Alethea Frazier Raynor—would like to thank and acknowledge the learning community of the Technical Support Team and it's members (both current and past) for their intellectual support in developing the framework over the years: from AED: Jeneen Garcia, Wendy Douglas-Nathai, Patrick Montesano and Jean Thomases; from AISR: Edwina Branch-Smith, Norm Fruchter, Richard Gray, Debi King, Lamson Lam, Warren Simmons, Hal Smith and Dennie Palmer Wolf. We would also like to thank our partners at Carnegie Corporation of New York Constancia Warren, Mindy Hernandez and Catherine Pino; and Kris Kurtenbach at the Collaborative Communications Group.

We also want to extend our thanks to the funders whose financial support made this work possible. We are particularly indebted to Michele Cahill of Carnegie Corporation of New York for launching the initiative, and to Kenneth Jones, formerly of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, who worked closely with us during the early years.

Critical to the development of this tool was *A Framework for Success for All Students* (2006), *Collected Papers from the Technical Support Team for the Schools for a New Society Initiative and Carnegie Corporation of New York.* We would like to thank those authors whose chapters formed the basis for this tool.

Many other individuals supported the development of this tool. Particularly we would like to thank Jonny Skye Njie, Leslie Rennie Hill, Stephanie Sibley and Mary Sylvia Harrison for their feedback, and all the SNS Core Partner and District Leaders whose work greatly contributed to developing this tool.

Finally, the contributions of the district, school, community, and youth leaders who led the work in the SNS sites have been especially valuable. The ideas behind these frameworks and indicators evolved as a result of their efforts and close collaborations over the five years of the initiative.

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Introduction and Context: The Focus on High Schools

Introduction

This tool was designed to deepen the understanding of what it takes to develop a system of excellent high schools. It provides a framework and guidelines for district leaders, community stakeholders, educators, administrators, parents and students to discuss, assess and map out the process of transforming their high schools to meet the needs of all students. School districts and community partners that have just begun or are in the midst of a systemic high school transformation agenda can use this tool to guide their reform process.

Two leading national education support organizations—the Academy for Educational Development and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform—originally designed this tool to assist the seven school districts involved in Carnegie Corporation's *Schools for a New Society* (SNS) initiative, a national initiative designed to reinvent urban high schools, redesign urban school districts and mobilize urban communities to demand and support widespread change in public schools. (See page 2 for more information on SNS.)

Using the rich experiences and emerging lessons from the seven SNS sites (Boston, MA, Hamilton County/Chattanooga, TN, Houston, TX, Providence, RI, Sacramento, CA, San Diego, CA and Worcester, MA), this tool outlines a range of strategies that districts and their community partners need to create the capacity and conditions for systemic high school transformation.
It is intended to:

- Provide a systemic change framework (see page 3) to assess development and implementation progress as it relates to high school redesign;
- Illustrate the various components of the high school transformation process;
- Identify indicators of effectiveness that can be refined and tracked to measure progress during implementation and
- Develop and promote a shared commitment to key work among all partners engaged in high school transformation work.

It must be noted that systemic high school transformation is a complicated and lengthy process. It is not an exact science, nor is it linear or formulaic, and it requires a careful analysis of data on the part of multiple stakeholders and diverse groups. Change is a process, not a single event; therefore dedicated time and resources (both human and fiscal) are necessary for planning, implementation and assessment in a cycle of continuous learning. This tool provides a framework and guiding questions to support that process and to stimulate rich and deep conversations for reflection and action.

Context: The Focus on High Schools

Two things are clear about urban high school education. The first is the imperative for sweeping change driven by the changes in society over the last 40 years. America can no longer continue to graduate a third or fewer of its students and to have so few graduates prepared for the demands of college and work. The second is the complexity of mounting and sustaining these changes, which are technical as well as political and cultural, so that the intended outcome—success for all students—is achieved.

The dramatic shift from a system in which high schools prepared a few students for post-secondary education to one in which all students are expected to achieve a broad definition of success calls for changes in the ways that schools, school districts and communities do business.

Until recently, much of the high school reform discussion appeared to focus almost exclusively on redesigning individual schools. If districts and states are serious about moving toward a just and equitable school system, the real question is how to create entire *systems* where excellence is the product of everyday practice and where high schools prepare all students—especially those who have been poorly served—for post-secondary education and training, employment and citizenship. This type of deep transformation necessitates bold new ways of thinking and requires a range of strategies that are systemic in nature—moving away from the one-school approach to the reorganization of all high schools in ways that support teaching and learning for the twenty-first century.[1]

[1] Excerpted from *A Framework for Success for All Students* (2006).

Background: Schools for a New Society

Schools for a New Society, Carnegie Corporation of New York's $60-million five-year initiative from 2001-2006 to reinvent urban high school education, was designed to build partnerships between school districts and their communities and create excellent opportunities for teaching and learning for all students.

Schools for a New Society challenged communities to reinvent all of their high schools and to redesign the district and central office to support them. High schools were thus both a target of change and a lever to change the operation of both the central office and the larger district.

The initiative also called for developing stronger community demand and support for excellent high schools. This requirement was a response to the short tenure of most urban school superintendents and the resulting need for a strong community voice that could help reforms weather transitions in leadership.

The fiscal structure of the SNS initiative also reflected the complex challenge of working in an urban context to achieve dramatic change at the school, district and community level. Rather than provide funds directly to the school district, Carnegie Corporation made its grants to significant community partners that had worked with the school district in the past to achieve excellence for all students[2] based on plans developed by the district and core partner.

SNS was not a ready-made design or model for all cities to adopt. Instead, it was a conceptual framework (see page 3) that cities used to transform high schools and school districts according to local needs and circumstances.

Above: *Students and adults at the 2006 Schools for a New Society Learning Institute in San Diego debrief a site visit at a local high school.*

Schools for a New Society challenged communities to reinvent all of their high schools and to redesign the district and central office to support them.

[2] Excerpted from *A Framework for Success for All Students* (2006).

The Systemic Change Framework: Sustaining High School Transformation for the Long Haul

The SNS framework illustrated in the graphic opposite presents a systemic theory of high school transformation.[3] (See Appendix 1 for full-page graphic.) The primary goal is to create an equitable school system that ensures all young people have access to a high-quality education that prepares them for post-secondary education, an increasingly demanding work force and engaged and active citizenship.

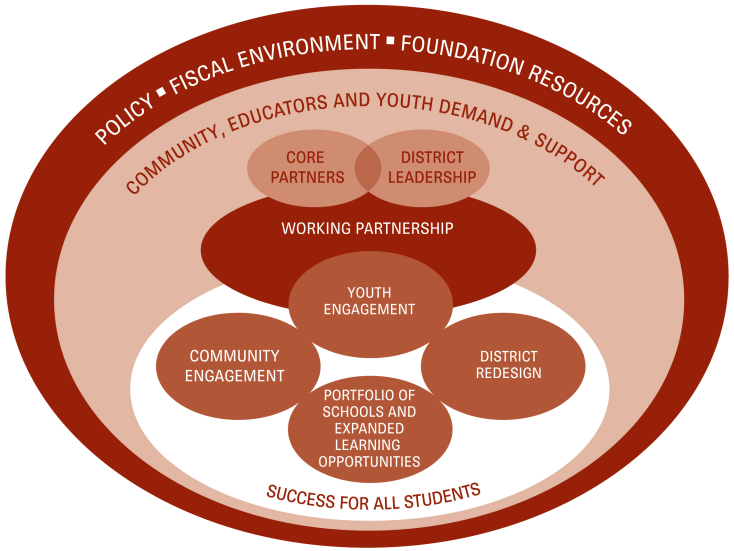
The complex relationship of the core elements depicted in the graphic visually demonstrates that developing an equitable system of high schools involves much more than adjusting the structure and operation of individual schools. Reforming the entire system is necessary to ensure that the community and the district infrastructure can support the transformation of instructional practices at the school and classroom level.

The framework illustrates the belief that high schools cannot be transformed without the district and central office rethinking the conditions that support success at the school level and the allocation of resources to different schools with varied needs. But school districts also need allies in this work—external groups that work with the district to build a partnership that can leverage needed action within the district, the schools and the community. Lastly, youth are the primary beneficiaries of this work, and their voices are essential to the process to ensure that changes reflect their genuine needs and interests and those of their families.

The framework suggests that success for all students requires each district to develop a working partnership with the community to:

- Intentionally create a portfolio of excellent high schools;
- Redesign the way the district operates to lead and support these schools;
- Leverage community contributions to expand learning opportunities for youth and community demand for educational excellence and
- Engage youth in both their own learning and in the reform effort.

3 This framework was developed for Carnegie Corporation's *Schools for a New Society* high school reform initiative by the Technical Support Team and the foundation with support from the seven sites.



The graphic illustrates all the pieces of the framework and how they work together. Think of each piece as a "cog" in an engine, each relying on the other to move.

Each of these cogs works simultaneously and in relationship to the other cogs to create success for all students. This tool includes a brief description of each of the cogs, or core elements, along with a set of indicators, to help translate the work within each of the elements into actionable steps. For a full description of the framework and the core elements, read *A Framework for Success for All Students* (2006). In addition to these five core elements, excellence and equity are cross-cutting or embedded issues within and across the framework that are demonstrated by:

- High standards and expectations for all students that guide policy and practice decisions;
- Equitable distribution of teacher quality throughout schools;
- Equitable distribution of students and social capital throughout schools;
- Equal access to rigorous coursework and supports needed to succeed;
- Accessible and available information on all school options and
- Distribution of achievement and opportunity that is not predicted by race, class, language or gender.

Tool Overview

This tool is intended to be used with a group of district and community stakeholders and should be adapted based on local and specific needs as part of the ongoing process of developing a high school transformation agenda. However, any group using the tool should consider the following:

- **Commitment:** Making the most of this tool requires a commitment of time and some resources. It is best suited for a series of facilitated and structured sessions over a period of time with a range of stakeholders. It requires a key person responsible for the overall process, which includes communication, documentation and collection of data, distribution of materials and notes, and follow-up. The process (conversations, meetings, etc.) should be facilitated by someone who is not a participant in the conversation.
- **Preparation:** Prep before each session is crucial. Initial prep should include a full reading of the tool by facilitators and meeting organizers, and collection of background materials and data to stimulate and support dialogue and action. The type of materials and data will vary depending on who the participants are and how familiar they are with this issue. Participants new to this conversation might require more context and some background materials that frame the high school issue in their particular district. After each session, additional data might be needed to move the conversation to the next level.
- **Process:** Conversations can begin as part of a kick-off event for a high school transformation planning process or can be incorporated into the ongoing work of a work group or committee focused on high schools.
- **Accountability:** Regardless of where the conversation begins, data and suggestions generated by use of the tool should be part of an ongoing process of planning, action and reflection that requires follow-up and readjustment. An accountability process should be established among participants to track effectiveness and progress and encourage readjustment when needed.

Systemic Change Framework *(See Appendix 1)*

The systemic change framework for high school transformation will be used throughout this process. Annotated descriptions and indicators of the following core elements of the framework are included in the tool:

1. Portfolio of Excellent Schools
2. District Redesign
3. Youth Engagement
4. Community Engagement, Demand and Support
5. Working Partnership

Using the Tool

The tool is divided into three separate conversations and will be most useful if completed in three separate meetings. However, it can also be used as part of a one-day retreat.[4] Each section contains an overview, worksheets and readings. Estimated time to complete the entire tool is eight hours plus pre-work, pre-reading and follow-up between meetings.

- **Part 1:** ***Setting Up the Process: Determining Where Your District/Community Is in Developing and Implementing a High School Transformation Agenda*** provides a framework and initiates a process to help districts, schools and communities gauge where they are in developing and implementing a systemic vision for high school transformation. *Estimated time: 3 hours*
- **Part 2:** ***Collecting Evidence: Assessing Development and Implementation*** provides a process for collecting and assessing evidence and identifying barriers and opportunities in each of the core elements of the systemic change framework. *Estimated time: 2.5 hours*
- **Part 3:** ***Analyzing Progress and Developing Priorities and an Action Agenda*** supports key stakeholders as they analyze their stage of development in systemic high school transformation and develop priorities or an action agenda for deepening or moving the work forward. *Estimated time: 2.5 hours*

This Tool Is

- Created to support a conversation and process;
- Designed to be provocative and expected to produce hard talk;
- A guiding set of questions and a suggested process and
- Intended to produce evidence, priorities and actions.

This Tool Is Not

- A checklist
- To be completed in isolation
- Show and tell

[4] If this tool is used as part of a one-day retreat, additional preparation and data collection will be needed to maximize its effectiveness. Please read all sections of the tool carefully and collect all necessary data before the retreat.

PART 1:

Setting Up the Process: Determining Where Your District/Community Is in Developing and Implementing a High School Transformation Agenda

Overview: Setting Up the Process

This section initiates a process to help districts, schools and communities gauge where they are in developing and implementing a systemic vision for high school transformation.

The purpose of this section is: 1) to begin or deepen a discussion about high school transformation using a group process; 2) to encourage thinking within and across the core element areas of the systemic change framework; 3) to assess progress and explore core beliefs and values related to this work.

What follows are detailed descriptions for each of the five core elements in the change framework for systemic high school renewal (see explanation, page 3) and a set of guiding questions to help your site gauge progress in the development and implementation of its high school transformation work. The elements include:

1. Portfolio of Excellent Schools
2. District Redesign
3. Youth Engagement
4. Community Engagement, Demand and Support
5. Working Partnership

These descriptions summarize information from *A Framework for Success for All Students* (2006).[5]

RECOMMENDED USE:
(Suggested time: 3 hours)

Part 1 is designed as an entry point into initial conversations that will prepare your group for using the tool. These conversations should involve an inclusive group that broadly represents all five core elements of the framework described on page 3.

To create deep and lasting change, all five of these core elements must be addressed, as they represent a comprehensive approach to systemic high school transformation. Experience with SNS sites proves that when one element of the framework is moved, there are consequences or unintended effects on other areas; therefore, representatives from each area need to be present and part of the ongoing change process to have thoughtful conversations on how changes in each area will affect their work.

Guiding Question:

Where is your district/community in the overall development and implementation of a systemic high school transformation agenda?

[5] http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/cogs.pdf

Part 1 Worksheet

Determining Where Your District/Community Is in Developing and Implementing a High School Transformation Agenda

Part 1 is a conversation starter designed to help your site conduct a quick assessment of the overall development and implementation of its systemic high school transformation agenda. *(Suggested time: 3 hours)*

RECOMMENDED USE:

In conversation with the group, use the following guiding questions to begin to gauge your site's progress.

STEP 1: ICE-BREAKER
Begin the conversation by greeting everyone in the room and engaging in a discussion using the following ice-breaker: *(Suggested time: 30 minutes)*

Question
- Briefly describe your group's/organization's work as it relates to high school transformation in the district. What is your groups/organization's involvement?

STEP 2: DISCUSSION
After ice-breaker, read the background piece on *Schools for a New Society* (page 2), the overview of the systemic change framework (page 3) and the short descriptions of each core element area (pages 9 to 13) with the following questions in mind; take notes for a full conversation.
(Suggested time: 30 minutes for reading and notes; 1.5 hours of conversation—2 hours total)

Questions
- What is your reaction/general impression of the systemic change framework?
- Where does your group/organization think the district is in relationship to this work? What questions/concerns/possibilities does it raise?
- What do you see as the relationship across or between these five core elements? What are a few implications this might have for the district?
- What else does your group/organization need to do to continue this conversation?
- Is anyone missing from the table?
- Are any data needed?
- What type of structure will best support the process of using this tool?
- Others?

NEXT STEPS:

Once your group has generated "needs" for future conversations, set up a time to meet again and agree on next steps for that meeting.

Descriptions of Core Elements

PORTFOLIO OF EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

There are high schools—large and small—in most districts that manage to prepare most of their students for success. However, districts have struggled to create entire systems of excellent high schools that prepare all students for post-secondary education and training, employment and citizenship. To address this problem, districts need to create systems of schools with a diversity of organizational formats, educational approaches and governance systems—a portfolio of schools. A portfolio of schools is much more than a mix of schools among which students choose. It is a strategy for creating a system of excellent high schools that share the same high standards and use choice as a central lever in the school reform process.

Characteristics of a System of Excellent High Schools

Designing a portfolio of schools requires more than the creation of new schools. Rather, the portfolio approach calls upon districts to be reorganized and for district and community resources to be deployed in new ways. The mix of schools in the portfolio can include small schools, schools restructured into small learning communities, charter schools, schools that are operated by community-based organizations working under contract with the district and other innovative formations. But regardless of who operates them, all the schools share two essential characteristics. First, they have a clear focus that serves to galvanize teachers' and students' work. Second, they are driven by the same high expectations for student learning and provide both a rigorous, standards-based college-preparatory curriculum and the academic and social supports needed to meet these high expectations. In this way, the portfolio provides multiple paths to success, organized around a common core set of standards and instructional practices.

Core Values

Four interrelated values are central to a portfolio of schools approach: excellence, equity, diversity and choice. While choice is a critical component, the portfolio approach is not an unregulated free market. Students choose from among a range of high schools based on their own interests, needs and ambitions. A degree of managed choice and careful accountability are built into the portfolio strategy. Choice is intended to promote equity within the portfolio, but patterns of inequality have a way of reappearing in new forms. Therefore, schools must be designed to include both strategies to reduce the impact of inequality and monitoring and feedback strategies that keep inequalities from emerging in different ways.

Implementation

While the school district will still play a leadership role, the portfolio approach depends on a powerful partnership between the school system and the community in which it operates. The following are roles for districts and community partners supporting these schools:

- Creating, managing and sustaining a system of individually excellent public high schools and guaranteeing all students access to these schools;
- Promoting diversity—of students and programs—both within and among schools;
- Applying universal standards of excellence across schools and providing supports that enable teachers and students to reach these standards;
- Engaging community groups and youth in the portfolio development and management process;
- Designing and managing the guidance and admissions process to provide fair access to the schools within the portfolio;
- Building the capacity of schools to excel for all students by improving conditions for teaching and learning and improving instruction and
- Monitoring and continuously improving schools in the portfolio based on four kinds of accountability: external, internal, reciprocal (between the school and the district) and community (between schools and the public).

Replacing the traditional system of residentially zoned high schools with a managed portfolio of excellent schools is a promising way to challenge the not-so-soft bigotry of the opportunity gap that feeds and fuels the stubborn disparities in achievement.

DISTRICT REDESIGN

To successfully create and support a portfolio of excellent high schools, districts must alter policies and practices that foster the status quo and impede success for all students. This means that districts must address individual and institutional beliefs and values, alter entrenched cultural norms, improve their technical capacity and their understanding of how they use their resources, create ownership of their problems and develop solutions to those problems that are widely supported and acted upon.

Until recently, the district's role in school reform went largely unexamined in research and policy on school improvement. Proponents of top-down (e.g., standards-based) and bottom-up (teacher- and school-centered) reforms looked at individual schools as the primary unit of analysis and change. Top-down reforms often bypassed the district central office by creating accountability systems and reform designs that focused solely on school-level performance and improvement. In many urban districts, the movement to create small high schools grew outside the district structure.

Characteristics of Redesigned School Districts

Unfortunately, many urban school districts fail to do what is needed to support and improve schools for a variety of reasons, including fragmented and demoralized central office staff and chronic budget shortfalls.

In 2000, *School Communities That Work,* the Annenberg Institute's task force on the future of urban districts, set a new course for thinking about the role of the school district. It called for a radical redesign and/or the creation of alternative systems that serve three essential functions:

1. Provide schools, students and educators with needed supports and timely interventions.
2. Ensure that schools have the power and the resources to make good decisions.
3. Make decisions and hold people throughout the system accountable by using indicators of school and district performance and practice.

To perform these functions, districts must organize themselves differently. First, districts must collaborate with multiple agencies, groups and institutions to support the academic attainment and development of students. Second, districts need to align their policy and practice reforms at the school and central office levels.

Core Values

Districts must create and operate portfolios of schools that address students' diverse needs and interests while maintaining standards of excellence and providing supports for achieving those standards. Districts can enhance high school improvement when they value and generate:

- High standards and expectations; a shared philosophy about learning and the authority to make key decisions, including hiring staff who support the philosophy;
- A pool of well-qualified teachers and administrators who have ready access to and incentives to participate in high-quality professional development;
- Materials and curriculum support to help schools develop courses of study that are aligned with the standards and a mechanism for comparing school progress in terms of equity, student outcomes and other indicators or results with schools serving similar populations;
- Access to economies of scale for functions like data and technology management, as well as transportation, food services, etc. and
- Substantive parent and community involvement in schools and in the lives of students.[6]

Implementation

Building the capacity of school districts to support portfolios of excellent high schools requires approaches that address individual and institutional beliefs and values, examine deeply rooted cultural norms, improve their capacity to allocate resources and create ownership of district problems and accountability for developing solutions that are widely supported and acted upon.

- **Value-driven Analyses from the Community**—A substantial segment of the community must establish the community's core beliefs and attitudes about reform, pinpoint those district policies and practices that support or impede their reform goals and seek consensus about the community's power to promote steps toward change.
- **Evidence-based Reviews from Multiple Sources**—Reviews of the district's outcomes must be evidence-based and extend beyond standardized test results to ensure that solid and complete data, rather than power or tradition, inform the debate and action. While these data represent an important starting point for discussion, they are too limited to inform policy and practice that might reshape the entire school district.
- **Community Engagement Based on Evidence**—Data must be analyzed by key constituencies outside of the district in order to gain community support for change. Many districts are using a variety of tools to conduct review processes that represent important models for engaging stakeholders in conversations about policy and practice that bridge differences in race, income, language and ethnicity.

[6] Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2002). *School Communities That Work: A National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts*. Providence, RI.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

As districts, schools and community partners rethink the nature and structure of their high schools, they also need to rethink the role of young people themselves in the high school enterprise. Creating a safe, engaging, supportive, meaningful and rigorous learning environment so that all students can and want to learn is at the heart of school transformation; it is also one of the biggest challenges. At an intuitive level, adults know that engaging students is a key factor in both individual and overall school success, yet many struggle to engage young people in meaningful roles or to find ways to connect youth engagement efforts to the larger reform agenda. More often than not, young people are viewed as recipients of learning experiences rather than as collaborators and co-constructors of those experiences.

However, schools, districts and communities need to recognize that one of the most important assets schools and school systems have in redesigning high schools is the students themselves. Engaging young people is not just a feel-good activity but the foundation for creating effective high schools that challenge, connect and prepare young people for their lives beyond the school walls.

Characteristics of Youth Engagement

Authentic engagement means giving all students opportunities to participate in the decisions that affect their lives (in school and out) and stands in sharp contrast to the notion of students as customers or consumers. Empowering students to see themselves as producers and constructors of knowledge[7] is a strategy to motivate and engage them in their own learning, thereby improving educational opportunities at the classroom, school and district level.

Engagement is stimulated by a learning environment that is challenging, safe, supportive and well structured; in which expectations are high, clear and fair and where learning is connected to the lives of students.[8] A strong school connection can translate into educational motivation, classroom engagement and better attendance, which are all linked to higher academic achievement. Therefore, engaging young people can effectively help schools meet the all-important bottom line: improving student learning.

[7] Annenberg Institute for School Reform. (2000).
[8] Klem, A., & Connell, J. (2004).

Core Values

Districts must develop schools that engage young people in all aspects of their learning environment. The ideal learning community is safe and supportive and deepens the learning experience, enabling students to make connections between what they learn and their lives and communities. But engagement cannot be a set of disconnected activities for small groups of students. Instead, engagement should be: a well-thought-out set of strategies accessible to all students, regardless of educational history and learning ability, institutionalized at multiple levels and connected to larger systemic issues operating at the classroom, school, district and community level.

Implementation

In a model district, young people will be engaged in:[9]

© 2005 by the Forum for Youth Invesment

Crucial to the success of any youth engagement strategy is the capacity for implementation. This begins with leadership buy-in and commitment, ideally at the school and district levels and with support and pressure from community partners. Without this level of buy-in, the ability to access time and resources and effect substantive change is greatly diminished.

[9] The Forum for Youth Investment. (2005, April).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, DEMAND AND SUPPORT

The purpose of community engagement in public education is to build and mobilize constituencies to support their public schools. For systemic reform initiatives aimed at transforming high schools and school districts, public engagement fulfills a variety of critical needs. First, tapping the ideas and expertise of parents, citizens and community constituencies committed to improving schools and school system performance can improve the design and implementation of the reform. Second, engagement can help build a permanent constituency for the reform, a particularly important asset in the highly charged world of high schools, where superintendents and school board members are transient too often. Third, engagement can strengthen the legitimacy of the reform, as varieties of constituencies come to understand, believe in and support the reform efforts. Finally, building community engagement intensifies public participation in public education and thus maximizes the potential for democratic action.

Characteristics of Community Engagement

Community refers to a continuum of organized constituencies to build a stronger base of support—from elite institutions to civic and cultural organizations to grassroots and youth groups. Teachers' unions can fall into this category as well. *Engagement* is the mobilization of constituencies around a common mission, goal or purpose. Effective engagement depends on both the articulation of a goal or purpose shared by a variety of constituency groups and the forging of relationships and structures that unite the groups in the pursuit of a common purpose.

Engagement strategies usually combine demand and support components. The *demand* side involves a critique or indictment of a school district's performance, failures and policy shortcomings, a set of expectations or challenges that schools do more for their students and a set of proposals to meet those higher expectations and significantly improve student achievement. The *support* side involves identifying, mobilizing and bringing together community leaders whose backing is critical to reform and whose time, resources and political capital will bolster the school system's efforts to produce better outcomes for the community's youth.

Core Values

The goal of systemic high school reform is not only to improve the quality of high schools, particularly poorly performing schools serving poor students of color, but also to build school and community cultures that can sustain the demand and support for high-quality high schools. While it is important to engage the city's political leadership, business leaders, colleges/universities, etc., in this endeavor, engagement efforts that begin and end with the elite sector are doomed to fail. The city's grassroots groups must also be engaged, because they represent the latent political capacity to challenge traditional race, class and power relationships in many urban settings. In fact, given the thorny challenges of transforming traditional high school structures and relationships, mobilized grassroots constituencies—and the organizations that support them—may be crucial to sustaining such reforms over the long term.

Implementation

To make engagement vital and enduring, constituencies must be actively involved in the following functions:

- **Information Dissemination and Reciprocal Communication**—Neighborhood groups should not be used only to disseminate and communicate information; two-way communication needs to evolve into a constant feedback loop that turns communication into accountability. The ultimate function of reciprocal accountability is to provide the levels of feedback, critique and advice necessary to continuously revise and improve the reform.
- **Participation in Governance of the Reform**—Governance structures involved in the reform process must transcend their dependence on segments of the city's elite sector and identify roles, powers and fiscal responsibilities for all the key constituencies, especially the grassroots sector. This is particularly crucial in racially divided cities and school systems.

WORKING PARTNERSHIP

Profound and systemic high school transformation requires bold changes, not only in the districts that govern, manage and support schools, but also in the broader community whose values and beliefs the district reflects. It is the community, after all, that will ultimately have to support and sustain the reform. Because of this, district/community partnership is widely held as a critical component of any large-scale school reform initiative. District administrators must forge working partnerships and agreements of mutual accountability with community organizations to improve the education of all the district's children.

Characteristics of Partnerships in the Context of Systemic Reform

Engaging strong community partners in the work of school and district reform will ***create and cultivate the conditions and the resources needed to deliver educational excellence and equity to all students.*** These conditions and resources include: 1) a shared accountability for schools, 2) an expanded number of unique and creative resources to support the educational process, and 3) the political will required to sustain change in the face of the inevitable conflicts and resistance that are part of major reform work. Because these "core partners" will co-lead and co-manage the change effort, they must have a certain level of credibility within the district, schools and community and also the capacity to help lead a large, complex effort.

Core Values

The working partnership is intended to evolve from collaboration between a core partner and a district into a larger set of rich relationships and alliances with other local organizations and institutions that represent a range of stakeholders and constituencies in the community. The end result at the local level should be increased capacities, new accountabilities, greater levels of trust and strong commitments to a community's young people.

Although district/community partnerships usually start as part of a structured initiative or to address a specific issue or problem, they should be designed to last beyond the life of that issue. Therefore, the partner needs to identify and integrate resources—human, material, knowledge or expertise—to sustain its work, independent of the district. In this way, partnerships with individuals, agencies, groups and businesses will evolve over time in response to changing needs, members and resources in the community.

Implementation

A working partnership is a formal relationship between the district and selected organizations or institutions that begins with, and builds on, mutual interests and stated commitments to achieve education reform. To be successful, working partnerships must be:

- **Action oriented**—Partners carry out achievable plans with agreed upon objectives/benchmarks.
- **Transparent**—Partners agree on the kinds of information to share and the conditions for sharing it.
- **Data driven**—Partners rely on data to allocate resources and create strategic action plans.

Essential to the growth and sustainability of the working partnership is a formal structure that explicitly outlines the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners. Clear expectations of participation are also critical to the success of the partnership and should be outlined in a formal agreement. Finally, for a partnership to be successful and sustainable there must be reciprocal accountability (for the implementation and outcomes of the reforms) and an established trust among the partners.

PART 2:

Collecting Evidence: Assessing Development and Implementation

Overview: Collecting Evidence

This section provides a process for collecting and assessing evidence and identifying barriers and opportunities in each of the core elements of the systemic change framework.

The purpose of this section is: 1) to use data to explore the characteristics of each of the framework's individual core element areas in depth; 2) to get people to think across core element areas and understand the inter-dynamics of these elements; 3) to assess where the group stands on the framework as a whole and to examine their core beliefs and values about this work.

What follows are a worksheet and sample indicators for each core element in the change framework for systemic high school transformation. In this section of the tool, users will discuss their development and effectiveness in implementing a high school transformation agenda in each of the five areas. Collecting evidence or data to support the assessment will enhance the tool's effectiveness.

The indicators represent an evolution of ideas and understanding of the framework developed through work with the seven SNS sites undergoing systemic high school reform. The indicators are intended to illustrate an idealized and comprehensive picture of what implementation could look like. They are not intended to be a checklist, but rather a barometer to measure progress and chart a future course.

Guiding Question:

What evidence is there (data, structures, policies, practices and resources) of your site's readiness or progress in each of the individual framework areas?

RECOMMENDED USE:

(Suggested time: 2–3 hours)

If your group has collected data based on conversations in Part 1, save time by sending it out to participants before the meeting.

Start with a summary of your group's last conversation, beginning with an overall assessment of where participants thought the district was in relation to the systemic change framework. Then share, present and discuss any data collected.

Once everyone in the room is on the same page, begin the Part 2 conversation by asking participants to read the indicators for each of the core element areas. (It might be helpful to have the one-page descriptions available as well.) To maximize the input of each conversation, think carefully about how the group is divided up. Make sure the dialogue engages all participants and that the full group has an opportunity to hear all the data and give input into each of the core element areas. This means dividing the group either randomly or by role association with a core element area and then coming back to share findings with the full group.

NEXT STEPS:

As homework for the next conversation, have participants think about the assessments and consider action steps across the initiative. This work can be done in smaller subcommittees for each core area, if needed, before bringing the ideas back to a larger-group conversation.

The key person responsible for the process will need to collect, analyze and transcribe notes for the next conversation. (It might be helpful to send the notes out to the group for feedback before the next meeting to make certain all important data have been captured.)

Part 2 Worksheet

Collecting Evidence: Assessing Development and Implementation

RECOMMENDED USE: *(Suggested time: 2–3 hours)*

1. **Indicators of Effectiveness:** Using either the sample indicators on page 18 or creating your group's own, please consider what structures, policies, practices and resources are dedicated to high school transformation at the district and school levels.
2. **Evidence of Effectiveness (Data):** Once indicators of effectiveness are listed, please consider what data your group has to prove or support the indicators.
3. **Barriers and Opportunities:** Once your group has listed its evidence, identify the barriers and opportunities that your district has experienced related to this element. Consider the data, structures, policies, practices and resources currently in place.

Portfolio of Schools	
CRITICAL ELEMENTS: INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS	
EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS (DATA) *Sample Questions:* ▪ What policies have been created or discontinued to address this? ▪ What practices have been changed or enhanced to achieve this? ▪ What political strategies have been employed here? ▪ What resources have been dedicated to this (financial, human, time, etc.)? ▪ What outcomes data are available that track implementation and/or impact in this area? ▪ Who leads this work, where is it housed and who is primarily responsible for managing it daily?	
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES	

Sample Indicators

BUILDING A PORTFOLIO OF EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

District/Community Level

- District works with community to develop a vision for a full portfolio of schools; this includes a broad vision of student success.
- Data are collected and analyzed to determine the features of a portfolio necessary to meet the educational needs of the students in the district.
- Key stakeholders and community partners (including young people) are consulted and engaged in developing and managing the school choice options in the portfolio.
- Data are used to develop a long-term plan for launching a portfolio of schools, prioritizing schools and communities with the greatest need and sense of urgency.
- Policies and practices are adopted to support improved instruction and the creation of personalized schools, where all students are known and parents and the community are welcome.
- Human, fiscal and organizational resources are aligned and mobilized to support the creation and maintenance of a portfolio of schools.
- Different schools in the portfolio include multiple structural and learning options that address the full range of students' learning styles, interests, needs and aspirations.
- Districts manage student choices by developing a sufficient supply of excellent options so that all students can find a place in at least one of their top schools.
- Districts take action to close schools that do not serve students well and work closely with community organizations and institutions to help guide students' and families' decisions.
- Districts create professional development programs and other capacity-building opportunities for principals, teachers and other new leaders based on leadership demands of redesigned high schools.

School Level

- Instructional improvement strategies are made by analyzing not only the required federal and state data on student performance, but also relevant data collected in classrooms, in schools and by community partners.
- Critical stakeholders (administrators, teachers, students and parents) play a significant role in the selection of educational improvement strategies.
- Proposed educational improvement strategies address the culture and context for learning and are linked to non-academic outcomes, such as the emotional, social, physical, ethical and vocational needs of students.
- Instructional improvement focuses on rigorous interdisciplinary curricula that integrate the development and use of literacy, mathematics, science and other core subjects.
- High-quality professional development is available for all teachers, primarily within schools.
- Instruction is engaging and student-centered and focuses on student inquiry and project-based learning, employing themes that help students understand real-world applications of academic skills and knowledge.
- Curriculum-embedded assessments (e.g., analyses of teacher assignments and student work, portfolios of student work, lesson study, work samples, etc.) enable students and faculty to monitor progress and make ongoing adjustments to practice.
- Common planning time allows teachers to deepen their craft and collaborate as members of professional learning communities.
- Extended time for learning through block-scheduling, internships and before- and after-school programming enable students and faculty to get the support they need to engage in challenging projects and tasks.
- Enhanced opportunities for each student to be known well are available, including strategies such as looping (students staying with the same teachers) and advisories that allow students the time they need to form meaningful relationships with faculty and their peers.
- Partnerships with community-based organizations, municipal agencies, businesses and higher education institutions extend learning opportunities for students and faculty and create pathways for learning and development that extend beyond secondary school.
- Supports are created that assist and/or accelerate the development of English-language learners, students performing well below expectations and students with disabilities.

Part 2 Worksheet

Collecting Evidence: Assessing Development and Implementation

RECOMMENDED USE: *(Suggested time: 2–3 hours)*

1. **Indicators of Effectiveness:** Using either the sample indicators on page 20 or creating your group's own, please consider what structures, policies, practices and resources are dedicated to high school transformation at the district and school levels.
2. **Evidence of Effectiveness (Data):** Once indicators of effectiveness are listed, please consider what data your group has to prove or support the indicators.
3. **Barriers and Opportunities:** Once your group has listed its evidence, identify the barriers and opportunities that your district has experienced related to this element. Consider the data, structures, policies, practices and resources currently in place.

District Redesign	
CRITICAL ELEMENTS: INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS	
EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS (DATA) *Sample Questions:* ▪ What policies have been created or discontinued to address this? ▪ What practices have been changed or enhanced to achieve this? ▪ What political strategies have been employed here? ▪ What resources have been dedicated to this (financial, human, time, etc.)? ▪ What outcomes data are available that track implementation and/or impact in this area? ▪ Who leads this work, where is it housed and who is primarily responsible for managing it daily?	
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES	

REDESIGNING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Traditional Assumptions About the Allocation of Opportunity and Human and Fiscal Resources for Success Are Challenged

- Standards and expectations are articulated based on achieving success for all students.
- Budget allocations are made to provide equitable support to all schools across the district.

District Sees Supporting Schools to Help Achieve Standards as its Primary Role

- Central office leadership positions are created and well staffed with professionals who have high expectations for all.
- Dedicated staff for high schools have the authority to make critical decisions.
- Differentiated technical and fiscal support is provided to help schools succeed.
- Processes are developed for recruiting and retaining highly qualified high school teachers, especially in areas of high need.
- Central office supports schools with embedded professional development and professional networks to improve teacher performance.
- Central office provides materials and curriculum support to help schools develop courses of study aligned with the standards.
- District develops core values and beliefs that encourage respectful and trusting relationships that connect school staff, students and parents—both on a person-to-person basis and through formal organizations like community-based groups and subject-matter networks.
- District creates structures and develops partnerships that allow for substantive parent and community involvement in schools and in the lives of students.

District Uses Data Widely and Effectively

- Common research-based indicators and definitions are used in all schools, and common data are collected and used for formative and summative purposes.
- Formal data systems that have been officially adopted at the city/state level are in place to provide usable data for evidence-based practice.
- Data are accessible and available to leaders throughout the district and community to ensure accountability and to evaluate improvement.
- Data-dissemination procedures and support are in place to ensure that timely information is accessible and relevant to schools and the community.
- A mechanism for comparing school progress in terms of equity, student outcomes and other indicators of results are established with schools serving similar populations.
- Data are fed back to schools in timely, useful ways and used to inform key decisions.
- Support is provided to help teachers and administrators use data in the classroom.
- Data help facilitate and support parent and community involvement in schools and in the lives of students.

District Promotes Accountability and Sustains Reform

- District makes decisions and holds itself and others throughout the system accountable by using indicators of school and district performance and practice.
- District creates policies that support reforms and advocates for municipal and state policy to sustain reforms.
- District develops the leadership capacity of central office and school-based leaders to sustain reform.
- Fiscal resources are reallocated within the district budget over time to sufficiently maintain personnel and programmatic resources without "seed" funding from external grants.
- Substantial reforms can be sustained without additional foundation funds.

Part 2 Worksheet

Collecting Evidence: Assessing Development and Implementation

RECOMMENDED USE: *(Suggested time: 2–3 hours)*

1. **Indicators of Effectiveness:** Using either the sample indicators on page 22 or creating your group's own, please consider what structures, policies, practices and resources are dedicated to high school transformation at the district and school levels.
2. **Evidence of Effectiveness (Data):** Once indicators of effectiveness are listed, please consider what data your group has to prove or support the indicators.
3. **Barriers and Opportunities:** Once your group has listed its evidence, identify the barriers and opportunities that your district has experienced related to this element. Consider the data, structures, policies, practices and resources currently in place.

Youth Engagement	
CRITICAL ELEMENTS: INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS	
EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS (DATA) *Sample Questions:* ▪ What policies have been created or discontinued to address this? ▪ What practices have been changed or enhanced to achieve this? ▪ What political strategies have been employed here? ▪ What resources have been dedicated to this (financial, human, time, etc.)? ▪ What outcomes data are available that track implementation and/or impact in this area? ▪ Who leads this work, where is it housed and who is primarily responsible for managing it daily?	
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES	

COMMITTING TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

District Level

- Youth engagement position created, supported (financially) and well staffed at the district level.
- Superintendent support shown through creation of policies that institutionalize youth engagement across the district.
- Youth and adult partnerships engage youth as co-constructors in the change or continuous improvement process. (This can be done through a democratically elected district-wide student government—if made clear in by-laws—or on site-based management teams that are supported by a district policy that requires student representatives on these teams.)
- Ongoing training and skill development for youth and adults provided to prepare them to work together.
- Youth included in adult structures and processes—on school board, superintendent advisory council, site-based management teams—with formal opportunities to contribute. Youth involved in key decisions—formally included on key decision-making bodies.
- Youth have opportunities to contribute to and influence the development of policy and structural change.
- District requires multiple forms of assessment for graduation.
- District policies require pedagogy that allows students to make choices about their educational needs and connects their learning to real-world experiences.
- The definition of student success is broad and includes a range of academic and non-academic indicators.
- Professional development for teachers and administrators includes practices that engage students in their learning and are youth-centered.

School Level

- Youth engagement position created at the school level. (A teacher will have release time from class to coordinate and facilitate this work. If it is someone else, they will have dedicated time—at least 25 percent—for this work.)
- Academic work is increasingly student-centered and enables students to make informed choices and take responsibility for their own learning.
- Engaging pedagogy is standard classroom practice. (Inquiry-based learning and differentiated instruction meet the needs of all students' learning styles.)
- End-of-the-year student portfolios and individual learning plans (ILP) are included in the multiple assessments educators use to monitor student progress.
- Students give regular feedback to the teachers.
- Dedicated time set aside for teacher professional development on engaging pedagogy and curriculum—ideally with student support or input.
- School-based democratic student government addresses school-wide issues related to climate, culture and school policy.
- Advisories or other structures personalize the learning environment and connect students to at least one adult in the building.

Classroom Level

- Students manage their own ILP, setting goals and developing benchmarks and tracking their own academic journey.
- Engaging pedagogy is incorporated into all classrooms. (Example: Inquiry-based learning that supports student choice and gives students opportunities to take on more responsible roles, both for what they learn and how they learn.)
- Group projects based on experiential learning are assigned and students are paired according to strengths and weaknesses.
- Students are given opportunities to contribute, be heard and make choices in the classroom.

Community Level

- Partnerships with external youth-serving organizations are cultivated to support teaching and learning and bring external resources into the school.
- Students are provided with opportunities to be engaged in the community and civic life through service learning, internships and community service that are connected to classroom learning.
- Links between school- and community-based learning experiences are embedded in the curriculum.

Part 2 Worksheet

Collecting Evidence: Assessing Development and Implementation

RECOMMENDED USE: *(Suggested time: 2–3 hours)*

1. **Indicators of Effectiveness:** Using either the sample indicators on page 24 or creating your group's own, please consider what structures, policies, practices and resources are dedicated to high school transformation at the district and school levels.
2. **Evidence of Effectiveness (Data):** Once indicators of effectiveness are listed, please consider what data your group has to prove or support the indicators.
3. **Barriers and Opportunities:** Once your group has listed its evidence, identify the barriers and opportunities that your district has experienced related to this element. Consider the data, structures, policies, practices and resources currently in place.

Community Engagement, Demand and Support	
CRITICAL ELEMENTS: INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS	
EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS (DATA) *Sample Questions:* ▪ What policies have been created or discontinued to address this? ▪ What practices have been changed or enhanced to achieve this? ▪ What political strategies have been employed here? ▪ What resources have been dedicated to this (financial, human, time, etc.)? ▪ What outcomes data are available that track implementation and/or impact in this area? ▪ Who leads this work, where is it housed and who is primarily responsible for managing it daily?	
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES	

MOBILIZING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, DEMAND AND SUPPORT

Community Is Authentically Engaged

- Community is involved in shaping a vision for change and in key decisions about reform.
- Community and schools develop shared criteria/indicators that describe what authentic engagement looks like and how it can be measured/documented.
- Community is an active participant at school board meetings.
- District provides formal and informal space for and responds to community input.
- A broad range of stakeholders increasingly "owns" the reforms and is given multiple opportunities to be engaged in school improvement efforts in ways that offer meaningful participation and an ability to utilize talents.
- Key constituencies are identified and organized, and multiple groups and organizations support a data-driven plan for systemic high school reinvention that will hold the schools and district accountable for results.
- Community has access to and understanding of data about its schools; partners work with the community to analyze and condense a wide variety of school and community data and information and use it to measure and guide reform efforts.
- Engaged constituencies include: civic/cultural groups, political leadership, teachers' unions, grassroots organizations and youth organizations.
- The district and partners (community, business, civic, religious) create regular opportunities to engage the community and policymakers in "owning" the goals, "feeling" the challenges and "seeing" the successes.
- Teachers, principals and school staff are engaged and involved in selecting, planning and implementing educational improvement strategies.
- Educational improvement strategies have a critical and sustainable mass of support among educators, students and other stakeholders.
- Community engagement work is linked to what will have an impact on teaching and learning (particularly at the school site level).

Communication Is Clear, Consistent, Reciprocal and Timely

- New communication channels are developed and used to disseminate information about access to new educational opportunities.
- Community partners have access and authority to make decisions about content and style of these new communication channels.
- Reciprocal communication (two-way communication) is developed to allow critical information to flow back and forth between schools and communities. This allows effective feedback that critiques, revises and improves reforms.

Governance of the Reform Extends to the Community

- A portion of the body governing the reform is made up of individuals or organizations with a demonstrated capacity and experience in community engagement and/or organizing.
- Leaders from elite, civic/cultural and grassroots groups are encouraged to become involved in governance.
- Funding stream is specifically dedicated (restricted) for community engagement/partnerships.
- A governance group exists that is authorized to make initiative decisions and play a role in overall program evaluation and review.
- An accountability system exists between the community and school system that clearly establishes benchmarks and the conditions for partnership, including:
    - Who is responsible/accountable for major work;
    - To whom are they responsible/accountable and
    - Consequences for not meeting responsibilities.

Part 2 Worksheet

Collecting Evidence: Assessing Development and Implementation

RECOMMENDED USE: *(Suggested time: 2–3 hours)*

1. **Indicators of Effectiveness:** Using either the sample indicators on page 26 or creating your group's own, please consider what structures, policies, practices and resources are dedicated to high school transformation at the district and school levels.
2. **Evidence of Effectiveness (Data):** Once indicators of effectiveness are listed, please consider what data your group has to prove or support the indicators.
3. **Barriers and Opportunities:** Once your group has listed its evidence, identify the barriers and opportunities that your district has experienced related to this element. Consider the data, structures, policies, practices and resources currently in place.

Working Partnership	
CRITICAL ELEMENTS: INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS	
EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS (DATA) *Sample Questions:* ▪ What policies have been created or discontinued to address this? ▪ What practices have been changed or enhanced to achieve this? ▪ What political strategies have been employed here? ▪ What resources have been dedicated to this (financial, human, time, etc.)? ▪ What outcomes data are available that track implementation and/or impact in this area? ▪ Who leads this work, where is it housed and who is primarily responsible for managing it daily?	
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES	

DEVELOPING A WORKING PARTNERSHIP

Managing the Partnership

- Partnership has a written document that outlines a clear rationale based on initiative goals and maintains a written record that defines roles and responsibilities.
- Partnership has a formal governance structure and processes that allow for clear, meaningful roles for each partner. All participants have the authority to make key decisions, raise challenges, set priorities and act on them.
- Members understand the motivations, incentives and commitments of each partner well enough to assume their point of view and advocate for their needs.
- Partnership has built enough trust and skill to talk about internal process issues and conflicts when they arise, rather than sidestepping them.
- Leadership is distributive, going beyond the superintendent and head of core partner organization.
- Partnership engages critical school and community stakeholders, including grassroots organizations and students.
- Access to key resources (human, monetary, time, etc.) is adequate and coordinated for all partners.
- Data are consistently used to make decisions about implementation.
- Partnership has a communication and engagement plan.
- Partnership has a core operating team charged with managing its structure to ensure all of the items above are accomplished.

Managing the Work

- Members of the partnership continually promote and broadcast a shared vision for district-wide high school reinvention to build ongoing community demand and support.
- Partners nurture community-wide demand and support for change, building on existing relationships and structures.
- The partnership develops structures and processes for ongoing planning and development, including data collection, analysis and the revisiting and revising of implementation plans.
- Partners connect schools and districts to critical external (and sometimes internal) resources (human, material, knowledge and expertise).
- Partnership develops collaborative approaches that seek to expand the capacities of the school community, while simultaneously holding the promise of building a political constituency for urban school reform.
- Partners regularly communicate and receive feedback from critical community and school stakeholders.
- The partnership creates regular opportunities to engage the community and policymakers in "owning" the goals, "feeling" the challenges and "seeing" the successes.
- Partners support the work during district leadership transitions and add to the sustainability of the reform effort.
- Partners work with the district and community to identify needs and priorities.
- Partners monitor results and serve as a "critical friend" to the district.

PART 3

Analyzing Progress and Developing Priorities and an Action Agenda

Overview: Analyzing Progress and Developing Priorities and an Action Agenda

This section is designed to support key stakeholders in analyzing their district's stage of development in systemic high school transformation for deepening or moving the work forward.

The purpose of this section is: 1) to encourage the group to analyze progress within and across the core elements areas; 2) for the group to determine and understand cross-cutting themes and commonalities as they relate to systemic high school transformation; 3) to develop priorities and an action agenda for high school transformation

Once your group has completed the worksheet and guiding questions in Part 3 and developed action steps for each core element, it will be able to look across the core element areas and develop a big picture agenda with priorities for work and action.

RECOMMENDED USE: *(Suggested time: 2.5 hours)*

Part 3A: Analyzing Progress and Developing Action Steps

(Suggested time: 1 hour)

Using your assessment from Part 2, analyze your district's progress in each of the core element areas. Then, reflecting on the barriers and opportunities your group generated, consider what steps are needed to move the work forward.

Guiding Question:

What does progress look like in each of the core element areas, and what do you need to do to move this work forward?

Part 3B: Developing Priorities and an Action Agenda

(Suggested time: 1.5 hours)

Part 3B provides an opportunity to take a step back and look at the entire framework or big picture of high school transformation in order to develop an action agenda that is aligned across the core elements and focused on creating a system of excellent high schools. This requires participants to analyze the strands of work to look for the commonalities, barriers and opportunities within and across the core element areas to identify what areas to prioritize.

Using the action steps generated in Part 3A, participants will look across the five core element areas to determine the commonalities of the work and the cross-cutting themes that emerge. Based on these themes and commonalities, participants will be asked to develop priorities and an action agenda.

Guiding Question:

What two or three major priorities will allow your group to deepen and move its work forward to promote success for all students over the course of the next year?

NEXT STEPS:

Once two to three priorities have emerged and a timeline is developed, indicators of progress should be identified for the group to revisit and revise, if needed, each time they meet. As the work continues, your group will likely refine priorities based on data and student needs.

Part 3A Worksheet

Analyzing Progress and Developing Action Steps

Using the assessment from Part 2, please analyze your site's progress in each of the core element areas and provide evidence and examples of the progress made. Then, reflecting on the barriers and opportunities your group generated, consider what steps your site needs to take to move the work forward. *(Suggested time: 1 hour)*

Core Element Area	Significant Progress ▪ Discussion is linked to action as part of ongoing process of improvement. ▪ Most indicators have been addressed. ▪ Significant progress in systemic implementation has been made. ▪ Data are routinely collected, analyzed and used to assess progress and adjust plans or action steps.	Some Progress ▪ Discussion is ongoing. ▪ Many indicators have been addressed. ▪ Implementation has started. ▪ Data are collected as evidence of progress.	Early Progress ▪ Discussion is under way. ▪ A few indicators have been addressed. ▪ Plans for implementation have been made. ▪ Data needs have been identified.	None ▪ Discussion has not occurred. ▪ No indicators have been addressed. ▪ No plans have been developed. ▪ Data have not been collected or reviewed.	Action Steps Reflecting on the assessment that your group generated in Part 2, what action steps does your group need to take to move this work forward? Questions to consider: ▪ What can be done to remove the barriers? ▪ What can be done to increase the opportunities? ▪ What indicators will your group use to gauge the progress it has made?
PORTFOLIO OF SCHOOLS	*Progress Made:* *Evidence:*				*Action Steps:*
DISTRICT REDESIGN					
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT					
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT					
WORKING PARTNERSHIP					

Part 3B Worksheet

Developing Priorities and a Systemic Action Agenda

As you move into this final stage of the tool and begin to develop an action agenda, please keep in mind that, as with any comprehensive change process, systemic high school transformation is not a short-term commitment likely to produce substantial results in student achievement in the early years of implementation. Creating the will and the momentum to effect change requires a continuous process of planning, doing and then reflecting on what was done. This point cannot be emphasized enough. At the onset, districts and their partners should identify and track a set of short-term benchmarks that will serve as leading indicators of progress toward long-term goals. *(Suggested time: 1.5 hours)*

RECOMMENDED USE:

STEP 1: ASSESSING THEMES AND COMMONALITIES
(Suggested time: 30 minutes)
Using the action steps generated in Part 3A, consider the following:

1. What are the intersections/commonalities of the work across the five core elements?
2. What cross-cutting themes emerge?

STEP 2: PRIORITIES, TIMELINE AND ACTION STEPS
(Suggested time: 1 hour)
Based on the cross-cutting themes and commonalities, what are two or three major priorities that your group must address over the course of the next year to deepen and move the work forward and promote success for all students? Create a timeline and action steps associated with each priority.

Guiding Questions

1. What outcomes is your group trying to achieve?
2. How will your group identify progress in this area? What types of data and other evidence will be gathered?
3. What policies and practices will be addressed?
4. What actions are needed to secure critical sustaining resources?
5. How will the work be monitored and with whom will this information be shared?
6. Who will lead this work? If needed, how will leadership capacity be developed?
7. Who will be involved? What relationships will your group need to develop or deepen?

NEXT STEPS:

Once your group has created two to three priorities and a timeline, use these to identify indicators of progress to revisit each time the group meets and revise when needed. As the work continues, your group will likely refine or revise these priorities based on data and student needs.

Conclusion

Creating a system of excellent and equitable high schools is a complex and continuous process that requires enduring commitment and support from the district and community, as well as a tenacious spirit and a clear vision of what constitutes success. This is especially true in the early years of implementation, before substantial results in student achievement are realized.

The framework guiding the *Schools for a New Society* initiative was comprehensive in scope, presenting many facets for leadership groups to consider. At different times during the initiative, SNS sites focused more attention on one core element of the framework than on another, which is a realistic approach. Now the challenge facing each district is to keep all of the core elements within sight and convey to partners and constituents its commitment to advancing a systemic agenda for high school transformation, even as the reform goals may shift in emphasis over time.

Making a long-term commitment to systemic reform requires continuously revisiting the impact and intersection among the core elements in the framework. Work in one area will undoubtedly create movement (positive or negative) in another area. Having leaders engaged across all of the areas will enhance the participants' potential to identify and address challenges and opportunities for change. Such complex interaction requires a vision that can be sustained after initial funding ends and through the inevitable leadership transitions.

Over the past five years, the seven cities that were part of the *Schools for a New Society* initiative made important strides in transforming their high schools, and they continue to build upon that work to improve learning options and outcomes for high school students. It is a work in progress. However, a visitor to any of the seven cities would see signs of change: more coherent high school policies; more rigorous and engaging coursework; more effective school practices and structures; and more commitment to engaging youth, families and communities in guiding and shaping those efforts. Some of the most significant changes occurred because of the increased focus on data and how they were used to shape teaching and learning in high schools.[10]

The seven cities have created new schools, personalized existing schools by dividing them into smaller units and adding student advisory periods, and formed partnerships with other institutions to provide additional learning opportunities. These new and transformed schools address a wide range of student needs and interests. Specific examples of progress in each of the core element areas from the SNS districts include:

Portfolio of Schools: One SNS site significantly diversified its high school options to include an array of school structures and learning opportunities. Literacy development for all students has been the central focus and, as a result, high schools in this city have shown as much as a 33-percentage-point increase in the number of students scoring at proficient and advanced levels on their English/Language Arts state assessments.

District Redesign: Another city completely revamped its central office data system. With a district-wide infrastructure and set of practices now in place, all high schools can collect, analyze and report on a range of student data that is used as a benchmark for instructional progress. This district examined and tracked significant (over 13 percent) increases in on-time graduation rates during the initiative.

Community Engagement: The core partner in another district formed a coalition with key community-based leaders to demand educational excellence in its high schools. This coalition has been instrumental in positioning youth voice as central to the high school redesign process and it has been recognized by state education officials as a catalyst for mobilizing the community to press for needed changes in struggling high schools.

Youth Engagement: Young people who were part of one district's citywide student government worked with principals and teachers to draft recommendations to revise the district's lock-out and tardy policy, which adversely affected overall student attendance. Their efforts to show that refusing students entry to school limited their access to learning resulted in the local school board reversing the lock-out policy.

Working Partnership: The core partner in one SNS district cultivated and supported a collaboration between the community college system and the district to open three early-college high schools over the last five years. These high schools give young people the opportunity to take college courses while still in high school and the possibility of graduating with a high school diploma and an associate's degree. In June of 2006, the first class of students did just that.

[10] A Framework for Success for All Students (2006).

These examples illustrate the power of collective effort to transform high schools and improve learning opportunities for all young people. Many other hard-won successes and useful lessons have been learned along the way. What will continue to sustain the work in these cities through leadership transitions and other challenges will be a persistent belief that high schools can be a place where excellent and equitable learning opportunities exist for all young people in our society.

Preliminary Data from an SNS Evaluation*

Some examples of the impact of SNS in three areas:

Impact on students, children, and youth

- Across all SNS sites, the percentage of ninth-grade students with on-time promotion increased by an initiative-wide average of 4 percent over a three-year period.
- The college-level test index indicates a nearly 20 percent increase initiative-wide in the number of students taking A.P and I.B. tests over a four-year period.

Impact on schools and teaching

- SNS was successful in keeping a focus on both high school restructuring and improvements in teaching and learning.
- The SNS investment in improving adolescent literacy has been notable.
- Most SNS districts made good progress in improving their data systems to better support good teaching and learning.
- Many of the SNS districts have taken significant steps to successfully restructure district–high school relationships in ways that are supportive of better outcomes for students.
- All SNS districts have increased the number of secondary school options (that is, expanded their portfolio of high schools) for at least some families and students.
- Youth engagement, or youth voice, rose in importance through participation in SNS and will hopefully be sustained beyond the initiative.

Impact on demand

- In almost all the SNS sites, the core partner organization has provided leadership stability and valuable counsel to the participating school districts, especially where turnover in district leadership has been an issue.

* From Nancy Adelman et al. (2007). National Cross-site Evaluation of the Carnegie Corporation's Schools for a New Society Initiative. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International. This evaluation was commissioned by Carnegie Corporation and conducted in partnership with the American Institutes for Research.

References and Resources

References:

A Framework for Success for All Students: Collected Papers from the Technical Support Team for the Schools for a New Society Initiative and Carnegie Corporation of New York (2006). New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York under agreement with the Academy for Educational Development and Collaborative Communications Group Inc.

Adelman, N. E. (2007)/ Findings from a National Cross-site Evaluation of the Schools for a New Society Initiative. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

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Klem A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). "Relationships Matter: Linking Teacher Support to Student Engagement and Achievement." Paper presented at the tenth biennial meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, Baltimore, March 11-14. Philadelphia: Institute for Research and Reform in Education

Additional Resources:

Academy for Educational Development, http://www.aed.org/

Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, http://www.annenberginstitute.org/

Century, J. R., and Levy, A. J. (2004). "Sustaining Change: A Study of Nine School Districts with Enduring Programs." Paper presented at the annual conference of the National Association for Research on Science Teaching, Vancouver, B.C., April 3. Newton, MA: Center for Science Education, Education Development Center.

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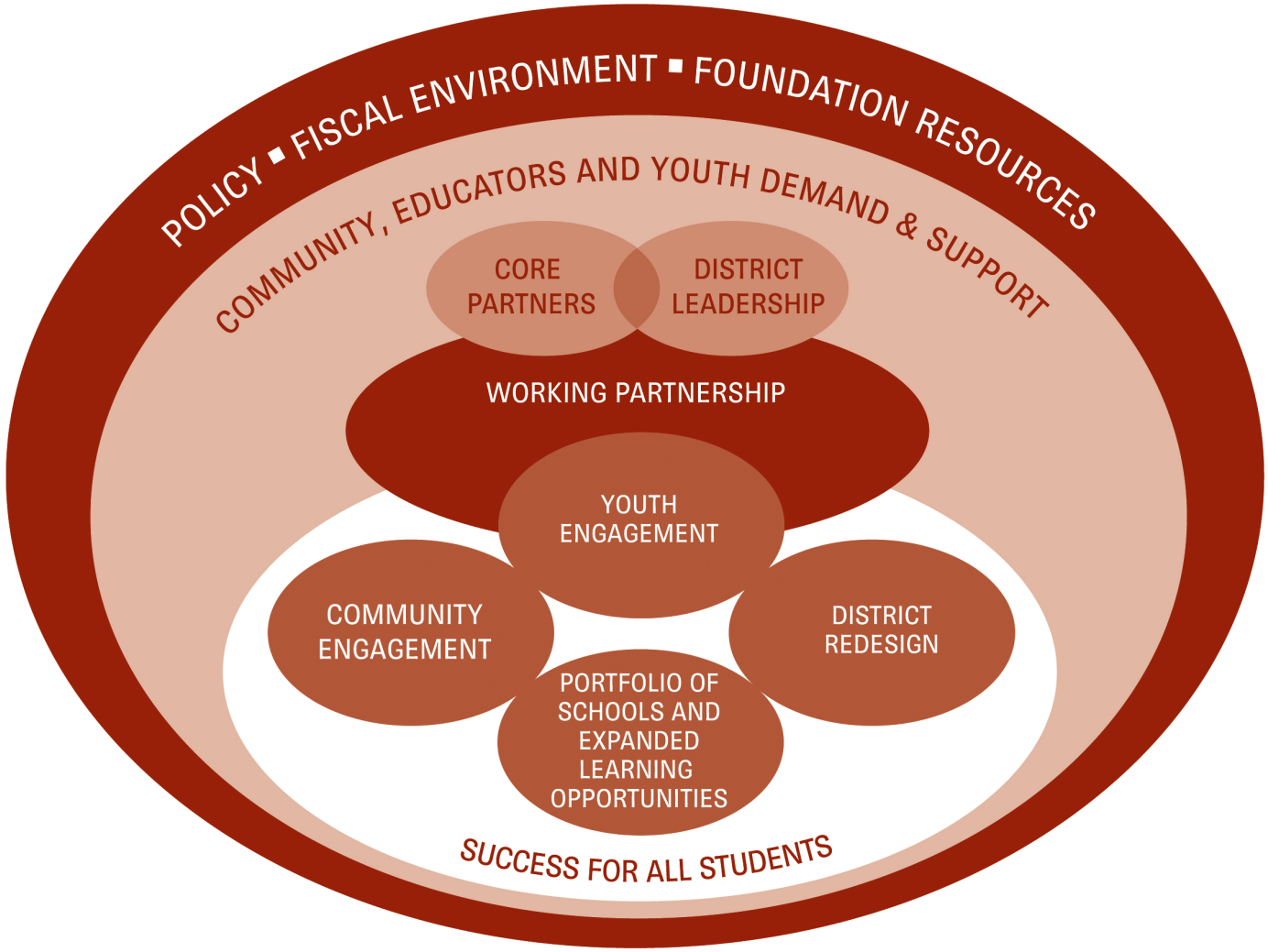
Appendix 1: The Systemic Change Framework for High School Transformation



This framework was developed for Carnegie Corporation's *Schools for a New Society* high school reform initiative by the Technical Support Team and the foundation with support from the seven sites.

Appendix 2: Part 2 Worksheet

CRITICAL ELEMENTS: INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS	
EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS (DATA) ***Sample Questions:*** ▪ What policies have been created or discontinued to address this? ▪ What practices have been changed or enhanced to achieve this? ▪ What political strategies have been employed here? ▪ What resources have been dedicated to this (financial, human, time, etc.)? ▪ What outcomes data are available that track implementation and/or impact in this area? ▪ Who leads this work, where is it housed and who is primarily responsible for managing it daily?	
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES	

Appendix 3: Part 3A Worksheet

Core Element Area	Significant Progress ▪ Discussion is linked to action as part of ongoing process of improvement. ▪ Most indicators have been addressed. ▪ Significant progress in systemic implementation has been made. ▪ Data are routinely collected, analyzed and used to assess progress and adjust plans or action steps.	Some Progress ▪ Discussion is ongoing. ▪ Many indicators have been addressed. ▪ Implementation has started. ▪ Data are collected as evidence of progress.	Early Progress ▪ Discussion is under way. ▪ A few indicators have been addressed. ▪ Plans for implementation have been made. ▪ Data needs have been identified.	None ▪ Discussion has not occurred. ▪ No indicators have been addressed. ▪ No plans have been developed. ▪ Data have not been collected or reviewed.	Action Steps Reflecting on the assessment that your group generated in Part 2, what action steps does your group need to take to move this work forward? Questions to consider: ▪ What can be done to remove the barriers? ▪ What can be done to increase the opportunities? ▪ What indicators will your group use to gauge the progress it has made?
PORTFOLIO OF SCHOOLS	*Progress Made:* *Evidence:*				*Action Steps:*
DISTRICT REDESIGN					
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT					
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT					
WORKING PARTNERSHIP					

For more information on this tool, or to order print copies call or email:
AED: framework_info@aed.org Phone: 212-243-1110
AISR: AISR_info@brown.edu Phone: 401-863-7990.

This tool was originally developed for Carnegie Corporation of New York as part of its *Schools for a New Society* initiative (2005).