

## **Discussion Paper: Defining Effective Schools**

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### **A. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper was to examine the literature to identify those factors in the educational process that are deemed to have the greatest positive influence on student achievement. Many educational researchers have addressed this topic and a multitude of lists of key indicators have been developed.

A 1995 report by the General Accounting Office of the U.S Federal Government, based on a review of successful practices in schools suggested that:

“Successful schools...had a well-defined mission: they knew what they wanted to accomplish. They organized the work environment, human resource practices, and curriculum and instruction... in ways that supported the mission. The evidence that we reviewed consistently demonstrated the need to integrate mission and key practices. No one practice, by itself, seems to ensure success.”

### **B. Characteristics of Effective Schools: K-12 Research**

A 2002 paper, published by the Washington Schools Research Center, identified the 5 most commonly cited characteristics in the research literature regarding student achievement:

- Emphasis on teaching basic skills
- High expectations for student achievement
- Frequent evaluation of student progress
- Safe and orderly school climate
- Educational leadership

Other factors they identified as being of importance to student achievement included:

- Spirit of cooperation & collaboration: teachers act as collaborative problem-solvers rather than waiting for district leadership to solve problems
- Importance of a learner-centered, constructivist approach
  - Students encouraged to be actively engaged in academic material: questioning, experimenting, reflecting, discussing and creating personal meaning
  - “. activities that are perceived by students as having some relation to their own personal interests, needs or goals are likely to motivate them toward greater involvement in the learning process...”
  - Showing respect for students’ diverse voices & perspectives
  - Modeling social responsibility for students
  - Students & educators working collaboratively in the learning process/co-learners
  - Assessments should uncover students’ deep understanding of the material, not just showing an ability to repeat information

- Meta-cognitive skills – students thinking about thinking (i.e. How they got to the answer)

Creemers and Reezigt's 1996 review of the literature identified 9 factors that characterize effective schools:

- Orderly environment/school climate
- Consensus and cooperation between teachers
- Focus on basic skills/learning time
- Monitoring of student progress/evaluation
- School educational/administrative leadership
- Policy on parent involvement
- High expectations
- Coordination of curricula & approaches to instruction
- Quality of the school curricula

In their discussion, they raised an interesting question about the cause & effect nature of these factors: if a school has high-achieving, well motivated students from supportive home backgrounds, it is easier for staff to spend time on organization and structured lessons versus those situations where students are more demanding, then schools may become overwhelmed and deal in a reactive mode as problems arise and thus find it difficult to develop long-term plans & new initiatives.

### **C. Characteristics of Effective Schools: Elementary School Research**

Mueller of the Wilder Research Center in Minnesota studied the characteristics of successful urban elementary schools in 1997. He identified 20 school-based characteristics or factors associated with improved student academic achievement. He organized these into five clusters as follows:

- **Outcome goals, curriculum & assessment**
  - Clearly-defined academic outcomes for all students
  - Curriculum is closely aligned with academic outcomes
  - Academically rigorous and challenging curriculum is provided to all students
  - Regular assessment of students' progress, aligned with outcome goals and the curriculum, is conducted
- **Classroom practices & instruction**
  - Contents of the core curriculum are thoroughly covered
  - Frequent monitoring of student progress occurs, with early intervention if problems emerge
  - Instruction time on the core curriculum is maximized during the regular school day (time on task)
  - Instructional goals are well matched to students' skill levels & interests
  - Instructional delivery is highly structured and interactive
  - Instructional methods are used with a demonstrated capacity to accelerate student achievement, especially for disadvantaged students
  - Classroom is managed in a manner conducive to student learning

- **Classroom climate and orientation to student learning**
  - School staff hold and demonstrate high expectations for all students
  - School staff have the attitude, “Whatever it takes”
  - It is evident that students are cared about and respected
  
- **Teacher leadership & development**
  - Teachers are strongly invested and engaged in efforts to improve student achievement
  - There is an emphasis on the professional development of teachers
  - Teachers are involved in decision-making and problem-solving
  
- **School environment and other school-wide factors**
  - School environment is orderly and safe
  - Strong leadership for school improvement is provided by the school principal
  - Classroom size is small (esp. K-3 and disadvantaged students)

### C. **Characteristics of Effective Schools: High School Research**

High school reform is receiving a great deal of attention, in California as well as nationally. Many feel that our traditional high schools are failing to serve the needs of our students. High dropout rates, low rates of college attendance and/or a need for remediation in college all lend credence to this argument. The California Department of Education noted, in 2004, that less than 10% of the state’s high schools have reached the optimum level of 800 on the Academic Performance Index (API) and that in the previous four years high schools had met their annual API growth targets only about 40% of the time.

Much of the literature on high school reform focuses on 3 critical components, often referred to as the new 3 R’s:

- Rigor – high expectations
- Relevance – meaningful course of study
- Relationships – powerful, sustained involvement with caring adults who mentor, advise and support students throughout their high school careers

Improving **rigor** of the high school curriculum requires attention be given not only to the offering higher level coursework to all students and/or raising graduation requirements, it also requires that consideration is given to the degree to which students develop proficiency in the subject matter. Students must demonstrate conceptual understanding of important content and use their knowledge and skills to create or explore new ideas rather than reproduce information. This requires them to organize, interpret, evaluate and synthesize information and to clearly communicate their results. One author suggests that improving the rigor of the high school curriculum requires:

- Developing versatile, dynamic and efficient assessment systems that reflect and reinforce higher standards of teaching and learning
- Ensuring that teachers have the resources, training and support they need
- Providing assistance to academically struggling students before they fall too far behind

**Relevance** refers to the degree to which schools provide a learning environment that is connected to the students' real-world interests and allows students to see a connection between schoolwork and their life after high school. Relevant assignments ask students to address questions or problems with real-world applications.

**Relationships** are created when students feel that someone cares about them in their school environment. One causal factor often attributed to the high rate of dropouts is the perception that no one else cares whether the young person stays in school or leaves. One of the strongest reasons put forward for the creation of smaller schools is that it is much easier to create an environment in which all kids are known and feel valued in a community of 300 versus a large school of 3,000. Many schools address this relationship piece through the use of advisory periods and/or mentorships where students develop a relationship with an adult who remains with them and keeps in close contact with them throughout their high school career.

A number of researchers and organizations have identified what they believe to be the key characteristics of successful high schools.

### 1. **The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has established partnerships with state education agencies, school districts and other organizations to improve high school graduation rates by starting new, small high schools and converting existing schools into smaller schools. To date, they have invested approximately \$1 billion in education including the creation of over 1,900 small high schools in 40 states. The foundation believes that high schools should become places that combine rigorous academic programs with relevance to students' interests and potential career opportunities, supported by positive relationships that can motivate students both academically and personally.

Through their experiences and research, the Gates Foundation identifies 7 attributes of high achieving schools:

- **Common focus**
  - Staff & students focused on a few, key goals
  - Time, tools & professional development aligned with instruction
- **High expectations**
  - All staff dedicated to helping all students achieve standards
  - All students following rigorous curriculum
  - All students leave school prepared for success in work, further education and responsible citizenship
- **Personalized**
  - Every student has an adult advocate/mentor and a personal plan for progress
  - Promotes powerful, sustained student relationships with adults
  - Important that school is small, less than 600, less than 400 ideal
- **Respect & responsibility**
  - Environment is authoritative, safe, ethical & studios

- Staff teaches, models and expects responsible behavior
- Characterized by mutual respect
- **Time to collaborate**
  - Staff has time to plan and collaborate to develop skills and plans to meet needs of all students
  - Parents recognized as partners in education
  - Partnerships with businesses to create relevance and work-based opportunities
- **Performance-based**
  - Students promoted to next level of learning only when they have achieved competency
  - Students receive additional time & assistance to achieve competency
- **Technology as a tool**
  - Teachers design engaging & imaginative curriculum linked to students interests
  - Easy access to best practices and learning opportunities
  - Schools communicate progress to parents and community

An independent educational research organization was contracted by the Gates Foundation to look at the results being achieved by the schools they are supporting. It is noted that the Gates Foundation supported schools are enrolling students from traditionally underserved populations. These schools tend to have a higher proportion of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and who were members of a racial/ethnic minority than other schools in their districts. It was also found that these schools generally enrolled students who began high school academically behind students attending other high schools in their same districts.

The early research results suggest that these schools have been successful with respect to attendance, test scores, and the quality of students' work in English/language arts. They are exhibiting a more positive trend in reading scores than other schools in the same areas. However, the researchers did not find a positive relationship for math performance on a consistent basis.

## 2. **International Center for Leadership in Education**

William Daggett, of the International Center for Leadership in Education, recently published a document, which includes case studies of America's most successful high schools. This document identified 30 successful high schools based on recommendations from the chief state school officers in 15 states and by several national organizations. Daggett suggests that while there is no one formula for a successful high school, certain characteristics appear to be consistent across the 30 high schools studied. The 9 common factors are:

- **Small learning communities** – not sufficient in itself, but they provide a platform to focus instruction around a student's interests, learning styles & aptitudes.
- **Culture of commitment to academic excellence** – believe all students can and must achieve high standards. The No Child Left Behind measure of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) & state tests create the floor that all students must achieve. Admission to college does not define excellence. Must communicate to students, parents & community why high

standards are essential. Personal relationships with students and families. Stress need for excellence in literacy.

- **Data** – laser-like focus on data. Used by teachers to make daily decisions about instruction. Communicated to students, parents & community on a regular basis.
- **9<sup>th</sup> grade** – looks different than other schools. Analyze student academic levels as they enter and if skills are not adequate for success in high school, then students are enrolled in enrichment (not remediation). Often based on a thematic area of interest. For these students, remaining high school curriculum is collapsed into 3 years during 10-12<sup>th</sup> grade. Upper class students serve as mentors/tutors to freshmen.
- **12<sup>th</sup> grade** – for students not requiring enrichment in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the regular high school curriculum is finished in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and senior year used as AP year where students may earn up to 30 college credits.
- **Curriculum and instruction** – high quality curriculum to guide instruction. Ongoing collaboration among teachers across disciplines. Partnerships with businesses and post-secondary institutions. Students given time to think reflectively about knowledge they are acquiring and its applications. Teacher given time for reflective thought on their practice.
- **Leadership** – key in a successful high school is a leader with solid skills who is well focused and stays in the position long enough to sustain change.
- **Relationships and guiding principles** – guiding principles create a culture that permits learning to occur. Apply to students, staff, parents and community. Allows instruction to be more orderly, meaningful and successful:
  - Respect
  - Responsibility
  - Honesty
  - Trustworthiness
  - Compassion
  - Loyalty
  - Optimism
  - Adaptability
  - Courage
  - Contemplation
  - Initiative
  - Perseverance
- **Professional development** – teacher-centered, rigorous, relevant, collaborative, supported & sustained.

### 3. Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)

The AVID model has proven successful for schools across the nation and was one of several programs identified by the U.S. Department of Education’s High School Leadership Summit as a “promising model for increasing access to rigorous core academic curriculum.” The vision of AVID is that all students can succeed in meeting a strict college-prep curriculum. This program uses the AVID elective class to promote organization, inquiry, expository writing, and collaboration. It also trains content-area teachers to understand nontraditional college-prep students’ backgrounds, and to adjust their classes with that in mind. AVID teaches the teachers to teach the students how to succeed in rigorous courses, and uses the elective class as an intensive intervention that directly affects students’ college preparedness. The program focuses on acceleration rather than remediation.

The key components of AVID have been identified as:

- High quality teacher training
- High expectations
- High level of structural support for students

Research has proven the benefits of AVID in many situations, for example:

- 80% of all high school students enrolled in AVID in California meet the UC “a-g” requirements versus 32% of all students statewide
- 59.7% of AVID students attend a CSU campus and 23.6% to a UC campus
- A Fort Worth, Texas school district found that the implementation of AVID led to a doubling in the number of students taking AP tests and a tripling in the number of AP tests taken by students; in addition, there has been a significant increase in the participation in AP classes and test taking by the district’s minority students.

#### **D. FURTHER INFORMATION**

Additional lists of the characteristics of effective schools have been included, for information, as Appendix A beginning on page 8.

Appendix B includes profiles of schools that might be considered highly effective. The elementary (p.11) and middle schools (p.14) included are among those California schools scoring highly on the API scoring process and/or those that have been identified as National Blue Ribbon Schools.

The 4 high schools profiled (p.17) were drawn from the Daggett study. These were chosen to be somewhat representative of the two PUSD comprehensive high schools in that they are all in suburban areas with relatively low percentages of minority students and those living in poverty. All are relatively large schools with enrollments comparable to that of Amador Valley & Foothill in PUSD.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS - ADDITIONAL RESEARCH RESULTS**

“What Helps Students Learn?” by Wang, M. C.; Haertel, G.D.; Geneva, D.; Walberg, H.J.  
Educational Leadership, December 1993/January 1994

This review of the literature found that classroom management was the most influential of the 28 factors identified in impacting how students learn (based on review of over 11,000 statistical findings). Within the category of “other” factors, student aptitude and home environment/parental support were rated as highly influential factors. She ranked the **28 factors into 5 categories**: (they are in descending order of importance by category and within each category):

- **Student aptitude**
  - Metacognitive processes \*\*
  - Cognitive processes
  - Social & behavioral attributes
  - Motivational affective attributes
  - Psychomotor skills
  - Student demographics
  
- **Classroom instruction & climate** (nearly as much impact as student aptitude)
  - Classroom management \*\*
  - Student & teacher social interactions
  - Quantity of instruction
  - Classroom climate
  - Classroom instruction
  - Academic interactions
  - Classroom assessments
  - Classroom implementation & support
  
- **Context** (almost as influential as student aptitude)
  - Home environment/parental support (among most influential of 28 factors)\*\*
  - Peer group
  - Community influences
  - Out-of-class time
  
- **Program design** (only showed a moderate effect on learning)
  - Curriculum design
  - Curriculum & instruction
  - Program demographics
  
- **School organization** (moderate influence)
  - School culture
  - Teacher/administrator decision-making
  - Parental involvement policy
  - School demographics
  - School policies
  
- **State Policies/district characteristics** (least influential factors)

**“Call to Action: Transforming High School for all Youth”** by the National High School Alliance and funded by the Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. April 2005.

This document identified 6 core principles around which a broad range of context-specific designs and strategies can be interpreted to meet local needs. They also noted, however, that all 6 must be addressed to effect deep and lasting change. These are designed to foster high academic achievement, to close the achievement gap and to promote civic and personal responsibility:

- Personalized learning environment
- Academic engagement of all students
- Empowered educators
- Accountable leaders
- Engaged community & youth
- Integrated system of high standards, curriculum instruction, assessments and supports

**“High Performance High Schools Initiative: A White Paper on Improving Student Achievement in California’s High Schools”** by the California Department of Education, 2004.

This initiative proposes critical state and local policy actions to guide high schools toward their primary role as educational institutions. It focuses on five critical initiatives that are necessary for boosting high school achievement for all students:

- Implementing **high expectations for all students** – no longer acceptable to focus high expectations only on the college-bound students. Too few students are taking academically rigorous courses. It is suggested that all students must be assigned to college-prep classes, AP & IB courses or career academy courses. In addition, access to supportive programs such as AVID must be made available to all students so that they can be prepared to meet these challenges.
- Fostering the **development of world-class teachers and site administrators** – improving student achievement is a function of increasing the skills of educators. Must attract the brightest and best to the field of education.
- Developing **world-class instructional materials** – proposes to develop a state level process of reviewing materials for standards alignment in each of the four core subject areas.
- Creating and **supporting successful transitions to postsecondary education** – need for focus on transitions into high school from middle school and from high school to postsecondary education. Need to focus on current system of college advising which faces limitations due to inadequate staffing of counselors and lack of teacher knowledge about college preparation issues.
- Nurturing and **developing a community of support for high achieving students** – promotes stakeholders assisting high schools in implementing innovative programs and approaches including smaller learning communities, thematic and magnet schools, flexible scheduling, and expanded service learning and community service programs.

## **“Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools – A Leadership Brief”**

by Wendy Togneri, Learning First Alliance

March 2003

- An analysis of districts’ efforts to improve achievement in all schools for all students
- Studied 5 school districts that had exhibited at least 3 years of improvement in student achievement in math and/or reading across multiple grades and across all races and ethnicities
- Identified 7 factors as essential to improvement:
  - Districts had courage to acknowledge poor performance and will to seek solutions
  - Districts put in place a system-wide approach to improving instruction (articulated curricular content & provided instructional supports)
  - Districts instilled vision that focused on student learning and guided instructional improvement
  - Districts made decisions based on data not instinct
  - Districts adopted new approaches to professional development that involved a coherent and district-organized set of strategies to improve instruction
  - Districts redefined leadership roles
  - Districts committed to sustaining reform over the long run

**APPENDIX B:**  
**PROFILES OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS**

**A. SUCCESSFUL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

**1. Pantera Elementary School, Diamond Bar, CA (Pomona Unified School District)**  
[www.pusd.org/schools/elementary/pantera/](http://www.pusd.org/schools/elementary/pantera/)

- K-6
- 300 students (53% Asian, 31% White, 9% Latino, 4% Filipino, 3% African-American)
- Traditional calendar
- Daily schedule:
  - Kindergarten: 8-11:45 am or 11-2:45 pm
  - 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>: 8:20 am to 2:25 pm
  - 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>: 8:20 to 2:55 pm
- Early release on Wednesdays at 1:30 for teacher collaboration
- 12 teachers with full credentials
- Instructional motto: “The standards drive the curriculum”
- Vision is to provide an exceptional high-quality educational experience that not only focuses on the core curriculum but visual and performing arts, physical education, technology and values
- Use of technology integrated into the curriculum at all grade levels
- Principal and 2 assistant principals cover 2 schools
- 2003 API Base Score of 988 with a ranking of 10 and similar school ranking of 10
- Parent education average years post-secondary of 3.15
- STAR test results:

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>% students scoring Advanced in English Language Arts</b>	<b>% students scoring Advanced in Math</b>	<b>% students scoring Proficient in English Language Arts</b>	<b>% students scoring Proficient in English Language Arts</b>
<b>2</b>	85	95	15	5
<b>3</b>	49	88	46	10
<b>4</b>	79	81	27	19
<b>5</b>	33	67	48	26

**2. Silver Spur Elementary School, Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District (L.A. County)**  
[www.edline.net/pages/Silver\\_Spur\\_Elementary](http://www.edline.net/pages/Silver_Spur_Elementary)

- K-5
- 527 Students (78% White, 18% Asian, 2% Latino, 2% other)
- Traditional calendar
- Daily schedule:
  - K: 8:30-11:50 or 9:50-1:35
  - 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>: 8:45-2:36
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup>: 8:45-2:56

- Silver Spur Elementary School exists for the benefit of the whole child
- Staff is dedicated to ensuring academic success for every student and to providing a comprehensive educational experience
- Staff, community and students of Silver Spur are committed to:
  - The pursuit of excellence in academics
  - A safe and secure learning and teaching environment
  - A respect for individual and cultural differences
  - The belief that all children and adults should be active participants in a supportive and challenging learning environment
- Character development program: Project Wisdom
- 25 teachers with full credentials
- 2003 Base API of 960 with a ranking of 10 and similar schools ranking of 10
- Parent education average years post-secondary of 4.41
- STAR test results for Silver Spur Elementary:

Grade Level	% students scoring Advanced in English Language Arts	% students scoring Advanced in Math	% students scoring Proficient in English Language Arts	% students scoring Proficient in English Language Arts
2	74	92	23	8
3	5	60	45	33
4	69	62	21	29
5	3	52	40	34

**3. Faria A+ Elementary School, Cupertino, CA (Cupertino School District)**  
[www.cupertino.k12.ca.us/Faria.www/default.html](http://www.cupertino.k12.ca.us/Faria.www/default.html)

- K-5
- 580 students (88% Asian, 11% White, 1% other)
- Alternative program/school of choice – enrollment by lottery
- 24 teachers with full credentials
- Academics Plus Program – emphasis on development and mastery of basic skills in a highly structured environment
- Heavy emphasis on reading, mathematics, English, grammar, spelling, penmanship and composition skills
- Solid curriculum in science, history and geography
- Focus on promoting maximum academic achievement for each and every child and to develop each child’s intellectual potential through an innovative, balanced and challenging curriculum
- High expectations and encouragement for responsible citizenship and character values
- Traditional calendar
- Daily schedule:
  - Kindergarten: 8:30-11:45 or 10:45-2:30
  - 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup>: 8:30-2:55
  - 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>: 8:30-3:05
  - Early release on Tuesdays for staff meetings & school planning

- 2003 Base API of 996 with a rank of 10 and similar schools rank of 10
- Parent education average years post-secondary of 4.80
- 
- STAR test results for Faria A+ Elementary:

Grade Level	% students scoring Advanced in English Language Arts	% students scoring Advanced in Math	% students scoring Proficient in English Language Arts	% students scoring Proficient in English Language Arts
2	71	86	29	14
3	59	80	36	18
4	76	66	21	31
5	70	82	27	16

#### 4. Additional exemplary elementary schools

The list of 2005 National Blue Ribbon School winners included 8 elementary schools with API base scores over 900. This information is provided should committee members wish to examine additional elementary schools.

Elementary School	District	2004 Base API	Enrollment	Website
KL Carver (K-5)	San Marino Unified	939	628	<a href="http://www.sanmarino.k12.ca.us/~carver/">www.sanmarino.k12.ca.us/~carver/</a>
Frank C. Leal (K-6)	ABC Unified	930	694	<a href="http://www.abcusd.k12.ca.us/district/info/schl/lealftp/index.html">www.abcusd.k12.ca.us/district/info/schl/lealftp/index.html</a>
Laguna Road (K-6)	Fullerton Elementary	925	600	<a href="http://www.fsd.k12.ca.us/lagunaroad/index2.html">www.fsd.k12.ca.us/lagunaroad/index2.html</a>
Peters Canyon (K-5)	Tustin Unified (Orange County)	922	475	<a href="http://www.tustin.k12.ca.us">www.tustin.k12.ca.us</a>
Alamo (K-5)	San Ramon Valley Unified	918	419	<a href="http://www.aes.srvusd.k12.ca.us/">www.aes.srvusd.k12.ca.us/</a>
Park Western Place (K-5)	Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)	912	656	<a href="http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?_pageid=33,54194&amp;_dad=ptl&amp;_schema=PTL_EP">http://notebook.lausd.net/portal/page?_pageid=33,54194&amp;_dad=ptl&amp;_schema=PTL_EP</a>
Walnut Acres (K-5)	Mount Diablo Unified	910	692	<a href="http://www.mdusd.k12.ca.us/walnutacres">www.mdusd.k12.ca.us/walnutacres</a>
Marshall Lane (K-5)	Campbell Union	902	528	<a href="http://www.campbellusd.org/%7emlane/mlhome.html">www.campbellusd.org/%7emlane/mlhome.html</a>

## B. SUCCESSFUL MIDDLE SCHOOLS

### 1. Jordan Middle School, Palo Alto, CA ([www.jordan.pausd.org](http://www.jordan.pausd.org))

- 964 students: (56% White, 19% Asian, 7% Latino, 5% African American, 13% other)
- Virtually all students speak English
- Not a magnet school, no specific entrance criteria
- Offers 6 periods from 8:10 am to 2:55 pm
  
- **Staffing:**
  - 80 full & part-time staff (37 with Masters, 2 with Doctoral degrees)
  - Staffing ratio: 28.5:1
  - 6<sup>th</sup> Grade English and Math class size: 24:1
  
- **Curriculum content & instruction:**
  - Active learning strategies
  - Ask questions/solve problems/create solutions
  - Cooperative groups
  - Exploration of multiple interests and talents
  - “Direct Instruction” is a choice program for 6<sup>th</sup> grade
  - Saturday “Academy” – offers voluntary access to library to work on projects; make up work; receive additional support from teacher on duty
  - Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) school-wide for 20 minutes every Wednesday
  - Advisory periods
  - School formed into 6 self-contained teams of 2-4 teachers with music and PE on alternate days, exploration through 6-week cycles
  - In 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students take 4 core courses and 2 electives
  - Electives include web-page design; computer programming; and industrial technology
  
- **Homework:**
  - Purpose is designed as practice and review; preparation; extension; and creativity
  - Homework Center open 3:00 – 4:00 Monday, Tuesday & Thursday
  - Special Math Homework Center open same days & hours in a separate location
  
- **Staff Development:**
  - Identified as a top priority
  - 3 staff development days/year
  - Subs get orientation program and in-service opportunities
  
- **Other information:**
  - Has an Academic Honesty Policy
  - Strong parental & community financial support
  - Parent visitation days scheduled monthly October to March

## 2. Orinda Intermediate School, Orinda, CA ([www.orinda.k12.ca.us/OIS/](http://www.orinda.k12.ca.us/OIS/))

- 885 students (79% White; 15% Asian; 2% Latino; 4% other)
- Not a magnet school, no specific criteria for entrance
- 7 – 45 minute periods during school day of 8:45 am to 3:30 pm
- Monday is common planning day with students released at 2:45 after 7 – 40 min. periods
  
- **Staffing:**
  - 100 fully-credentialed teachers, 2 with emergency credentials
  - Staffed at 28:1
  - 2 FT associate principals to assist with implementation of school goals
  - 2 school counselors
  
- **Curriculum content & instruction:**
  - Math sequence provides “on and off ramps”
  - District-wide curriculum plan with specific action steps
  - Under-performing students identified and supported through:
    - Differentiated instruction
    - Support cores & clustering
    - Close supervision by Vice-Principal/counselor teams
    - Services from District Math Specialist if needed
    - District Summer Academy program
  - 90% of students meet or exceed grade standards
  
- **Homework:**
  - Designed to be relevant, challenging, meaningful and to reinforce classroom learning objectives
  
- **Staff Development:**
  - Able to observe master teachers
  - Peer observation process
  - Collaborative planning
  - Designated training to keep resource specialists abreast of new standards, teaching methods
  - Training in technology assisted instructional strategies
  
- **Other information:**
  - School-wide character education program
  - Student recognition program based on factors other than grades
  - After school sports sponsored by parent club and district and open to all students

### 3. Piedmont Middle School, Piedmont, CA ([www.piedmont.k12.ca.us/pms/](http://www.piedmont.k12.ca.us/pms/))

- 620 students (70% White, 20% Asian, 3% Latino, 3% African-American, 4% other)
- Not a magnet, no specific criteria for entrance
- **Staffing:**
  - School-wide staffing ratio of 26:1
  - 42% of teachers have masters or doctorate; 54% have 30 or more units beyond Bachelors
  - Library staffed by **FT teaching librarian and FT assistant librarian**
  - On-site technology coordinator
- **Curriculum content & instruction:**
  - Differentiated instruction
  - Standards-based report cards
  - Multiple assessment instruments
  - Sequencing math and foreign language
- **Homework:**
  - Average 20-30 minutes per academic subject per day for a **minimum of 1 hour** each school night
- **Staff Development:**
  - 3 staff development days/year
- **Other information:**
  - Parent Club being asked to raise \$1 million/year through direct donations
  - Implementing Character Education program
  - 2 computer labs with new software

### 4. Additional exemplary middle schools

The 2004 list of National Blue Ribbon winners included 8 middle schools. The 4 with the highest API scores are:

Middle School	District	2004 Base API	Enrollment	Website
William H. Crocker (6-8)	Hillsborough City Elementary (San Mateo)	930	464	<a href="http://www.hcsd.k12.ca.us/crocker">www.hcsd.k12.ca.us/crocker</a>
Foothill (6-8)	Mount Diablo Unified	867	1087	<a href="http://www.mdusd.k12.ca.us/foothill">www.mdusd.k12.ca.us/foothill</a>
Earl Warren (7-8)	San Dieguito Union	867	632	<a href="http://www.sduhsd.k12.ca.us/ew/">www.sduhsd.k12.ca.us/ew/</a>
D. Russell Parks (7-8)	Fullerton Elementary	861	910	<a href="http://www.fsd.k12.ca.us/parks/">www.fsd.k12.ca.us/parks/</a>

## C. SUCCESSFUL HIGH SCHOOLS (from Daggett study in 2004):

### 1. Brockport High School, Brockport, New York

- **1500 students**
- 7% minority
- 20% free/reduced lunch
- 70% to college
- 97% attendance rate
- School based on relationships, mutual respect, 40 assets
- **Block schedule:**
  - 4 – 85 min. periods/day; students take 7 classes every other day with a 85 min. advisory every 2<sup>nd</sup> day
  - **Advisory** is 15 students with each teacher – 1<sup>st</sup> 15 min. homeroom and then students can seek out teachers for additional help or participate in club activities
  - 35 min. period at end of day – 2 days/week for students needing help and 2 days for teacher planning
  - Many attribute success of school to success of block scheduling: increased # students taking & passing Regent’s exam; increased SAT scores; decreased # students failing courses; decrease in dropout rate; decrease in disciplinary referrals; decrease in # suspensions
- Instruction strategies focus on **hands-on participation in real world situations / internships**
- Offer a **national pre-engineering program “Project Lead the Way”**
- **Partnership with local state university allows a 3:1:3 program** – students do 3 yrs of hs, 1 concurrent year and then 3 yrs to complete Bachelor’s degree in college
- Strong focus on extra-curricular and co-curricular activities (field trips & guest speakers) coordinated by dedicated FT staff: Dean of Faculty & Student Services
- Dropout rate less than 1%
- Wide range of supports: specialized classes, after-school tutoring, peer tutoring, teachers available during advisory
- Parent/community involvement
- Students trained as **“Safe School Ambassadors”**
- **3 year induction program for new teachers** with assigned mentor teacher
- **5 greatest strengths identified by school principal:**
  - Caring staff
  - Teamwork among administrators, teachers and support staff
  - Supportive administration
  - Block scheduling and advisement
  - Quality and quantity of programs available to students

## 2. Fort Mill High School, Fort Mill, South Carolina

- Suburban
- **1900 students**
- 114 teachers
- 10% minority
- 11% free/reduced lunch
- 98.7% attendance rate
- 1.9% dropout rate
- 86% scored 3 or more on AP Eng Lang
- 91% scored 3 or more on AP Eng Lit
- Highest AP pass rates in State
- 100% scored 3 or more on AP Calculus
- 78% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders pass all 3 subjects on State Basic Skills Assessment tests
- Over 70% of students take SAT with average score of 1059
- Strong leadership
- High expectations and high standards for all students
- Rigorous & relevant curriculum
  - No study halls
  - Strong AP program
- Community & business partnerships
- **9<sup>th</sup> grade academy/freshman house – summer orientation**
  - Students testing below grade level in reading at end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade are offered free participation in summer program “Bridges”
  - Strong interventions available, especially for 9<sup>th</sup> grade algebra & reading
  - Individual advisement to develop a 4 year plan
  - Dedicated 9<sup>th</sup> grade facility and administrator
- Students have **option of choosing a career path 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade** from 1 of 4 strands:
  - Arts & Humanities
  - Engineering & Industrial Technology
  - Business/Marketing & Computer Technology
  - Health & human Services
- Specific majors offered within these strands
- **4 period block schedule**
- Assistant principals & counselors split the student body alphabetically for continuity
- Varied extra-curricular program
- Parent & community involvement
- Ample staff development
- Safe & orderly school
- School resource officer on campus full-time
- Students late to class sent to “lock out” room and to “time out” room for discipline referrals
- **Greatest strengths identified by principal:**
  - 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition program/house
  - Career/clusters/majors
  - High standards/diverse and rigorous curriculum
  - Strong administration
  - Strong community & business leadership

### 3. Kennesaw Mountain High School, Kennesaw, Georgia

- **3,000 students**
- 81% white
- 4% free/reduced lunch
- 10% with disabilities
- Staff of 188
- Suburban
- 98% passed ELA 11<sup>th</sup> grade test
- 3% dropout rate
  
- Some small learning communities, but most part of large, comprehensive high school
- Offer **magnet programs**:
  - Advanced math/science/technology
  - Naval ROTC
  - National Academy of Finance
  - Planning to add new academy: National Academy of Travel/Tourism/Event Planning
- **4 period block schedule – provides opportunities for projects & real world activities**
- Wide breadth of courses/pathways for students
- **17 AP classes offered**
- 115 core courses
- Elective offerings based on student interest and input from post-secondary and business community
- Mainstreaming students with disabilities
- **2 FT positions to promote high student achievement**:
  - Master teacher
  - Vision quest – empowers student leadership & oversees performance rewards for students & teachers
- Offer a **work-based program**
- **Partnership with post-secondary institutions for advanced placement credit**
- **Teachers expected to create projects & activities** (use of Picasso software)
- Significant collaboration time
- Strong extra-curricular including award-winning bands
- Committed to **character education**
- **Strong community service program**
- **Greatest strengths as identified by the principal**:
  - Strong learning community in which teachers set high expectations for student success; students are constantly challenged to meet the high standards set by their teachers
  - Innovative curriculum designed to meet students' individual needs for diverse learning
  - Inclusion of all students into the academic environment and social culture of the school
  - Strong relationships between students and teachers based on respect and mutual commitment to learning
  - Community support and involvement in all aspects of students' school experience

#### 4. Valparaiso High School, Valparaiso, Indiana

- **2,100 students**
- 10% minority
- 11% free/reduced lunch
- 97% graduation rate
- 87% pass state exams (state avg. 69%)
- 96% attendance
- 79% attend college
- 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in state for PSAT & SAT scores; core academic achievement; % of honors diplomas granted
  
- **Traditional 7 period day with 50 min. classes**
  - Several double periods offered
  - Homeroom meets as needed
  
- Extensive course offerings
- **Open access to IB program** – 40% of students take at least 1 IB class during 4 years
- Career & tech ed classes
- **School-wide writing initiative**
- **Freshman academy** – additional assistance to students with low academic achievement including special ed & ELL
- **Planned Action for Student Success (PASS)** for students failing 1 or more classes: student, parent & school develop contract for success
- Academic support for state tests: summer school & study hall
- Technology enhanced learning
- Wide range of extra-curricular
- Strong recognition for academic success
- Parent involvement
- **Strong community service focus** with full-time service learning coordinator
- Safe & clean school
- Strong, stable teaching staff with mentors for new teachers
- **Strengths identified by principal:**
  - Safe and secure learning environment
  - Effective governance
  - Rigorous & relevant curriculum
  - Staff development
  - Development of learning communities

## **RESOURCE LIST: EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS PAPER**

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- Togneri, Wendy, "Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools – A Leadership Brief" Learning First Alliance. March 2003. [www.learningfirst.org](http://www.learningfirst.org)

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