

A CALL TO ACTION: Transforming High School for All Youth

Core Principles



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The National High School Alliance's A Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth provides a common framework for leaders at the national, state, district, school, and community levels to use in engaging a diverse cross-section of stakeholders in the hard work of transforming high schools for all youth. The framework identifies six core principles and recommended strategies that will foster high academic achievement, close the achievement gap, and promote civic and personal growth in high-school-age youth. The core principles are inter-related and non-negotiable for the transformation of high schools. In order to create deep and lasting change, all six of the core principles must be addressed. At the center of the framework is the National High School Alliance's belief that the purpose of high school is to ensure that all high-school-age youth are ready for college, careers, and active civic participation.

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Recommended Strategies

Personalized Learning Environments

- ◆ Structure school size and schedules so that all students and all teachers are in small learning environments—ideally, 400 students or less in a 9-12 high school
- ◆ Develop academically rigorous curricula that meet or exceed standards, are relevant to real-world contexts, and build on student and community assets
- ◆ Build capacity of teachers to identify the need of—and provide appropriate supports and accommodations for—multiple student populations
- ◆ Establish teacher teaming and looping structures
- ◆ Develop a personal learning plan for each student
- ◆ Work across the school system to address student needs at critical transitions, in particular the transition from the middle grades to high school and from high school to post-secondary education
- ◆ Identify an advocate/advisor for each student and their family
- ◆ Involve students in decision-making about their academic development
- ◆ Build student capacity and provide opportunities for students to exercise leadership and civic engagement

Academic Engagement of All Students

- ◆ Engage all students in a rigorous, standards-based core academic curriculum
- ◆ Emphasize project-based learning and other engaging, inquiry-based teaching methods that provide opportunities for students to master academic content, learn workforce skills, and develop personal strengths
- ◆ Eliminate non-academically rigorous courses and tracks
- ◆ Differentiate instruction and provide supports that meet the varied learning needs of multiple student populations
- ◆ Connect curriculum to real-world contexts that build upon student and community resources
- ◆ Provide individualized guidance, information, and resources on career pathways and opportunities for participating in workplace-based learning
- ◆ Structure schedules for extended/flexible instructional time blocks
- ◆ Use multiple measures to assess student outcomes, including performance-based assessments

Empowered Educators

- ◆ Schedule common planning time for collaborative development of curriculum and instruction, assessment of student work, and analysis of student performance data
- ◆ Build educators' capacity to use data and research to inform instructional practice and to guide professional learning priorities and needs
- ◆ Empower instructional staff with authority to define professional development needs and to make decisions about curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom environment
- ◆ Differentiate instruction and provide supports to meet the learning needs of multiple student populations
- ◆ Utilize communities of practice as a mechanism for transforming the way educators are prepared, inducted, and retained

Accountable Leaders

- ◆ Engage state, district, school, community, youth, and municipal leaders in articulating a shared vision for all high-school-age youth and in defining accountability at each level
- ◆ Allocate resources necessary to support both short- and long-term implementation of policies and practice
- ◆ Use data to monitor and communicate progress to all stakeholders
- ◆ Assess the impact of any reform policy or practice on equitable distribution of resources, particularly the allocation of high-quality teachers
- ◆ Assess the impact of any reform or policy practice on all populations of students, particularly those traditionally marginalized such as English-language learners and students with disabilities
- ◆ Develop strategic, systemic approaches for addressing both dropout prevention and dropout recovery for vulnerable student populations
- ◆ Enact policy to support the retention of school and district leaders and teachers who will sustain the shared reform strategy and vision for all high-school-age youth
- ◆ Provide structures and supports to foster distributed leadership and communities of practice among educators, which leads toward continual improvement of instruction
- ◆ Enact policies for the recruitment, preparation, and development of leaders in education to ensure accountability in the preparation of all youth for college, careers, and active civic participation

Engaged Community and Youth

- ◆ Engage with education leaders to articulate a shared vision for all high-school-age youth
- ◆ Commit community resources and establish partnerships with the school and district to support this vision
- ◆ Hold education leaders accountable for allocating resources and establishing equitable policies that ensure all youth, schools, and communities have access to quality resources
- ◆ Hold education leaders accountable for communicating data on youth outcomes
- ◆ Communicate data on community needs and concerns to education leaders
- ◆ Organize and build community capacity—particularly within low-income, minority populations that have been traditionally marginalized in civic and school affairs—to assume a more formal role as active and knowledgeable participants in the process of improving outcomes for all high-school-age youth
- ◆ Organize and build youth capacity to exercise leadership and participate in decision-making that affects their schools and communities

Integrated System of High Standards, Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments, and Supports

- ◆ Establish clear and rigorous standards aligned with curricula and entrance requirements for post-secondary education and careers
- ◆ Develop and utilize multiple assessments, including performance-based measures (e.g., portfolios, public exhibitions, capstone projects), that align with standards
- ◆ Plan intended outcomes and assessment strategies before initiating a learning activity or project
- ◆ Build students' capacity to critique their own work and learning process
- ◆ Provide accelerated learning opportunities to help all students meet or exceed standards
- ◆ Integrate literacy instruction throughout the curriculum in a way that is tailored to the needs of adolescent learners
- ◆ Eliminate academic tracking