



COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCE GUIDE

Tools for Communicating about the Oregon Small Schools Initiative

July 2004

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INTRODUCTION: Communications as a Catalyst

"Because the landscape of education reform is littered with broken promises, overblown goals, inadequate implementation, and poor accountability, garnering and sustaining public support...will require a concerted and sophisticated effort to convince a skeptical public that change – appropriate and desired change – is possible."

*"Capacity and Public Will: Mustering Support for Postsecondary Reform,"
Blenda J. Wilson, October 2003*

Effective communications depend on clarity and consistency. This Communications Resource Guide provides Partnership Schools with terminology, tips and tools to speak in a common voice about high school reform. These materials are informed by public opinion research and best practices from other small schools.

The goal of this Guide is to advance both local and statewide understanding of high school reform by promoting consistent communications about the move to small, effective high schools and the Oregon Small Schools Initiative.

E3 agrees with Blenda Wilson's statement above that "concerted and sophisticated" communications and community engagement are essential to our work of creating and replicating rigorous, personalized small high schools. As change agents, it is our job to connect stakeholders to the change process by posing and answering questions such as:

- Why is change needed in today's high schools?
- How does a small school structure improve outcomes for all students, and especially students of color and low-income students?
- What are the characteristics of effective teaching and learning in the high school years today?
- What is involved in starting or restructuring into a personalized, rigorous small high school?
- What role can the community play in supporting transformed high schools?

The Oregon Small School Initiative's Partnership Schools will lead by example. Through effective communications, work on the local level will serve as a catalyst to broader community understanding. Together, we can build a movement that expects, demands and supports effective schools for all of Oregon's young people.

SECTION I: Tips

CREATING A COMMUNICATIONS CULTURE

Effective communication is an integral part of creating high-performing schools - and everyone can play a role. Equip all members of your team, along with the larger community, to be effective communicators by:

- ❑ Bringing together all key leaders who will guide the change effort in your school and community and review the material in this Guide together.
- ❑ Using the materials in this Guide to develop a framework for communicating about your change process.
- ❑ Identifying your communication goals, your key audiences, the messages for each audience, and the methods you will use to reach them.
- ❑ Keeping communications at the forefront in all aspects of your school design work.

COMMUNICATION GOALS

Make sure your efforts are strategic by identifying the goals you hope to advance. The following goal statement and objectives guide communications for the statewide Small Schools Initiative. You may adopt these or develop a local version that provides direction for your communications effort.

Goal

Develop public commitment and a broad, sustained base of support for high school reinvention that closes the achievement gap and prepares all students for post-high school education.

Objectives

1. **Inform** the community of the need for and work of the high school change process in an ongoing effort to garner their understanding and support.
2. **Involve** targeted segments of the community in three areas of work:
 - ❑ School design: Foster participation of all community stakeholders in designing, leading, and supporting the process of high school transformation or creation.
 - ❑ Student learning: Create, participate in, and support learning communities that encompass both the high school and the local community.
 - ❑ System change: Advocate necessary policy or system-wide practices change that removes barriers for transforming teaching and learning for all students.

TARGETING YOUR AUDIENCES

Begin by identifying all of the constituencies who are affected by the change process. Then add all of those whose participation is needed to make the effort a success. Within each audience, consider all of the subgroups, e.g., different language or cultural groups. The following clusters are suggested as broad categories to organize your audiences:

- ❑ School-based audiences: students, teachers, staff, administrators and school board members
- ❑ Parents
- ❑ Employers and civic leaders

Once audiences are identified, make sure you have a way to communicate with each:

- ❑ An up-to-date database with all contact information
- ❑ Translation services, as needed
- ❑ Key communicators, i.e., leaders in each targeted audience who can help communicate with their constituency

Consider the perspective that each audience brings, and use these factors to help tailor messages to each audience (see Messages, page 12):

- ❑ What is their starting place of information on this change effort?
- ❑ What is their self-interest? What are their needs and concerns?
- ❑ What can they offer? What assets do they represent?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Once you have identified the audiences that are connected to your change process, you will want to think through the strategies and tools you will use to communicate with and engage them. A strong, two-way communications program is the cornerstone of all community engagement efforts. Likewise, effective community engagement will create more communicators who will inform and involve others.

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative will be providing additional materials and technical assistance to support community engagement in high school reform around the state. Please talk with your School Change Coach if you would like help designing community engagement approaches such as:

- ❑ **Advisory Groups** – Engage existing groups in this work, or in forming a new body to advise or oversee the small schools effort.
- ❑ **Community Forums** – Design interactive events for the community as a whole, or tailor to specific groups.
- ❑ **Focus Groups** – Convene groups of students, parents, teachers, employers, etc., and learn from how they think about the issues.
- ❑ **Community Leader Interviews** – Use these to build relationships with opinion leaders in each target audience.

WORKING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA

The news media – your local newspapers, radio and TV stations – can help you reach the vast majority of your community, those who do not have children in school. For best coverage, think like a reporter, and anticipate the key elements of the news story: a time peg, key facts and figures, and personal stories.

- ❑ **A time peg** Why should they write the story now? Many events qualify as a time peg for reporters – the element that makes it “news.” Graduation, school starting, assessment results released, a class project reaching completion, an academic contest – all can be used as a time peg to promote your message.
- ❑ **Facts and figures** Use numbers to bolster your message. Quantify your results, or use numbers to identify the challenge. Are more students taking the PSAT? Are graduation rates improving? What are the underlying assessment results that illustrate the issue? Even the warmest feature story benefits from grounding in data.
- ❑ **Personal stories** Reporters like to focus on compelling personal stories. A class that is involved in a remarkable project. A student who has overcome the odds to succeed in school. Parents who have volunteered in extraordinary ways. A business that has pitched in to help. For any story, identify people to speak to reporters – whether students, teachers, parents, or members of the community.
- ❑ **Avoid jargon** Remember to explain your effort in simple, direct terms: What it will mean for the student, the school and the community. Think about how you would explain your work to your neighbor over the fence. Although you, and possibly the reporter you speak to, may be well versed in the research and jargon of the small schools movement, the average reader will not be. Try to avoid terms that need explanation (e.g., ‘theory of action’, ‘Partnership Schools Network’).

Pitching Your Story

Reporters are busy, but they also have pages and airtime to fill. If you pitch a good story combining the above elements – and provide phone numbers or opportunities to visit the school – you are most likely to win the coverage you seek. You may write up a formal news release, which is effective especially in communities with many news outlets, or you can call your local school’s reporter. In either case, doing the legwork ahead of time will help you present your message in the most compelling way.

Editorials & Letters to the Editor

Along with keeping reporters informed, make sure the editorial writers for your local media have a chance to learn about your work. Guest editorials (‘Op Ed’ submissions) and letters to the editor are a great way to showcase the voices of students, teachers, parents, and employers – all of whom can help inspire and involve their peers and the larger community. Be proactive – the letters section is often one of the most-read sections of a newspaper.

Capturing Media Clips

Please keep clippings of all media coverage your school receives related to small schools work. This information will be useful in documenting communications and community engagement efforts at both the local level and state level.

Materials for Your News Releases

For media releases, E3 has provided standard quotes and boilerplate copy (see Tools, page 15).

SECTION II: Terms to Use

Partnership Schools are asked to use the standard language that appears below when referencing the Oregon Small Schools Initiative.

PROGRAM NAME and AFFILIATIONS

Program Name and Abbreviations

Full program name: Oregon Small Schools Initiative

Acceptable abbreviations: "the Initiative" *or* "the Small Schools Initiative"

Abbreviations to avoid: "OSSSI"

Program Affiliations

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

About E3: Employers for Education Excellence

Founded in 1996 in partnership with the Oregon Business Council, E3: Employers for Education Excellence promotes high academic standards and strong community involvement to prepare *all* Oregon students for success in post-secondary education and employment.

About Meyer Memorial Trust

The Portland-based foundation, since its inception in 1982, has awarded over 4,300 grants totaling over \$331 million to support a wide range of arts, education, and social concerns throughout the state of Oregon and in Clark County, Washington.

About Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Since 2000, the Seattle-based foundation has given over \$4 billion to promote equity in global health and learning.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION and TAGLINE

Organizational Description

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative is a program of E3: Employers for Education Excellence, funded by a \$25 million grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. E3: Employers for Education Excellence is a statewide non-profit organization that promotes high academic standards and strong community involvement to prepare *all* Oregon students for college, work and civic life. For more information, visit www.E3oregon.org

Program Description

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative is a multi-year, \$25 million statewide program to increase student achievement and graduation rates in Oregon high schools. It will help communities develop both restructured and new high schools that offer a rigorous, personalized education to all students, and which will serve as models for the rest of the state. These schools will ensure equally high outcomes for all participants so that success or failure can no longer be predicted by race, gender, home language, or economic status. The Initiative will act as a catalyst to transform teaching and learning, school structure, and educational policy in Oregon.

Program Goal

By creating high-achieving and equitable small high schools, the Oregon Small Schools Initiative will act as a catalyst to:

- Prepare every high school student for college or further education.
- Close the achievement gap between students of color and low-income students and their peers.
- Increase the graduation rate for all students.

Tagline

Partner schools are encouraged to use the Oregon Small Schools Initiative tagline – **Anything Is Possible** – in materials they create.

Anything Is Possible

Imagine a high school where students and teachers
really know each other.

Where students are motivated by a challenging curriculum that connects to the real world.

Imagine a high school where all students

– no exceptions, no excuses –

achieve their highest potential and set a course for the future.

Imagine all Oregon high schools looked like this.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary of terms is intended to promote common understanding of core concepts and consistent language among professional staff. With all other audiences (e.g., students, parents, the media, the larger community), try to avoid 'education speak'. Use common sense language in place of jargon and terms that require explanation when communicating with the media and community audiences.

Achievement gap

The predictability of students' success or failure that correlates with race, gender, home language, or economic status. A primary goal of the Initiative is to close this gap in Partnership Schools.

Advisory Cabinet

An official group of education experts that serves as an advisory body for the Small Schools Initiative. Cabinet members represent diverse elements of the Oregon education and business landscape, including the Department of Education, public universities, non-profit organizations, and employer partners.

Application Portfolio

A collection of documents submitted to the Initiative by schools desiring to partner with the Initiative. Large existing schools submit a portfolio consisting of a School Change Rubric self-assessment, narrative answers to a set of reflection questions, and a signature sheet. New school teams use the Self-Assessment tool to inform their school design, and submit narrative answers to a set of reflection questions and a signature sheet.

Autonomous school

A school that has autonomy to make decisions regarding its own curriculum, scheduling, staffing, budget, governance, and space to enact its school vision and plans.

Cadre I

The initial cohort of Initiative Partnership Schools who joined the Initiative in 2004, including both new start schools as well as eight existing high schools who will convert into multiple autonomous small schools.

Cadre II

The second cohort of Initiative Partnership Schools who will join the Initiative in 2005, including both new start schools as well as existing high schools who will convert into multiple autonomous small schools.

College readiness

The condition of being eligible to be admitted and prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, including 4-year universities, 2-year colleges and certificated training programs. A major goal of the Initiative is to increase college readiness for students in Oregon.

Conversion school

A school with 700 or more students that is seeking to reconfigure into multiple autonomous schools of 400 or fewer students.

Core Agreements

A list of five actions that Partnership Schools agree to:

- Pursue equity and social justice in all student interactions and school redesign efforts.
- Engage the community so that it truly “owns” the vision for the school.
- Seek instructional excellence through rigor, relevance, and relationships.
- Keep students and their interests at the center of all school redesign efforts.
- Develop small schools that are autonomous in six areas: budget, schedule, staffing, curriculum, space, and leadership and governance.

Design Team

A team of E3 staff, consisting of the Initiative Director, Assistant Director, and Senior Coaches, as well as consultants, who collaborate to create and plan all aspects of the Oregon Small Schools Initiative.

Equitable school

A school that excels at:

- Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system; removing the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any social, economic, or cultural factors.
- Interrupting inequitable practices, eliminating biases and oppression, and creating inclusive school environments for adults and children.

- Discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that each human being possesses.

(Definition courtesy of BayCES, the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools)

Expert Faculty

A group of education experts from across the nation who advise Initiative staff and occasionally provide professional development to Partnership Schools.

Fouts & Associates

An independent firm providing external evaluation of the Initiative for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

High achieving school

A school that demonstrates evidence of the 'New Paradigms' category on the School Change Rubric (defined in this Glossary), and demonstrates evidence of:

- Eliminating the achievement gap (removing the predictability of success or failure that correlates with race, gender, home language, or economic status).
- Increased graduation rates for all students.
- Increased number of students who are eligible to be admitted and prepared to succeed in postsecondary education.

New Start School

A small school that had not opened its doors prior to the inception of the Initiative. New Start Partnership Schools may reflect different forms, including public charter, alternative, or magnet schools, but all will follow the Initiative's Core Agreements and will pursue equity and high achievement.

Partnership School

Any school adhering to the partnership requirements and officially receiving funding and support from the Initiative.

Partnership School Network

A collaborative association of Initiative schools. Schools in the Network will provide mutual support and share best practices in school redesign.

Partnership requirements

A set of district and school level provisions as defined in the Partnership and New Start School Agreements that all partnering districts and schools must follow.

Program officer

Official representatives of the Bill & Melinda Gates and Meyer Memorial Trust foundations assigned to oversee their organizations' relationship with the Initiative.

Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships

These "three R's" underscore essential components of high achieving and equitable small schools: challenging academics, authentic learning experiences, and a personalized approach to teaching and learning.

Rigor: Students acquire knowledge and skills central to core disciplines or content areas, and methods of inquiry, higher order thinking skills, and habits of mind, that are applied to unique and complex situations both within the classroom and beyond the classroom walls.

Relevance: Activities, learnings and content applied in real world settings that serve a real need or solve a real problem, and/or that connect with an individual student's personal or career interests, passion or goals.

Relationships: Positive, sustained adult relationships, allowing the adult to 1) mentor the student and introduce him/her to the adult environment or networks, and/or 2) know the student's strengths, interests and goals in order to use these to inform instructional strategies or activities provided.

School Change Coach

Initiative staff that provides ongoing technical support for Partnership Schools. Coaches work closely with school leaders and personnel on all aspects of the school design and transformation work.

School Change Coordinator

School-level leader who leads and supports the design and transformation work at their site. Change Coordinators work closely with School Change Coaches to coordinate Initiative support.

School Change Rubric

A comprehensive tool designed by Initiative staff to help educators and others interested in high school redesign better understand the critical elements of high achieving and equitable small high schools. The Rubric will be used to guide the design of small schools as well as to assess the school's progress toward the New Paradigm level of the Rubric. It reflects the thinking of the Initiative Design Team, national research on best practices in school redesign, and suggestions from the Initiative's Advisory Cabinet and expert faculty.

School Change Rubric Terminology

Strand

A broad category of school design issues found in the School Change Rubric. The Rubric contains four strands: *School Structure & Culture*, *Teaching & Learning*, *Leadership Development*, and *Community Engagement*.

Descriptor

Brief statements in each dimension of the Rubric that explain educational practices. Three levels of descriptors are articulated for each Rubric dimension: A basic level entitled 'Early Steps', a more advanced level entitled 'Growing Innovation', and an exemplary level entitled 'New Paradigms'.

Dimension

A sub-category of school design found in the School Change Rubric. The Rubric contains 5-6 dimensions under each strand for a total of 22 dimensions. One dimension – equity – is found in all four strands.

New Paradigms

The third – and highest – level of practice on each dimension of the Rubric. Schools operating at the New Paradigms level can serve as models for other schools across the nation.

Small school

A school with an enrollment of 400 students or less.

SECTION III: Tools

MESSAGES

Effective communications depend on clarity and consistency. By identifying your core messages up front, you can be sure to convey the information that will advance your work regardless of the opportunity. Even when invited to comment by others, make sure to refer back to your key messages to get your story across.

Your core messages should address four areas:

- ❑ Vision: What will success look like?
- ❑ Problem/Risks: Why is the change necessary? What is at stake?
- ❑ Opportunity: What solutions are you proposing to the problem?
- ❑ Call to Action: What role can people play?

Each message should be grounded in evidence and brought to life with illustrations.

The messages below, developed for the statewide Initiative, are based on public opinion and best practices research. Each is offered for adaptation by Partnership Schools.

Message 1: A great high school education for *every* student.

An education that prepares *all students* for college, work and life:

- Teachers and other adults who know and support them [*relationships*].
- Relevant coursework that relates to their passions, engages them in the community and enables them to apply what they are learning [*relevance*].
- High standards that challenge them and prepare them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in school, work and life [*rigor*].

Local Adaptation: Vision Message

Use this or similar language to paint the picture of what effective schools look like and accomplish.

Message 2: Oregon's high schools need to change.

Since Oregon set high standards for the skills and knowledge students need to succeed, student performance and achievement has improved. However, our large, impersonal high schools are not working:

- Only half of students meet state standards for reading, writing and math (Oregon Dept. of Education, www.ode.state.or.us).
- Only 1-in-4 Oregon students graduates ready for college (Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, www.manhattan-institute.org).

- Half of those who do attend college require remedial courses to make up for what they didn't learn in high school (Oregon University System, www.ous.edu). The majority of employers and college professors say high school graduates' skills are "fair" or "poor" (Public Agenda, 2002, www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=25realitycheck.h21).
- Twelve percent of students drop out, with African-American and Hispanic students leaving school at twice that rate (Oregon Dept. of Education, www.ode.state.or.us).
- College graduates earn 70% more than high school graduates. High school dropouts are four times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed. 60 percent of new jobs in the 21st century will require skills possessed by only 20 percent of the current workforce. Equalizing access to college among blacks, Latinos and whites would add as much as \$230 billion to the gross domestic product and generate \$80 billion in new tax revenues (*Doubling the Numbers*, Richard Kazis, 2003, www.jff.org/jff/kc/library/0207/index_html).

Local Adaptation: Problem/Risk Message

Use local data within the context of state and national data.

Message 3: Research shows that small schools work.

Research shows that effective small schools work better for all students:

- They are more flexible and responsive to students, parents and teachers.
- Teachers see fewer students each day, and can create more personalized coursework.
- Small schools have demonstrated success in promoting equity, i.e., ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants, removing the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any social, economic or cultural factors (BayCES, www.bayces.org). All students achieve, overcoming the achievement gap now faced by students of color and those from low-income families.
- Students are safer, have better attendance and behavior, demonstrate higher achievement and are more likely to graduate.

Local Adaptation: Opportunity Message – Big Picture

This "big picture" message conveys what research has demonstrated about the link between small schools and improved outcomes for students.

Message 4: The Initiative provides resources to create model schools.

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative, a multi-year, \$25 million effort, will create new small high schools, by restructuring 12 or more large high schools into small schools, and by helping local innovators develop 12 or more new small high schools. Each small school will:

- Enroll fewer than 400 students.
- Serve as a center for powerful teaching and learning, based on a decade of research into the attributes of high-performing schools.

- Function as an autonomous small school – not a small learning community within a larger school – with independence in budgeting, staffing, space, curriculum, scheduling, and leadership and governance.

The Initiative will provide: training; funding and technical assistance to support school-wide planning; restructuring; professional development for teachers and administrators; curriculum; and family and community partnerships.

Local Adaptation: Opportunity Message – Local Plan

Describe what your plans are – how your community will work together to improve outcomes for students. Be specific.

Message 5: The Initiative is a catalyst for systemic change.

The Initiative aims to spark change throughout Oregon’s high schools by:

- Supporting Small School Initiative Partnership Schools to lead by example, sharing experiences, successes and mistakes.
- Offering online learning tools and professional development opportunities for all Oregon schools.
- Raising awareness in Oregon’s communities about the need to improve high school education.
- Working with state and community partners to remove policy barriers that prevent innovation.

Local Adaptation: Opportunity Message – Statewide Role

You may choose to describe how your local efforts are part of a broader change process that will benefit students throughout Oregon.

Message 6: The community is a vital partner.

Transforming high schools requires everyone’s commitment:

- Students, parents, employers, teachers and principals – all must expect, demand, and support changes that ensure *all* students succeed in high school.
- All must do their part to make high school learning more relevant to students – bringing real-world experience and challenges into high school.
- Persistence and vision will pay off in students better prepared for the workforce, college and for the responsibilities of citizenship. Without strong schools, our economy and civic life suffer.

Local Adaptation: Call to Action Message

Let each audience know what you need them to do to reach your goals.

LOGO USAGE

The E3 and Oregon Small Schools Initiative logos may be used in communication materials, such as joint press releases, by making a request to your School Change Coach. Such materials will require the approval of the School Change Coach prior to printing and/or distribution.

BOILER PLATE LANGUAGE FOR MEDIA RELEASES

E3 expects that the language below be used near the end of every news release that is issued regarding participation in the Oregon Small Schools Initiative: (See sample media release on page 19)

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative is a program of E3: Employers for Education Excellence, funded by a \$25 million grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. E3: Employers for Education Excellence promotes high academic standards and strong community involvement to prepare *all* Oregon students for success in post-secondary education and employment. For more information, visit www.E3oregon.org.

The following quotes may be used in news releases; your School Change Coach can assist you in acquiring other quotes from Initiative staff or funders as needed.

"Our high schools must do better – preparing students for college, giving them skills they need in the workplace and helping them achieve their highest potential," said Doug Stamm of Meyer Memorial Trust. "The Oregon Small Schools Initiative will help lead the way."

"_____ has brought together teachers, students, parents and the community to personalize learning and set high expectations for all students," said Karen Phillips, Oregon Small Schools Initiative Director. "The new Oregon small schools are creating a wonderful model for the outstanding small high schools of the future."

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

You may incorporate portions of this FAQ developed for the statewide Initiative into your local materials.

What is the Oregon Small Schools Initiative?

The Initiative is a multi-year, \$25 million statewide program to increase student achievement and graduation rates in Oregon high schools. It will help communities develop both restructured and new high schools that offer a rigorous, personalized education to all students, and which will serve as models for the rest of the state. A particular focus is on traditionally underserved students – those from low-income homes and students of color.

Why is the Oregon Small Schools Initiative necessary?

Oregon 's high schools need to change – our large, impersonal high schools simply fall short for too many of our students:

- Only half meet state standards for reading and math.
- Only one-in-four Oregon students graduates truly ready for college; half of those who do attend college require remedial courses.
- Statewide, only about three-quarters of Oregon students graduate from high school, and dropout rates among African-American and Hispanic students are more than twice the state average.

In today's economy – where college graduates earn 70 percent more than high school graduates, and dropouts are four times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed – Oregon can't afford to let its high schools fail so many students.

Why are smaller schools better?

More than ten years of research demonstrates that when schools are smaller, teachers and other adults form close, supportive relationships with students. Relevant coursework engages students in the community, and allows them to apply their learning. And students meet high standards that challenge them and prepare them with knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college, work and life. In small schools, students are safer, have better attendance and behavior, demonstrate higher achievement and are more likely to graduate.

How will the initiative measure success?

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative created a School Change Rubric that specifies the indicators of a high-performing high school. Schools will be evaluated on their progress in four arenas: school culture and structure, teaching and learning, leadership development, and community engagement. Ultimately, the rigorous, personalized teaching and learning at small schools will increase student achievement, as measured by graduation rates, test scores and the number of students who graduate truly prepared for college. Initial measures will include higher student attendance rates, greater satisfaction among students, parents and school staff, and increasing parent, community and student engagement in their schools.

Who is eligible for the Oregon Small Schools Initiative?

The Initiative intends to help Oregon high schools improve achievement among all students, particularly students of color and those from low-income homes. More than 50 high schools in Oregon meet eligibility standards of:

- Enrollment greater than 700 students
- Either 25 percent of students from low-income families, or at least 20 percent low-income and 15 percent students of color

Twenty-three Oregon high schools applied to participate in the first round of conversion work; eight were selected.

Which schools are participating?

In late April 2004, eight Partnership Schools were selected as the first cadre of schools to convert from large high schools into small, autonomous schools. Together, they encompass the range of Oregon 's large high schools, representing rural, suburban and city schools, and serve more than 11,000 students, including many students of color, immigrants learning English and youth from low-income homes. The high schools selected are: Lebanon High School, Liberty High School in Hillsboro, Marshall High School in Portland, Newberg High School, North Eugene High School, both North and South Medford High Schools, and Woodburn High School.

How are schools selected?

In the first round of funding, applicants went through an extensive self-assessment process, measuring their schools against benchmarks established by the Initiative in four key areas: school structure and culture, teaching and learning, leadership development, and community engagement. Through site visits to finalists, Initiative staff, members of the Small Schools Advisory Cabinet and other experts from educational organizations in Oregon met with school and district staff, students, parents, and community members. The Advisory Cabinet invited all eight finalists to join the first cadre of Partnership Schools, because each demonstrated that they were ready to tackle the significant challenges of transforming into small schools.

How much funding will each high school receive?

The high schools participating in the first round of the Oregon Small Schools Initiative will receive extensive coaching and technical assistance, along with direct funding to support their transformation into autonomous small schools. The first payment – an advance of \$25,000 for pre-planning – was made in May 2004. Further payments will be made every September 10 and March 10, based on annual action plans and budgets. The total funding for each school will be from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million, depending upon their enrollment and school needs.

When will the small schools open?

Marshall, Liberty and Lebanon high schools each plan to open as four small schools in the fall of 2004. Each of the other high schools will work with the initiative to develop their transformation plans, which will include opening at least one small independent school by the fall of 2006.

Does creating new schools mean building new buildings?

Actually, the large high schools that are transforming into a cluster of small high schools are reconfiguring their existing buildings creatively – often by splitting up separate wings of the school. They may remodel to truly separate the physical spaces for each school, or to be sure each small school has amenities such as science labs. In many cases, the smaller schools may choose to share some common spaces, such as a library or counseling office, within their larger campus.

Will this mean smaller class sizes? And what about sports teams, electives, and extra-curricular offering?

Each small school will develop its own answers to these questions based on the needs and interests of its community. In other conversions around the country, athletics and other activities are provided as shared services.

What will the grant money pay for?

School budgets throughout the state are tight. But the Oregon Small Schools Initiative is designed to push for increased student achievement, no matter what the operating budget of the school. When measured by cost per graduate, the cost of operating small schools compares favorably with large schools. The grant funds will pay for initial needs for schools to make the transition to small, high-performing models. Those costs may include: professional development, technical support and consultants; reimbursement for substitutes or staff overtime for planning, collaboration and curriculum design; stipends for teachers and other staff for extra-duty work; start-up spending for site visits, conferences, resource books and supplies; limited spending on materials, hardware or software; activities and planning to engage parents and the community. The grant money will not pay for ongoing staffing or operations or replace existing dollars.

What's next for the Initiative?

In spring 2005, the Initiative will name another round of large high schools to be restructured into autonomous small schools, for a total of 12 schools to be transformed. In addition, the Initiative is helping local innovators, whether school districts or community groups, as they develop 12 or more new small high schools. The first round of new small school projects, which may be public charter or magnet schools, will be announced in fall 2004.

Can eligible schools apply again?

Absolutely. The Initiative will continue to encourage all Oregon schools to continue to improve their teaching and learning in keeping with the best practices at the heart of the small schools framework. The eight schools named in spring 2004 were the most ready to take advantage of the Initiative's support –

and most likely to become models for other high schools in their footsteps. The self-assessment and feedback from the Initiative teams' evaluations should prepare schools that applied in the first round to be even better prepared to compete for the second round of funding.

Will other schools benefit?

The Initiative expects to spark change throughout Oregon's high schools. Partnership Schools will lead by example, sharing experiences, successes, and mistakes. All Oregon high schools will be invited to access online learning tools and selected professional development opportunities. And the Initiative will work with state and community partners to remove policy barriers that prevent innovation.

How can the community support high school transformation?

Students, parents, employers, teachers and principals – all must expect, demand, and support changes that ensure all students succeed in high school. All can do their part to make high school learning more relevant to students – bringing real-world experience and challenges into high school.

How is the Initiative managed and funded?

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative is funded by a \$25 million grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Initiative is a program of E3: Employers for Education Excellence. Founded in 1996 in partnership with the Oregon Business Council, E3: Employers for Education Excellence promotes high academic standards and strong community involvement to prepare all Oregon students for success in post-secondary education and employment.

Where can I learn more about the characteristics and value of small high schools?

Web sites with information about small high schools include:

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – www.gatesfoundation.org
Institute for Research and Reform in Education – www.irre.org
Small Schools Workshop – www.smallschoolsworkshop.org
Successful Charter Schools - www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charter
National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities - www.edfacilities.org
New Technology Foundation - www.newtechfoundation.org
Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound - www.elob.org
EdVisions - www.edvisions.coop
Early College - www.earlycolleges.org

For more information on the Small Schools Initiative or to get its monthly e-newsletter, email karenphillips@E3oregon.org, or call 503-595-7600.

TEMPLATES

Media Release from April 2004

E3: Employers for Education Excellence today announced the first eight high schools invited to participate in the Oregon Smalls School Initiative, a project to increase student achievement and graduation rates in Oregon's high schools.

The high schools selected are: Lebanon High School, Liberty High School in Hillsboro, Marshall High School in Portland, Newberg High School, both North and South Medford High Schools, North Eugene High School, and Woodburn High School.

Together, the schools encompass the range of Oregon's large high schools, representing rural, suburban and city schools and serving a wide variety of students, including many students of color, immigrants learning English and youth from low-income homes. What unites the schools is a commitment to raise graduation rates and eliminate the achievement gap by transforming into autonomous, rigorous high schools with no more than 400 students.

Each school will receive grant funds and intensive coaching and technical assistance to carry out the transformation. In some cases, the schools are planning to break into smaller schools as soon as this Fall. Other schools will spend the next year or two preparing for that transformation.

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative's Advisory Cabinet had originally intended to invite four or five high schools to participate in the first round of partnerships. However, at a meeting Tuesday, the Cabinet was impressed by the readiness demonstrated by all eight finalists and decided to include each in the first cadre of Initiative-supported schools.

"Through their hard work and the commitment of their community, each of these high schools has proven that they are ready to take the next step with us, developing small high schools that will challenge and support *all* students to achieve at high levels," said René Léger, E3's executive director, who noted that currently only 1 in 4 Oregon students graduates ready for college. "Together, we will create model high schools to inspire all of Oregon, and the nation."

The multi-year, \$25-million Oregon Small Schools Initiative represents the largest private investment ever in Oregon's K-12 school system. The Meyer Memorial Trust and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation together support the Initiative, which they intend as a catalyst for improving high school education throughout Oregon.

"Our high schools must do better – preparing students for college, giving them skills they need in the workplace and helping them achieve their highest potential," said Doug Stamm of Meyer Memorial Trust. "The Oregon Small Schools Initiative will help lead the way."

"These schools have brought together teachers, students, parents and the community to personalize learning and set high expectations for all students," said Karen Phillips, Oregon Small Schools Initiative Director. "Each community and each high school is unique, and the small schools created will offer a wonderful range of models for the outstanding small high schools of the future."

The eight Partnership Schools named today are the first cadre in the Initiative's work in Oregon communities. More than 50 large Oregon high schools that serve significant minority and low-

income populations were eligible for the initiative, and 23 submitted applications. The Partnership Schools were chosen for their readiness and commitment to reconfigure into small schools, as evidenced through detailed application materials and site visits. Next year, the Initiative will select another round of schools, for a total of 12 or more large high schools restructured into autonomous small schools.

The Initiative will also help local innovators, whether school districts or community groups, develop 12 or more new small high schools. Each school will reflect the latest research and best practices in teaching and learning, leadership and community involvement. The first round of new small school projects will be announced in Fall 2004.

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative's reach will extend beyond the two-dozen high schools chosen to participate directly. These schools will lead by example, sharing their experiences, successes, and mistakes. The Initiative will offer online learning tools and professional development opportunities for all Oregon schools, and will work with state and community partners to remove policy barriers that prevent innovation at the high school level.