

What is the Alternative High School Initiative?

The Alternative High School Initiative (AHSI) is a network of youth development organizations with over 211 sites nationwide committed to creating educational opportunities for young people for whom traditional school settings have not been successful. AHSI took shape in 2003 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as a response to the growing national trend of diminishing high school graduation rates affecting this country's youth. Comprised of eleven intermediaries with innovative program models and two conveners, AHSI collaborates with local communities to sustain safe, top quality high schools for vulnerable youth. Additional information is available at <http://www.ahsi.info> which also provides links to each AHSI organization's website.

What Distinguishes AHSI from Other High Schools?

AHSI defines alternatives for high school as new alternative secondary school initiatives that prepare young people through programs characterized by rigor, relevance, and relationships, to graduate from high school and achieve college success. Progress is evident in quality alternatives for high school based on such indicators as increases in high school graduation rates among students participating in these programs, decreases in dropout rates, higher rates of college entry, and preliminary indications that young people will succeed in and complete postsecondary education. Together AHSI organizations present families, districts, and policy stakeholders with a portfolio of small, alternative high school options. The schools are student-centered and strive to have youth voice, project-based learning and leadership development drive the learning process. These principles are reflected in a set of universal distinguishers evident in the design of all AHSI schools:

- authentic learning, teaching, and performance assessment;
- personalized school culture;
- shared leadership and responsibility;
- supportive partnerships; and
- future focus for students.

What is the AHSI Policy Perspective? What Examples of State Policy Exist?

The AHSI network has made efforts to understand how existing policies at the federal, state, and local levels affect alternatives for high school. Based on this understanding, the AHSI network has charted key policy conditions that merit attention if alternatives for high school are to reach large-scale, nationwide success. At present, AHSI is well-positioned to use the collectively-developed policy framework to implement a set of policy strategies together in one or a few places. AHSI shares its policy perspective in the hope of fostering dialogue and broad, community-wide discussion of the potential for working together with a range of partners in places interested in expanding alternatives for high school.

A centerpiece of the AHSI policy perspective is a framework consisting of seven key themes and conditions which the network has identified as essential for alternatives for high school to achieve large scale success. These seven policy themes include five conditions proposed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as necessary for large scale K-12 education reform and two additional conditions which are particularly

relevant for alternatives for high school. The following table explains the seven key policy conditions, and provides examples of supportive policies collected to date from a few states. The extent of examples per policy condition varies; this is more a “moment in time” snapshot than an exhaustive treatment.

Policy Themes & Issues Affecting Alternatives for High School with State Policy Examples Collected To Date, June 2008	
AHSI 7 Policy Conditions for Large Scale Success	State Policy Examples
<p>1. Increased College Access</p> <p>High quality alternative high schools prepare students to complete high school by earning a regular diploma or an equivalent credential, and they prepare young people to pursue postsecondary education and careers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dual enrollment and dual credit policies enable students to take college courses while enrolled in high school, easing the transition to postsecondary education. ➤ Schools and colleges need autonomy and coordination to assist students in meeting the requirements of both institutions. ➤ Supports to stay in and finish college (including exposure, readiness, access, financial aid, academic and social networks, etc.) are essential. 	<p>Arizona, California, and Florida are states in which dual enrollment programs have been studied with promising results, including a finding “that high school students who take college courses subsequently perform better in college than those with no history of dual enrollment course-taking (Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos, p. 7).”</p> <p>Georgia created ACCEL grants in 2004 as part of the state’s HOPE Scholarships to enable high school students to pay for tuition and other costs of college courses leading to a degree (Ibid, p. 52).</p> <p>North Carolina allows dual enrollment/dual credit, however, students must spend at least half-day in a high school building to be considered enrolled in high school. (Gateway to College is seeking a waiver of the half-day residency provision to enable students to be awarded high school credit).</p> <p>Tuition waivers are available to students in early college programs as part of North Carolina’s Learn and Earn system of small high schools (Steinberg and Almeida, 2008, p. 11).</p> <p>Rhode Island created a subcommittee of the Governor’s P-16 Council to guide dual enrollment policymaking in 2007. The RI Board of Governors for Higher Education, in coordination with the Department of Education, has hired a dual enrollment manager to support the state program (Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos, p. 43).</p>
<p>2. Need-based, Adequacy Approach to Funding</p> <p>Adequate, continuing funding at levels <u>above</u> per pupil funding allotments for traditional high school programs is essential if alternatives for high school are to reach sustainable nationwide scale.</p>	<p>California: Under state law, students are eligible for per pupil funding beyond age 19 if they are enrolled in a program run by YouthBuild USA, Job Corps, or the California Association of Local Service and Conservation Corps. (If students are not in one of these programs, however, access to per pupil funding ends when a student turns 19). To qualify, the student must be enrolled prior to her/his 19th birthday and must be a full-time student.</p> <p>Georgia: A “weighted” student funding formula provides that special education and alternative education students receive higher than the normal Full Time Equivalent student allotment. The highest FTE rating</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Per-pupil funding allotments need to follow students into alternative programs. ➤ Student eligibility and placement are determined by State Education Agencies, defining whether enrollment, per pupil funding, and other benefits are allowable. 	<p>for a special education student in Georgia is 5.0 or 5 times the normal allotment. Georgia funds alternative education on a formula basis and assigns a 1.3 weight for each alternative education student enrolled. However, Georgia caps at a very low level the number of students for which each district can receive alternative school FTE allotments.</p> <p>Wisconsin: Children At Risk of Not Graduating from High School (WI Statute 118.153) defines “children at risk” to mean pupils in grades 5 to 12 who are at risk of not graduating from high school, either because they are dropouts or meet other criteria. This statute requires the state education agency to offer dropout prevention programs while students are still enrolled in the district, enabling the flow of per pupil funds to cover students enrolled in those programs.</p>
<p>3. Rigorous, Reasonable Academic Standards and Assessments</p> <p>Alternatives for high school are committed to ensuring that students meet or exceed academic standards and competencies for high school completion and readiness for entry into postsecondary education. AHSI models seek to measure student learning along a continuum that includes state tests and requirements as well as authentic assessments of performance through tasks, projects, and portfolios.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Standards and competencies in lieu of Carnegie units; performance- and project-based instruction and assessment ➤ Alternative proficiency exams or arrangements need SEA approval, enabling students to demonstrate mastery of content (as opposed to seat-time). ➤ SEA approval of alternative curriculum and course work are necessary for students to meet required state standards for high school graduation. 	<p>California: <i>Curriculum alignment</i> -- In December 2005, the University of California system approved the A-G Course Matrix developed by The Big Picture Company. The A-G Course Matrix validates coursework credit for earning a high school diploma in alternative high school settings. Approval certifies that Big Picture’s curriculum aligns with UC system admission requirements. The course descriptions in the A-G Course Matrix provide for mastery of content and skills to occur in a variety of contexts, including internships, projects, lectures, workshops, and seminars. (Prior to approval of the A-G Course Matrix, only graduation from a traditional high school was acceptable for entry into the University of CA system). Diploma Plus is adapting Big Picture’s A-G Course Matrix for use with its growing network of schools in the state.</p> <p>Georgia: <i>Seat Time</i> - Performance Learning Centers (PLCs) operated by Communities in Schools of Georgia receive a blanket waiver from the state’s normal Seat-Time requirement. Seat-Time rules enable a student to earn only one course credit per semester. A PLC student can advance to the next course level at any time <u>performance is attained</u> rather than not being able to advance until the end of the school term or semester (December or May). As a result, students who enrolled in the PLC and were behind in credits earned have moved more quickly through their required high school courses, and many have graduated on time thanks to the waiver.</p> <p>Indiana: <i>Seat time and more</i> – Diploma Plus obtained waivers from the State Board of Education for 1) Flexibility in scheduling of student time to match instructional needs and approach, 2) Flexibility in course titles, construction and combinations to accommodate the model’s more integrated curriculum, and 3) Flexibility in the use of alternative instructional media in lieu of textbooks.</p> <p>Michigan: <i>Alternative Assessment Arrangements</i> -- Students attending Big Picture Company schools received relief via the legislature from the requirement to take the Michigan assessment to calculate annual yearly progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind in addition to taking the ACT as part of the college application process. Colleges don’t accept MEAP test scores. The ACT is now the only required test.</p>

	<p>New York: <i>Seat time</i> -- For its five schools in New York City, Diploma Plus has developed a school schedule which ensures that students meet Carnegie unit seat-time requirements, in the context of an overall curriculum that is performance-based.</p> <p>Tennessee: <i>Scheduling / Standards</i> -- Innovative Education Program provisions of the Tennessee Code Annotated provide districts such as Metro Nashville Public Schools MNPS to provide alternative schools with flexible scheduling options while maintaining rigorous academic standards.</p> <p>Tennessee: <i>Alternative Assessment Arrangements</i> -- State and NCLB requirements mandate participation of all high school students in all end-of-course and Gateway testing before graduation. Metro Nashville Public Schools has developed alternative assessment rubrics that meet the requirements of state transcripts, in addition to such school-level assessments as portfolio, project-based, work-based and exhibition performance assessments.</p>
<p>4. Strong Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Accountability standards under NCLB ➤ Performance measures ➤ Flexibility 	<p>Alternatives for high school are dedicated to being held accountable for students' academic achievement. Students who have not fulfilled their academic potential in traditional K-12 settings often require additional supports. An alternative model's accountability must be aligned with access to the necessary resources and flexibility for innovation in programming that will enable students to succeed.</p> <p>(State examples pending)</p>
<p>5. Expanded Options for Parents and Students</p> <p>Parents and students would benefit from a wider range of alternatives for high school, preferably with the ability to choose a learning environment likely to be effective at enabling a young person to achieve success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ SEA approval of "high school" curricula / programming ➤ Parental and student choice 	<p>Georgia: Parents are able to approach the school district or CISGA Performance Learning Centers directly to enroll their children.</p> <p>New Jersey: Under state code, priority-funded "Abbott" districts such as Newark Public Schools must continually assess the needs of at-risk students at both the middle and high schools level for placement in alternative education programs.</p> <p>Rhode Island: The Big Picture Company negotiated approval from the State Board of Regents for its flagship Met school to operate as a "high school" but in a different way. BP was freed of meeting the standard definitional requirements for "high schools." Any other school in RI is able to take advantage of this opportunity to define "high school" differently.</p>

<p>6. Open Sector, Readiness to Open Alternative High Schools</p> <p>Launching and expanding alternatives for high school requires a healthy “open sector” in education that is receptive to education programs that expand, enhance, and recalibrate the premises and structure of the existing public school system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Teacher certification ➤ Principal / administrator certification ➤ Funding standards ➤ Capital funding ➤ Facilities design standards 	<p>Indiana: <i>Teacher Certification</i> – Diploma Plus obtained a waiver from the State Board of Education for flexibility in assignment of licensed teachers.</p> <p>Minnesota: <i>Teacher Certification</i> -- EdVisions Schools and many other small schools currently receive waivers from normal Staff Licensing requirements under NCLB. The waivers allow staff to work as interdisciplinary educators. However, the sustainability of the waivers is questionable as the policy supporting waivers may sunset; EdVisions has advised state legislators on drafting a bill, not yet passed, that would provide for an interdisciplinary license.</p> <p>Minnesota: <i>Facilities Aid</i> -- A state “lease aid” program provides up to \$1,600/student/year on top of ADA funding to assist schools in leasing adequate facilities to house EdVisions schools’ alternative programming.</p> <p>Rhode Island: <i>Facilities Aid / Design</i> – The Big Picture Company utilized state bond revenue to underwrite development of The Met campus in Providence; the state approved the school design.</p>
<p>7. Coordination with City and Other Public Agencies and Community Organizations</p> <p>Alternatives for high school recognize the need to offer students supports and services that are beyond the purview of the school system to provide. To do this, many alternatives for high school coordinate with other public agencies and with community organizations to create options for students to tap into a range of appropriate resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Supports and services typically arranged by city agencies <p>Institutional linkages to federal programs managed by state and/or local jurisdictions (such as child welfare, criminal and juvenile justice, health care, etc.)</p>	<p>Massachusetts: <i>Coordination with Juvenile Justice</i> -- In cooperation with the state Department of Youth Services, Diploma Plus has developed and implemented a curriculum that is performance-based, for students in secure facilities</p> <p>Michigan: <i>Coordination with Juvenile Justice</i> – Lighthouse Academy in Grand Rapids, an affiliate of the National Association of Street Schools, receives per-pupil funds through the intermediate school district to serve students involved with the juvenile justice system.</p> <p>Pennsylvania: Broad coordination -- Pennsylvania’s Department of Labor and Industry created the Pennsylvania Youth in Transition program which funds eight regional partnerships to develop or expand cross-system collaboration for improving outcomes among out-of-school youth and young people aging out of foster care.</p> <p>Washington: <i>Broad coordination</i> -- The 2007 legislative session created “Building Bridges” (HB 1573), a grant program for partnerships of schools, families, and communities to build a comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention and retrieval system. These grants will serve at-risk middle and high school students. Targeted student populations to be identified include youth in foster care, the juvenile justice system, special education and youth who have dropped out of school.</p>

What are Key Strategic Considerations for any City?

- **Conducting a Policy Scan:** One option for a city is to conduct a thorough assessment of policies currently in effect, with reference to the AHSI Seven Policy Conditions -- giving particular attention to the sub-categories noted below each of the seven.
- **Policy Items to Keep Prominent:** In any case, NLC's YEF Institute strongly recommends that each city keep the following policy items prominent when seeking to ensure success of a new portfolio of alternatives for high school:
 - **Increasing College Access:** Coordination is required to ensure that high school graduation requirements align with postsecondary institution entry requirements. To enhance college /postsecondary alignment and access, higher education institutions and the SEA are well positioned to collaborate to ensure that students attending high quality alternative high schools engage in a curriculum recognized as one that prepares students for college admission, and provides assistance with seeking admission, supports beyond matriculation, opportunities for dual enrollment/dual credit, real-world learning opportunities, among other topics.
 - **Funding:** There is a need for adequacy and applicability of operating funding for struggling students and re-enrolled former dropouts; access to capital or lease-aid funding; and access to philanthropic or other sources to purchase technical assistance and professional development services beyond the scope of public education funding.
 - **Student academic assessment and school-level accountability:** Alternative forms of "authentic" assessment will require approval from the state. The SEA must ensure that student assessments provide for performance- and project-based learning and take into account students' starting points
 - **Teacher and Principal Certification –** SEA policies need to be flexible, creating opportunities for engaging teachers and administrators who are trained and attuned to meeting the needs of struggling students, and for interdisciplinary roles.
 - **Coordination –** Create means (e.g., formal partnerships, programs, etc.) for maximizing student supports available from public, community-based, and faith-based organizations.

What are Selected Sources of Additional Information for Cities and Partners?

1. Alternatives for high school

American Youth Policy Forum, At-Risk, Dropout & Disconnected Youth, Alternative Education Program Area <http://www.aypf.org/programs/education/atrisk.htm>

- Federal, State, and Local Roles Supporting Alternative Education

California Alternative Education Research Project, http://jac.stanford.edu/current_initiatives/alt_ed.html

- Legislative History of Alternative Education: The Policy Context of Continuation High Schools

National Youth Employment Coalition, Expanding and Financing Education Options for Struggling Students and Out-of-School Youth Project, <http://nyec.org/page.cfm?pageID=141>.

- Financing Alternative Education Pathways: Profiles and Policy (2005)
- Funding Alternative Education Pathways: A Review of the Literature

2. Broader high school reform

Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success, <http://www.apass.uiuc.edu/>

- Inventory by State: National Inventory of Academic Pathways

Achieve, American Diploma Project, <http://www.achieve.org/node/604>

Alliance for Excellent Education, Education in the States,

http://www.all4ed.org/about_the_crisis/schools/map

- Dropout Factories
- Graduation Rates and Data

Council for Great City Schools, Research brief "Supporting Successful Transitions to High School," (2008)

http://www.cgcs.org/publications/CGCS_SuccessfulTransitions.pdf

Council of Chief State School Officers, Secondary School Redesign,

http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Secondary_School_Redesign/

Education Commission of the States, ECS High School Policy Center (HSPC),

<http://www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=%2Fhtml%2FIssuesbyLetter%2Easp%3Fs%3De%26e%3Dh%26i%3Dk>

- Tools and Resources: High School Agenda: Who's Doing What
- High School Dropout Rates/Graduation Rates
- At-Risk: Dropouts
- Career/Technical Education
- Transitions to Post-Secondary

Jobs for the Future, Double the Numbers,

http://www.iff.org/Content/Current+Projects_Improving+Youth+Transitions_Double+the+Numbers+2007.html

- On Ramp to College: A State Policymakers' Guide to Dual Enrollment (2008)
- Raising Graduation Rates in an Era of High (2008)
- Addressing America's Dropout Challenge: State Efforts to Boost Graduation Rates Require Federal Support (2006)

National Association for State Boards of Education, High School Redesign Project,
<http://www.nasbe.org/index.php/projects-separator/hsr>

- [Research and Policy: State Policy Initiatives](#)
- [State Policies and High School Redesign \(2007\)](#)

National Governors Association, NGA Center for Best Practices Honors States Grant Program,
<http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.1f41d49be2d3d33eacdcbbeb501010a0/?vqnextoid=8487739a87165110VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD>

National High School Alliance, Policy Center, <http://www.hsalliance.org/policy/index.asp>

- [National Network of Constituent Organizations](#)

National High School Center, Topics for High School Improvement: High School Dropout Prevention,
<http://www.betterhighschools.org/topics/DropoutPrevention.asp>

Southern Region Education Board, High Schools,
<http://www.sreb.org/main/highschools/highschoolsindex.asp>

- [Lost in Transition: Building a Better Path from School to College and Careers \(2008\)](#)
- [Building Transitions from High School to College to Careers for Youth – 7 state reports](#)
- [High School to College to Careers: Aligning State Policies \(2007\)](#)