

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

Steering High Schools in a New Direction

In a previous E-Hint the *No Child Left Behind* initiative of the Bush Administration was described as being akin to the *RMS Titanic*, in that it was like a massive vessel designed to move rapidly and assertively forward without enough consideration for stopping or steering it in a different direction. However, today there is an effort to change its direction and even modify it to be more suitable for the needs of 21st Century students. Keep in mind that all curriculums need to be developed K-12, for effective decision-making and alignment. But as suggested In the previous E-Hint, high schools need to refine the basic knowledge students gain in grades kindergarten through eight into perspectives and behaviors that are dynamic in their real life applications, and more deeply scholastic in meeting challenges associated with college studies. The *Coalition of Essential Schools (CES)*, an improvement model originally created by the late Ted Sizer, is one of several models striving to accomplish that end. That organization's "Common Principles" are a guiding philosophy more than a replicable model for schools, but the CLI's detailed organization structure and processes can be used to make CES principles work. Below are the principles (shown in the left column) and how the CLI Model can be used to make them work in real settings through its subject area committee (SAC), curriculum coordinating council (CCC), administrators (A), and individual or groups of teachers (T).

A Correlation of CES Principles with CLI Implementation Processes

Coalition of Essential School Principles	Curriculum Leadership Institute Processes Used to Make CES Principles Work
<p>Learning to use one's mind well. The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well. Schools should not be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.</p>	<p>(SAC/T) Obviously, teachers must be able to use their own minds well before anything can be done with students. The place to begin that process is in the development of high achievement unit outcomes that are sophisticated and make good use of the higher categories of Bloom's Taxonomy. Afterward it is important that all teachers participate in staff development to thoroughly understand, teach to, and assess those more intellectually stimulating intentions for student learning.</p>
<p>Less is more – depth over coverage. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that the students need, rather than by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "less is more" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort to merely cover content.</p>	<p>(SAC/T) This one is difficult for curriculum developers and teachers to deal with after eight years of preparing students for success in the completion of multiple-choice high stakes tests. It's clear the intent of this CES principle is that students operate in an applied, inter-disciplinary environment in which problem solving efforts call on many varied skills and scholastic understandings. It's also clear that assessing a student's ability to perform this way will entail the use of situational tests that include such things as scenarios and case studies. As with the first principle, high achievement unit outcomes must be much more sophisticated than most state standards are today.</p>

<p>Goals apply to all students. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of students.</p>	<p>(CCC/A/T) Some school districts are already using computer software to essentially create an IEP (individual education plan) for each student, similar to the contract teaching/learning system used by some schools in the 1960s. While common high achievement unit outcomes are still applicable, interpreting how to achieve those results according to individual needs will be challenging to discern and prepare by qualified high school advisors, as well as individual teachers.</p>
<p>Personalization. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students in the high school and middle school and no more than 20 in the elementary school. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.</p>	<p>(CCC/SAC/A/T) In an era of considerable fiscal restraint this principle seems almost laughable, but only in the context of the public understanding of schools as being academic factories using assembly-line techniques. This principle also suggests strongly that no curriculum should be a carbon copy of state standards, but rather a highly creative and personalized set of intentions for student learning loosely guided by external expectations. Politicians and bureaucrats now trying to lead the school reform movement will need to celebrate the professionalism of local teachers and administrators, a perspective already built into the CLI process. Also, all of the school's professionals must work together to find creative and effective uses of time.</p>
<p>Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.</p>	<p>(T) Today this concept isn't as great a leap of logic as it once was, since today's standards are clearly focused on student learning. However, many of today's teachers still need to improve the quality of their teaching methods and classroom activities through use of the coaching metaphor suggested by CES.</p>
<p>Demonstration of mastery. Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Students not yet at appropriate levels of competence should be provided intensive support and resources to assist them quickly to meet those standards. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner's strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance. Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation - an "Exhibition." As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.</p>	<p>(CCC/SAC/T) This concept of mastery aligns well with general definitions used by CLI for many years, but is a major departure from the NCLB era approach. Notice that CES doesn't mention anything like a multiple choice test, but instead talks about <i>exhibitions</i> as being a key aspect of mastery. Such a definition means that students can actually do something substantive in an applied and real life context, and that what they do can be perceived as making some kind of difference in terms of useful tasks and projects. Here is a situation in which scenarios, case studies, projects, and other forms of multi-faceted challenges can be met by students competently and creatively. There is no question that a high school's front-loaded curriculum must be much different than most are today, and that overall formative and summative assessment strategies be more dynamic and relevant to the kinds of situations students will encounter in the real world.</p>
<p>A tone of decency and trust. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized. Parents should be key collaborators and vital members of the school community.</p>	<p>(T) Just as it is important to celebrate the professionalism of teachers, it is just as critical that students be treated well. While this doesn't reflect any particular CLI approach to school improvement, it does build on principles also found in <i>Effective Schools</i> goals. Creating a sense of purpose with an expectation that students do all they can to advance themselves and the school community creates an environment that stimulates positive feelings and self worth.</p>
<p>Commitment to the entire school. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.</p>	<p>(CCC/SAC/T) This principle is particularly challenging for high school teachers who have typically been prepared as subject area specialists. However, the CLI's processes accept this idea especially at the curriculum council level, as that group must approve all academic programs prepared by teachers. If the logic of a curricular element cannot be justified to those outside the discipline, it may not be appropriate in the context of what students should know and do in our communities.</p>

<p>Resources dedicated to teaching and learning. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include student loads that promote personalization, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff, and an ultimate per-pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional schools.</p>	<p>(A/CCC) Setting fiscal priorities is one of the most difficult tasks of any administrative team and lay board, especially when special interest groups are assembled to press their case. Nevertheless, an academic leader must always work with peers and decision-makers to establish or reorder priorities according to student needs. A curriculum council must do this all the time, and help other leaders in the district do the same thing.</p>
<p>Democracy and equity - The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.</p>	<p>(A/CCC/T) This principle is now built into all accreditation systems, so boards and administrative teams are working with it constantly. From a curricular point-of-view, the academic program should be reviewed by the CCC on a regular basis to ensure that all students are appropriately served no matter what race, cultural group, gender, or lifestyle they represent. Likewise, individual teachers must assure equity in their instructional practices.</p>

The Coalition of Essential Schools also has Benchmarks it uses to explain the ten principles, and they suggest many of the same ideas expressed by the CLI. Interestingly, many of the benchmarks include use of other school improvement strategies such as differentiated instruction, professional learning communities, transformational leadership, performance-based assessment and interdisciplinary curriculum. All of those techniques are also advocated by CLI, which provides the umbrella *academic governance model* for many less comprehensive improvement methods.