

State-Level High School Improvement Systems Checklist

Prepared by the National High School Center
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As states work to develop systems of support for improving schools at all levels, including the high school level, it is important that they build on local contexts while creating a coherent, aligned systems approach designed to strengthen schools over the long term. States can begin with a vision and clear goals, as well as a way to determine the number of high schools most immediately in need of focused support. This process will involve having states identify points of integration between elements of a coherent system and potential barriers.

States are at various stages of developing their system of support to reach struggling high schools. Below are some of the areas to consider when assessing where your state may be in terms of the elements of using existing support and guidance mechanisms and reconfiguring and/or creating new structures to leverage system change for high school improvement. These elements may be of help in supporting your thinking about establishing or refining your state's education planning and implementation process.

Do states in your region have any of the following in place?

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- ☐ Permanent education round table, commission or task force on high school improvement
- ☐ A required rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum for graduation
- ☐ Statewide initiatives for student awareness of multiple postsecondary pathways such as college awareness initiatives
- ☐ Support for college-level learning opportunities in high school, such as dual enrollment and Early College High School initiatives
- ☐ Support and guidance related to use of assessment data to drive differentiated instruction
- ☐ More rigorous graduation requirements, possibly bolstered by such initiatives as *NGA Honor States Grants* or *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*
- ☐ Support for strategic and integrated virtual learning opportunities
- ☐ Adoption of other indicators of achievement beyond test scores (e.g., portfolios)
- ☐ Other: _____

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- ☐ An accessible longitudinal K–16 data system, possibly as part of the *NGA Compact* or *NCEA's Quality Data Campaign*
- ☐ A P–12, P–16 or P–21 state system initiative (e.g., data warehousing, alignment of standards, information sharing, clear articulation of standards across the grade levels)
- ☐ High school standards and requirements aligned with college expectations, possibly supported by such an initiative as Achieve Inc.'s *American Diploma Project* or the *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*
- ☐ College and work readiness assessments, including end-of-course assessments
- ☐ Communication of and support for provision of suitable testing accommodations for students with special needs
- ☐ Provision of research-based information about strategies that can maximize learning at the high school level
- ☐ Support for high school readiness assessments
- ☐ Other: _____

TEACHER QUALITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- ☐ Plan for ensuring better high school teacher preparation, training, recruitment and retention such as assistance and/or incentives for training teachers
- ☐ Support for high-quality professional development that is coherent, sustained, and job-embedded
- ☐ Support for pre-certification programs and mentoring for new teachers with a focus on effective as well as quality instruction in high schools
- ☐ Strategies and implementation of a teacher accountability and assessment plan at the high school level
- ☐ Plan for addressing equitable distribution of high-quality high school teachers across districts and schools and within schools and across districts, schools, and course levels
- ☐ Plan to recruit and prepare Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers with focus on advancing high level of rigor and critical-thinking skills through CTE
- ☐ Other: _____

RESOURCES: FINANCIAL AND OTHER

- ☐ Leveraging federal and/or other resources in an integrated way in support of better high schools, for example: Title I, Title III, Title V, special education, school improvement, small learning communities, grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, etc. (Please see “Key Federal Funding Streams Affecting High Schools” below.)
- ☐ Special financial resources and grants for high school restructuring
- ☐ Adequate number of managers and assigned hours within the state education agency (SEA) dedicated to advancing and integrating the work of ensuring excellent high schools
- ☐ Partnerships between district- and state-level personnel and personnel at institutions of higher education to coordinate around high school improvement for greater efficiency, savings, and timely impact (e.g., dual enrollment, articulation agreements)
- ☐ Incentives for experienced quality teachers to work in the most challenged high schools
- ☐ Incentives for disadvantaged students to take Advanced Placement (AP) exams and college and work preparatory courses (e.g., AVID)
- ☐ Other: _____

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- ☐ Articulation of a vision and state education plan for better schools, including high schools, with designated high school priorities and a strategy for approaching school improvement in a coherent, aligned manner
- ☐ Policies that are coherent and aligned across multiple governance systems
- ☐ Streamlining and connecting governance via P–12 or P–16 council or commission on alignment that is integrated into day-to-day education operations and budget/finance systems
- ☐ Support for school administrators and teachers to become instructional leaders and positive change agents (e.g., common planning time, resource allocation, collaboration opportunities, commitment to transparency)
- ☐ Mechanism for rural stakeholder engagement
- ☐ State-level system support for elementary and middle school improvement that is integrated with state-level support for high school improvement
- ☐ Other: _____

ORGANIZATION AND RESTRUCTURING

- ☐ Criteria for identifying low-performing districts and/or high schools and for removing them from low-performing lists upon improvement
- ☐ Articulated action plan for turning around low-performing districts and/or high schools, possibly assisted by funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation or other sources
- ☐ Identified resources of technical assistance to support turning around low-performing high schools and restructuring efforts
- ☐ Use of school improvement teams and/or coaches for low-performing high schools who are coordinated and communicating internally and externally
- ☐ Support for dropout prevention and recovery programs
- ☐ Assistance, information, and/or support for establishing high school charter schools and/or small learning communities
- ☐ Other: _____

STUDENT SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS

- ☐ Support for literacy and math recovery programs, including tiered intervention models and avenues for academic catch-up
- ☐ Support for high school-level tutoring and intensive counseling
- ☐ Statewide pathways for industry certification
- ☐ Use of comprehensive school reform-type models, such as *Talent Development* and *High Schools That Work*, and related initiatives, such as *Career Academy Support Network*
- ☐ Support for safe school climate that works to ensure the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of students
- ☐ Support for high school attendance and behavior monitoring
- ☐ Support for equity initiatives, such as policies to close the achievement gap through access to high-level coursework
- ☐ Support for individual learning plans for all students in addition to those with learning disabilities
- ☐ Provision of research-based information about strategies that can maximize learning at the high school level
- ☐ Support for career guidance to help students focus their high school coursework

ADDITIONAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

- ☐ Specific state laws, policies, initiatives, or regulations that affect high school improvement
- ☐ Partnerships with other agencies or institutions of higher learning
- ☐ Sources of authority and governance (e.g., a hands-on governor, an empowered state board of education, an involved legislature with active oversight)
- ☐ Demographics of population
- ☐ Number of students in the state who attend schools in urban and rural areas
- ☐ Parent, business, and community involvement
- ☐ Other: _____

KEY FEDERAL FUNDING STREAMS AFFECTING HIGH SCHOOLS

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title I, Part A, Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Education Agency (LEA)
- ESEA, Title I, Part C, Education of Migratory Children
- ESEA, Title I, Part D, Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent or at Risk of Dropping Out
- ESEA, Title II, Part A, Teacher Quality
- ESEA, Title III, English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement and Academic Achievement Grant Programs
- ESEA, Title IV, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities—SEA Program
- ESEA, Title IV, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities—Governors' Program
- ESEA, Title V, Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs
- ESEA, Title VI, Innovative Education Program Strategies
- IDEA, Part B, Coordinated Services and Schoolwide Programs
- McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, Title VII, Subtitle B, Education for Homeless Children and Youth

Additional federal grants and resources that are available to LEAs and/or SEAs to support high schools and/or high school-age students:

- Advanced Placement Incentive Program: www.ed.gov/programs/apincent
- School Dropout Prevention Program: www.ed.gov/programs/dropout
- Smaller Learning Communities: www.ed.gov/programs/slcp
- State Scholars Initiative: www.wiche.edu/statescholars
- Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cte/
- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA): www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd

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