

Chapter 2

Twelve Principles for High School Renewal

At an important turning point in our study, the High School Task Force agreed upon a comprehensive vision that makes student learning and performance the organizing principle for our endeavors.

We reached consensus on a set of principles that were common across longitudinal studies of effectiveness and other reports. We believe the adoption of the Twelve Principles will improve student performance in Vermont's high schools.

We recognize that the Principles are not immutable; they will evolve as we continue to work for congruence between the vision they embody and the many requirements and demands that already challenge our schools and school districts.

In this chapter, the Task Force lists a few of the practices that embody each Principle. Many of the practices, it should be noted, embody several Principles, and not all practices that support a Principle have been listed. Appendix B outlines a rubric designed to help schools and communities communicate and assess progress toward the Twelve Principles in their own schools. Appendix C relates the Twelve Principles to New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) standards and Vermont's *School Quality Standards*.

The Task Force urges educators, families, students, citizens and policy-makers to:

- Embrace these Principles
- Assess high schools in relation to the Principles
- Join a statewide dialogue on how we can broaden support for the Principles
- Strive together for the renewal of our schools centered on the vision the Principles represent





Twelve Principles for High School Renewal in Vermont

- 1 Engaged Learners**
Students are engaged learners who are responsible for and actively involved in their own learning.
- 2 Challenging Standards**
Each student is expected to demonstrate that he or she has met challenging standards based on *Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* or national standards.
- 3 Multiple Pathways**
High schools provide each student with a variety of learning opportunities and multiple pathways to meet graduation requirements.
- 4 Personalized Learning**
High schools create small, personalized and safe learning environments that provide students with stable support from adults, caring connections to mentors and a sense of belonging.
- 5 Flexible Structures**
High school schedules and organizations are flexible to allow time for varied instructional activities and to provide an integrated learning experience. Learning is the constant; time is the variable.
- 6 Real-Life Experiences**
Students learn about careers and college opportunities through real-life experiences and adult interaction, including work-based learning, service learning, career exploration, job shadowing and career academies.
- 7 Instructional Leadership**
Adults in the school use research-based practices and effective administrative and instructional strategies to support increased student performance.
- 8 Alignment**
Supported by research-based professional development, high schools align their curricula, instruction and assessment with Vermont's *School Quality Standards*.
- 9 Shared Purpose**
Every high school adopts and publicizes a compelling vision and mission that uses a results-oriented approach to promote continuous improvement.



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Pre-K-16 Continuity

Every high school is a member of a pre-K-16 education system and is a partner with middle schools, colleges and post-graduation training programs to help students make successful transitions.

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Family Participation

Families are active participants in their young adults' education and have varied opportunities to volunteer, serve on decision-making groups, assist students in setting learning goals, monitor results and support learning at home.

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Community Partnerships

Every high school forms active partnerships with families, community members, business people, civic leaders and policy-makers to ensure fiscal support and to expand student learning opportunities.

“When a pupil asks ‘What am I doing here?’ we need to know that she wants to propose her own answers to that question, whether or not the larger system is attentive or responsive. And if we listen and respond, a new energy source for school reform can be triggered by our response: ‘What are you personally planning to do?’ ”

David Gibson with John Clarke,
*Growing Toward Systemic Change:
Developing Personal Learning Plans
at Montpelier High School*

Principle 1: Engaged Learners

Students are engaged learners who are responsible for and actively involved in their own learning.

Rationale

The purpose of high school is not to prepare students for a particular adult role. Instead, schools should help students explore their interests and aspirations and understand their career opportunities and the value of learning. The high school experience should expand from the classroom into the community to demonstrate real-world applications of knowledge. It should aid students in maturing and in learning how to make informed, well-reasoned choices. Students should acquire knowledge and learn how to use that information to solve the problems in life and work.

Our common purpose should be to develop high schools where students graduate ready to take on active roles as adults in their communities. Our central focus should be to allow students to develop their roles by actively engaging them in the workplace, community, post-secondary institutions and electronic networks as well as in the classroom. The way schools are organized and the way classrooms engage students should be centered on student needs and involving students in their own education.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Student participation in setting learning goals
- Using teaching strategies (e.g., metacognition, reflection) that adapt to different learning styles
- Personalized learning, personal learning plans and portfolios
- Graduation challenge/capstone programs

Principle 2: Challenging Standards

Each student is expected to demonstrate that he or she has met challenging standards based on *Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* or national standards.

Rationale

Engaging students in the direction of their own learning process begins with a clear statement of the expected performance against common standards. Instead of requiring the accumulation of credits in particular subject areas, these performance standards should be relevant to the acquisition of skills and knowledge sufficient to succeed in adult life.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Making use of Vermont's *School Quality Standards* and adopting standards-based graduation requirements
- Expanding Advanced Placement (AP) programs and raising standards for special needs students
- Increasing the level and challenge of required course sequences
- Eliminating low-level courses and the non-college track
- Teaching reading and writing across the curriculum
- Expanding dual enrollment opportunities

“In numerous surveys, high school students have expressed their belief that their future success in the job market depends only on whether they graduate, not on their grades or what they learn.”

Laurence Steinberg, *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform has Failed and What Parents Need to Do.*

Principle 3: Multiple Pathways

High schools provide each student with a variety of learning opportunities and multiple pathways to meet graduation requirements.

Rationale

Each student has a unique learning style. Students who spoke with the Task Force emphasized this point and asked that high schools stop putting arbitrary barriers in the way of their natural desires and interests in learning. While most young people understand the need to demonstrate mastery of a core set of competencies, they want to pursue their own investigation of learning, not a prescribed regimen of unrelated classes that are established by rules, requirements and traditions.

Students also asked for learning experiences that connect classroom knowledge to life experiences, acknowledging that their own pathways through life will require individualized preparation. They pointed out that the current disconnect between learning and real life often explains why an academic record is not a complete measure of a student's aspirations and potential. Nationwide studies affirm what our students are telling us: students have diverse learning styles, skills and attitudes. Working with these differences will produce better results than trying to re-work them.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Developing career academies, applied academics and career exploration opportunities in school
- Expanding and integrating community- and work-based learning opportunities
- Using multiple measures to assess achievement of standards
- Aligning high school standards-based transcripts and post-secondary admission requirements
- Adopting dual enrollment agreements with higher education institutions
- Establishing graduation challenge/capstone programs as culminating projects
- Developing working relationships between sending high schools and technical education centers



Principle 4: Personalized Learning

High schools create small, personalized and safe learning environments that provide students with stable support from adults, caring connections to mentors and a sense of belonging.

Rationale

Students learn best when they are in a physically, emotionally and intellectually safe and respectful environment. Personalized learning respects the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds, talents, interests and aspirations. Students face a world full of risks that only increase after graduation. To prepare students for their adult roles, high school must provide safe, supportive and encouraging environments allowing them to take risks, make mistakes and try again. Students need to be respected for who they are and what matters to them. They need to learn the importance of providing that same respect to others as they assume the mantle of adult citizenship.

High schools that have adopted a model of personalized learning in smaller learning environments are documenting improved student outcomes. When learning environments are smaller and more intimate, teachers and students can more easily get acquainted; teachers can spend more time with individual students; and students seem to benefit from the sense of belonging to a community. Whether this is the result of smaller groupings or other reforms related to smaller grouping currently is unknown, but there is little doubt about the contribution of small learning communities to improved outcomes.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Developing freshman academies and transition programs to adult life
- Organizing adult mentoring for all students
- Exploring school-within-a-school, house or other smaller learning community configurations
- Designing a comprehensive educational support system to assist each student

“...practices that do appear to make a difference, such as raising academic standards and giving students plenty of one-on-one support, are most easily realized in smaller cohesive groups.”

U.S. Department of Education,
Aiming High

Principle 5: Flexible Structures

High school schedules and organizations are flexible to allow time for varied instructional activities and to provide an integrated learning experience. Learning is the constant; time is the variable.

Rationale

The establishment of flexible structures is one of the most consistent recommendations the Task Force found in major research on high school reform. When school structures are flexible, the concept of the school day and the walls of the school no longer limit educational opportunities.

One flexible model that many Vermont high schools are now implementing is block scheduling, a school-day format of longer but fewer classes. Because teachers and students have more time in each class and fewer classes per day, interaction increases, potential subject matter for courses expands and innovative teaching methods are enabled. Increasing evidence shows that learning improves, teacher satisfaction and student attendance increase and more innovative coursework can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Flexible structures can be the building block for other aspects of school renewal. Personalizing learning, enhancing opportunities for professional development, encouraging curriculum innovation and providing students with work- and community-based learning opportunities all depend on flexibility in scheduling when and where learning happens.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Exploring a.m./p.m. structures: mornings for class instruction, afternoons for work- and community-based learning, extracurricular activities, professional development and integrated team planning
- Providing professional development opportunities and support to help faculty adapt to changes in scheduling
- Creating credit for personalized learning opportunities, such as travel-based learning, learning through internships and online learning
- Designing collaboratives among high schools and between high schools and technical education centers whether onsite, online or via distance learning
- Applying alternative systems for grouping students (not just by grade or age)



Principle 6: Real-Life Experiences

Students learn about careers and college opportunities through real-life experiences and adult interaction, including work-based learning, service learning, job shadowing, career exploration and career academies.

Rationale

Learning, like work, is a lifelong engagement. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, however, most formal education was directly related to community- and work-based activities. Young people learned by watching and working alongside their parents or through apprenticeships with master artisans. With the onset of the Industrial Revolution, educational systems began to separate work from learning.

Over time, the gap has grown between education and the work world. Concepts learned in the classroom have little real-world significance for many students because, in many cases, the classroom isn't connected to the world outside the school. Education cannot be delivered solely from textbooks and lectures; it must also include practical, hands-on experiences that challenge students to apply what they have learned in the classroom. Community- and work-based learning re-establish the connection between the classroom and the rest of the world by providing a bridge between theory and practice. Moreover, changes in the workplace emphasize the need for more highly skilled people whose training includes practical work experience.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Establishing internships, apprenticeships, career exploration, community service and work-based learning opportunities
- Designing graduation challenge/capstone programs with culminating exhibitions
- Using multiple measures to assess achievement of standards
- Developing strong partnerships between businesses and schools
- Alloting flexible blocks of time for instruction
- Building mentoring programs that link students to community advocates and other adults

“When students without community-based learning experience walk downtown to and from school, they look at buildings and do not know what goes on inside. Their learning is at the school. With internships, students are put into the buildings. They learn what makes a community and they gain an increased sense of belonging.”

Vermont high school teacher

“Teachers must teach to higher standards and help students achieve a deeper understanding of content. They must help all students, of all abilities and from all backgrounds, achieve high standards. Given this challenge, we need to establish an effective professional development system that helps teachers increase their content knowledge, gain necessary teaching skills and revise their school and classroom curriculum.”

Vermont Department of Education,
*Recommendations to Establish a
Statewide System of Educator
Preparation and Professional
Development*

Principle 7: Instructional Leadership

Adults in the school use research-based practices and effective administrative and instructional strategies to support increased student performance.

Rationale

Even if a high school’s leadership and faculty are fully committed to the Twelve Principles, revitalization of a school’s performance will depend on building, supplementing and supporting teachers with rigorous and effective professional development and improved administrative leadership and by removing obstacles to change. As noted by the Maine Commission on Secondary Education in *Promising Futures*:

The current teacher’s work life stems from a time when teachers were assumed to have “learned their field” in college and students were expected to “learn what the teacher knows.” The knowledge explosion and our increasingly sophisticated understanding of teens and their learning make this job definition harmfully obsolete. They will need to devise individualized learning activities for students, and their own knowledge and skills will need to expand in order to match the ever-widening variety of learning and teaching challenges presented by students. (34)

The most effective professional development is job-embedded, built into the very job of teaching. Research on effective professional development has pointed to a need for leadership in devising and implementing new models for developing skills in our teachers. Teachers lead their own professional development in these models, which are based on self-assessment and involvement in objective goal setting, design and execution. Administrative leadership skills include building continuous and ongoing community support for effective professional development. Difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and administrators is an additional challenge for effective, consistent educational leadership.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Supporting peer evaluation and conferencing over student work
- Preparing school leaders to focus on peer support and curriculum improvements, not just evaluation
- Using research-based models for professional development that fit professional challenges
- Using in-service time for faculty to collaboratively develop schoolwide professional development plans for each year, aligned with the school action plan
- Aligning individual professional development plans with the school action plan
- Supporting national certification opportunities for teachers
- Building business/education partnerships that provide teacher internships and opportunities for collaboration on curriculum development and teaching



“Vermont’s *Framework* helps to establish world-class standards that schools and communities need to address. To assure a successful future, Vermont students must have access to a quality education that enables them to perform as competent, productive and engaged members of the workforce and society.”

Vermont Business Roundtable,
From High School to Workplace

Principle 8: Alignment

Supported by research-based professional development, high schools aligns their curricula, instruction and assessment with Vermont’s *School Quality Standards*.

Rationale

As the introduction to *Vermont’s Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* states, “these standards provide practical, useful reference points for the development of local curriculum and assessment. They are intended as points of reference, not limitations. Many students will accomplish much more than these standards envision; yet the standards set the targets for what all students should be challenged, encouraged and expected to achieve.”

Most high schools have already begun the process of aligning local curriculum with the *Framework*. A few have even begun developing graduation requirements based on achievement of standards, not just completion of credits. These are important changes as they establish both a new set of expectations for students and teachers and promote better outcomes from our education process. The standards make expectations for their performance clear to all students so they can understand what they need to learn and be able to do.

The *School Quality Standards* require all Vermont high schools to establish a process to ensure that graduating students can demonstrate achievement and mastery of *Vermont’s Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*, including the Fields of Knowledge and the Vital Results, by 2005. Alignment of curriculum with the *Framework’s* standards is essential for fulfillment of the spirit and letter of the standards-based graduation requirement.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Conducting curriculum mapping to determine alignment with standards
- Developing standards-based units of study
- Using multiple measures to assess achievement of standards
- Developing standards-based portfolios to catalogue student performance related to standards
- Providing the support and means for faculty to develop the skills necessary to assist student mastery of *Vermont’s Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*

Principle 9: Shared Purpose

Every high school adopts and publicizes a compelling vision and mission that use a results-oriented approach to promote continuous improvement.

Rationale

Because so many stakeholders are involved in the success of our high schools, it is essential that schools devise, adopt and publicize a shared vision and mission developed through a collaborative and consultative process. Families, students, teachers, employers, social services, community organizations and other schools all should understand the school's mission and their own responsibilities and contributions.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Holding community forums to develop a shared purpose
- Incorporating post-secondary data (e.g., post-secondary enrollment and completion, student surveys and employment after graduation) into pre-K-12 assessment and using longitudinal outcomes research in action planning
- Using multiple measures to assess achievement of standards
- Developing strong partnerships between business, government and service agencies and schools
- Improving relationships between sending high schools and technical education centers

“The boundaries separating members of the education system—learners, teachers, family and community members—can easily suppress change. However, when a common vision supports systemic resonance, the boundaries flex and allow people to come into dialogue and synchronize in unexpected ways.”

David Gibson and John Clarke,
*Growing Toward Systemic Change:
Developing Personal Learning Plans at
Montpelier High School*

“High schools can most effectively enact meaningful changes through the support of and coordination with post-secondary systems and sending middle schools.”

Vermont High School Task Force

Principle 10: Pre-K-16 Continuity

Every high school is a member of a pre-K-16 education system and is a partner with middle schools, colleges and post-graduation training programs to help students make successful transitions.

Rationale

A strong pre-K-16 structure, linked by common goals and reform strategies, is critical to high school renewal. With the State Board of Education’s adoption of the Common Core of Learning in August 1993, Vermont recognized that the entire education system has a responsibility to provide all students with the means to master commonly defined, broad areas of knowledge and skills. Each step of the education continuum provides age-appropriate learning opportunities that are aligned with the state’s standards, with the shared goal of preparing each student for adult life. Alignment of learning experiences for students pre-K-16 is possible and it is necessary. To that end, high schools should:

- Develop partnerships to support success across systems, to answer questions like: How well are our high school graduates doing in college—not only college admission but college completion? Is every high school graduate college and/or work-ready?
- Clarify expectations for college and work success. Research tells us that the quality and intensity of the high school curriculum is the most important predictor of college completion.
- Focus professional development and instructional strategies on meeting the needs of each student and reducing secondary and post-secondary performance and aspiration gaps among groups of students.
- Continue building partnerships with post-secondary institutions to align standards-based transcripts with admission criteria.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Positioning the high school as hub of a comprehensive, community learning network that includes other schools, internships, work-based learning, home schooling and enrollment in college classes
- Establishing transition and orientation programs along the pre-K-16 continuum
- Developing pre-K-12 consultation structures
- Designing capstone projects that span several grades
- Aligning high school standards-based transcripts with post-secondary admission requirements
- Establishing mentoring relationships that support student progress

Principle 11: Family Participation

Families are active participants in their young adults' education and have varied opportunities to volunteer, serve on decision-making groups, assist students in setting learning goals, monitor results and support learning at home.

Rationale

Academic performance improves when families are involved in their children's educations. Blended families, single-parent families, two-wage-earner households, the demands of other children on the family—all of these make it a challenge to engage families in the school. Yet, the effort must be made. Families are an essential part of a student's support and nurturing, and schools cannot—nor should they—fill all needs of our youth. Preparing well-rounded, well-adjusted youth is a 24-hour a day job, and families must participate as partners with schools.

Moreover, families have an important role in creating and continuously improving the mission of the school itself. A school is most likely to be successful when the vision is collaboratively developed and when accountability is shared among students, educators, families and the community.

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Ensuing family input in student goal-setting and monitoring and in developing personalized learning plans
- Involving parents in school action planning and school leadership teams
- Scheduling “first day” events to begin the school year and a mid-year school report night to discuss school progress
- Establishing closer collaboration with home schooling families
- Engaging family participation in education to model lifelong learning
- Scheduling adequate, mutually convenient times for families and educators to meet
- Defining reasonable caseloads and flexible work days for guidance counselors to enable them to support increased interaction with families
- Scheduling regular parent/student/school forums to share ideas
- Integrating the goals of parent organizations into the school action plan
- Developing home/school compacts to guide a shared effort toward student learning

“Overall, 49 percent of students reported that their parents talked with them daily about school and 27 percent talked with them once or twice a week. Eighteen percent of students reported that their parents never talk with them about school and 7 percent reported that their parents talk with them less than once a month.”

Vermont Department of Health,
2001 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior
Survey

“We believe that one of the most promising strategies for helping young people improve academic achievement and labor market connections is to strengthen the links between local employers and schools.”

Committee for Economic Development, *The Employer’s Role in Linking School and Work*

Principle 12: Community Partnerships

Every high school forms active partnerships with community members, business people, civic leaders and policy-makers to ensure fiscal support and to expand student learning opportunities.

Rationale

Building community alliances is one of the key reform strategies identified by the New American High Schools program in a literature overview published by the U.S. Department of Education in 1999:

In order to prepare students for the many challenges they face, schools are learning to reach out to their local stakeholders to take full advantage of the resources available to them. Partnerships with employers, linkages with social service and other community organizations, and deeper bonds with family and teachers all benefit students. Although schools cannot lose sight of their primary mission and responsibilities—that of educating youth for productive lives—their capacity to do so can be substantially enhanced with the help of others. Partnerships with community-based organizations can alleviate the need for schools to address their students’ legal, medical, and financial issues single-handedly, while employers can help design curricula, serve on advisory councils, provide work-based learning activities, and serve as mentors. All of these relationships translate, in varying degrees, to improved student attitudes toward and engagement in school, better grades, higher graduation rates, enrollment in postsecondary education, and a host of other positive outcomes. (92)

This Principle is embodied in these effective practices:

- Positioning schools as the hub of a comprehensive, community, lifelong learning network and offering teachers and students work-based learning opportunities with employers and social service organizations
- Developing strong business/education partnerships
- Designing graduation challenge/capstone programs
- Offering community service learning opportunities and inviting community members to serve on capstone or graduation challenge review panels
- Using mentors to better guide students toward their aspirations and goals