

## Chapter 5

# Practices to Consider Phasing Out

At the Kidsfirst Conference in May 2000, Task Force members facilitated the first “Fishbowl” session in which 20 students from several Vermont high schools responded to the question: “If you could create your version of the idea high school, what would it look like?” In a frank discussion of their own high school experiences, students made clear the many challenges we confront as we work on a fresh vision of how our high schools can improve learning for all students.

In considering the structure of the system that we need to change, the Task Force consulted *Promising Futures*, a document developed by the Maine Commission on Secondary Education, which looked at the same conditions described by our students and courageously presented a list of practices that have since outlived their usefulness.

The Task Force believes that substantive improvement in high school learning cannot occur if we hold sacrosanct any of the structures and practices that currently define the high school experience. We recommend that schools, districts and communities carefully evaluate whether the practices outlined in this chapter continue to serve the best interests of all their students. If they do not, they should be phased out and replaced with practices aligned with relevant aspects of the Twelve Principles reported here.



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**“The manner in which a high school organizes itself and the ways in which it uses time to create a framework affects almost everything about teaching and learning in the school.”**

National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*

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## Phase Outs Pertaining to Learning and Teaching

# 1

**PHASE OUT: Master schedules that lockstep students' learning opportunities.**

**Why?** Effective learning activities respond to learners' and teachers' needs. Master schedules often confine activities to short, uniform periods, single-discipline curricula and few hands-on or experiential learning opportunities that address diverse styles and paces of learning.

**Consider instead ...**

**These Principles:**

4. Personalized Learning
5. Flexible Structures
6. Real-Life Experiences

**These Effective Practices:**

- Allocation of flexible blocks of time
- A.M./P.M. Structure: A.M. for class instruction; P.M. for co-curricular, professional development, integrated teams
- Capstone programs and individual studies
- Work-based, community and service learning

# 2

**PHASE OUT: Student loads that preclude effective teaching.**

**Why?** Teachers cannot effectively assign learning tasks and give regular, individualized feedback to students if they are responsible for too many students at one time.

**Consider instead ...**

**These Principles:**

1. Engaged Learners
4. Personalized Learning
7. Instructional Leadership

**These Effective Practices:**

- “House” concept: smaller student groups, core teacher teams from multiple disciplines, greater personalization
- Advisories
- Cross-high school networking (e.g., foreign language programs via Vermont Interactive Learning Network)
- Arranging mentors for all students and teachers

# 3 PHASE OUT: Classifying and teaching students by ability or interest (tracking).

**Why?** Students who spend their entire secondary years in lower track, homogeneous groups experience depressed aspirations, lower academic self-confidence and limited achievement.

## Consider instead ...

### These Principles:

2. Challenging Standards
3. Multiple Pathways
4. Personalized Learning

### These Effective Practices:

- Career pathways
- “Houses” that group students by interest or grade
- Personalized learning plans

# 4 PHASE OUT: Student assessments based only on grades or on forms of learning that require memorization and little application.

**Why?** Grade point averages (GPA), graduation based solely on grades as the measure of learning and growth and transcripts that report only grades serve few educational purposes and limit everyone’s understanding of achievement and success.

## Consider instead ...

### These Principles:

2. Challenging Standards
3. Multiple Pathways
4. Personalized Learning
6. Real-Life Experiences
8. Alignment

### These Effective Practices:

- Multiple measures to demonstrate achievement of standards, including personal portfolios, state and local measures
- Standards-based graduation and transcripts
- Learning goals, aligned with *Vermont’s Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*, set by student, family and faculty advisor
- Capstone projects or graduation challenge experiences

“We are trying to create some level of dissonance. As you embrace the Principles, you will come to understand that many current practices interfere with the journey to high school renewal.”

Vermont High School Task Force

“A 1999 survey of teachers in Vermont found that . . . 89.3 percent of high school teachers did not use a curriculum based on the Vermont standards. Further, in the same survey . . . 63 percent of high school teachers responded ‘no’ when asked if they used a curriculum that was reviewed for alignment with the state standards . . . These figures indicate that continued evaluation of implementation and the role of standards is necessary.”

National Conference of State Legislatures, *Teaching in Vermont: An Inventory of Policies and Practices*

## 5 PHASE OUT: Curricula and learning based solely on texts and teacher-determined goals, topics and activities.

**Why?** Curriculum will engage students in meaningful learning when student needs and interests and *Vermont’s Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities* are the basis for that curriculum.

Consider instead . . .

### These Principles:

1. Engaged Learners
2. Challenging Standards
3. Multiple Pathways
8. Alignment

### This Effective Practice:

- School as the hub of a comprehensive, community learning network that includes personalized learning plans, capstone projects, year-end learning periods, internships, work-based learning and dual enrollment options

## 6 PHASE OUT: A co-curriculum that is seen as “extra” curriculum.

**Why?** All student activities can be re-cast as learning opportunities when they are defined as an essential part of students’ learning experience. Student learning goals, in alignment with Vermont’s *Framework*, can provide a framework for the structure and evaluation of student activities.

Consider instead . . .

### These Principles:

3. Multiple Pathways
4. Personalized Learning
6. Real-Life Experiences
8. Alignment
12. Community Partnerships

### These Effective Practices:

- Linking goals of student organizations and activities to student progress and action plan
- Establishing goal-based evaluation systems for student activities with shared responsibility for assessment
- Linking individual co-curricular activities to individual learning plans
- Using co-curriculum to provide a full range of learning opportunities and experiences in alignment with Vermont’s *Framework*.

# 7

## PHASE OUT: Diploma requirements that use only Carnegie units based on traditional grading systems.

**Why?** The diversity of knowledge, skills and personal attributes that must be mastered to succeed in the world today, and the ability to integrate and apply this learning, cannot be categorized or measured by systems developed more than a half-century ago.

### Consider instead . . .

#### These Principles:

1. Engaged Learners
3. Multiple Pathways
5. Flexible Structures
6. Real-Life Experiences

#### These Effective Practices:

- Using multiple measures to demonstrate achievement of standards
- Establishing standards-based promotion and graduation
- Requiring personal learning plans, personal portfolios and capstone projects
- Requiring work-based and community-based learning opportunities

# 8

## PHASE OUT: Study halls that offer neither student and teacher educational interaction nor true opportunities for learning.

**Why?** Students should have opportunities for meaningful learning experiences throughout the school day. A study hall that is little more than leisure time is not education time well spent, nor does it optimize the investment we make in a professional faculty, technology and other resources.

### Consider instead . . .

#### These Principles:

1. Engaged Learners
2. Challenging Standards
3. Multiple Pathways
5. Flexible Structures

#### These Effective Practices:

- Community-based learning, service learning internships and other off-campus learning experiences
- Advisories
- Expanding student awareness of available supports
- Study groups that focus on student-initiated topics
- Regularly scheduled student “fishbowls” with teachers, administrators and the community
- Dual enrollment options

**“High schools must abandon or revise the Carnegie unit so that they no longer equate seat time with learning.”**

National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*

**“Central to the public’s belief in higher (educational) standards is what amounts to a philosophical rule of thumb for dealing with children. Ask more from them, and they will do more. Ask less, and they will do just enough to get by.”**

*Standards and Accountability: A Report from the Public Agenda for the 1999 National Education Summit*



## Phase Outs Pertaining to School Organization

### 9 PHASE OUT: The six-hour, five-day school week, September to June school year.

**Why?** Learning, especially learning that incorporates workplace and community-based projects, should occur when the best opportunities arise.

#### Consider instead ...

##### **These Principles:**

- 3. Multiple Pathways
- 5. Flexible Structures
- 6. Real-Life Experiences

##### **These Effective Practices:**

- Allocation of flexible blocks of time for instruction
- Extended or restructured school year
- Distance learning
- Split sessions
- Dual enrollment options

### 10 PHASE OUT: Limiting faculty organization to discipline-specific groupings.

**Why?** Teachers need to be part of instructional teams that focus on a core group of students as well as discipline-specific teams. Development of closer teacher and student relationships improves student learning and teacher satisfaction. Cross-disciplinary faculty teams provide additional professional support for teachers.

#### Consider instead ...

##### **These Principles:**

- 4. Personalized Learning
- 5. Flexible Structures
- 7. Instructional Leadership

##### **These Effective Practices:**

- Faculty teams that cross department lines
- Study groups for teachers
- Teacher-leaders in each school
- Cross-disciplinary teams of teachers assigned to a house (see small Learning Communities, chapter 4)
- Community-based teaching teams (e.g., art faculty plus local artists)

# 11

## PHASE OUT: Supervision and evaluation that ignore student outcomes.

**Why?** Meaningful evaluations will address performance criteria related to student learning and growth and be aligned with Vermont's *Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*.

### Consider instead ...

#### These Principles:

- 2. Challenging Standards
- 4. Personalized Learning
- 7. Instructional Leadership
- 10. Pre-K-16 Continuity

#### These Effective Practices:

- Use of longitudinal outcomes data (e.g., post-secondary enrollment and retention, student surveys)
- Peer evaluation and conferencing to evaluate student work
- Use data from educational support teams and action planning to develop teacher and administrator roles, responsibilities and subsequent evaluations

# 12

## PHASE OUT: Job descriptions or work assignments that are predicated on the assumption that teachers are working only when instructing groups.

**Why?** Time for planning, authentic assessment, individual student advisories, professional development and student and parent conferences need to be recognized as part of a teacher's work week.

### Consider instead ...

#### These Principles:

- 5. Flexible Structures
- 7. Instructional Leadership
- 12. Community Partnerships

#### These Effective Practices:

- Flexible use of time, including adjustment to teaching load, recognition of non-classroom time that includes professional development and individual student advisories
- Redefining educators' roles to include other professional responsibilities such as developing teacher mentoring programs for all new teachers, educational support team activities, work- and community-based learning coordination, teacher-leader roles, advisories, business-sponsored internships, etc. (see glossary)

**“One of the most critical barriers to providing professional development activities is not resources, but time. Without adequate non-instructional time during the school day, it is difficult to provide the sustained, curriculum-oriented opportunities encouraged by the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators (VSBPE), that have been proven by research to be more effective in raising student achievement.”**

National Conference of State Legislatures, *Teaching in Vermont: An Inventory of Policies and Practices*

# 13 PHASE OUT: Faculty meetings and structures that limit time for sharing professional information and perspectives.

**Why?** Faculty involvement in decisions about students, instructional matters, curriculum and educational policy will enhance a school's effectiveness.

## Consider instead ...

### These Principles:

8. Alignment
7. Instructional Leadership
9. Shared Purpose

### These Effective Practices:

- Faculty meetings jointly planned and delivered by faculty
- Meetings that group faculty in a variety of configurations and interdisciplinary teams
- Opportunities for faculty members to present student work that will serve as the focus for specific discussion
- Using faculty meeting time to align instructional programs with Vermont's *Framework*.

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**“When you hear faculty referring to in-service day as ‘donut day,’ you know they aren’t finding it meaningful. Filling, maybe, but not fulfilling.”**

Bob Stanton, Assistant Superintendent, Lamoille South Supervisory Union

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# 14 PHASE OUT: Decision-making processes limiting the role of students and families in key decisions regarding present and future learning opportunities.

**Why?** Involvement in decision-making increases student and family engagement in the learning process and improves school accountability to the community.

## Consider instead ...

### These Principles:

1. Engaged Learners
4. Personalized Learning
9. Shared Purpose
11. Family Participation

### These Effective Practices:

- Flexibility in scheduling and resources to give parents access to educators through office hours, voice mail, Internet bulletin boards, student-led conferences, etc.
- Personal learning plans
- Community dialogue nights
- Inclusion of students on school improvement teams and other leadership groups

# 15

## **PHASE OUT: Professional development that is not integrated with daily professional practice.**

**Why?** The most effective professional development is continuous and focuses on educators' learning needs—needs that, if answered, will improve an educator's ability to meet student learning needs. Educators themselves are best able to identify these needs and to plan professional development activities to meet them.

### **Consider instead . . .**

#### **These Principles:**

- 7. Instructional Leadership
- 9. Shared Purpose

#### **These Effective Practices:**

- Linking the school's professional development plan to the district plan and the Five Standards for Vermont Educators developed by the Vermont Standards Board for Professional Educators
- Emphasizing professional development models that are embedded in the work of teaching, such as teacher-leaders and peer coaches
- Alignment of professional development plans with national staff development council standards

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**“The fullest development of the intellect today makes it possible for them to continue developing visions of ever more remarkable human beings. The best way to predict the future, however, is to invent it now.”**

Arthur Costa, Ed.D

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## Phase Outs Pertaining to District, Community and State Support



# 16

### **PHASE OUT: Policies and procedures of the school, district and state that inhibit creativity and collaboration among faculty, between high schools and technical education centers and between secondary schools and their communities.**

**Why?** Policies and procedures, including contractually directed requirements, should function principally to serve student learning and to foster the attainment of *Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*. Stakeholders have often worked in isolation, developing significant plans that have resulted in competition instead of collaboration to benefit student learning.

#### Consider instead ...

##### **These Principles:**

- 7. Instructional Leadership
- 9. Shared Purpose

##### **These Effective Practices:**

- Evaluating school policies for harmony with learning goals
- Aligning district schedules to enable collaboration in curriculum and professional development
- Seeking waivers and removing barriers to innovation
- Building community partnerships resulting in collaborations on curricula and fostering enhanced learning opportunities for students and professional development for educators.
- Creating mentoring relationships that cross building and delivery system boundaries
- Providing opportunities for teachers to create integrated units of study and complete internships with businesses
- Organizing “fishbowl” sessions to let students, families and the community understand each others’ concerns and needs (see Appendix F)

# 17

**PHASE OUT: Parent and school organizations that focus on special interests and/or on fundraising for activities that have no clear educational mission or accountability framework.**

**Why?** Activities sponsored by the school should be examined in light of the school's mission and goals and the contributions made to student learning and development. If activities are not aligned with the core mission, they should be recast to provide authentic learning opportunities or considered for discontinuation.

### Consider instead . . .

#### **These Principles:**

- 8. Alignment
- 9. Shared Purpose
- 11. Family Participation

#### **These Effective Practices:**

- Educating parent and school support organizations about the school's vision and mission
- Linking all student-parent groups to action planning and using the planning process to focus community groups
- Linking goals of parent organizations to student progress and establishing a goals-based evaluation system with shared ownership
- If an organization cannot implement needed changes, consider whether it is worth retaining

