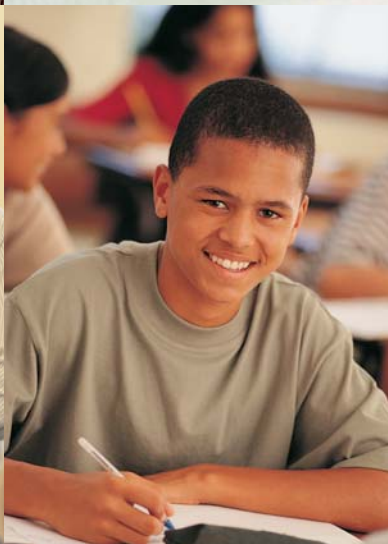


Executive Summary

BREAKING RANKS II™: Strategies for Leading High School Reform



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
of SECONDARY SCHOOL
PRINCIPALS



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Introduction

First published in 1996, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* presented a vision of a dramatically different high school of the 21st century. Its more than

80 recommendations provided direction for high school principals across the country in making schools more student-centered by personalized programs, support services, and intellectual rigor for all students.

Breaking Ranks II outlines the need for current high schools to engage in the process of change that will ensure success for every high school student. Its first set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of a professional learning community, wherein leadership throughout the institution refocuses its work on what will

successfully support every student in their high school experience. The second set of recommendations and tools focuses on the need to provide every student with meaningful adult relationships that can best support every student. And the third set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of personalized learning, where students see their learning as meaningful and relevant, as well as rigorous and challenging, ensuring their success both within and beyond high school. Together, these recommendations and activities ultimately lead to the success of every student, not only those typically served well by the traditional comprehensive high school.

Breaking Ranks II is intended to assist principals by:

- Providing strategies for implementing the recommendations
- Illustrating possible entry points or areas in which to begin reform
- Profiling the successes, challenges, and results of schools implementing the recommendations.

How Well Does Your School Serve Each Student?

In the opening chapter of *Breaking Ranks II* school leaders are confronted with questions about their schools. Some of these questions are:

- How many of the students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in four years?
- What percentage of your graduates must take remedial courses in college or a community college? What percentage of those finish college?
- Does your leadership team successfully interact with “hard-to-reach” parents with activities such as home visits, Saturday meetings, and meetings outside of regular business hours?
- How many low-income and/or minority students are enrolled in advanced courses?
- How many teachers from different disciplines work together on a regular basis?
- Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?
- What percentage of the classes per week at your school is primarily lecture-driven?

If, after answering the questions, principals see room for improvement, setting a vision for that improvement is their next step.

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Seven Cornerstone Strategies to Improve Student Performance

Seven cornerstone strategies have been gleaned from the experiences of *Breaking Ranks* schools and will help those who wonder how to start. These seven cornerstone strategies cut across all three core areas and most of the 31 recommendations. Together, these seven cornerstone strategies, if implemented effectively, will form the foundation for improving the performance of each student in your school.

1. **Core Knowledge:** Establish the essential learnings a student is required to learn in order to graduate, and adjust the curriculum and teaching strategies to realize that goal
2. **Connections with Students:** Increase the quantity and improve the quality of interactions between students, teachers, and other school personnel by reducing the number of students for which any adult or group of adults is responsible
3. **Personalized Planning:** Implement a comprehensive advisory program that ensures each student has frequent and meaningful opportunities to plan and assess his or her academic and social progress with a faculty member
4. **Adapting to Differences:** Ensure teachers use a variety of instructional strategies and assessments to accommodate individual learning styles
5. **Flexible Use of Time:** Implement schedules flexible enough to accommodate teaching strategies consistent with the ways students learn most effectively and that allow for effective teacher teaming and lesson planning
6. **Distributed Leadership:** Institute structural leadership changes that allow for meaningful involvement in decision making by students, teachers, family members, and the community and that support effective communication with these groups
7. **Continuous Professional Development:** Align comprehensive, ongoing professional development program and individual Personal Learning Plans of staff members with the content knowledge and instructional strategies required to prepare students for graduation.

Breaking Ranks II illustrates how school principals and their leadership teams hold the key to initiating essential conversations about relationships among people and relationships between students and ideas.



Seven Cornerstone Strategies



Core Area 1

Sowing the Seeds for Change: Collaborative Leadership, Professional Learning Communities, and the Strategic Use of Data

The idea for comprehensive change may not begin in the principal's office, but it most assuredly can end there either through incomplete planning, failure to involve others, neglect, or failure to create conditions that allow a new order of things to emerge in the high school. Creating those conditions is often the first challenge—and sometimes it must start within the principal's own thinking and interactions with people.

Core Area 1

Recommendations:

1. The principal will provide leadership in the high school community by building and maintaining a **vision, direction, and focus for student learning**
2. Each high school will establish a **site council** and accord other meaningful roles in decision making to students, parents, and members of the staff to promote student learning and an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership
3. A high school will regard itself as a **community** in which members of the staff collaborate to develop and implement the school's learning goals
4. **Teachers will provide the leadership** essential to the success of reform, collaborating with others in the educational community to redefine the role of the teacher and to identify sources of support for that redefined role
5. Every school will be a learning community for the entire community. As such, the school will promote the use of **Personal Learning Plans for each educator** and provide the resources to ensure that the principal, teachers, and other staff members can address their own learning and professional development needs as they relate to improved student learning
6. The school community will promote policies and practices that **recognize diversity** in accord with the core values of a democratic and civil society and will offer substantive ongoing professional development to help educators appreciate issues of diversity and expose students to a rich array of viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences
7. High schools will build **partnerships with institutions of higher education** to provide teachers and administrators at both levels with ideas and opportunities to enhance the education, performance, and evaluation of educators
8. High schools will develop political and financial **relationships with individuals, organizations, and businesses** to support and supplement educational programs and policies
9. At least once every five years, each high school will convene a broadly based external panel to offer a **Public Description of the school**, a requirement that could be met in conjunction with the evaluations of state, regional, and other accrediting groups.

Core Area 2

Personalizing the School Environment

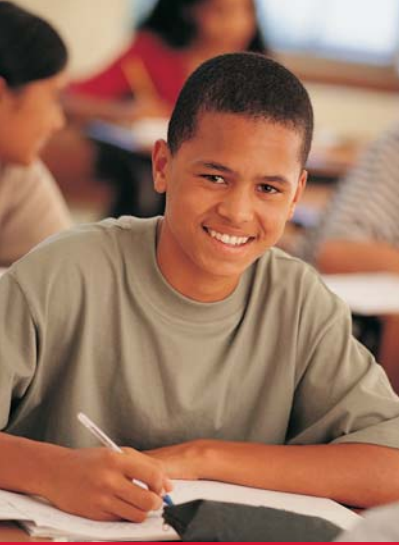
If high achievement for all students is the goal of reform, then personalization is the key. Although some students might be able to make it through four years of high school despite the lack of any personal connections, all students require a supportive environment—some more than others. Creating that environment is essential to bringing learning to fruition. In keeping with the sentiment implicit in the word, *personalization* can mean different things to different people. However, most definitions converge on a few common principles associated with providing students with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to the school, a sense of ownership over the direction of one's learning, and the ability to recognize one's choices and to make choices based on one's own experience and understanding of the choices. The following provides a working definition linked to the *Breaking Ranks* call for a more student-centered, personalized experience in high school.

Recommendations:

10. High schools will create **small units** in which anonymity is banished
11. Each high school teacher involved in the instructional program on a full-time basis will be responsible for **contact time with no more than 90 students** during a given term so that the teacher can give greater attention to the needs of every student
12. Each student will have a **Personal Plan for Progress** that will be reviewed often to ensure that the high school takes individual needs into consideration and to allow students, within reasonable parameters, to design their own methods for learning in an effort to meet high standards
13. Every high school student will have a **Personal Adult Advocate** to help him or her personalize the educational experience
14. Teachers will convey a **sense of caring** to their students so that students feel that their teachers share a stake in their learning
15. High schools will develop **flexible scheduling** and student grouping patterns that allow better use of time in order to meet the individual needs of students to ensure academic success
16. The high school will engage students' **families as partners** in the students' education
17. The high school community, which cannot be values-neutral, will advocate and model a set of core **values essential in a democratic and civil society**
18. High schools, in conjunction with agencies in the community, will help coordinate the delivery of **physical and mental health and social services for youth.**



Core Area 2



Core Area 3

Core Area 3

Making Learning Personal: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

In this chapter we discuss the importance of **building relationships between students and ideas**—how the student interacts and directs his or her own learning with the oversight, coaching, and motivational strategies associated with student-centered curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships cannot be left outside that door, however. In fact, they become a tool within the classroom to generate excitement about ideas and learning.

Recommendations:

19. Each high school will identify a set of **essential learnings**—in literature and language, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, and the arts—in which students must demonstrate achievement in order to graduate
20. Each high school will present **alternatives to tracking** and to ability grouping
21. The high school will reorganize the traditional department structure in order to **integrate the school's curriculum** to the extent possible and emphasize depth over breadth of coverage
22. The content of the curriculum, where practical, should connect to **real-life applications** of knowledge and skills to help students link their education to the future
23. The high school will promote **service programs** and student activities as integral to an education, providing opportunities for all students that support and extend academic learning
24. The academic program will extend **beyond the high school campus** to take advantage of learning opportunities outside the four walls of the building
25. Teachers will design high-quality work and teach in ways that **engage students**, cause them to persist, and, when the work is successfully completed, result in their satisfaction and their acquisition of knowledge, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and other abilities valued by society
26. Teachers will know and be able to use a variety of strategies and settings that identify and accommodate **individual learning styles** and engage students
27. Each high school teacher will have a broad base of **academic knowledge** with depth in at least one subject area
28. Teachers will be adept at acting as coaches and facilitators to promote more **active involvement of students** in their own learning
29. Teachers will **integrate assessment into instruction** so that assessment is accomplished using a variety of methods and does not merely measure students, but becomes part of the learning process
30. Recognizing that education is a continuum, high schools will reach out to elementary and middle level schools as well as institutions of higher education to better serve the **articulation of student learning** and to ensure each stage of the continuum understands what will be required of students at the succeeding stage
31. Schools will develop a strategic plan to make **technology** integral to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, accommodating different learning styles and helping teachers to individualize and improve the learning process.

Connecting *Breaking Ranks II* Recommendations in High School Renewal



Connecting *BR II*
Recommendations

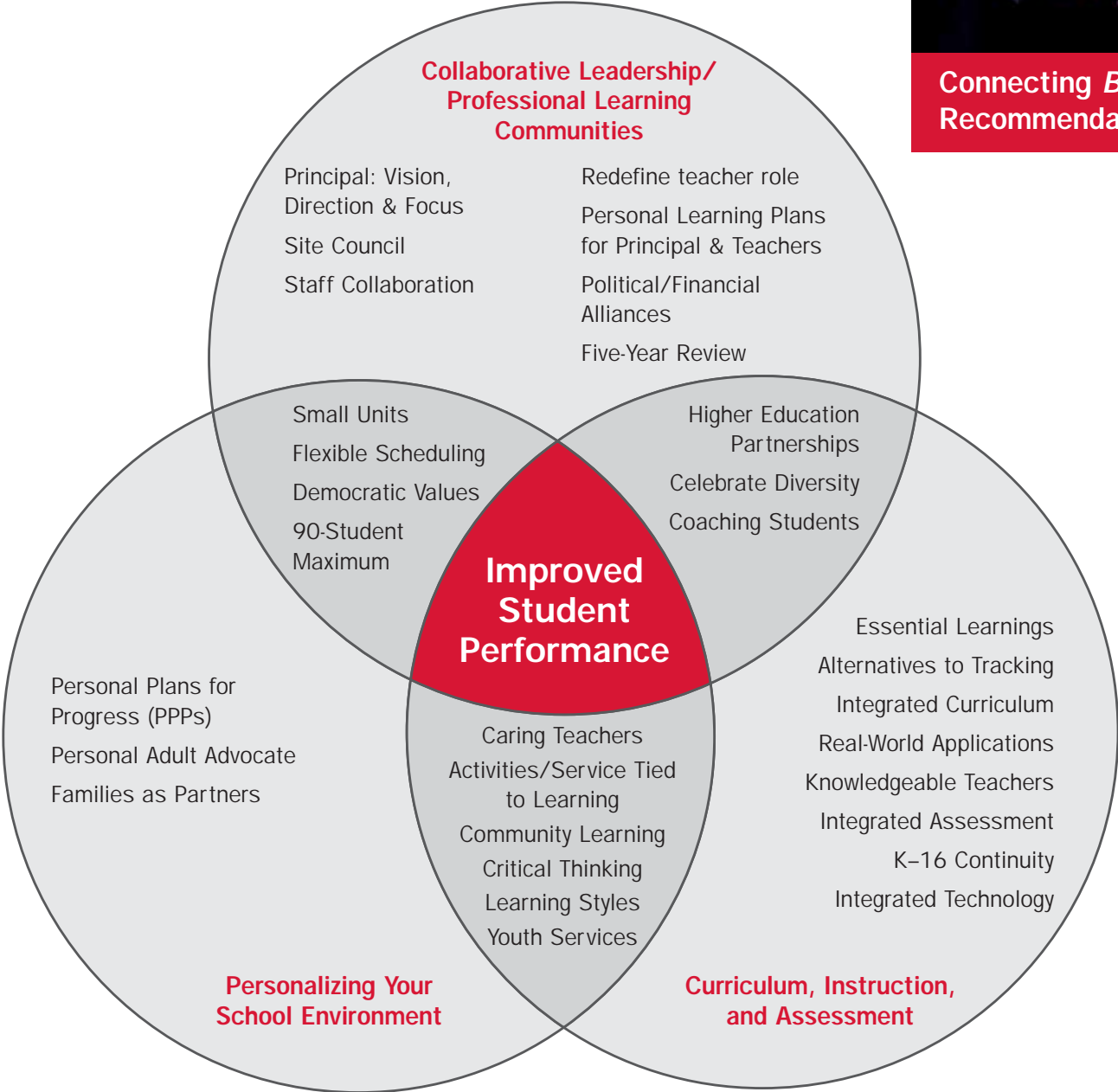


Diagram by John Clarke, Steering Group, Vermont's "High Schools on the Move"

Advance Praise for *Breaking Ranks II*TM

Breaking Ranks II is the most powerful and practical resource available anywhere. It is a must-read handbook for all those working on high school reform. It is superb!

Michael Fullan
Dean, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Breaking Ranks II is a powerful tool for all secondary school principals. The book offers valuable strategies, recommendations, and resources for effecting comprehensive school reform, while underscoring the importance of preparing individual adolescents for membership in a democratic society.

James P. Comer
Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry
Yale Child Study Center
Associate Dean, Yale School of Medicine

The templates for action in *Breaking Ranks II* are clear and compelling. The case studies are powerful and convincing. The report is as well organized and helpful to the reader as any I've seen.

Ron Wolk
Founding Editor
Education Week and *Teacher Magazine*

NASSP demonstrates its ongoing commitment to meaningful reform of the American high school with the release of *Breaking Ranks II*, the much-needed next step in outlining strategies that will produce effective change in our high schools. We applaud the NASSP effort in this period of challenge and change in education.

George Kersey, Jr.
Executive Director
Phi Delta Kappa International

Every person connected to a high school should read this book—the school board member, the superintendent, the principal, faculty, staff, students, and parent leaders—because it lays out a journey which, if they are willing to undertake it, would dramatically improve the learning experience for every high school student. Bravo to NASSP for undertaking this important work.

Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director
National School Boards Association

Breaking Ranks II is thoughtful and doable. The vignettes of school practice are incredibly valuable. This document will prove to be the most important work on improving the high school this decade.

Tom Sergiovanni
Lillian Radford Distinguished Professor of Education
Trinity University

To order copies of *Breaking Ranks II*, call the NASSP Sales office at 800-253-7746, or visit www.principals.org.

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