

Annual Progress Report for the National Network of Constituent Organizations September 2005-September 2006

Summary

The National Network of Constituent Organizations (Network) is an initiative of the National High School Alliance (HS Alliance), which is based at the Institute for Educational Leadership. In its first year, the HS Alliance has cultivated the Network into a working group of six national constituent organizations for collaboration, coordination, and the development of new ideas and activities related to the National Governor's Association/Achieve Action Agenda. By convening quarterly meetings, disseminating tools and resources, and developing new avenues of communication, including a monthly conference call and newsletter, the HS Alliance has informed Network members and the fifty partner organizations of the HS Alliance about progress in the Honor States and high school redesign issues more generally and facilitated collaboration among Network members. Network meetings have led to the development of joint activities and new project ideas that advance the NGA/Achieve Action Agenda. In addition, each of the Network members has developed a set of communication materials and venues in which to share information about high school redesign. The HS Alliance has supported Network members' work by developing a Discussion Guide to frame work around *all four* of the project's objectives, as well as a number of tools and resources that provide current and relevant information, synthesis, and analysis on key issues in response to the needs of its members.

Goal(s) and Objectives

The *goals* of the National Network of Constituent Organizations (Network) are to:

- Goal One: Align and leverage the resources and strategies of national organizations working to support systemic high school redesign in the Honor States;
- Goal Two: Leverage the networks of the Network, the HS Alliance, and other national constituent organizations to transfer knowledge from the Honor States to other states.

The *four objectives* for achieving these goals are as follows:

Objective #1: Provide opportunities for the national leaders of the Honor States Program (Gates and NGA) to inform the Network, the HS Alliance partners, and other national constituent organizations about the about the progress of, and promising practices emerging from, the Honor States;

Objective #2: Provide opportunities for the Network, the HS Alliance partners, and other national constituent organizations to inform the national and state leaders of the Honor States Program about their resources, strategies, and perspectives on systemic high school redesign;

Objective #3: Facilitate forums for the Network members to explore key issues emerging in the Honor States, and to identify strategic opportunities to work together at the national, state, school, and community levels to create a coherent Network of support that aligns and leverages high school redesign initiatives in Honor States and in other states;

Objective #4: Facilitate the exchange of ideas, resources, and strategies around the principles for systemic high school redesign outlined in the Action Agenda/Blueprint for Improving America's High Schools (NGA), and A Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth (HS Alliance).

Progress to Date

The National High School Alliance (HS Alliance) has cultivated the National Network of Constituent Organizations (Network) into a working group of six national constituent organizations for collaboration, coordination, and the development of new ideas and activities related to the National Governor's Association/Achieve Action Agenda. In its first year, the Network worked to lay the foundation for collaborative relationships among the designees from each member organization—a critical aspect in the success of this initiative—by providing forums in which they can learn, share resources, and plan joint activities. The HS Alliance facilitated successful quarterly meetings, disseminating tools and resources, developing new avenues of communication, including a monthly conference call and newsletter, and by developing resources and agendas that are responsive to and serve the needs of its members.

The HS Alliance developed a Discussion Guide to frame work around *all four* of the project's objectives. The guide is designed to facilitate a two-way exchange between the Network organizations and the Honor State Program leaders, with a section for "Analysis and Recommendations for States" and "Analysis and Recommendations for National Organizations." The guide is organized around the following four issue areas, with a specific set of focus questions provided for each:

- Leveraging strengths
- Overcoming implementation challenges
- Building capacity
- Cultivating engagement
- Providing support and fostering collaboration

All of the other resources developed to support the Network's progress are described below.

Outcome #1 (relating to Objective #1): Members of the Network, the HS Alliance partners, and other national constituent organizations disseminate information to their constituents about the progress of, and promising practices emerging from, the Honor States.

The HS Alliance has helped to inform Network members and HS Alliance partners about the progress of and promising practices emerging from the Honor States so that they can share this information with their constituents. Strategies for doing so have included the following:

- Providing dedicated online space for all Network-related information and resources on the HS Alliance website
- Including time on meeting agendas for updates on progress in the Honor States and related activities provided by NGA, Achieve, and consultant staff;
- Ensuring that members receive the NGA e-newsletter updates providing progress reports on the Honor States (and posting them on the Network web site); and,
- Producing a monthly Network e-newsletter featuring information about Honor States activities
- Including information about Network and Honor State program activity in the HS Alliance e-newsletter, partner conference calls and meetings.

In a survey of Network members, all six agreed that the Network is helping them learn about work in the Honor States and ADP states. Armed with this information, Network organizations have been educating their constituents about activity in the Honor States in the following ways:

- Including information about the Honor States in their newsletters and other communications.
 - NASBE included updates on states' activities since the NGA 2005 Education Summit in their newsletter and has also included information on the Honor States' program on its web site.
 - CCSSO has included profiles of Honor States' high school reform strategies and activities in its "Supporting Secondary School Redesign" newsletter.
- Featuring Achieve and/or NGA in meetings and conference calls with members.
 - SHEEO plans to feature Achieve in its upcoming annual meeting in a session on high school reform.
 - SHEEO is developing a future meeting (January 2007) for higher education leaders from ADP and Honor States to build momentum around higher education's role in high school reform.
 - NCSL is planning a session on improving dropout rates by increasing rigor and relevance for its annual meeting. Mike Cohen from Achieve and three state legislators will talk about specific initiatives in their states.
 - CCSSO featured Achieve's Closing the Expectations Gap Report in its monthly conference call with the CCSSO State Network on Secondary Redesign. CCSSO has also shared Achieve's and NGA's initiatives and resources at their member meetings with state education agency officials.

Outcome #2 (relating to Objective #2): National and state leaders of the Honor States Program use information and feedback provided by the Network, the HS Alliance partners, and other national constituent organizations to leverage the successful implementation of the Honor States Program.

The HS Alliance has provided opportunities for the Network, HS Alliance partners, and other national constituent organizations to inform the national leaders of the Honor States program (Gates and NGA) about their perspectives, strategies, and resources for systemic high school redesign. For example, during the Network's first meeting (December 2005), the agenda was structured to facilitate an exchange of perspectives and sharing of resources among Network members, HS Alliance partners, Gates, NGA, Achieve, and Holland & Knight staff about the Honor States program. In addition to a panel discussion among Network members facilitated by Holland & Knight and Gates staff; and a program overview from NGA staff, the meeting agenda included a large group open discussion as well as small group discussions.

For the small group discussions, participants were organized into cross-policy level groups to review and provide feedback on summaries of plans from each of the ten states awarded grants under Phase I of the National Governor's Association (NGA) Honor States program. Information in the one-page summaries provided by the NGA included the name of the state team leader, tentative national partner organizations, project goals, and a brief summary of activities to meet the goals.

Given the limited information available on the state work plans at the time of this meeting, facilitators used a modified form of the Discussion Guide (described in the “Progress to Date” section above) that framed participant feedback in terms of questions and issues for consideration, rather than as a formal critique or analysis of state plans. As the states develop their strategic work plans for systemic high school redesign, the intention of this feedback was to help inform the planning process in constructive ways. A summary of the themes and recommendations emerging from this meeting can be accessed on the Network website.

Outcome #3 (relating to Objective #3): The members of the Network work together at the national, state, school, and community levels to align and leverage efforts in the Honor States and in other states.

The HS Alliance has facilitated Network members’ development of joint strategies, activities, and opportunities to coordinate work in order to align and leverage their efforts at the national level. The HS Alliance strategies for facilitating collaborative work among the Network members have included the following:

- Providing time at quarterly meetings for Network members to work in small discussion groups to identify common challenges and opportunities for collaboration;
- Producing a regularly updated table that outlines each Network organization’s activities focused on the Honor States program, including the project goals, accomplishments, and contact information;
- Producing a monthly Network e-newsletter featuring updates on the progress of members’ constituent activity;
- Producing an annual timeline outlining the convening activities of all Network members and other key organizations.

According to a recent survey, all six of the Network organizations agree that the Network is helping them to collaborate and coordinate with other Network members. For example, the Network designee from NCSL noted that time spent at Network meetings “brainstorming about how to communicate with Honor States and [a] national audience¹ is particularly valuable. According to the designee from SHEEO, “it has been most helpful to hear what other organizations are doing, especially what is going on in each state, as this both helps us get a global sense of progress on the agenda and allows us to identify where we can assist, collaborate with, and/or leverage the efforts of fellow organizations.”

Network members have been working together in a range of ways, such as by participating in conferences and writing articles for publications of the other organizations, and sharing communications. Following are some specific examples of these collaborations:

- SHEEO is working with NASBE to convene state teams, identify higher education leadership, and develop readiness indicators, all of which will be shared with the College Ready Roundtable.
- Key speakers for CCSSO’s June Secondary School Redesign Conference included Gerald Tirozzi from NASSP and Matt Gandal from Achieve.
- NCSL is working with NASSP to identify principal and district-level speakers for meetings with legislators.

¹ All quotes are from a recent Network survey of the six member organizations.

- NCSL featured Mike Cohen in an Annual Meeting session on improving dropout rates by increasing rigor and relevance.
- NASSP is contributing an article to one of NASBE's primary publications.
- Achieve will be contributing an article to an NASSP policy-focused newsletter.

In year two, we will also facilitate collaboration that reaches beyond the national to the state, school, and community levels in the Honor States (see section: "Next year objectives and activities" for further description).

Outcome #4 (relating to Objective #4): Members of the Network engage their constituents in dialogue about the principles, strategies, and resources for implementing systemic high school redesign outlined in the Action Agenda/Blueprint for Improving America's High Schools (NGA) and A Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth (HS Alliance).

Network members have developed communication materials and organized venues in which to engage their constituents in dialogue about systemic high school redesign.

Examples of these efforts include the following:

- NASSP adopted a position statement that is against ability grouping and tracking.
- NASBE included updates in their newsletter on states' activities since the NGA 2005 Education Summit and included information about the Honor States' program on its web site. The NASBE designee noted, "I have been able to collaborate with other Network organizations to help keep our membership up to date on high school redesign issues."
- The CCSSO designee stated, "Achieve's and NGA's initiatives and resources have been shared at our member meetings with state education agency officials." Their spring newsletter featured promising state programs and resources.
- NCSL planned a session for its Annual Meeting on improving dropout rates by increasing rigor and relevance and is preparing a magazine article for *State Legislatures* magazine on this issue.
- SHEEO included sessions on high school reform for its annual meeting in July.
- NAACP is developing a parent handbook that will include recommendations related to curriculum rigor and college preparedness.

The project timeline below indicates the status of each milestone as outlined in the original proposal:

Activity: Identify National Constituent Organizations	Target Date	Status
Milestone A: Finalize participant list	September 15, 2005	Completed
Milestone B: Send introduction/invitation letter to all organizations; communication to HS Alliance partners	September 30, 2005	Completed
Milestone B: Follow-up calls/emails to invitees	October 5, 2005	Completed
Activity: Convene Meetings	Target Date	Status
Milestone A: Initiate project meetings with HS Alliance, NGA, and Gates staff	October 15, 2005	Completed
Milestone B: Convene annual national meeting	December 2005 December 2006	Completed for year one
Milestone C: Convene advisory group	December 20, 2005	Completed
Milestone D: Convene quarterly meetings	2005-06: Dec, March, June, August 2006-07: Dec, March, June, August	Completed for year one
Indicators of Progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% participation of Network members in national forums and focus forums • 75% satisfaction rating • Timely delivery of agenda to participants, etc. 	Instruments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant lists • Post-meeting surveys • Advisory group self-assessments 	Consistent 100% participation; Survey results and other feedback indicate high levels of satisfaction; All materials shared in timely manner
Activity: Produce Resource Documents	Target Date(s)	Status
Milestone A: Complete Table of Constituent and Policy Initiatives—revised quarterly	2005-06: Nov, Feb, May, July 2006-07: Nov, February, May, July In consultation with program officer, quarterly target was revised to biannual.	Completed
Milestone B: Complete Discussion Guide	November 2005, revised as needed for each meeting	Completed
Milestone C: Produce Meeting Summary Reports	2006: Jan, April, July, Sept 2006-07: Jan, April, July, Sept	Completed for meetings held
Milestone D: Initiate monthly email updates	January 2006	Regular email communications sent starting in Jan; format revised in May and newsletter template developed in June
Milestone E: Launch online resource	June 2006	The Network site launched, updated regularly
Indicators of Progress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% of Network and NHA participants are disseminating project reports and resources to their members and Networks 	Instruments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dissemination forms to collect data on use of resources ▪ Self-reports captured in meeting summaries ▪ Phone/email inquiries about resources received from project participants, HS Alliance partners, and constituents ▪ Website tracking tools 	According to self reports and Network survey, almost all participants are disseminating/featuring NGA and Achieve reports in their communications. Participants will begin disseminating Network publications, such as the rigor paper and framework, in the coming year.

Key accomplishments and success stories:

- **Developed and convened quarterly meetings that facilitated collaboration among network members** The HS Alliance developed agendas, discussion guides, and tools to guide three productive Network meetings. These meetings led to the development of joint activities and new project ideas that advance the NGA/Achieve Action Agenda. Examples of these activities are provided under Outcome #3.
- **Supported strong and consistent messages about high school redesign.** Each of the six Network organizations have substantially expanded and strengthened their communications to constituents as a result of their grant and participation in the Network. Network members are now actively addressing issues of high school redesign in their newsletters, publications, and conferences.
- **Synthesized and analyzed key issues.** In response to the Network members' need for greater understanding of academic rigor, the HS Alliance developed a discussion paper summarizing major policy trends and analyzing how the Network organizations define, frame, and engage their respective constituents on the issue of increasing rigor in high schools. By developing this discussion paper, the HS Alliance has provided Network members with the foundation for crafting strategies to advance academic rigor in a coordinated way. The paper was revised based on discussion at the quarterly meeting and will be disseminated as an issue brief.
- **Produced tools and resources to support Network members' work.** As another outcome of this meeting, the HS Alliance produced a framework based on Network members' expressed need for a tool to improve communication about what rigor is with and among their constituents. This framework is based upon the group's consensus agreement on the outcome of a rigorous education. In addition, we are also developing a reference tool for the Action Agenda to provide resources and publications that contain key messages and information that Network members might incorporate into publications or newsletters. The HS Alliance shares relevant resources for the Network members through the monthly e-newsletter.

Unmet outcomes:

The HS Alliance made progress towards each of its outcomes in year one. Through collaboration with staff at NGA and Achieve regarding the progress of implementation in the Honor States, the Network will be able to begin more intensive work focused on all aspects of Outcomes #2 and #3 during year two.

Year two objectives and activities:

A priority for year two is to devote greater time and attention to Objectives #2 and #3, i.e., providing information and feedback to Honor State leaders (NGA and Gates staff); and, using the Network to align and leverage efforts in the Honor States, respectively. This will be possible now that the state work plans are completed and implementation is farther along. To achieve the impact described in Outcomes #2 and #3, the Network members will be asked to gather input from their respective constituents in Honor States about the successes, challenges, and strategies for addressing barriers to implementation. The work will also depend upon the NGA and other organizations working closely on the Honor States program, to provide information about the specific challenges and needs of state grantees. Thus, the next round of Network convening will focus on identifying strategies for addressing specific challenges in Honor States and will utilize the Discussion Guide developed in year one to facilitate this process.

Work on these objectives will also involve launching the Call to Action Online Resource Guide, which will provide leaders at all levels with access to national organizations' tools and resources for high school redesign. The guide will be organized around the six core principles and recommended strategies outlined in the HS Alliance's *Call to Action* framework, and will include contact information for the national organizations with expertise in specific areas of high school redesign; these organizations' available resources for planning and implementing high school redesign; related research; key data points; and contact information for schools exemplifying implementation of specific strategies.

Throughout year two, we will also continue to convene Network members and produce resources that will help them coordinate their work and deepen their thinking about issues related to the NGA/Action Agenda and the HS Alliance's *Call to Action*. These resources, such as discussion papers, tools, and compilations of resources produced by other organizations, will be disseminated through the monthly newsletters and on the Network website. The HS Alliance is also maintaining an online National Calendar of high school-related events.

Lessons Learned:

Collaboration needs dedicated time, space, and resources. Cultivating collaborative relationships among constituent organizations, each with their own distinct agenda and membership, is a gradual process that takes time and persistence. Cultivating organizational buy-in to the process and a sense of the value of collaboration involves developing relationships among individuals and organizations, and providing the tools and strategies that enable them to work more effectively together.

Creating common language across organizations builds the capacity of high-level staff and facilitates collaboration.

Network members play an important role in supporting the Honor States work by communicating key ideas among their respective constituents. Through Network meetings and resources, the HS Alliance has helped the six organizations strengthen and coordinate the messages related to high school redesign in their publications and communications to members, trainings, and through other activities. Resources like the paper and framework on academic rigor also provide common language around which Network members can coordinate their communications and develop joint activities.

It is important to relate the Honor States program to the work of Network members.

In order to ensure members see value in this Network and can incorporate the NGA/Action Agenda into their work, we have learned to focus on topics and priorities based on the work in which they are engaged at a particular time and their expressed needs for assistance in completing that work. Rigor was a topic that all of the organizations were addressing in their publications, and therefore, provided an ideal opportunity for coordination and focus. The tools we develop assist Network members with activities in their work plans. For example, most of the Network members are preparing articles for publications and so resources that can help them with these communications are particularly helpful.

Challenges:

Helping Constituent Organizations Advance a National Agenda. Constituent organizations are designed to advance the interests of their constituents, rather than pursue a national agenda. It is sometimes challenging to help the Network members advance the NGA/Achieve Action Agenda since it doesn't always align with the views of their constituents. To address this challenge, the HS Alliance is working with Network members to develop resources that will inform and raise awareness among their constituents. For instance, though NASBE and CCSSO will not take a position on specific curriculum requirements, they can cite a study that found that students who took specific courses were more successful in college.

Bridging Differences Across Network Organizations. The Network organizations have very different missions and constituents and operate at different levels of policy. For example, while NASSP represents principals and their interests, the CCSSO represents heads of state education agencies. These two organizations support their members in very different ways with different types of resources. Defining meeting agendas and developing tools that meet the needs and interests of organizations that work at the federal, state, and local levels is a challenging endeavor, one that the HS Alliance works to meet in developing resources for its partners.

Informing/Supporting the Honor States. While Network members learned about the Action Agenda from Honor State program leaders (e.g., Gates, NGA, and consultant staff), the six organizations have not yet had much opportunity to help inform the state grantees about strategies and resources they can offer to support effective high school redesign. Though they were able to provide some input at the first Network meeting (see description under Outcome #2), there was limited information available at that time about the grantee state's work plans. Now that work plans are completed and implementation is further along in the Honor States, the Network will rely on the NGA to share more information about these states so that we can identify issues that the Network can address in strategic ways. Strategies for facilitating this exchange will be a major focus for the Network's second year.

Reports, Publications, and Information Sharing:

Information is being disseminated in the following ways:

- *Monthly newsletters:* includes information about Network meetings and calls, updates on Network members and Honor States, and other relevant resources.
- *Reports/Tools:* An issue brief, *Increasing Academic Rigor in High Schools, Network Perspectives*, was published on the web and we are currently exploring options for hard copy dissemination. A tool, *Defining Rigor in High School: Core Principles*, was prepared to provide a conceptual framework for understanding and establishing common language about the meaning of "academic rigor."
- *Online tools and resources:* a dedicated section of the HS Alliance website includes all Network information and resources.
- *Table of Initiatives:* this is a regularly updated table that outlines each Network organization's activities focused on the Honor States program, including the project goals, accomplishments, and contact information.
- *Annual timeline:* this outline provides a chronology of the convening activities of all Network members and other key organizations. This information is also included in the HS Alliance's National Calendar of Events.

Conclusion

In the project's first year, the HS Alliance facilitated collaborative relationships among the Network organizations, and produced synthesis and analysis resources that helped to build their capacity on issues of high school redesign. As the Honor States Program evolves over time, there will be a continuing need to further build the capacity and reach of these organizations on issues of high school redesign. Having established and cultivated relationships with a key group of national constituent organizations, the HS Alliance will be able to continue to provide this support.