

America's Most Successful High Schools — What Makes Them Work

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Executive Summary

The 30 high schools included in the *Bringing Successful Practices to Scale* initiative, co-sponsored by the International Center for Leadership in Education and the Council of Chief State Schools Officers with financial support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, have provided great insight into how American high schools can help *all* students complete an academically rigorous and relevant curriculum. Especially insightful is the comparison of findings from these 30 high schools to the many good high schools that will need to make some further changes before they can be classified as great in terms of all students' academic success.

While there is no one formula for a successful high school, certain characteristics appear to be consistent across the 30 high schools. They are:

1. Focusing instruction around students' interests, learning styles, and aptitudes through a variety of small learning community approaches, most commonly academies
2. An unrelenting commitment by administrators and teachers to excellence for all students with a particular emphasis on literacy across the curriculum
3. A laser-like focus on data at the classroom level to make daily instructional decisions for individual students.
4. An extraordinary commitment of resources and attention to 9th grade students
5. A rigorous and relevant 12th grade year
6. High-quality curriculum and instruction that focuses on rigor, relevance, relationships, and reflective thought.
7. Solid and dedicated leadership.
8. Relationships driven by guiding principles
9. Sustained and supported professional development

It has become apparent in recent years that most American high schools need some degree of reform if they are to get all students toward a rigorous and relevant curriculum. This paper lays out both the changes that are needed in most schools and, equally as important, the process that is necessary to move from a traditional high school to one that is highly successful.