

Personalization and Social Supports

Site Visit Protocol and Discussion Guide



NATIONAL
HIGH SCHOOL
ALLIANCE

WASHINGTON, DC

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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*



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.

Acknowledgements

The National High School Alliance would like to acknowledge the primary authors of this protocol, Nettie Legters, Research Scientist, Johns Hopkins University, Center for the Social Organization of Schools, and Mala Thakur, National Youth Employment Coalition.

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

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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

Using the Protocol as a Tool and Guide for a Site Visit

The protocol is designed to be a tool and guide to facilitating a school/program site visit. The criteria are described in each section. 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 will share observations and reflections. Notes from the protocol may be useful for these discussions and for individual partner work beyond the scope of the meeting.

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
Safe and Welcoming Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the school/program made welcoming to youth (at the beginning of the year, everyday, for students entering mid-year)? • How does the school/program provide an environment in which students feel safe (physically and psychologically)? • Is this a school/program a place where students want to be? Do students feel they belong here? 	
Clear and Shared Expectations and Responsibility for Conduct and Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? • How do students know that their attendance in the school/program is important and desired? • How are lapses in conduct or attendance addressed by the school/program? Who takes corrective action (administrators, teachers, students)? 	
Mutual Respect and Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the school/program foster mutual respect among all its participants? Are corrective actions perceived as fair, both in process and in outcome? • 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? 	
Visible Reflection and Celebration of Student Interests and Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the environment reflect and celebrate youth interests and accomplishments? • What kinds of student accomplishments are rewarded and highlighted in this school? 	

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
Student/Adult Grouping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)? • 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)? • How is data used and by whom to guide grouping decisions? 	
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)? • Is time used in flexible ways to address students' learning needs and provide multiple opportunities to learn? 	
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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). 	
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? • To what extent are students, families, and/or community members involved in the above? • How are faculty supervision and evaluation carried out? 	

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
Youth-Adult Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? • To what extent do these relationships reflect trust, mutual respect, and open communication? • How are tensions in youth-adult relationships addressed? • 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? 	
Relationships Among Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the school/program foster positive and supportive relationships, both formal and informal, among adults? • To what extent do these relationships reflect trust, mutual respect, and open communication? • When adults talk to one another (in SLC/Team meetings or informally), what do they talk about? • How does the school/program engage and work with parents and guardians? • How are tensions in relationships among adults addressed? 	
Relationships Among Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the school/program foster positive and supportive relationships among youth? • To what extent do these relationships reflect trust, mutual respect, and open communication? • How are tensions in relationships among youth addressed? 	
Skill Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)? 	

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
Student Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What instructional practices are used to actively engage students in learning (e.g. projects, cooperative groups, field work, Socratic dialog)? • How do curriculum and instruction reflect and build on students' strengths and interests? • How do curriculum or instructional practices make learning meaningful and relevant to students' current lives and future aspirations? • Does the program/school offer work-based and/or experiential learning opportunities? • How does the school/program ensure that competencies developed are relevant to labor market, industry and/or postsecondary requirements? • How does the academic program engage students as resources and demonstrate that youth are valued and appreciated? 	
Learning Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? • How does the program/school identify and support failing or potentially failing students? • What opportunities for extra academic help are available for students who need it? • What acceleration and enrichment opportunities are available for students to pursue academic interests and talents? 	
High Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)? • 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? 	
Professional Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? 	

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
Community Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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)?• How does the school/program relate to the community's goals and visions?• 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?• What additional resources does the school/program provide the community (e.g. classes for adults or use of the building as a community center)?	

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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
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National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Career Academy Coalition
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Community & Youth Leaders

Chicago Community Trust
Forum for Youth Investment
National League of Cities
National Youth Employment Coalition
Public Education Network
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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
Web site: www.hsalliance.org