

# How Can District Leaders Support Successful High School Transformation?

Excerpts from:

*Reflections on Reform: Hard Lessons and Practical Solutions*

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# District Supports

- ◆ Create a district-wide framework for high school reform
  - Compelling
    - ◆ Sufficient evidence to adopt sets of practices across all schools
    - ◆ ALL students can do better if these practices are adopted

# District Supports

- ◆ Create a district-wide framework for high school reform
  - Compelling
  - Coherent and efficient
    - ◆ Not enough money or human resources to effectively implement one such framework much less two or three
    - ◆ Professional development of teachers and administrators around shared implementation standards
      - “Demand” placed on schools prioritized accordingly
      - Accountability for school and PD providers transparent
    - ◆ Personnel recruitment has clear and consistent focus
    - ◆ Compels realignment of core resources to support highest priorities
    - ◆ More easily communicable and defensible to policy makers, community leaders and funders

# District Supports

- ◆ Create a district-wide framework for high school reform
  - Compelling
  - Coherent and efficient
  - Sustainable
    - ◆ Individual schools easily marginalized and tokenized when surrounded by business as usual
    - ◆ Reform less vulnerable to departure of individual leaders when all schools are engaged
    - ◆ Reform becomes the work of the district rather than a program in one or a few schools

# District Supports

- ◆ Create a district-wide framework for high school reform
  - Compelling
  - Coherent and efficient
  - Sustainable
  - Equitable and accountable
    - ◆ All students deserve these opportunities and will get them!
    - ◆ Prevent draining of innovative teachers into “reforming” schools and out of equally needy schools
    - ◆ Personnel evaluation and retention around same expectations

# District Supports

- ◆ District leaders buy in to this reform framework (board, superintendent, central office)
  - District leaders remaining on the sideline, waiting and seeing, passively undermining will trump even strong school staff (administrator and teacher) buy-in every time – have to get the leadership on board from the get go
  - Teacher buy-in important but comes AFTER leadership buy-in (district and building) and for many staff only comes after implementation and early wins

# District Supports

- ◆ Set clear expectations
  - Student outcomes such as:
    - ◆ Closing gaps toward AYP in core subject areas
    - ◆ Percentages of students with threshold levels of attendance
    - ◆ Persistence rates from 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>
    - ◆ Percentages of students on track for graduation
    - ◆ Percentages of students in all SLCs
      - Taking advanced courses
      - Taking and scoring at college acceptance levels on national tests
      - Enrolling and completing post-secondary training and education

# District Supports

- ◆ Set clear expectations
  - Implementation standards such as:
    - ◆ Wall to wall four-year SLCs with themes and equitable profiles of staff and students
    - ◆ Common planning time available and used effectively
    - ◆ Shared goals and benchmarks for instructional improvement
    - ◆ Threshold levels of quality instruction in all classes
    - ◆ Effective family advocate for all students and families
  - Implementation timelines such as:
    - ◆ When will all high schools have wall to wall SLCs
    - ◆ When will all classrooms show threshold levels of quality instruction
    - ◆ When will all students and families have effective family advocates

# District Supports

- ◆ Set clear expectations
  - Participation and engagement in reform support activities
    - ◆ Principals and appropriate district leaders
    - ◆ All teachers, teacher leaders and building administrators
    - ◆ Follow-up on commitments made during support activities
    - ◆ Follow-through monitored by outside providers and district personnel

# District Supports

- ◆ Allow building-level flexibility of resource allocation to achieve implementation quality
  - Sunsetting of programs not aligned with reform framework
  - Converting building-level administrative and support staff positions to instructional positions
  - Redefining job descriptions of administrators
  - Shifting certification profile of building staff to fit educational needs of students

# District Supports

- ◆ Reallocate district resources and policies to support building needs
  - Restructuring reporting relationships in line with high school reform work, for example
    - ◆ All high school principals, school improvement facilitators and instructional coaches reporting to superintendent (small district) or to direct superintendent report (larger district)
    - ◆ Director of Family and Student Advocacy to support high schools' work on this issue
  - Moving central office instructional support staff into building-level coaching activities
  - Revise staffing process and decision-making models to ensure framework implementation, for example
    - ◆ Staffing toward equitable student access to highly qualified instructors across SLCs and buildings
    - ◆ Site-based decision-making focused on quality and participation
  - Shifting federal title monies to support high school transformation work

# District Supports

- ◆ Provide additional and realigned professional development time
  - Late start/early release time for reform-related professional development
  - Realignment of existing professional development days toward reform goals
- ◆ Recruit and retain staff willing and ready to support reform

# District Supports

- ◆ Provide political support and cover for schools to do their work
  - Advocate for reform with community interests
  - Recruit community resources (political, financial and human) for reform efforts
  - Take on opponents of reform principles such as equity
  - Instigate and then own district-wide policy changes that threaten the status quo

# District Supports

- ◆ Seek and obtain aligned external resources to launch and strengthen reform
  - Qualified and committed technical assistance providers – less providers who can help schools do more of the work
  - Fungible outside dollars to support reform effort
  - Fend off grants and other opportunities that distract from the reform

# District Supports

- ◆ Identify, train and promote emerging leaders to help ensure sustainability beyond existing leaders and “thick” levels of outside supports
  - Recognize accomplishments of emerging leaders
  - Send clear signals to all staff regarding what is expected and recognized
  - Internal cadres of technical assistance experts
    - ◆ Transfer of intellectual capital from outside providers
    - ◆ Monitor and support building reform efforts



**firstthingsfirst\***

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