

# National High School Alliance Indicators Protocols

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*Site Visit and  
Discussion Guides*



NATIONAL  
HIGH SCHOOL  
ALLIANCE

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WASHINGTON, DC

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## *Site Visit and Discussion Guides*



### **The Vision and Mission of the National High School Alliance**

The National High School Alliance is a partnership of nearly over fifty leading organizations that share a **vision** for a nationwide commitment to fostering high academic achievement, closing the achievement gap, and promoting civic and personal growth among all youth in our high schools and communities.

To advance this vision, the HS Alliance's **mission** is to engage its partners to work individually and collectively to inform policy, practice, and research, and to promote public awareness and engagement. The HS Alliance accomplishes this by providing a forum for professional discourse and collaborative effort to leverage its partners' resources, knowledge, and capacity.

### **Contact Information**

Naomi Housman, Director  
Sara Goldware, Program Associate  
The National High School Alliance  
at the Institute for Educational Leadership  
4455 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 310  
Washington, DC 20008  
Tel: (202) 822-8405  
Fax: (202) 872-4050  
E-mail: [hsalliance@iel.org](mailto:hsalliance@iel.org)

Please visit our website at [www.hsalliance.org](http://www.hsalliance.org) to learn more about the National High School Alliance.

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## **How to Use the Indicators Protocols**

These protocols are designed to be tools and guides to facilitate a school/program site visit. Each protocol differs slightly in its format. For each, the criteria are described in each section. In some protocols, sub-criteria are listed in each section, and are followed by indicators phrased as questions, both to prompt critical observations and to facilitate conversations with members of the school community.

Use the questions as a starting point in conversations at the site, and as appropriate. Space is provided for notes. Visitors are encouraged to note what they observed as evidence of the indicators in the school and how they saw this to have impact for the school. Following the site visit, visitors should share observations and reflections. Notes from the protocols may be useful for these discussions and for individual work beyond the scope of the meeting.

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## Table of Contents

- A Call to Action: Indicators Protocol*** **9**  
This protocol uses the six core principles of *A Call to Action: Transforming High School for All Youth* to examine school-wide and small learning community/themed program progress. This protocol was used at the May 2006 partners meeting in Providence, Rhode Island, and is based on the National Academy Foundation's *Academy and School Profile 2005*.
- Active, Powerful and Knowledgeable Communities*** **17**  
This protocol examines a school's progress in on community engagement and the development of leadership in the community. The protocol, developed for use at the October 2002 partners meeting in Chicago, Illinois, is based on the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform publication, *Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools: A Comprehensive Series of Reports on the Findings of the Indicators Project on Education Organizing* (2002).
- Personalization and Social Supports*** **21**  
This protocol examines a school or program's progress on personalization and social support, focusing on climate, organization, youth-adult relationships, curriculum and pedagogy, and community partnerships and connections. The protocol was developed for use at the December 2003 partners meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- Professional Learning Communities*** **29**  
This protocol focuses on the role of professional learning communities in the development of practitioners for improved student outcomes. It also includes an overview of research on professional learning communities and an extensive bibliography. The protocol was developed for the 2003 partners meeting in Washington, DC.
- Relevant and Connected Learning*** **43**  
This protocol is designed to collect and organize observations and reflections around the academic engagement of all students through rigorous and relevant curricula. The protocol was developed for the April 2004 partners meeting in Oakland, California, and is based on the Jobs for the Future publication, *Connected Learning Communities: A Toolkit for Reinventing High Schools* (2001).

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# ***A Call to Action*** **Indicators Protocol**

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## ***Site Visit and*** ***Discussion Guide***

Prepared for the May 2006 National High School Alliance Partners Meeting in Providence, RI

*Indicators developed by the National Academy Foundation for the 2005 Academy & School Profile*



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

An integrated system of standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and supports mandates common expectations for all students; clearly communicates parameters for success in each successive year of school and for successful transition into postsecondary education and careers; and outlines how students will learn, be assessed, and receive support.

### SCHOOL-WIDE INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>School has begun to develop rigorous standards. Some courses use multiple measures and some students are learning to critique their own work. Student support systems are somewhat limited and do not yet align with system of standards and common assessments.</p>	<p>Rigorous, aligned standards exist for most courses and skill areas. Many courses use multiple measures and students are learning to critique their own work. Student support systems are being expanded and aligned with system of standards and common assessments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School has clear and rigorous standards aligned with curricula and entrance requirements for post-secondary education and careers; academic tracking has been eliminated</li> <li>▪ All courses regularly use multiple assessments, including performance-based measures (e.g., portfolios, public exhibitions, capstone projects), that align with standards</li> <li>▪ All teachers plan intended outcomes and assessment strategies before initiating a learning activity or project</li> <li>▪ School explicitly builds students' capacity to critique their own work and learning process</li> <li>▪ Accelerated learning opportunities are in place to help all students meet or exceed standards</li> <li>▪ Literacy instruction is integrated throughout the curriculum in a way that is tailored to student needs</li> </ul>

**Observations and evidence**

### SLC, Academy, Magnet, Team or Themed PROGRAM INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>Program has begun to develop rigorous standards. Multiple measures are used on occasion. Some students are learning to critique their own work. Program-based academic support strategies are in the planning stages.</p>	<p>Rigorous, aligned standards exist for key Program courses. Multiple measures are often used. Many students are learning to critique their own work. Program-based academic support systems are being piloted by Program staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program has clear and rigorous standards aligned with curricula and entrance requirements for post-secondary education and careers</li> <li>▪ Program is open to all students in the school and actively recruits a student population that mirrors the entire school</li> <li>▪ All Program courses regularly use multiple assessments, including performance-based measures (e.g., portfolios, public exhibitions, capstone projects), that align with standards</li> <li>▪ Program teachers plan intended outcomes and assessment strategies before initiating a learning activity or project</li> <li>▪ Program work explicitly builds students' capacity to critique their own work and learning process</li> <li>▪ Program students can access accelerated learning opportunities to help them meet or exceed standards</li> <li>▪ Literacy instruction is integrated throughout Program curriculum in a way that is tailored to student needs</li> </ul>

**Observations and evidence**

## Personalized Learning Environments

Personalized learning environments support all students by designing curriculum, supports, structures, and a learning climate focused on student needs, interests and development.

### SCHOOL-WIDE INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>Some students and teachers are in smaller learning communities. Uneven level of curricular rigor and relevance exist throughout the school. School beginning to collect data and take action to improve student transitions, student-adult relationships and overall school climate.</p>	<p>Many students and teachers are in small schools or small learning communities. Explicit work on academic rigor and relevance is underway and resulting in increased student performance. Student transitions, school climate and student-adult relationships are improving as a result of focused efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School size and schedules support all students and all teachers with small learning environments (ideally 400 students or less in a 9-12 high school)</li> <li>▪ All students provided with academically rigorous curricula that meet or exceed standards, are relevant to real-world contexts, and build on student and community assets</li> <li>▪ A network of adults works together and with students to access the necessary academic and social resources through tools such as personal learning plans, academic intervention programs, postsecondary plans, and advisors for every student</li> <li>▪ Interactions among and between adults and students are defined by trust, respect, open communication, and clear, shared expectations</li> <li>▪ Transition from middle grades to high school is eased through pre-assessment work, orientation programs, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade support systems</li> <li>▪ School climate is safe and welcoming to all students</li> </ul>

**Observations and evidence**

### SLC, Academy, Magnet, Team or Themed PROGRAM INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>Students and staff scheduled into program, but cohort may not be pure. Program courses are seeking ways to increase both rigor and relevance. Personal learning plans and student supports are in planning stages. Staff works explicitly on creating a positive classroom climate.</p>	<p>Students and staff scheduled appropriately into program. Academic rigor and relevance are evident in most Program courses. Personal learning plans and student supports are in place for many students. Positive, welcoming program climate is emerging.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Small learning community structure in place and features a pure cohort of students and team of teachers scheduled appropriately</li> <li>▪ All students provided with academically rigorous curricula that meet or exceed standards, align with NAF curricular frameworks, are relevant to real-world contexts, and build on student and community assets</li> <li>▪ Program staff collaborate to develop personal learning plans, academic intervention programs, and advisors for each student</li> <li>▪ Interactions among and between Program staff and students are defined by trust, respect, open communication, and clear, shared expectations</li> <li>▪ Student orientation and support programs help students new to the Program to succeed</li> <li>▪ Program climate is safe and welcoming to all students</li> </ul>

**Observations and evidence**

## Academic Engagement of All Students

Academically engaged students are actively involved in disciplined inquiry requiring problem-solving, higher-order thinking, and the capacity to construct, rather than merely reproduce knowledge. Educators and students co-construct learning experiences that are relevant to economic, social, and political dynamics at local, national, and global levels. Curriculum and instruction value and connect learning to students' cultural and linguistic contexts.

### SCHOOL-WIDE INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>Curriculum is still primarily teacher- and text-centered. Across the school, few courses use projects or attempt to incorporate issues of student interest. Themes are not yet explored by all students in meaningful ways. Limited flexibility in terms of instructional time and assessment measures.</p>	<p>Select courses engage students in projects that incorporate issues of student and community interest. Teachers increasingly attempt to differentiate instruction for all students. Themes are explored by many students. School beginning to experiment with flexible use of instructional time and multiple assessment measures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All students pursue a rigorous, standards-based core academic curriculum</li> <li>▪ All classrooms use 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</li> <li>▪ School has eliminated all non-academically rigorous courses and tracks</li> <li>▪ All teachers differentiate instruction and provide supports that meet the varied learning needs of multiple student populations</li> <li>▪ All teachers connect curriculum to real-world contexts that build upon student and community resources</li> <li>▪ School has systems in place to provide all students with individualized guidance, information, and resources on career pathways and opportunities for participating in workplace-based learning</li> <li>▪ School schedules provide for extended/flexible instructional time blocks</li> <li>▪ School uses multiple measures to assess student outcomes, including performance-based assessments</li> </ul>

#### Observations and evidence

### SLC, Academy, Magnet, Team or Themed PROGRAM INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>The programs rely heavily on curriculum and assignments that lack real-world context. Teachers make few attempts to connect curriculum or support to individual student interests or needs. Themes addressed only broadly. Time use and tests mostly traditional.</p>	<p>Teachers regularly engage students in real-world projects. Teachers regularly connect curriculum and support to individual student interests and needs. Themes addressed throughout program. Time use and assessment practices are increasingly innovative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All Program courses are aligned with and support core academic standards</li> <li>▪ Program courses primarily use 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</li> <li>▪ Program teachers differentiate instruction and provide supports that meet the varied learning needs of multiple student populations</li> <li>▪ Program teachers connect curriculum to real-world contexts that build upon student and community resources</li> <li>▪ Internships and workplace-based learning opportunities are in place for all Program students</li> <li>▪ Program uses extended/flexible instructional time blocks</li> <li>▪ Program uses multiple measures to assess student outcomes, including performance-based assessments</li> </ul>

#### Observations and evidence

## Empowered Educators

Empowered educators are those who are supported by their school community to continuously seek, share, and act on their learning in order to improve their practice for the purpose of improved student outcomes.

### SCHOOL-WIDE INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>Professional development features workshops on effective strategies for instruction and assessment. Training may be somewhat episodic with limited teacher choice or input. Explicit work on building a "professional learning community" among the staff has begun. Time for collaborative planning is limited or not widely available for all staff.</p>	<p>Professional development is increasingly data-driven and teacher-planned. Staff is building capacity to reflect on their practice and implement solutions to improve. A collaborative professional culture is emerging. Schedule accommodates common planning time for teaching teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School builds teachers' capacity to use data and research to inform instructional practice and to guide professional learning priorities and needs</li> <li>▪ School empowers instructional staff with authority to define professional development needs and to make decisions about curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom environment</li> <li>▪ All staff trained to differentiate instruction and provide supports to meet the learning needs of multiple student populations</li> <li>▪ School works explicitly to build a collaborative professional community where staff analyze student performance data and their practice in order to improve results</li> <li>▪ School schedule accommodates common planning time for collaborative development of curriculum and instruction, assessment of student work, and analysis of student performance data</li> </ul>

#### Observations and evidence

### SLC, Academy, Magnet, Team or Themed PROGRAM INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>Program teachers attend training on issues related to building a smaller learning community. Training may be somewhat episodic. Collaboration and trust are building within teaching team. Common planning periods are primarily used to discuss program logistics.</p>	<p>Program teachers beginning to use student performance data to guide training needs. Explicit teambuilding work is underway among Program teachers and trust is the norm. Common planning time is often used to analyze student work and plan integrated instruction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program teachers have the authority to define professional development needs and to make decisions about curriculum, teaching methods, daily schedule, program budget, program staffing, and classroom environment</li> <li>▪ All staff trained to differentiate instruction and provide supports to meet the learning needs of multiple student populations</li> <li>▪ Program staff members work explicitly on teambuilding</li> <li>▪ Program staff has common planning time for collaborative development of curriculum and instruction, assessment of student work, and analysis of student performance data</li> </ul>

#### Observations and evidence

## Accountable Leaders

Leaders at all levels of the program, school, and district must be accountable to, and work in partnership with, the communities and youth they serve. Accountable leaders resist the temptation of quick-fix solutions, choosing instead to engage stakeholders around the challenges of making schools responsive to and accountable for the success of all youth, including the most vulnerable populations.

### SCHOOL-WIDE INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>Vision may exist but may not be shared or focus on success for all students. School beginning to analyze data and develop strategies to ensure all students succeed. Leadership taking steps to develop staff capacity for instructional leadership. Accountability systems are in early stages of development.</p>	<p>School working on refining vision by engaging all stakeholders. School improvement and reform efforts are aimed at closing achievement gaps. Staff capacity for instructional leadership is growing. Conversations about accountability have begun.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School leaders and stakeholders create a shared vision of success for all students and to define accountability at each level</li> <li>▪ School uses data to monitor and communicate progress towards the vision to all stakeholders</li> <li>▪ School continually assesses the impact of reforms on all populations of students, particularly those traditionally marginalized such as English language learners and students with disabilities</li> <li>▪ School uses strategic, systemic approaches to address both dropout prevention <i>and</i> dropout recovery for vulnerable student populations</li> <li>▪ Staff works together as a “professional learning community” focused on student learning</li> <li>▪ School recruits, develops, and retains leaders with the accountability to implement the shared vision and prepare all youth for college, career, and citizenship</li> </ul>

#### Observations and evidence

### SLC, Academy, Magnet, Team or Themed PROGRAM INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
<p>Program mission and vision statement exist, but may not focus on success for all students. Program is beginning to analyze data and develop strategies to ensure all students succeed. Team is beginning to work on instructional leadership. Program accountability systems are in early stages of development.</p>	<p>Program is working on refining vision by engaging all stakeholders. Program improvement seeks to close achievement gaps. Instructional leadership of Program team is growing. Clear standards and expectations are leading to accountability conversations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program has a shared vision of success for all students; staff, student, and parent accountability is clearly defined</li> <li>▪ Program staff use data to monitor and communicate progress towards the vision to all Program stakeholders</li> <li>▪ Program staff continually assess the impact of their efforts on all populations of students, particularly those traditionally marginalized such as English language learners and students with disabilities</li> <li>▪ Program uses strategic, systemic approaches to address both dropout prevention <i>and</i> dropout recovery for vulnerable student populations</li> <li>▪ Program staff work together as a “professional learning community” focused on student learning</li> <li>▪ Program team recruits, develops, and retains leaders with the accountability to implement the shared vision and prepare all youth for college, career, and citizenship</li> </ul>

#### Observations and evidence

## Engaged Community and Youth

All facets of the community work together to articulate a shared vision for all high-school-age youth and to establish a network of accountability that ensures progress towards achieving that shared vision.

### SCHOOL-WIDE INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
School vision exists, but is not actively supported by all stakeholders. Community partners and parents have a basic understanding of school goals and performance data. School is beginning to reach out to traditionally marginalized groups. A handful of students sit on school improvement groups. Conversations about accountability have begun.	A collaboratively developed vision helps focus school improvement efforts. Community partners and parents have a solid understanding of school goals and know how they can help support student achievement. Many students and community members have meaningful roles in school reform efforts. A school-wide accountability plan has been developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students, parents, and community leaders engage with school and district leaders to articulate a shared vision for all high school-age youth</li> <li>▪ Parents and civic leaders share community data and concerns with school and district leaders and provide resources and partnerships to support the articulated vision</li> <li>▪ School and district leaders held accountable for allocating resources and establishing equitable policies that ensure all youth have access to quality resources</li> <li>▪ School leaders held accountable for communicating data on student outcomes</li> <li>▪ School works explicitly to build community capacity – particularly within low-income, minority populations that have been traditionally marginalized in civic and school affairs – to assume meaningful roles in the school reform process</li> <li>▪ School organizes and builds students' capacity to exercise leadership and participate in decision-making that affects their schools and community</li> </ul>

#### Observations and evidence

### SLC, Academy, Magnet, Team or Themed PROGRAM INDICATORS

Early Development	Growth	Sustainability
Some program vision exists but needs broader input and support. Employer partners and parents have a basic understanding of Program goals and performance data. Program is beginning to reach out to traditionally marginalized groups. A handful of students have official Program leadership roles.	A collaboratively developed vision helps focus program improvement efforts. Employer partners and parents have a solid understanding of Program goals and know how they can help support students. Many students and community members have meaningful Program leadership roles. An Program accountability plan has been developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program leaders work with students, parents, and employer partners to articulate a shared vision for all Program students</li> <li>▪ Parents and employer partners share community data and concerns with Program staff and provide resources and partnerships to support the articulated vision</li> <li>▪ Program leaders held accountable for allocating resources and establishing equitable policies that ensure all youth have access to quality resources</li> <li>▪ Program leaders held accountable for communicating data on student outcomes</li> <li>▪ Program works explicitly to have parents – particularly low-income, minority populations that have been traditionally marginalized in civic and school affairs – assume meaningful roles in the Program design and implementation process</li> <li>▪ Program builds students' capacity to exercise leadership and participate in decision-making that affect the program</li> </ul>

#### Observations and evidence

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# **Active, Powerful, and Knowledgeable Communities**

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## ***Site Visit Protocol and Discussion Guide***

Prepared for the October 2002 National High School Alliance Partners Meeting in Chicago, IL

Based on the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform report, *Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools: A Comprehensive Series of Reports on the Findings on the Indicators Project on Education Organizing*, 2002.



## Building Community Capacity

<p><b>Leadership Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of formal attention is given to training and developing parent leadership?</li> <li>• On the local school council?</li> <li>• In community work?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<p><b>Leadership Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is knowledge of powerful educational practice growing in both the school and the community?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<p><b>Community Power</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the power and influence of the community evident?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<p><b>Social Capital</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are personal and organizational relationships in the community bringing additional resources to the school?</li> <li>• Helping the school get things done?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>

## Creating Public Accountability

<p><b>Public Accountability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the school and community groups make public planning and improvement work?</li> <li>• How are school officials held accountable by parents and community members?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
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## Improving Schools

<p><b>Equity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What evidence is there that the community organization has improved equity of resources: such as increased funds, access to academic programs, and higher quality of teaching?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<p><b>School/Community Connections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the evidence of school and community connections?</li> <li>• How have they been established?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<p><b>Curriculum and instruction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How has teaching and learning improved because of community involvement?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>
<p><b>School climate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the school climate conducive to learning (clean, safe, welcoming to parents, etc.)?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Notes</b></p>

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# **Personalization and Social Supports**

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## ***Site Visit Protocol and Discussion Guide***

Prepared for the December 2003 National High School Alliance Partners Meeting in Philadelphia, PA

*Developed by Nettie Legters, Johns Hopkins University, Center for the Social Organization of Schools;  
and Mala Thakur, National Youth Employment Coalition*



## **Overview**

Strong, supportive relationships between students and adults are an integral part of effective schools and educational programs. Most high schools, however, are organized in ways that make it difficult for adults to know students well. Efforts to respond to the wide range of adolescent students' needs are often approached as add-on components, disconnected from academic achievement, rigorous curriculum, and high teacher expectations for student success. Current calls for reform emphasize the interdependent relationship between personalized learning communities and academic achievement, viewing both as essential to enabling *all* students to meet high standards and create productive futures for themselves. Linking supportive relationships with high standards for achievement in every school for every student presents a significant challenge to existing school structures and habits of interaction, however, and demands substantial and creative investments in organizational and human development.

The focus of this meeting on personalization and social support creates a natural extension of the previous two partner meetings—one on the role of family and community in high school reform, and the other on professional learning communities in schools. Communities are an essential aspect of the personalization and social supports that youth need; and, professional learning communities among adults model and set the tone for a culture of shared respect and trusting relationships that personalization and social support seek to provide students. Both community engagement and professional learning communities can also provide the infrastructure in which adults have the opportunity to acquire the skills required to successfully enact personalization and social support in a way that is intimately linked to academic achievement and social development of high school-aged youth.

This meeting and site visits strive to “unpack” whether and how schools are enacting the synergistic relationship between personalization and academic achievement.

## **Structure of the Protocol**

The protocol is designed to help collect and organize observations and reflections during your site visit. Educator and practitioner are used interchangeably to refer to all school or program based professionals, such as teachers, specialists, principals and youth workers.

The protocol is organized into five categories:

- I. Climate
- II. Organization
- III. Youth Adult Relationships
- IV. Curriculum and Pedagogy
- V. Community Partnerships and Connections

## I. Climate

Personalized programs/schools provide a safe, welcoming environment for all students characterized by clear and shared expectations, mutual respect, a sense of fairness, and visible celebration of students' accomplishments.

Criteria	Questions	Observed Practice/Comments
<b>Safe and Welcoming Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the school/program made welcoming to youth (at the beginning of the year, everyday, for students entering mid-year)?</li> <li>• How does the school/program provide an environment in which students feel safe (physically and psychologically)?</li> <li>• Is this a school/program a place where students want to be? Do students feel they belong here?</li> </ul>	
<b>Clear and Shared Expectations and Responsibility for Conduct and Attendance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the school/program have a written code of ethics, behavior, and disciplinary procedures? Who is involved in developing the code? How are students, educators and staff made aware of it? How do they use it?</li> <li>• How do students know that their attendance in the school/program is important and desired?</li> <li>• How are lapses in conduct or attendance addressed by the school/program? Who takes corrective action (administrators, teachers, students)?</li> </ul>	
<b>Mutual Respect and Fairness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the school/program foster mutual respect among all its participants? Are corrective actions perceived as fair, both in process and in outcome?</li> <li>• How does the school/program foster faculty/staff awareness of diverse groups? How do you prepare faculty/staff to talk with students about racism and discrimination?</li> </ul>	
<b>Visible Reflection and Celebration of Student Interests and Accomplishments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the environment reflect and celebrate youth interests and accomplishments?</li> <li>• What kinds of student accomplishments are rewarded and highlighted in this school?</li> </ul>	

## II. Organization

Personalized programs/schools are explicitly organized to encourage development of supportive, informed relationships between adults and students that serve students' social and academic advancement. They also consciously foster active participation and strong personal investment in the operation and continuous improvement of the program/school.

Criteria	Questions	Observed Practice/Comments
<b>Student/Adult Grouping</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the school/program group students and adults in ways that enable students and adults to know one another well (e.g. small learning communities (SLC), teams, advisories, mentoring, looping)?</li> <li>• What procedures does the school/program use to group student/adults (e.g. informed and participatory choice process for students and adults; assigned based on academic/behavior criteria; random assignment)?</li> <li>• How is data used and by whom to guide grouping decisions?</li> </ul>	
<b>Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the school schedule fully support implementation of grouping practices and structures designed to foster personalization (e.g. teachers have unique SLC or team assignment; students spend the majority of their time in their SLC/team; teacher teams have common planning time)?</li> <li>• Is time used in flexible ways to address students' learning needs and provide multiple opportunities to learn?</li> </ul>	
<b>Space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the school spatially organized to fully support grouping practices and structures designed to foster personalization (e.g. SLCs and teams are in self contained areas with proximate classrooms; meeting space for teachers and students is available).</li> </ul>	
<b>Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the school/program's governance structure? Who makes decisions about student/adult placements, curriculum, instruction, discipline, program development, professional development, staffing, and budget?</li> <li>• To what extent are students, families, and/or community members involved in the above?</li> <li>• How are faculty supervision and evaluation carried out?</li> </ul>	

### III. Youth/Adult Relationships

Personalized programs/schools operate from the assumption that positive and supportive relationships are highly motivating for youth and necessary features of a successful learning environment. Conscious effort is made to foster healthy relationships among adults, between adults and students, and among students characterized by trust, mutual respect, and open communication. Adults are encouraged to see each student as a “whole young person,” recognize that youth have assets and needs beyond academics, and work collectively to connect young people with necessary and appropriate social supports and learning opportunities.

Criteria	Questions	Observed Practice/Comments
<b>Youth-Adult Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the school/program foster positive and supportive relationships, both formal and informal, between students and educators, staff and other adults in the community?</li> <li>• To what extent do these relationships reflect trust, mutual respect, and open communication?</li> <li>• How are tensions in youth-adult relationships addressed?</li> <li>• Do students feel that the adults in their school/program care about them and are on their side working to serve their best interests and highest aspirations?</li> </ul>	
<b>Relationships Among Adults</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the school/program foster positive and supportive relationships, both formal and informal, among adults?</li> <li>• To what extent do these relationships reflect trust, mutual respect, and open communication?</li> <li>• When adults talk to one another (in SLC/Team meetings or informally), what do they talk about?</li> <li>• How does the school/program engage and work with parents and guardians?</li> <li>• How are tensions in relationships among adults addressed?</li> </ul>	
<b>Relationships Among Youth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the school/program foster positive and supportive relationships among youth?</li> <li>• To what extent do these relationships reflect trust, mutual respect, and open communication?</li> <li>• How are tensions in relationships among youth addressed?</li> </ul>	
<b>Skill Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What learning opportunities do adults and/or youth have in this school/program that facilitate the development of positive supportive relationships (i.e. community building, communication, peer mediation, conflict resolution)?</li> </ul>	

#### IV. Curriculum and Pedagogy

Personalized programs/schools organize and deliver instruction in ways that engage students by building on their strengths and interests, applying active instructional practices, and making learning relevant to students' lives and futures. The school/program conveys high expectations for all students, uses data to diagnose learning needs and expects adults to work collaboratively and creatively to providing differentiated supports that enable all students to succeed. A primary purpose of personalization is to provide multiple paths to the same goal of success in a high standards curriculum.

Criteria	Questions	Observed Practice/Comments
<b>Student Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What instructional practices are used to actively engage students in learning (e.g. projects, cooperative groups, field work, Socratic dialog)?</li> <li>• How do curriculum and instruction reflect and build on students' strengths and interests?</li> <li>• How do curriculum or instructional practices make learning meaningful and relevant to students' current lives and future aspirations?</li> <li>• Does the program/school offer work-based and/or experiential learning opportunities?</li> <li>• How does the school/program ensure that competencies developed are relevant to labor market, industry and/or postsecondary requirements?</li> <li>• How does the academic program engage students as resources and demonstrate that youth are valued and appreciated?</li> </ul>	
<b>Learning Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the school/program determine students' needs, assets and goals? Who is involved in the process? How is the information used to support students?</li> <li>• How does the program/school identify and support failing or potentially failing students?</li> <li>• What opportunities for extra academic help are available for students who need it?</li> <li>• What acceleration and enrichment opportunities are available for students to pursue academic interests and talents?</li> </ul>	
<b>High Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the school expect all students to succeed in a common core college-preparatory curriculum, or are students tracked into different curricular streams (e.g. honors, college prep, general, vocational)?</li> <li>• Do curriculum and instruction at this school/program respond to different student needs at the expense of or in service of high standards for all students?</li> </ul>	
<b>Professional Supports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What supports are available to instructional staff to improve their ability to engage students, make learning relevant, deepen content knowledge, and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students?</li> </ul>	

## V. Community Partnerships and Connections

Personalized programs/schools acknowledge that the communities in which they reside are strong influences and important resources for education and youth development. They are actively engaged in learning about the community and in partnerships with all forms of community organizations and individuals to strengthen and coordinate the web of support for the youth they serve.

Criteria	Questions	Observed Practice/Comments
<b>Community Connections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does the school/program identify/define the larger community (e.g. neighborhood; city; official community or municipal organizations; businesses; any entity that works in partnership with the school)?</li><li>• How does the school/program relate to the community's goals and visions?</li><li>• What specific collaborative ties has the school/program developed and what purpose does each serve? How do these support the school/program's mission? What additional collaborations might support these goals?</li><li>• What additional resources does the school/program provide the community (e.g. classes for adults or use of the building as a community center)?</li></ul>	

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# Professional Learning Communities

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## *Site Visit Protocol and Discussion Guide*

Prepared for the 2003 National High School Alliance Partners Meeting in Washington, DC

The National High School Alliance acknowledges the following partners for their input on the protocol and meeting planning: Dawn Stratman-Krusemark, American Federation of Teachers; John Nori, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and Betty Hale, Institute for Educational Leadership. Cris Gutierrez, High School Teacher-Scholar and Consultant, the Achievement Council, also contributed in significant ways to the development of the protocol. The National High School Alliance acknowledges the work of Louise, Kruse, Marks (1996), and the work of the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools directed by Fred. M. Newmann, for the framework upon which this protocol is structured. The protocol also incorporated key ideas from Lee and Smith (1996), and Little (1993). Literature reviews by Hord (1997) on professional learning communities, and by the National Association of Secondary School Principals on secondary school reform (2002), provided the context and sources for research on the multiple aspects of professional learning communities.



## **Focus of the Protocol**

The Role of Professional Learning Communities in the Development of Practitioners for Improved Student Outcomes

## **Structure of the Protocol**

This protocol is designed to structure observations and reflections specific to professional learning communities during the site visit and debriefing sessions. The term “practitioner” is used generically to refer to all school or program-based professionals, such as teachers, specialists, principals, and youth workers.

The protocol is organized into six characteristics that define a high quality professional learning community. Section six outlines the elements that need to be in place in order to support the five characteristics. For each section, key indicators are phrased as questions.

- I. Shared Norms and Values
- II. Collective Responsibility for Shared Norms and Values
- III. Focus on Student Learning
- IV. De-Privatization of Practice
- V. Collaboration
- VI. Conditions and Structures

## Overview of Literature on Professional Learning Communities

Leading researchers and practitioner organizations have identified professional learning communities as a key component for the improvement of teaching and learning, particularly at the secondary level. The outcomes of professional learning communities for high school-aged youth, as suggested by current literature, are consistent with the mission of the National Alliance on the American High School (HS Alliance): to foster high academic achievement, close the achievement gap, and promote civic and personal growth of all high school-aged youth. The HS Alliance explores professional learning communities as a promising strategy within the context of one of its seven focus areas: the preparation and development of teachers, principals, and youth workers.

A professional learning community is characterized by the collaborative work of educators to continuously seek, share, and act on their learning in order to improve their practice for the purpose of improved student outcomes (Astuto, 1993). Professional learning communities have been identified as a core component of successful schoolwide improvement for several reasons: they function as an effective strategy for building school capacity around core issues of teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 1995); they foster the democratic practices required to undertake and sustain fundamental, systemic change (Bryk, 1994); and, they can serve as a mechanism for transforming school culture. By modeling collegiality, intellectual inquiry, critical discourse, and continuous improvement, professional learning communities also function—in implicit and explicit ways—to raise the expectation and standard for students' level of engagement, development, and achievement. Studies have indicated that students tend to be engaged in learning at high intellectual levels when the adults are engaged with one another and with their students at high intellectual levels around a shared vision for student success. Through the learning community, teachers learn “how to translate enhance curricula and higher standards into teaching and learning for all of their students” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). Quality professional learning communities are also characterized by many of the same attributes associated with high quality professional development: they shift the notion of professional competence from individual teacher expertise to professional community expertise; they foster a collective sense of responsibility for students' progress (Anderson, Rolheiser, & Gordon, 1998); they are inherently job-embedded and team-based (Darling-Hammond, 1996,1998b); they require a community of learners to translate into higher levels of learning for all (Jones, 1998; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997); and, they are embedded in schoolwide goals for student learning specific to the school community (Renyi, 1998; CCSSO, 1997; Sparks, 1998).

Although comparative or longitudinal studies have not yet been undertaken to measure the impact of an organizational school feature such as a professional learning community, available research asserts that the defining features of teachers' work lives do have a significant influence on teacher learning and development. Further, the literature asserts that there are specific characteristics of professional learning communities that impact teacher's ability to significantly improve student learning and development. Two characteristics have been identified as having most significant influence on student outcomes: cultural norms around learning; and, the collective responsibility of teachers for learning of all students. The literature also asserts that professional learning communities with these features are most likely to emerge in smaller schools. Because smaller schools tend to be designed with a communal, rather than bureaucratic, decision-making structure, they also foster two other characteristics of professional learning communities associated with improved outcomes for both teacher and students: sharing, collaboration and cooperation

among teachers; and, authority to define their needs and to control decisions about curriculum, teaching methods, classroom environment, and other school issues not specific to instruction.

A recent strand of research suggests that professional learning communities must also balance attention to the collective, shared identity of professional learning communities (i.e., a strong focus on team and schoolwide needs and priorities), with attention to the needs and contributions of teachers as individuals. Structures that support professional learning communities must therefore provide opportunities for both shared and individual learning (Scribner, 2002). Shared learning requires more systemic supports, such as time, additional personnel, resources, and training in the skills required to facilitate collaborative work. Individual learning often can be provided in a less systemic way, through the provision of opportunities for professional development through stand-alone workshops or seminars to help teachers build skills in specific areas. Individual learning is important in that it serves to foster teachers' sense of self-efficacy and agency that are crucial for their full participation in a professional learning community. Professional learning communities that recognize the voice and contributions of individuals also serve an important role in providing a context in which there is room for critical inquiry and dissent.

## **I. Shared Norms and Values**

Practitioner roles, responsibilities, and objectives are jointly defined and clearly articulated around shared norms and values that reflect a commitment to equity and high expectations for all students' learning.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Observations/Evidence</b>
<b>A. Is there an ongoing discourse to develop and reaffirm common norms and values about students, learning, teaching, and their roles in the context of the school and community? Are the shared norms and values in writing?</b>	
<b>B. Do the shared norms and values include the belief and expectation that all students can learn and achieve?</b>	
<b>C. Do shared norms and values include both academic and youth development outcomes?</b>	
<b>D. Are students included in the discourse around shared values and norms? Do they articulate and embrace these values?</b>	

## II. Collective Responsibility for Implementing Shared Norms and Values

When norms and values are shared and clearly articulated as schoolwide expectations, practitioners assume collective responsibility for meeting and holding one another accountable to them. This sense of collective responsibility creates energy throughout the school so that effective practices and processes can be sustained over time and are not dependent upon a particular school leader or condition.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Observations/ Evidence</b>
<b>A. Is there a mutual understanding and expectation that all members of the faculty are responsible for student outcomes?</b>	
<b>B. Do practitioners hold one another responsible for developing curriculum, instruction, and assessments consistent with shared values and norms?</b>	
<b>C. Do practitioners analyze disaggregated student performance data to ensure equitable access to resources?</b>	
<b>D. Do students feel connected to a sense of collective responsibility for successful schoolwide outcomes?</b>	

### III. Focus on Student Learning

The primary efforts and activities of a professional learning community are focused on the tough questions of student learning. To answer these questions, practitioners engage in reflective dialogue and critical inquiry to seek a better understanding and practice that will ultimately benefit students.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Observations/ Evidence</b>
<b>A. Do practitioners focus on students' intellectual development (rather only on specific techniques or how to cover curriculum)?</b>	
<b>B. Is teaching practice based on a coherent curricular vision around core ideas and modes of inquiry in the disciplines?</b>	
<b>C. Is teaching practice guided by diagnostic assessments and other data that show how students learn as well as what they know?</b>	
<b>D. Do practitioners employ multiple strategies to meet all students' needs, including English learners and students with disabilities?</b>	
<b>E. Do practitioners recognize and engage students around their prior knowledge and cultural contexts?</b>	
<b>F. Are students aware of teacher expectations and purposes for learning content and methods?</b>	

#### **IV. De-Privatization of Practice**

Professional learning communities transform the privatized, isolated practice of teaching by establishing the structures and expectations for public, reflective, ongoing discourse on the challenges of teaching and learning. By making their work “public,” practitioners define—and continually redefine—the meaning of good teaching and classroom practice for themselves both as individuals and as members of a professional community.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Observations/ Evidence</b>
<b>A. Do practitioners share what they know with one another?</b>	
<b>B. Do practitioners consult with one another in a spirit of professional inquiry about their problems and successes with teaching and learning?</b>	
<b>C. Do practitioners observe and provide critical feedback on one another’s practice through reflective dialogue?</b>	
<b>D. Do practitioners work together to review, and to make decisions about practices based on, quality research?</b>	
<b>E. Do practitioners make their work public to students, parents and community, and engage them as valuable partners in the process?</b>	
<b>F. Do practitioners have external networks to access ideas, materials, and colleagues (e.g. via institutes, content associations; school-university partnerships, reform collaborations)?</b>	

## V. Collaboration

A key attribute of professional learning communities is the extent to which practitioners engage in ongoing collaboration. Because the focus is on improving practice for improved student outcomes, collaboration can occur both within and across traditional departmental structures, depending upon the need and expertise required to solve a particular problem.

### Indicators

### Observations/ Evidence

<b>A. Do practitioners draw on one another’s expertise— both within and across groupings and content areas— to address obstacles and to improve their ability to serve diverse student academic and social needs?</b>	
<b>B. Do practitioners encourage and support risk-taking and innovative practices based on research?</b>	
<b>C. Are practitioners generating “craft knowledge,” i.e. knowledge from individual classroom practice is refined through collaboration?</b>	
<b>D. Do students have opportunities to work in collaborative ways with one another and with practitioners to inform the teaching and learning process?</b>	

## VI. Structures and Conditions

Five key school structures and conditions impact the development and sustainability of a professional learning community: school leadership; school autonomy and shared decision-making; time for teacher planning and analysis; and, professional development.

### Indicators

### Observations/ Evidence

#### A. Leadership

<b>Does the school leader act as the facilitator, rather than as the main architect, of professional learning community?</b>	
<b>Does the school leader actively support shared decision-making through distributive leadership?</b>	
<b>Does the school leader ensure organizational structures and resources to support professional community (time, personnel, schedule, etc.)?</b>	
<b>Does the school leader negotiate the politics of reform within the local context (e.g. with the district, union, parents, other agencies)?</b>	

#### B. School autonomy and shared decision making

<b>Do practitioners have authority to make decisions about resources, hiring, and management of classroom and schoolwide issues?</b>	
<b>Do practitioners define and structure staff development based on their needs (rather than as administrators define them)?</b>	
<b>Do teachers play an integral role in decisions about students with special needs?</b>	

***C. Time for teacher planning and analysis***

<b>Are teaching schedules designed to allow for regular team meetings?</b>	
<b>Are additional personnel (e.g. aides, interns, volunteers) and partnerships (e.g. business apprenticeships, service learning) used to create more planning time for teachers?</b>	
<b>Are PD funds allocated to provide release time (e.g. for meetings, retreats, summer projects)?</b>	

***D. Professional development***

<b>Are PD opportunities structured both for the whole faculty as well as for individual teachers?</b>	
<b>Do PD activities draw upon both internal and external expertise?</b>	
<b>Is PD embedded, ongoing, and connected to the school's mission and priorities?</b>	
<b>Are new teachers provided with supports and induction into the professional learning community?</b>	

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# Relevant and Connected Learning

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## *Site Visit Protocol and Discussion Guide*

Prepared for the April 2004 National High School Alliance Partners Meeting  
in Oakland, CA

*Adapted from Connected Learning Communities: A Toolkit for Reinventing High Schools  
by Cheryl Almeida and Sue Goldberger, Jobs for the Future (2001).*

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## **Overview of Focus on Relevant and Connected Learning**

Research has shown that the organizational features of high schools have an impact upon the quality of teaching and learning and that high school-aged youth thrive in personalized school environments in which the adults in their schools know them. Additionally, schools can restructure to improve academic or social supports, or both, for students. The academic structure determines how knowledge is made available to students - what and how students learn (Lee, 1993; Lee, Smith, Croninger, 1997). Learning that makes connections to real life and students' real-world experiences is vital, particularly for high school-aged students who are most at risk for school failure (NASSP, 1996). The social structure of a school determines the relationships between the members of the school community—students to teachers; teacher to teacher; teacher to administrator; and student to student (Dornbusch, et al, 1996).

Adults in the school can play a supportive role by helping students to access resources, guidance and information about course options, higher education and career paths. In addition, many students need access to counseling and extra help to succeed in their classes and to build their capacity to handle academically rigorous coursework. Together the academic and social structures establish a school's priorities and the school's climate and culture. District-level restructuring is also crucial in supporting and sustaining the innovations of high schools, and for ensuring systemic equity so that all students have access to excellent schools.

## **Structure of the Discussion Guide**

The discussion guide is designed to help collect and organize observations and reflections during the interactive sessions with local teachers and students. The guide is organized using the “Six A’s” framework developed by Jobs for the Future:

- I. Academic Rigor
- II. Authenticity
- III. Active Exploration
- IV. Applied Learning
- V. Adult Connections
- VI. Assessment Practices

## The “Six A’s” Discussion Guide on Relevant and Connected Learning

**I. Academic Rigor:** Projects address key learning standards identified by the school or district and help students develop habits of mind and work associated with academic and professional disciplines.

What is the central problem or question addressed by the project?

What knowledge area and central concepts will the project address?

What habits of mind will students develop?

What learning standards are addressed by the project?

**II. Authenticity:** Projects use a real-world context (e.g., community and workplace problems) and address issues that matter to the students.

Where in the 'real world' might one see the problem or question addressed at work or in the community?

How do we know the problem or question is one the students see as meaningful?

Who might be appropriate audiences for student work?

**III. Active Exploration:** Projects extend beyond the classroom and connect to work internships, field-based investigations, and community explorations.

What field-based activities does the project require students to conduct?

What methods and sources of information are students expected to use?

**IV. Applied Learning:** Projects engage students in solving semi-structured problems calling for competencies expected in high-performance work organizations (e.g., teamwork, problem-solving, communication, etc.)

What are students actually going to do to apply the knowledge they are learning to complex or semi-structured problems?

Which competencies expected in a high performance work will be developed?

What self-management skills does the project require students to use?

**V. Adult Connections: Projects connect students with adult mentors and coaches from the wider community.**

Do students have access to at least one other adult with expertise relevant to the project?

Does the project offer students the opportunity to develop a broader understanding of the relevant field of work through observing adults?

Does at least one adult from outside the classroom help students develop a sense of the real world standards for the type of work in the project?

**VI. Assessment Practices:** Projects involve students in regular exhibitions and assessments of their work in light of personal, school and real-world standards of performance.

What are the criteria for measuring student achievement of the disciplinary knowledge, habits of mind, and applied learning goals of the project?

Are students asked to review or help establish project criteria?

Do students receive ongoing feedback on their work-in-progress from teachers, mentors, and peers?

What deliverables are students expected to complete prior to the final product or outcome for the project?

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# Partners of the National High School Alliance

## **National Research and Policy Organizations**

Achieve, Inc.  
Alliance for Excellent Education  
American Youth Policy Forum  
Annenberg Institute for School Reform  
Association for Career and Technical Education  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
Carnegie Corporation of New York  
Center on Education Policy  
CORD  
Education Development Center  
Education Trust  
Institute for Educational Leadership  
Jobs for the Future  
KnowledgeWorks Foundation  
MDRC  
National Council of La Raza  
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform  
Pathways to College Network

## **State Leaders**

Council of Chief State School Officers  
National Association of State Boards of Education  
National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education  
National Conference of State Legislatures

## **District & School Leaders**

American Federation of Teachers  
Buck Institute for Education  
College Board  
Consortium on Chicago School Research

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform  
Middle College National Consortium  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Career Academy Coalition  
National Education Association  
National Staff Development Council  
New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Commission on Public Secondary Schools

## **Community & Youth Leaders**

Chicago Community Trust  
Forum for Youth Investment  
National League of Cities  
National Youth Employment Coalition  
Public Education Network  
Rural School and Community Trust  
What Kids Can Do

## **Technical Assistance Providers**

Academy for Educational Development, Schools for a New Society  
Career Academy Support Network, UC Berkeley  
Center for the Social Organization of Schools, Talent Development High School  
Coalition of Essential Schools  
Commonwealth Corporation  
Cristo Rey Network  
Education Alliance at Brown University  
Institute for Research and Reform in Education, First Things First  
National Academy Foundation  
National Center on Education and the Economy, America's Choice High Schools  
Southern Regional Education Board, High Schools That Work



The National High School Alliance is housed at  
the Institute for Educational Leadership  
4455 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 310  
Washington, DC 20008  
Tel: (202) 822-8405  
Fax: (202) 872-4050  
E-mail: [hsalliance@iel.org](mailto:hsalliance@iel.org)  
Web site: [www.hsalliance.org](http://www.hsalliance.org)