

# OREGON **Small Schools** INITIATIVE

## *Rigor, Relevance, Relationships:* Small Schools—Big Results

### Big Challenges

#### 1 in 4 ready for college, study says

“One in four high school students in Oregon...graduates with the skills and transcripts he or she needs to go to a four-year college, the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research said...”

THE OREGONIAN, September 17, 2003

Twice as many African Americans and Latinos drop out as their white cohorts.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Small Solutions

“Large, impersonal high schools, where students tend to get lost in the shuffle, can exacerbate low achievement and poor graduation rates. The Oregon Small Schools Initiative will help create smaller, more focused high schools that provide personal attention and rigorous coursework to help all students succeed.”

THOMAS VANDER ARK, Executive Director For Education, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

### Research shows that students who attend small schools:

- Are safer
- Demonstrate higher achievement
- Have better attendance and behavior
- Are more likely to graduate

### Initiative overview

*This multi-year, \$25 million Initiative will develop a cadre of both restructured and new high schools that are small, rigorous and personalized.*

**GOALS** Close the achievement gap between students of color and low-income students and their peers and increase the graduation rate and preparation for postsecondary education for all high school students in Oregon.

**OBJECTIVE** Restructure existing large high schools into small, autonomous schools and create new small high schools. Act as a catalyst to transform teaching and learning in Oregon high schools.

**STRATEGY** Establish small, rigorous, personalized high schools that reflect research and best-practices in leadership, teaching and learning. Work with statewide education and community partners to address barriers to innovation at the high school level.

**SUPPORT** Provide support and technical assistance for school-wide planning, restructuring governance, professional development for teachers and administrators, curriculum development, family and community partnerships, and other key elements of school-wide transformation.



A project of E3: Employers for Education Excellence with the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Meyer Memorial Trust

# rigor, relevance, relationships

## OREGON **Small Schools** INITIATIVE

### Criteria for selection

#### Conversions

- Existing high schools with enrollments greater than 700
- One of the following:
  - At least 25% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch program OR
  - At least 20% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch program and at least 15% minority enrollment

#### New Starts

- New, intentionally small public high school
- Total enrollment of 400 students or less
- Projected enrollment of at least 25% students of color or low-income

#### All Small Schools

- A clear rationale for creating small high school(s)
- Buy-in and policy support by the school board, superintendent, teachers' union, school staff and local community
- Demonstrated commitment to Initiative Core Agreements:
  - Pursue equity and social justice
  - Engage the community
  - Seek instructional excellence through rigor, relevance and relationships
  - Keep students at the center
  - Establish small school autonomy in budget, schedule, staffing, curriculum, space and leadership and governance

### Expectations

Individual school size will be less than 400 students, or approximately 100 students per grade level.

All school designs will reflect research-based attributes of high-performing schools:

- Common focus
- High expectations
- Personalization
- Respect and responsibility
- Teacher collaboration
- Performance-based assessment
- Technology as a tool

All school curriculum and practices will incorporate attributes that characterize powerful teaching and learning:

- Active inquiry
- In-depth learning
- Performance assessment

### selection timeline

#### Spring 2004

Conversion sites selected—first cadre  
New Start applications available

#### Summer 2004

Technical assistance begins—first cadre conversions  
New Start designs selected—first cadre

#### Fall 2004

Technical assistance begins—first cadre new starts

#### Spring 2005

Conversion sites selected—second cadre

#### Summer 2005

Technical assistance begins—second cadre conversions

#### Fall 2005

New Start applications available  
New Start Regional Workshops offered

#### Winter 2006

New Start finalists selected—seed grants awarded

#### Spring 2006

New Start designs selected—second cadre

#### Summer 2006

Technical assistance begins—second cadre new starts

#### 2006-2009

Initiative activities and technical assistance continue

### contact

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“I felt alienated and out of place at the larger, traditional school. Now, I have a 3.5+ on my report cards, I am excited about the assignments, and I am happy to come to school.”

STUDENT, Small High-Achieving High School