

Based on your study, what are the critical and essential components of a quality high school?

- Quality schools meet the needs of all students, from those heading towards four-year colleges to those who may be in danger of never graduating from HS
- Quality schools provide students with challenging intellectual work, authentic experiences that will apply in life outside of school, and opportunities for collaboration. The Gates Foundation dubs this the “New 3 R’s”: rigor, relevance, and relationships.
- Quality schools engage students so that they don’t feel simply like they are jumping through hoops. Such personalization is evident when students feel they are well known by staff, and programs of study are organized around student needs and interests rather than subjects or teachers.
- High school improvement efforts share some common reform strategies to maximize student engagement:
 1. Organizational: adopting a communitarian rather than bureaucratic ethos. Organize teachers into teams and give staff power for decision-making, from discipline to curriculum. Student performance is boosted through increased use of effective pedagogy and increased social support for student learning. Teachers have professional development opportunities.
 2. Curriculum: interdisciplinary courses, project-based learning, flexible scheduling (more blocks, fewer transitions), mixed-ability classes, advisories led by the same teacher for long periods of time (one or more years), explicit career goal or other mentoring strategies, explicit discussion of relevance of classes—all this without sacrificing excellent college-prep classes that serve a minority of the students well.
 3. Pedagogy: more classes based in discussion and expression, student voices encouraged (as opposed to writing towards the test), and lots of community-based learning opportunities (shadowing, service learning, work-based learning). High expectations combined with high levels of support. Teaching that builds in risk-taking, revision, learning from mistakes, and culturally appropriate materials. Assessment of student learning through a variety of means, such as performance and portfolios.
 4. Co-curricular activities: sports, the arts, and volunteering all give students an opportunity to develop social skills and “social capital.”
 5. Community involvement: business community involved in mentoring students, increasing family involvement in upper grades through active volunteer programs, parent input on empowered committees, guest teaching.
- In quality schools, teachers feel a part of a professional community, and student performance

Were you able to discern any facility requirements that would help either of the two HS improve the quality of their programs?

- In order to maximize the five facets of student engagement (above), the facilities must have: flexible spaces for both content delivery and small group discussions; meeting spaces for large group discussions; plenty of labs and other places for hands-on experiences; art and music rooms; gyms and fields for exercise and organized sports; and

well-equipped vo-tech spaces. In our district, all of these might not need to be present in both Wa-Hi and Lincoln simultaneously.

- Technology must constantly stay current.
- The Gates Foundation claims quality schools are seldom those with enrollments over 400 students; other studies dispute that. The size is less important than the “feel” of the school, its organization, and its educational philosophy.

Concerns

- In our district, career education seems to be secondarily valued at the middle and high school levels; the default emphasis is on college prep.
- Many factors work against most kinds of in-depth, hands-on learning experiences that are the backbone of vo-tech or career education:
 - Teaching to the WASL
 - Lack of scheduling in long blocks of time
 - Problems with the types of credits students get from vo-tech classes
 - State requirements for teachers to be “highly qualified” in the subject areas they are teaching.
- We are concerned that the voters need to be shown the value-added nature of education in our district. Convincing the voters may call for a radical new philosophy of education in the community.
- We interviewed community leaders to begin gauging voter sentiment about high school education in the district. Gary Ponti (Riding the Wave Board President) says that their group is establishing indicators to assess the community quantitatively. Jim Kuntz (Exec. Dir. Port of WW) reports that business prospects are interested in test scores and M&O levy passage history.

Questions

- 96% of high school grads believe real world learning opportunities, like internships, would encourage them to work harder and see the significance of what they learn. 50% of the seniors polled stated that their senior year was a waste of time, with almost all requirements met by that time. (“Resistors in our Midst” by Levi Folly) Hence, studies indicate that HS students generally value education, admit they are not challenged by high school work and that they do not have positive relationships with many adults in school. **Could we include randomly selected students in our planning?**
- The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has instituted several initiatives to promote high school reform through public and private partnership and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The High Schools We Need: Improving an American Institution by Terry Bergeson (State Superintendent of Public Instruction, May 2006) lists several current high school reform initiatives that our district could look at, e.g. Talent Development High Schools, High Schools that Work, Career Academies and Early College High School Initiatives. **How do we pursue some of this funding, especially for Lincoln High School?**