

National High School Alliance
National Network of Constituent Organizations (NNCO)

Meeting Summary and Next Steps
March 23, 2006

The National Network of Constituent Organizations had its second meeting on March 23, 2006, at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. The purposes and intended outcomes of the meeting were as follows:

- To identify opportunities for NNCOs to support the Gates and NGA Honor States' investments and the American Diploma Project
- To review the NNCO project status and goals
- To identify opportunities for NNCO collaboration in supporting the NGA/Achieve Action Agenda
- To identify next steps and actions for NNCOs

Representatives of the six NNCO organizations were present (a participant list is included below). Also in attendance were representatives of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the National Governor's Association, Achieve, Holland & Knight, and the National High School Alliance. The group received updates on Honor State grantee activities and the American Diploma Project, and discussed opportunities for collaboration on issues such as the challenges of increasing rigor and raising graduation requirements.

The following issues and challenges were identified as requiring attention in the implementation of Honor State and ADP goals:

- Agreeing on a definition of rigor (you know it when you see it was the prevailing sentiment) and providing examples targeted to each constituent group;
- Addressing the tension between increasing rigor without increasing dropout rates – recent research seems to indicate that this apparent conflict may not be as problematic as originally thought;
- Identifying ways to provide meaningful information about graduation rate data and how to use it to inform state, district and school-level decision making;
- Developing concise and current information on Honor States' activities targeted for action by each constituent organization's members;
- Identifying additional ways of aligning the work of the constituent organizations, in Washington and in the field, to specific Honor States' activities, on a state-by-state basis;
- Improving communication among state entities and between state entities and their constituencies about issues related to high school reform, as well as connecting what appear to be disparate national and state activities to local high school improvement efforts;
- Seeking ways to coordinate studies, data collection, and reports among NNCO organizations and other organizations working on high school redesign; and
- Coordinating communication related to the NGA/Achieve action agenda to ensure common goals and similar language are used to build support and drive implementation.

Participants raised and discussed ideas for addressing each of these challenge areas.

Agreeing on a definition of rigor (you know it when you see it was the prevailing sentiment) and providing examples targeted to each constituent group

While the participants felt that their constituencies all supported the idea of increased high school rigor, it was much more challenging to define and identify what rigor really means in practice.

Potential next steps:

- NNCO organizations could advocate for elimination of non-college preparatory curricula
- NAACP had defined rigor based on NCES/Adelman studies. This could form the basis for a shared definition among NNCOs
- NASSP has developed tools for defining rigor to use in their Breaking Ranks trainings. (This information should be shared among NNCOs)
- The NNCO could identify a short list of key questions that could be used to seek information about level of/commitment to rigorous programming
- Organizations could mine examples of rigor from professional learning communities at the school level
- NGA/Achieve could provide examples of states that have provided thoughtful definitions of rigor to their districts and schools.

Addressing the tension between increasing rigor without increasing dropout rates

Participants wanted to address their constituents' concerns about increasing dropout rates, particularly among poor and minority students, as the high school curriculum becomes more challenging.

Potential next steps:

- Achieve is developing a series of papers on this topic that it can share with the NNCOs
- NGA/Achieve can identify states that are doing a good job of addressing this issue. The HS Alliance could identify or draft profiles of promising practices in this area
- NAASP just released Breaking Ranks in the Middle, and is focusing on middle school – high school transition.

Providing meaningful information about graduation rates and their definitions

Participants wanted to educate their constituents about the importance of having a uniform graduation rate. They also wanted to be prepared to address public concern if graduation rates increased significantly as a result of changes in definitions.

Potential next steps:

- NNCOs should help the states craft messages about why the graduation rates will change and the importance of accurate data
- NNCOs should advocate for including graduation rates in report cards and other accountability systems

Developing concise and current information on Honor States' activities targeted for action by each constituent organization's members

Participants wanted to be able to provide information on the Honor States' activities without sending their constituents to the National Governor's Association. They felt they needed access to current information so they could inform their constituents directly about this work.

Potential next steps:

- NGA could distribute monthly policy updates to NNCOs, and include NNCO activities as appropriate
- The HS Alliance could include information on the Honor States, including the state plans and any summaries of their activities on the NNCO portion of its web site
- NNCO organizations could review the American Diploma Project states' plans (available on the Achieve website.) The HS Alliance could include a link to these plans.

Identifying additional ways of aligning the work of the constituent organizations, in Washington and in the field, to specific Honor States' activities, on a state-by-state basis

Participants were unsure about how to connect their constituents to the Honor States' work. They weren't sure who to contact or if they should have their constituents contact members of the Honor States' leadership teams.

Potential next steps:

- NGA will have conversations with each of the NNCOs about how to go about connecting their constituents to the Honor States' work. They can supply contact information and suggestions about which states need support from particular NNCO's.

Improving communication among state entities and between state entities and their constituencies about issues related to high school reform, as well as connecting what appear to be disparate national and state activities to local high school improvement efforts

Participants were frustrated by the lack of communication between, for example, state boards of education, state departments of education, and state legislative bodies. They wanted to think about ways of facilitating communication between these entities and of improving communication between these entities and their constituents.

Potential next steps:

- Organizations should work on building coalitions among state entities involved in reform
- Organizations should try to connect the people at the state level actually carrying out the work—the level below the policymakers.

Participants were also concerned that national policies and reform efforts were disconnected from what local practitioners were doing in districts and schools. Without improved communication with districts and schools, their efforts may have little impact.

Potential next steps:

- Organizations should think about how to connect state leaders to strong local leaders. They should think about how they can support strong district leaders.

Seeking ways to coordinate studies, data collection, and reports among NNCO organizations and other organizations working on high school redesign

Participants were concerned about the duplication of efforts in state and national information collections. They wanted a way to know what other information collections were taking place.

Potential next steps:

- The HS Alliance could create an Intranet site so the NNCOs can exchange information about their information collection activities
- The HS Alliance could summarize information collection activities on particular topics
- NNCO organizations should become more connected personally, so they can share what they are doing.

Coordinating communication related to the NGA/Achieve action agenda to ensure common goals and similar language are used to build support and drive implementation

Participants thought it would be helpful to coordinate messages related to the NGA/Achieve Action Agenda that they were conveying to their constituents in publications, conferences, and other communications.

Potential next steps:

- Communications related to the NGA/Achieve Action Agenda could be simultaneously modified and repackaged for different stakeholders and constituencies
- Organizations could co-convene meetings on particular topics or share their agendas, speakers, etc.

Immediate Next Steps

- The HS Alliance should continue developing the NNCO web site to facilitate NNCO coordination and provide members with access to relevant materials and resources.
 - The HS Alliance will send out a request for relevant publications and regular communications to constituents and post them on the NNCO web site.
 - The HS Alliance will post relevant meetings, events, and report releases on their National Calendar. Organizations should immediately begin checking the calendar and using it for planning their own events. They should also use it to think about coordination.
 - The HS Alliance will begin exploring the development of a password protected intranet or similar functionality for NNCO members.
- Organizations should include information about the NNCO project and their support for the NGA/Achieve Action Agenda in their regular communications.
 - Organizations should include descriptions of the NNCO project in their newsletters.
 - Organizations should begin talking to their constituents about the components of the action agenda and their work in these issue areas. (More specific guidance on particular issues will follow).
- NGA will provide state-specific and organization-specific information about how the NNCOs can support the Honor States.
 - NGA will include the NNCO organizations in its monthly policy updates and progress reports.

- During conference calls with each NNCO, NGA will let organizations know which states need particular attention.
- NNCO Organizations should also let NGA (contact Torrey Shawe) know of constituents that are doing a particularly good job so they can discuss how to replicate that work.
- The HS Alliance will continue to facilitate collaborations between the entire network and individual NNCOs.
 - The HS Alliance will begin facilitating conference calls with particular organizations on specific issues—i.e. policy areas in which organizations should collaborate.
 - The HS Alliance will review NNCO publications and communications and analyze and compare how the NNCOs are addressing topics within the action agenda to share with the network—i.e. how is each organization defining rigor?

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