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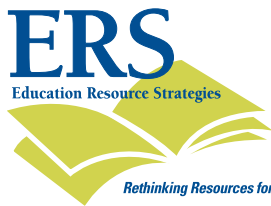
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Personalization Strategic Designs
MetWest High School



Case Studies of Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools

Education Resource Strategies

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Case Studies of Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools

This report is one of nine detailed case studies of small urban high schools. Each case study can be accessed individually or in one complete document at www.educationresourcestrategies.org.

Core Academic Strategic Designs

1. Academy of the Pacific Rim
2. Noble Street Charter High School
3. University Park Campus School

Relevance Strategic Designs

4. Boston Arts Academy
5. Life Academy of Health and Bioscience
6. Perspectives Charter School
7. TechBoston Academy
8. High Tech High School

Personalization Strategic Designs

9. MetWest High School

Also available on our Web site, www.educationresourcestrategies.org:

- Executive summary and full report: "Strategic Designs: Lessons from Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools"
- Detailed methodology
- Data request and interview protocol
- Introduction to the "Big 3" framework
- Comparative Leading Edge School data on diagnostic resource indicators (by school)

Thirty years ago, urban high school organization looked similar from one school to the next. Today, rising dropout rates and persistent achievement gaps have generated an urgency around redesigning the urban high school. Creating small high schools has become a central element of this redesign movement, with reformers envisioning improving instruction and, through the schools' "smallness," creating a supportive community of adult and student learners.

At Education Resource Strategies (ERS), in our work with school and district leaders, we have found that many school districts begin creating small high schools without a clear sense of how much they will spend or how to ensure that small schools organize in ways that will promote high performance. In response, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported ERS in a three-year effort aimed at building understanding and tools to support districts in creating cost-effective systems of high-performing urban high schools.

This report is one of nine detailed case studies of small urban high schools that served as the foundation for our report "Strategic Designs: Lessons from Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools" (available at www.educationresourcestrategies.org). We dubbed these nine schools "Leading Edge Schools" because they stand apart from other high schools across the country in designing new ways to "do school" while outperforming most high schools in their local districts.

We found that Leading Edge Schools deliberately create high-performing organizational structures, or Strategic Designs, that deliberately organize people, time, and money to advance their specific instructional models — the set of decisions the schools make about how they organize and deliver instruction. They create these Strategic Designs through four interconnected practices:

1. Clearly defining an instructional model that reflects the schools' vision, learning goals, and student population.
2. Organizing people, time, and money to support this instructional model by (a) investing in teaching quality, (b) using student time strategically, and (c) creating individual attention for students.
3. Making trade-offs to invest in the most important priorities when faced with limits on the amount, type, and use of people, time, and money.
4. Adapting their strategies in response to lessons learned and changing student needs and conditions.

Reviewing the case studies, readers will find that teacher characteristics, staffing patterns, schedules, and budgets look very different across the nine schools. Their instructional models reflect three broad approaches to teaching and learning:

1. **Core academics:** a rigorous core academic college-preparatory program for all students;
2. **Relevance:** a curriculum that is relevant to student interests and/or the world in which they live; and
3. **Personalization:** personal relationships between adults and students are fostered to ensure all students are known well by at least one adult.

All Leading Edge Schools incorporate some aspects of each approach, while tending to emphasize one over the others.

We also found that although no school organizes resources exactly the same, high-performing schools organize people, time, and money to implement three high-performance resources strategies. They:

1. Invest to continuously improve **teaching quality** through hiring, professional development, job structure, and collaborative planning time.
2. Use **student time** strategically, linking it to student learning needs.
3. Create **individual attention** and personal learning environments.

Using these strategies as our framework, we assessed case study school practices and quantified their resource use. We did this by creating a set of *diagnostic indicators* that describe how schools best use their resources for improving student performance. They are used throughout the case studies to illustrate resource use.

A detailed methodology, an in-depth introduction to the “Big 3” framework, and a full list of the diagnostic indicators can be found at www.educationresourcestrategies.org.

Education Resource Strategies hopes that these case studies will serve multiple purposes: to generate ideas about implementing strategies in schools; to help develop new small schools and reform existing schools; and to engage colleagues, principals, and teachers in conversations about what is possible in their districts. By detailing how these nine Leading Edge Schools organize their resources — people, time, and money — to improve student achievement, it is our hope that readers will be able to apply the findings to their own context and contribute to changing the national conversation around resource use from “how much” to “how well.”

Personalization Strategic Designs

9. MetWest High School

314 East 10th Street
Oakland, CA 94606
www.bigpicture.org

MetWest High School is a small, innovative public high school in the Oakland Unified School District, serving 128 students in grades nine through 12. The school's comprehensive college-preparatory curriculum focuses on personalizing students' education based on their strengths and interests.

MetWest's mission

MetWest High School prepares young adults to recognize and take advantage of all resources to further their personal well-being. Graduates will have the skills, habits, knowledge, and community to overcome obstacles to their success, access four-year colleges, and contribute positively to our world.

Summarized from www.bigpicture.org

MetWest takes an unconventional approach: There are no formal classes, final exams, letter grades, or bells between classes. Students are grouped in 17-person "advisories" that stay together with the same teacher/advisor for two years. MetWest leaders believe that students learn not so much by sitting and listening, but by doing and discussing. Therefore, real-world experiences are as important as classroom instruction and testing. Students are encouraged to pursue their passions in the workplace. Every student is matched to an internship within the community based on his or her interests. Students work at their internships two days a week and use that workplace experience as the foundation for research projects.

Students at MetWest work with advisors, parents, and workplace mentors to design a project-based, personalized curriculum based on the students' strengths and interests. Advisors assess students' progress and efforts through presentations of their research projects, which must incorporate critical thinking in the areas of math, history, literature, and science.

MetWest students regularly outperform district high schools on state achievement tests, and in 2006, the school celebrated its first graduating class, all of whom were accepted to four-year colleges.

As a small school within Oakland Unified, MetWest is accountable to the district and its teachers are part of the local union. In recent years, Oakland Unified has allowed principals more autonomy and flexibility around resource allocation — choices of people, time, and money — in exchange for accountability for results. Oakland Unified is decentralizing many central budget items, allowing schools to contract with the central office for services they want at their sites. As a result, more budget items are now found at the school level.

As a district small school, MetWest must administer the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). MetWest is categorized as an independent study school, and it can therefore give students credit for the amount of time invested in certain areas and mastery (versus seat time at a traditional high school). In other words, students must meet the same graduation requirements as other district high school students, but they can do so through mastery instead of cumulative credit hours (see Appendix 9.3).

Community connections

MetWest opened in 2002 with 34 ninth graders housed in two classrooms at Laney Community College in downtown Oakland. As it outgrew its space, the school moved to its current location — the first floor of Oakland Unified’s administrative building across from Laney College. Students use the college’s library and gym, and they have the opportunity to take college-level courses there.

MetWest is part of a network of schools associated with The Big Picture Company, a Rhode Island–based nonprofit organization that launched its first school in 1996 and has opened 40 schools in cities across the United States over the past decade.¹

Community involvement is a core component in all Big Picture schools. MetWest hosts monthly potluck family nights, which give students, parents, mentors, and advisors an opportunity to catch up. Parents participate in the school’s hiring process and fundraising activities. The school also relies on numerous partnerships with businesses and organizations throughout the community to sponsor interns and provide other resources.

MetWest leaders believe the school’s unconventional and personalized approach has empowered its students to take charge of their learning and gain the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve success beyond high school and become lifelong learners.

Student demographics

Students interested in MetWest apply and are admitted to the school based on a random lottery run for all schools by Oakland Unified central services. MetWest accepts students in all grade levels (although it is extremely rare to have students entering in 12th grade). The school mirrors the district’s student population fairly closely. Figure 9.1 outlines the demographic data of MetWest students compared to the Oakland Unified average.

FIGURE 9.1*Student demographics: MetWest and Oakland Unified district average, SY2005–06*

	MetWest	Oakland Unified district average
Race/ethnicity		
African American	36%	35%
Hispanic	34%	40%
Asian	19%	17%
Caucasian	6%	2%
Other	5%	6%
Socioeconomic status		
Free and reduced-price lunch	58% ⁱ	66%
Program		
English language learners	19%	28%
Special education	8%	12%

Source: <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DistEnr2.asp?TheName=Oakland&cSelect=0161259--OAKLAND+UNIFIED&cChoice=DistEnrEth&cYear=2005-06&cLevel=District&cTopic=Enrollment&myTimeFrame=S&submit1=Submit>; percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

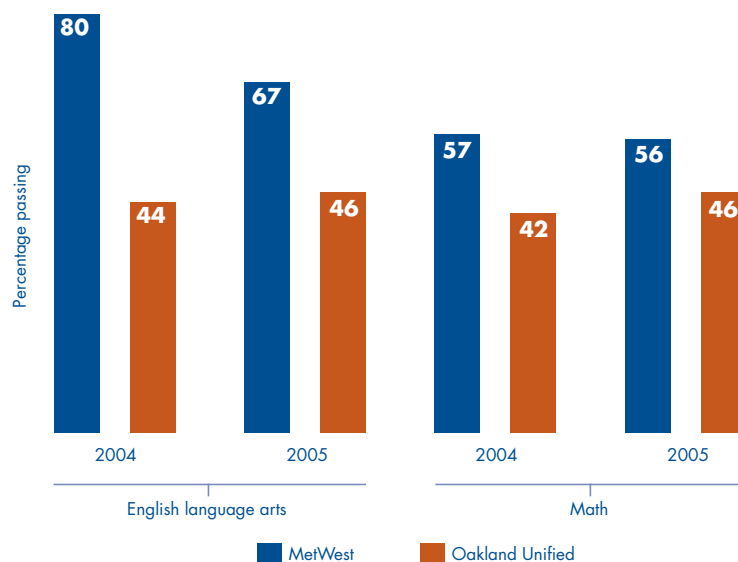
ⁱ According to the principal, the number of students receiving a free or reduced-price lunch will be reported as higher in future years; in 2005–06, many of the students didn't turn in the appropriate paperwork.

Student performance

MetWest regularly outperforms almost all other Oakland Unified high schools on the CAHSEE, a criterion-based test that all California public school students must pass to graduate. As seen in Figure 9.2, MetWest students greatly outperformed Oakland Unified students on the reading portion of the exam, and they outperformed Oakland Unified students in math in both years.

FIGURE 9.2

Percentage of students passing CAHSEE: MetWest and Oakland Unified, 2004 and 2005



Source: <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

Note: CAHSEE is only reported as percentage passing and does not yet break student scores down by proficiency.

MetWest also exceeds the district in other indicators of student performance, such as attendance and graduation, and it has lower dropout and suspension rates, as shown in Figure 9.3.

FIGURE 9.3

Other indicators of student performance, SY2005–06

	MetWest	Oakland Unified district average
Attendance rate	95%	64% ⁱ
Suspension rate	4% ⁱⁱ	16%
Dropout rate	0%	7%
Graduation rate	96%	71%

Source: Oakland Unified school report cards; <http://webportal.ousd.k12.ca.us>.

ⁱ <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/expulsion/ExpReports/DistrictExp.aspx?cYear=2005-06&cChoice=DstExp1a&cCounty=01&cNumber=0161259&cName=Oakland+Unified>.

ⁱⁱ Suspension rate provided by MetWest principal.

Per-pupil spending

As a district school, MetWest receives a lump-sum per-pupil budget from Oakland Unified that is based on the previous school year's average daily attendance and the total number of students enrolled. The principal has discretion over these funds. According to Principal Matt Spengler: "The district has changed how money is allocated, has given principals more power to make decisions, and is making things transparent."²

Under the old model, the district would require schools to have approximately one teacher for every 36 students. Now, schools get the per-pupil allocation and can hire staff as needed to run their models, within budget. There are no required positions, such as a librarian or security. The majority of the budget is devoted to personnel, and there is not a lot of wiggle room, especially given MetWest's small size. MetWest tries to use its resources creatively to support student needs. For example, when several 11th graders did not pass the CAHSEE math exam last year, Spengler hired a part-time consultant/teacher to provide support services.

In addition to the flexibility derived from discretion over the budget, some of MetWest's ability to respond to student needs comes from outside dollars. For SY2005–06, MetWest received a total of \$90,000 in grants and private donations. Five years ago, MetWest received a \$240,000 start-up grant,³ of which \$20,000 remains and serves as the school's discretionary budget. The school uses the funds to address immediate instructional or buildingwide needs, which also has helped build staff trust and motivation. The money has had a huge impact on the school's flexibility to operate.

Though MetWest appears to spend slightly more per pupil overall (\$7,790 versus \$5,382 for the comparison school), the difference can partially be explained by private fund data, which were available for MetWest but not the comparison school (see Figure 9.4). The difference also is due to higher per-pupil leadership costs at MetWest: The school invests 19 percent of its operating budget on leadership, more than twice as much as the Oakland Unified comparison school, mostly due to spreading the cost of leadership over the smaller student enrollment.

FIGURE 9.4*Per-pupil operating expenditures, SY2005–06*

	MetWest	Oakland Unified comparison schoolⁱ
Total fully allocated operating budget ⁱⁱ	\$1,050,975	\$11,248,860
General education per pupil (unweighted, fully allocated, including private, no geographic adjuster)	\$7,790	\$5,382
Percentage above that is privately funded	8%	N/A ⁱⁱⁱ
Percentage spent on instruction	46%	49%
Student-teacher ratio	15:1	21:1
Percentage spent on leadership ^{iv}	19%	8%
Percentage spent on pupil services ^v	1%	3%

i. Comparison schools are the highest-performing, nonexam schools in the district that were selected to provide a comparison to the Leading Edge Schools' per-pupil cost.⁴

ii. Fully allocated operating budget includes the costs of running a school on a daily basis.⁵

iii. Data on private funding were not collected for the comparison schools.

iv. Leadership coding includes all functions associated with governance, school administration, secretaries and clerks supporting school leaders, and accountability (research, evaluation and assessment, community relations, attendance tracking, student assignment, etc.).

v. Pupil services coding includes all functions associated with noninstructional programs.⁶

MetWest budgets its teacher salaries based on actual salaries in Oakland Unified schools (rather than average salaries, as is the practice in many districts). MetWest Principal Spengler notes the trade-off of paying for teacher experience that is felt particularly keenly at a small school: Less experienced teachers cost a school less than more experienced teachers. Though this trade-off has not influenced hiring decisions at MetWest to date, Spengler mentioned the concern moving forward. Sustainability of the teaching staff is an ongoing and constant conversation at MetWest. Although teachers put in a lot of extra time and work for relatively little money as compared with other districts, when they feel effective with the growth and learning of students, it makes a difference, says Spengler.

Flexibility dimensions⁷

As a small school within Oakland Unified, MetWest is subject to district and local union policies. The school has some autonomy over the hiring and firing of its staff,⁸ and it can alter class size (see Figure 9.5). It does not control teachers' salaries or teacher and student time. MetWest has discretion over much of its budget, including the option to purchase or opt out of services from the district.

FIGURE 9.5

Flexibility dimensions

Flexibility dimension	MetWest
Hiring and firing	Yes (except during district layoffs when the school must hire internally)
Teacher time	No
Class size	Yes
Student time	No
Staffing composition	Yes (except for special education requirements)
Salary	No (district pay scale)
Option to opt out of district services	Yes
Discretion over nonsalary budget	Yes (can carry over external funds)

Resource strategies

The following sections highlight MetWest’s practices around three resource strategies of high-performing high schools: the school’s investment in teaching quality, its strategic use of student time, and the provision of individual attention to students.⁹

MetWest resource strategy highlights

- 1. Invest to continuously improve teaching quality through hiring, professional development, job structure, and collaborative planning time*
 - Multistep hiring process focused on teachers who are generalists and interested in facilitating student learning
 - Significant investment in professional development and collaborative time, totaling 167 hours a year
 - Use of part-time faculty to provide expertise, particularly in math and science
- 2. Use student time strategically, linking it to student learning needs*
 - Students spend significant time in relevant learning: two days a week in internships
 - Individualized student schedules based on needs and interests
 - Partnerships with external organizations extend learning opportunities beyond the school
- 3. Create individual attention and personalized learning environments*
 - Performance-based assessment of mastery through exhibitions and portfolios
 - Personalized learning environments fostered through advisory, family contact, and small teacher loads (17) and class sizes

■ Resource strategy 1

Invest to continuously improve teaching quality through hiring, professional development, job structure, and collaborative planning time

- *Multistep hiring process focused on teachers who are generalists and interested in facilitating student learning*
- *Significant investment in professional development and collaborative time, totaling 167 hours a year*
- *Use of part-time faculty to provide expertise, particularly in math and science*

Multistep hiring process focused on teachers who are generalists and interested in facilitating student learning

MetWest recruits and hires teachers from both inside and outside the district using a rigorous, collaborative hiring process. Applicants are asked to submit an application, teach a lesson, interview with advisors and students, be observed teaching in their current school by a MetWest staff member, and have a one-on-one interview with the principal.

In SY2005–06, three of MetWest’s eight “advisors” (MetWest’s name for full-time teachers) were new to the school, but they all had previous teaching experience. Two of the positions were new to the school with the expansion to include 12th grade. Typically, the school has turnover of one advisor per year. All staff from SY2005–06 returned to MetWest in SY2006–07.¹⁰ Of the returning advisors, just less than half have master’s degrees (45 percent) and more than half have three or fewer years’ teaching experience (57 percent).

MetWest follows the local teacher union’s process for hiring and the district’s seniority rules. Another teacher from an Oakland Unified school could demand to work at MetWest, but that has not happened, and the principal does not anticipate that it will happen because of MetWest’s unique working situation. “Working here is not about teaching a subject all day long,” says Spengler. “It’s about facilitating student learning and often interests people who are interested in teaching, youth development, and community outreach.”

Through the hiring process, MetWest attracts teachers who meet the school’s philosophy and needs. MetWest teachers wear many hats. Says one teacher: “As an advisor, you’re a project manager, you teach curriculum, you’re managing an internship program, and you’re a social worker, parent, advocate, and college counselor It’s like going into a kid’s costume box and pulling out a new hat each moment. We’re always adapting to do everything we can to help our kids be successful.”

MetWest teachers are paid via the Oakland Unified pay scale and then given stipends for extra work or extra time.

Significant investment in professional development and collaborative time, totaling 167 hours a year

MetWest has structured professional collaborative time into the teachers’ schedules. During the summer, teachers attend eight days of professional development. During the school year, almost every day involves some form of professional development: Tuesday mornings, teachers have a 45-minute faculty meeting; on Wednesdays, there is one hour of collaborative planning time/team planning followed by 90 minutes of professional development; on Thursdays, there is a 15-minute faculty meeting and one hour of professional development every other week. This equals 167 hours, or 12 percent, of the teachers’ year spent on professional development. MetWest’s investment in professional development and collaborative planning time accounts

for 7 percent of the school's budget, or \$8,852 per teacher, about two-thirds of which goes for teacher time. New teachers receive additional support through special meetings with a former MetWest teacher who now works with the district.

Advisors at MetWest speak very highly of the time they have to collaborate, and they believe that the time has produced a professional culture in the school with high levels of trust, respect, and support. According to advisors, professional development guides the MetWest program. Says one advisor: "[Professional development] time is well structured; teacher time isn't wasted."

Although there are no individual teacher professional development plans, MetWest has set up a peer-coaching program in which each advisor sets a priority for the quarter and receives support from a colleague to best achieve his or her goals. The goal-setting process is a formal self-assessment tool that fulfills Big Picture priorities, schoolwide goals, and California Department of Education expectations.

Although teachers are not formally evaluated at MetWest beyond the paperwork required by the state, the principal conducts weekly, 30-minute, one-on-one meetings with every advisor. According to one teacher: "His finger is always on the pulse." The meeting focuses on all parts of an advisor's job, with 20 minutes for the principal's agenda and 10 minutes for the advisor. The principal says these meetings are part of the school's proactive planning and they provide a consistent place to discuss instructional and interpersonal issues.

MetWest also has a strong partnership with Big Picture, which provides support for instruction, leadership, and coaching. Big Picture maintains a Web site that is full of teacher resources, including curriculum strategies and the Learning Through Internship (LTI) database. In addition, the organization provides notebooks and calendars for students and a parent organizer for their families. Those materials elevated the school's status and built confidence within the community, says Principal Spengler. Big Picture has a school coach who visits MetWest every five weeks and facilitates weekly conference calls with the leaders of all seven Big Picture schools located in California. Big Picture also helps sites share ideas via video conferencing and through an annual summer conference that MetWest's principal and staff attend.

Use of part-time faculty to provide expertise, particularly in math and science

MetWest uses part-time staff and consultants to provide instructional support for struggling students and to keep class sizes small and teacher loads very low. In addition to the principal, eight advisors, an LTI coordinator, and the office manager, MetWest employs several faculty members part time, including math consultants, science consultants, a CAHSEE support coordinator, a Spanish teacher, and a special education teacher. In addition, MetWest uses volunteers to serve as literacy seminar instructors.

With the flexibility of the stipend line item in the school’s budget, the principal hires substitute teachers and pays for consultants to provide content expertise, particularly in math and science. “As a school, you can’t expect advisors to do it all,” says Spengler. He adds that most advisors at MetWest are strong in English language arts and humanities but not as strong in math and science.

■ Resource strategy 2

Use student time strategically, linking it to student learning needs

- *Students spend significant time in relevant learning: two days a week in internships*
- *Individualized student schedules based on needs and interests*
- *Partnerships with external organizations extend learning opportunities beyond the school*

Students spend significant time in relevant learning: two days a week in internships

What sets MetWest apart from traditional high schools is its focus on students learning through real-world experiences. MetWest students spend 1,224 hours a year in school — 437 hours in core studies (36 percent), 432 hours in noncore studies (35 percent), and 158 hours in academic support (13 percent). Students spend a total of 84 percent of the year in instruction, but the learning experience is different from a traditional high school. At the center of every student’s education at MetWest is the LTI program, which consists of an internship for two full school days each week working with an expert mentor in a student’s field of interest. Students work on projects at their internship sites that benefit both the student and the mentor, and they integrate academic lessons and research to further student learning. MetWest students have LTI each year they attend the school.

Individualized student schedules based on needs and interests

At MetWest, students have their own personalized schedules with time slated for three main components: advisory, independent work time (including seminars, workshops, and college-level courses), and LTI (see Appendix 9.2 for a sample schedule).

Advisory

Students attend advisory Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings for 60 minutes and Monday afternoons for 30 minutes. The time is devoted to core academic instruction, which focuses on humanities as well as research and writing skills that students need to be successful on their projects and on meeting the California state standards. Though students spend far

less time in the classroom compared to typical Oakland Unified high school students (due to the two days a week in internships), the principal believes that MetWest is making the most of the time. As an independent study school, MetWest can give students credit for the amount of time invested in certain areas and mastery (versus seat time like at a traditional district high school). MetWest students also have 30 minutes of advisory on Friday afternoons that serve a support and enrichment function (akin to advisory in other Leading Edge Schools).

Independent work time

Learning takes many forms during the independent work-time blocks, which total about 11 hours per week and vary by student. All MetWest students take three and a half hours of math and three and a half hours of foreign language per week. MetWest math is taught to small groups of about seven or eight organized by math level. All MetWest students take at least three years of math and must successfully complete algebra and geometry courses. Sophomores and juniors take three and a half hours of science (biology and chemistry) per week. Students also may use these blocks of time to take literature seminars at MetWest (primarily offered by volunteers), take classes at nearby Laney Community College, schedule one-on-one instructional time with their advisor, or work on their independent projects.

Partnerships with external organizations extend learning opportunities beyond the school

MetWest has successfully leveraged community resources to support its instructional design. The school relies heavily on its partnerships, both for student internships and to provide other academic experiences and services for students. “Because of the structure of the school, we’re able to make use of the community resources in a very big way,” says Principal Spengler. “We make every effort to connect with our community organizations in order to provide programs and opportunities for our students.”

More than 100 community leaders and organizations work with MetWest. In addition to the organizations that offer internships, some of the school’s partners include Casey Family Programs (counseling), the Oakland Museum of California (art classes), 826 Valencia (writing workshop for ninth graders), and organizations that provide active electives for students (kayak program).

MetWest’s partnership with Laney Community College is an important part of the school’s goal to prepare its students to be successful in college. Students can take college-level courses at Laney, have internships there, and use the college’s athletic fields and gym. At any given time, 30–40 percent of MetWest students take a course at Laney, and all seniors in SY2005–06 passed at least one college-level course.

■ Resource strategy 3

Create individual attention and personal learning environments

- *Performance-based assessment of mastery through exhibitions and portfolios*
- *Personalized learning environments fostered through advisory, family contact, and small teacher loads (17) and class sizes*

Performance-based assessment of mastery through exhibitions and portfolios

Students at MetWest are not assessed through tests and grades. Teachers work hard to develop rubrics and set performance standards for which each student is held accountable. Students are assessed on quarterly exhibitions of their work (presentations of their learning to their families and LTI mentor, as well as MetWest faculty and students), weekly meetings with advisors, weekly journals, and yearly presentation portfolios. MetWest faculty use data from these assessments — and from state and district standardized tests — to drive both professional development and instructional practice. Recently, the University of California approved the curriculum of California Big Picture high schools as meeting University of California’s high-achieving and competitive admissions eligibility requirements.¹¹ This is a strong validation for what MetWest is doing and of the innovative teaching environment.

At MetWest, assessment begins before the school year starts with a daylong summer orientation program for new students that is devoted to building relationships, developing trust, and enabling advisors and school leaders to better understand the students’ strengths and weaknesses. For example, school staff members collect writing samples from journals that the students write during the orientation. MetWest staff examines this writing — along with district math and literacy data, demographics, gender, and social strengths — to build heterogeneous advisory groups. Advisors also conduct home visits prior to the school year to initiate a relationship with students and their families.

Personalized learning environments fostered through advisory, family contact, and small teacher loads (17) and class sizes

Education at MetWest exemplifies Big Picture’s commitment to educate “one student at a time.” Students work closely with mentors, advisors, and their parents or guardians to review all aspects of their high school experience. And advisors extend themselves tremendously to connect with their students and students’ families and to provide a curriculum that is challenging, engaging, and meets students’ needs.

At MetWest, grade-level groups of approximately 17 students work with an advisor for two years at a time throughout their high school experience.¹² Advisors are responsible for teaching some content and then supporting students for the remainder of their individualized academic programs. There also is time built into the schedule for support and enrichment through advisory. Advisors have at least one, one-on-one meeting with each of their students every week. In addition, advisors visit students at their internships and talk with mentors about the progress of the work at least once every two weeks. MetWest advisors also frequently meet with families to discuss a student's learning and growth. Says one advisor: "Talking with parents is a natural fit at MetWest; they are not surprised to get your phone calls."

In addition to small advisories, MetWest provides other small learning opportunities such as literature seminars, with five to 11 students, and math classes, with seven to 15 students. The school uses part-time instructors to keep classes small. Students also work one-on-one with an internship mentor two days each week during their internships.

Each student has a learning team, which includes the student, parent(s), advisor, and internship mentor. The learning team meets quarterly to collaborate on the student's educational plan and goals and to assess their progress. Students' individual educational plans and learning goals are all based on each student's interests and passions and are aligned with district and state standards.

In an effort to continually respond to students' needs and interests, advisors are continually revising and reinventing the curriculum. Advisors speak about the subsequent difficulty in perfecting the craft of teaching. They are able to guide students through the process of learning, but it is tough to squeeze in the curriculum and continue to develop the program. They sometimes feel like they are perpetual new teachers — always developing the curriculum and rarely able to do something twice.

MetWest's individualized learning program demands a lot of time from advisors. They work 55–80 hours each week, do not have prep time built into the school day, and are responsible for students' academic progress as well as their social and emotional development. Advisors raise some concerns about the sustainability of the model — an issue they say is "a small school thing" rather than "a MetWest thing." In some ways, they believe that they are subsidizing their salary with their own time to do the work that needs to be done. On the other hand, they see their work making a difference for students. "There is something infectious about working here," says one advisor. "The pay is low and the work is hard, but what you're able to do with kids is so much different from my own educational experience."

NOTES

- ¹ For more information, see www.bigpicture.org/index.htm.
- ² Matt Spengler is no longer principal of MetWest. A former teacher, Eve Gordon, is now the principal.
- ³ The start-up grant was from the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools.
- ⁴ In Oakland, where we did not have a prior relationship, we met with district leaders to seek feedback on which comparison school to use and obtain school budgets. Oakland Unified comparison school demographics: 1,734 students; 59 percent African American; 19 percent Asian; 7 percent Caucasian; 13 percent Hispanic; 2 percent other; 92 percent free or reduced-price lunch; 10 percent students with disabilities; 11 percent English language learners.
- ⁵ These costs include provision and support of the academic program; administration and support services; provision and maintenance of the physical plant; and auxiliary services such as food, transportation, and security. For district schools, some of these costs are administered at the district central office level. If a charter school has a charter management organization (CMO), some of these costs are administered at the CMO level.
- ⁶ These include social and emotional needs (social workers, character education, mentoring, parent programs, etc.), physical health (itinerant therapists, nurses, etc.), students with disabilities and English language learners evaluation/diagnostics, career/academic counseling, and other noninstructional programs (athletics, truancy, etc.).
- ⁷ Flexibility dimensions are a school's ability to use its resources — people, time, and money — as it chooses. Schools can be limited by legal or administrative constraints, such as federal or state laws, union contracts, or district policies. The degree of school flexibility depends on both how much it has and whether the school can use the resource as it chooses.
- ⁸ This autonomy in hiring is overridden when there are layoffs within the district, forcing all schools to accept internal staff.
- ⁹ This framework for analysis, the “Big 3” resource strategies of high-performing schools, is more fully described in Appendix 9.1.
- ¹⁰ The study was conducted during SY2005–06, and results are noted for that year.
- ¹¹ See www.universityofcalifornia.edu/admissions/undergrad_adm/paths_to_adm/freshman.html.
- ¹² Advisories would be even smaller if that were feasible within the budget. For example, at the Met school in Providence, RI, which has a higher per-pupil funding, there are 12 students in an advisory.

APPENDIX 9.1

Resource strategies

Resource principles	What we see in the school	Diagnostic indicators
Invest in teaching quality		
Hire and organize staff to fit school needs in terms of expertise, philosophy, and schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rigorous hiring process includes application, interviews with advisors and students, teaching a lesson, teaching observation in current school by a MetWest staff member, and one-on-one interview with the principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of a rigorous, strategic hiring process 57% of core academic teachers with three or fewer years' experience 100% of core teachers teaching more than one subject Leverage outside experts for core and noncore courses
Integrate significant resources for well-designed professional development that provides expert support to implement the schools' instructional models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eight full days devoted to professional development in the summer Weekly collaborative planning time and professional development time Focus of professional development: curriculum planning, student support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$2,386 per teacher on professional development (not including teacher time) 19% staff with instructional leadership roles
Design teacher teams and schedules to include blocks of collaborative planning time effectively used to improve classroom practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers meet three to four times per week for professional development and faculty meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12% of teacher year in professional development (with collaborative planning time) 167 total yearly teacher professional development hours (with collaborative planning time) 60 minutes collaborative planning time per week No professional development in content-based teams
Enact systems that promote individual teacher growth through induction, leadership opportunities, professional development planning, evaluation, and compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External support for new teachers by former MetWest teacher Individual quarterly priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ratio of teachers to school-based evaluators is 9:1 Regular review of teacher performance and growth 1% of teacher compensation devoted to leadership roles

(continued)

(continued)

Resource principles	What we see in the school	Diagnostic indicators
Use student time strategically		
Purposefully align the schools' schedules with their instructional models and student needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule focuses on individual student mastery rather than seat time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School schedules reflect instructional model and academic needs of students 432 total yearly hours in noncore academics 35% of student year in noncore academics
Maximize time on academic subjects, including longer blocks of uninterrupted time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule includes flexible blocks of time with heavy emphasis on internships (two days per week) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,224 yearly student hours 437 average yearly hours in core academics 437 yearly hours in ninth and 12th grade core academics 36% of student year in core academics 1,748 total core academic hours over four years
Vary individual student time when necessary to ensure all students meet rigorous standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student schedules individualized based on needs and interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13% student year in academic support 158 yearly hours spent in academic support Ratio of time in ninth grade math to average time in math: 1.0 Ratio of time in ninth grade English language arts to average time in English language arts: 1.0
Create individual attention		
Assess student learning on an ongoing basis and adjust instruction and support accordingly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular review and discussion of student progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use formative assessments systematically to guide instruction throughout the year
Create smaller group sizes and reduced teacher loads for targeted purposes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely small teacher loads Small class sizes, particularly in math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average class size overall: 17 Average class size core: 17 Average class size English language arts: 8 Average class size math: 7 Average teacher load overall: 17 Average teacher load core: 17
Organize structures that foster personal relationships between students and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisory (loops grades 9–10 and 11–12) Mentors through internships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student to core academic teacher ratio is 14:1 151 total yearly teacher hours spent in social and emotional support 128 students in grades 9–12 Looping practices in all areas around strategically grouped students

APPENDIX 9.2

MetWest sample student schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Academic Advisory (8:30–9:30)	LTI (8:30–3:30)	Academic advisory (8:30–9:30)	LTI (8:30–3:30)	Academic advisory (8:30–9:30)
Independent work time, literature seminars, workshops, Laney classes, MetWest math (9:30–12:00)		Independent work time, literature seminars, workshops, Laney classes, MetWest math (9:30–12:00)		Independent work time (9:30–12:00)
Lunch (12:00–12:45)		Lunch (12:00–12:45)		Lunch (12:00–12:45)
Independent work time, literature seminars, workshops, Laney classes, MetWest math (12:45–3:00)		Independent work time, literature seminars, workshops, Laney classes, MetWest math (12:45–1:45)		Town Hall (12:45–1:30)
Academic advisory (3:00–3:30)				Active electives (1:30–3:00)
				Advisory (Support and enrichment) (3:00–3:30)

LTI = Learning Through Internship

APPENDIX 9.3

Oakland Unified graduation requirements

Subject	Credits/semesters
English language arts	40 credits: 8 semesters
Math	30 credits: 6 semesters minimum, including algebra and geometry
Science	30 credits: 2 semesters of physical science, 2 semesters of biology, 2 semesters of science electives
U.S. history	10 credits: 2 semesters
World cultures	10 credits: 2 semesters
American economics	10 credits: 2 semesters
World language	10 credits: 2 semesters
Art	10 credits: 2 semesters
Physical education	20 credits: 4 semesters
Electives	60 credits: 11 semesters
Total	230 minimum credits

APPENDIX 9.4

The Big Picture philosophy

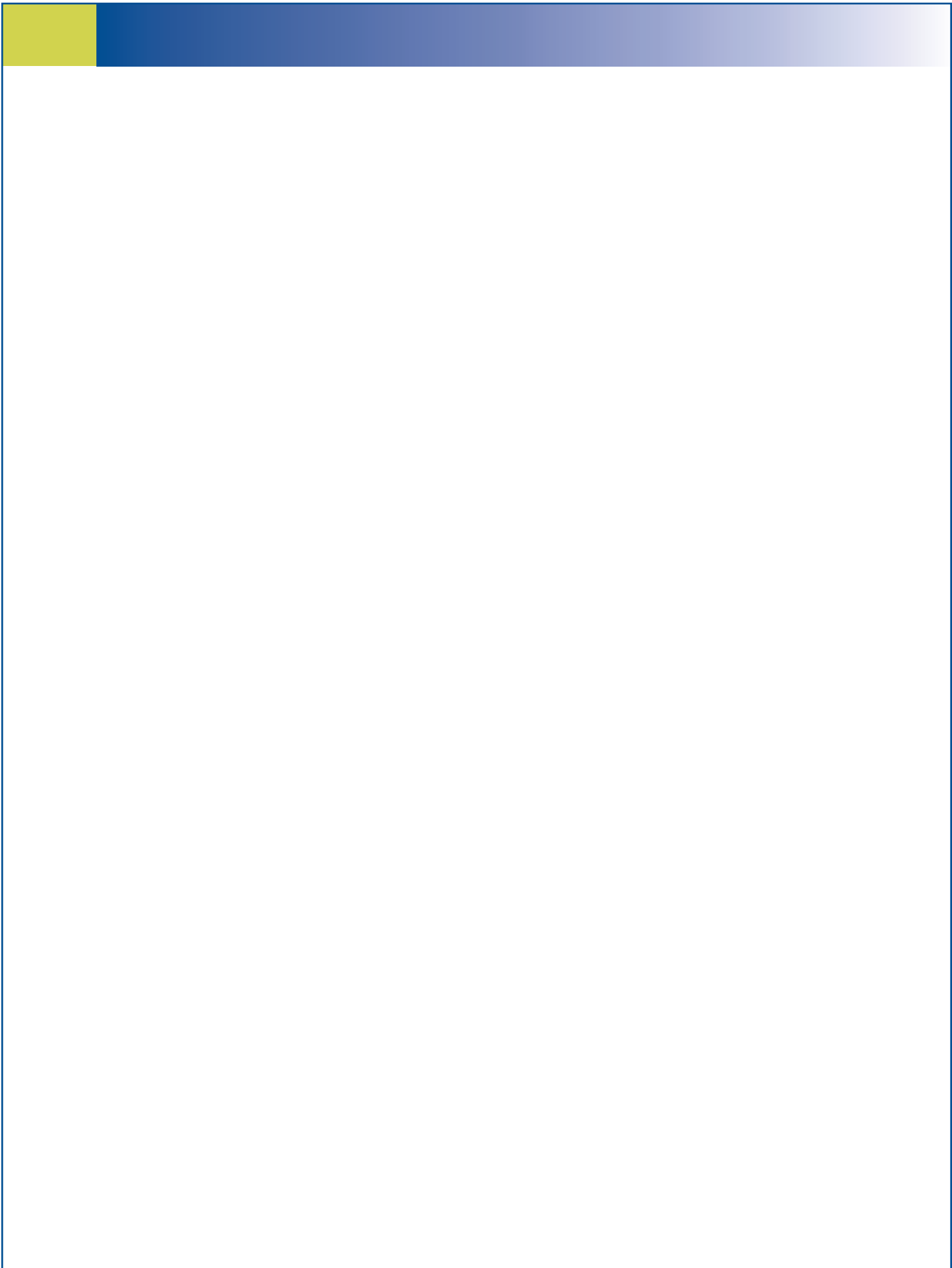
“The Big Picture Company believes that schools must be personalized, educating every student equally, *one student at a time*. Each student’s learning plan should grow out of his or her unique needs, interests, and passions. The education system must ensure that students and families are active participants in the design and authentic assessment of each child’s learning. Schools must be small enough to encourage the development of a community of learners, and to allow for each child to be known well by at least one adult. School staff and leaders must be visionaries and life-long learners. Schools must connect students, and the school, to the community — both by sending students out to learn from mentors in the real world, and by allowing the school itself to serve as an asset to the local community and its needs. Finally, schools must allow for admission to, and success in, college to be a reality for every student, and work closely with students, families, and colleges throughout — and beyond — the application process.”

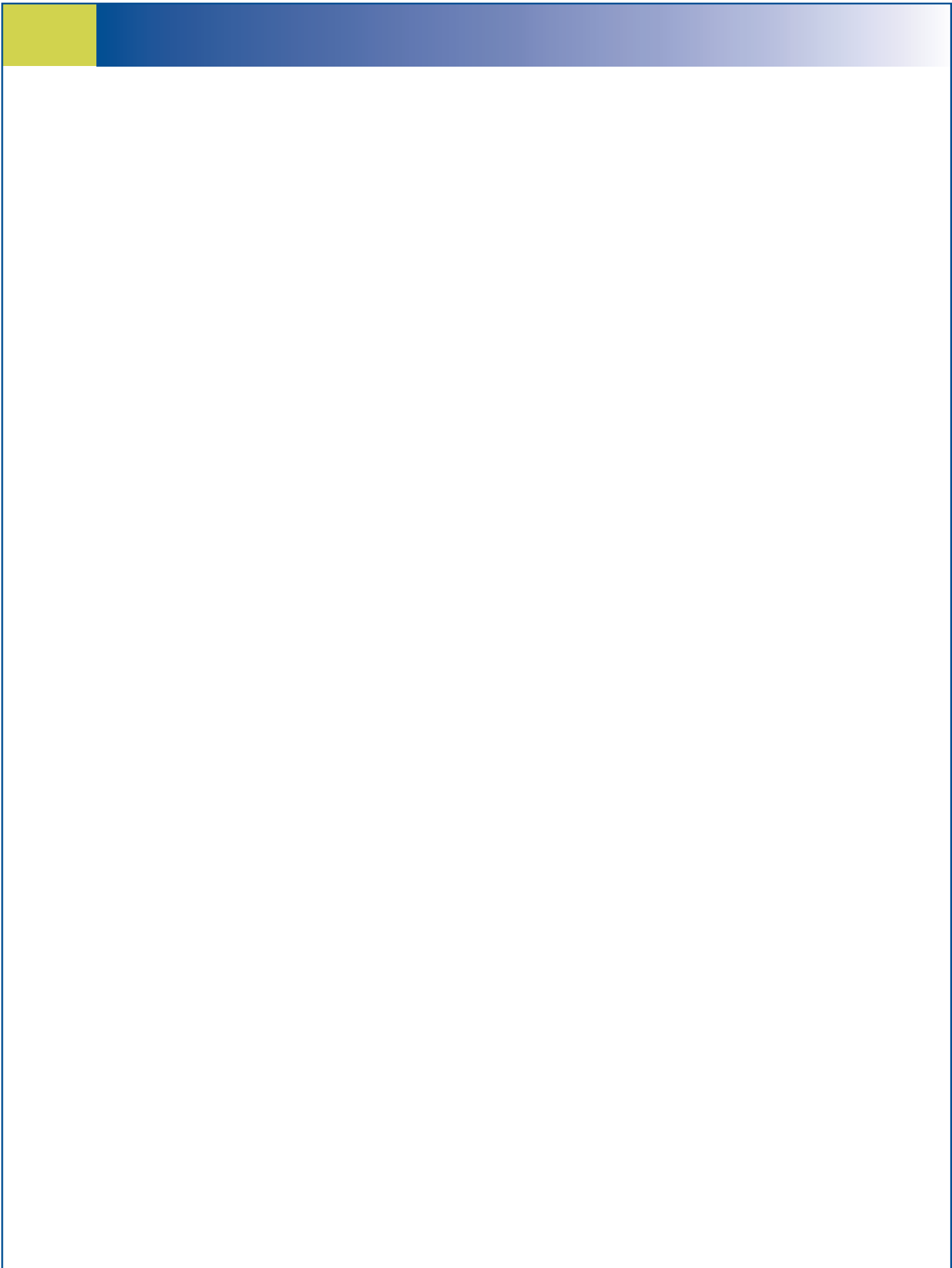
www.bigpicture.org

APPENDIX 9.5

MetWest staff list

Position	Full-time equivalent	ERS coding categories	Other
Principal	1.0	Leadership	
Internship coordinator	1.0	Leadership	
Teacher — grade 9	1.0	Core	
Teacher — grade 9	1.0	Core	
Teacher — grade 10	1.0	Core	
Teacher — grade 11	1.0	Core	
Teacher — grade 12	1.0	Core	
Teacher — grade 10	1.0	Core	
Teacher — grade 11	1.0	Core	
Teacher — grade 12	1.0	Core	
Office manager	0.8	Leadership	
Special education	0.4	Core	
CAHSEE and student support	0.6	Instruction and pupil services	
Spanish teacher	0.4	Core	
Social worker	0.2	Pupil services	







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Education Resource Strategies, Inc., is a nonprofit organization that has worked extensively with urban public school systems to rethink the use of district- and school-level resources and build strategies for improved instruction and performance.

Our mission is to be a catalyst for the creation of high-performing urban school systems by promoting and supporting the strategic management of education resources. Our unique strength is in our action research where our partnerships with school systems bridge research and practice. We support our clients with Web-based tools, research and training, and diagnostic analyses tailored to their districts. Together, we outline strategies that are actionable and transformational both within and beyond the districts in which we work.

ERS's work and research have identified several areas in which school systems effectively leverage their resources to improve instruction, forming the basis for our five practice areas: Strategic School System Design; School Funding and Staffing Systems; Strategic School Design; School Support, Planning, and Supervision; and Human Capital.

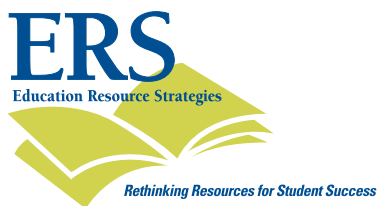
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The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported Education Resource Strategies in a three-year effort aimed at building understanding and tools that would support districts in creating cost-effective systems of high-performing urban high schools.

Out of our extensive research, we created the following reports and tools to support leaders as they consider and design small high schools in their districts. All materials are available at www.educationresourcestrategies.org.

- *"The Cost of Small High Schools: A Literature Review"*
- *"Strategic Designs: Lessons from Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools"*
- *"Case Studies of Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools"*
- *"District Spending in Small and Large High Schools: Lessons from Boston, Baltimore, and Chicago"*
- **Going to Scale Tool**
- **Small Secondary School Design Tool**
- **District Assessment Tool**



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