

SMART USE OF RESOURCES KEY TO SMALL HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS

Detailed report highlights the importance of focusing on teacher quality, increasing academic time and providing individual attention in high-performing small high schools.

WATERTOWN, Mass., June 3—For small urban high schools to be successful they need to be more than just small, they need to be strategic. A new study, by Education Resource Strategies (ERS), says a smart use of people, time, and money is critical to high student performance.

ERS, an organization that studies resource use in urban school districts, examined nine high-performing small urban high schools throughout the U.S. to better understand how they achieved their success. The resulting study, “Strategic Designs: Lessons from Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools,” is a detailed look at how very different small high schools organize everything from bell schedules and teacher planning time to staffing strategies and dollar-by-dollar spending on students and teachers.

The report, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, found that there is not one way, but rather a strategic way to organize schools. The high performing “Leading Edge” schools in the study don’t accept traditional staffing and schedules, but instead proactively manage their resources—people, time, and money. The findings advance the limited existing research on resource use in secondary schools and demonstrate that it is not just *how much money* is spent that impacts student learning, but *how well* the resources are used.

“Creating small schools is about so much more than smallness,” says Regis Shields, the report’s co-author. “It is about how schools take advantage of size and rethink the high school experience for urban students.”

Shields adds that the schools ERS studied have clearly defined instructional models and use existing resources to invest in teaching quality, use student time strategically, and create individual attention for students to support these models. At these Leading-Edge Schools:

- Principals carefully select teaching staff to meet high standards and fit specific school design needs.
- Students, on average, spend 20% more time in school per day and spend 233 more days over four years—more than an entire school year—on core academics than their peers in traditional high schools.
- Teachers devote five times more hours to collaborating and professional development than local districts require.
- Administrators focus resources on core academics and find creative, cost-effective ways to provide non-core subjects.

These practices have been instrumental for each of the nine high schools in maintaining consistently high student academic performance.

These findings demand a mindset change at the district level, says the report's co-author Karen Hawley Miles. "Implementing these practices in traditional districts requires changes in typical union contracts and administration policies as well as changes in the kind of support and supervision districts provide for schools," she says.

For example, principals at each of the Leading Edge schools are free of most administrative policies and union contract provisions, so they can select teachers, assign staff roles and create schedules for their schools that best fit their students' needs.

To read the full report, go to www.educationresourcestrategies.org

About Education Resource Strategies

Education Resource Strategies (ERS) is a non-profit organization that works extensively with urban public school systems to rethink the use of district and school-level resources, and build strategies for improved instruction and performance. Recent ERS partner districts include St. Paul Public Schools, New York City Department of Education, Atlanta Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, Boston Public Schools, and Cincinnati Public Schools

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