

Making the Case for Small Schools – The Facts

American high schools operate in much the same way today as they did 50 years ago, leaving most of today's young people without the academic preparation they need to be successful in college, work and their communities.

The problem with large, impersonal high schools

- About 30% of American students drop out of high school including about 45% of Hispanic and African American students.
- Racial and economic gaps are large and growing
- Nearly one in five seniors cannot identify the main idea in what they have read and nearly two in five seniors haven't mastered the usage of fractions, percents and averages.
- American high school student achievement ranks in the lower half of the developed countries.
- Eleventh graders in U.S. high schools are typically taught science that students in other industrialized nations are exposed to in the ninth grade.
- American ninth graders study math taught to seventh graders abroad.
- Nearly half of high school graduates who go on to college require remedial courses.

The reasons why

- Anonymity: high schools have doubled in size in the last generation resulting in overcrowding and reduced student and teacher interaction.
- Incoherence: high schools offer a dizzying array of disconnected courses with little guidance.
- Isolation: many teachers see over 150 students daily and have little adult contact.
- Low expectations: only one of four to six tracks in most high schools prepares students for college.
- Intractable: high schools are slow to change due to large and isolated staffs, restrictive state and district policies and employment agreements, higher education entrance requirements, and an array of interest groups dictating much of a school's policy.

The Small Schools Solution: combining rigor and relationships

- Small high schools (ideally 400 students or fewer) can provide a personalized learning environment where every student has an adult advocate. Students in small schools feel less alienated and tend to be more actively engaged in school activities.
- Students in small schools are far less likely to experience physical danger, loss of property and the demoralizing effects of vandalism.
- Students in small schools in New York had higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates than their peers in larger schools. Students in small schools in Chicago had dropout rates one-third lower than students attending big schools.
- Small schools show the most promise for raising achievement levels of disadvantaged students and students of color.
- Small schools create professional learning communities where teachers have the opportunity to work collectively to improve their skills and curriculum.

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