

# **College Readiness and High School Reform Whitepaper**

## **Addendum to the Report:**

### **Creating a College-Based Culture in the Monticello Central School District**

### **Curriculum Management Audit of the Honors Program Report of Findings**

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## **Introduction**

Recent research in the Monticello Central School District indicates the district's commitment to developing an educational environment that encourages students to practice lifelong learning and become productive citizens through the development of inquiring minds, compassionate hearts, creative expression, healthy bodies and service to the community. This whitepaper is an addendum to the curriculum audit of the Monticello School District honors program that examines the literature related to high school reform within the context of the district's goals and developing students who, upon graduating high school, are more prepared to work and study in the current knowledge economy.

In this knowledge economy, the demand for a highly skilled workforce is more important now than it has ever been. Economists, business leaders, and education experts predict that in this environment, jobs that require only a high school diploma will need to be filled by less than 30% of the workforce by 2018, indicating that the majority of jobs available by 2018 will require some form of post-secondary training (Carenvale, 2010). The College Board, a not-for-profit association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity (The College Board web site, 2010), published the disturbing finding that the United States now ranks number 12 in the world with respect to college graduates attaining at least an associate's degree. In this study, College Board reported that an average of 41.6% of the American population between the ages of 25 to 34 had earned an associates degree (Lee & Rawls, 2010). Studies on college readiness found that success in college, meaning earning a degree, is related to how well-prepared students are for college. Even when students are entering college, many are placing in remedial courses, which affects their ability to succeed in college or even complete a post-secondary degree (Conley, 2010).

With the demand for a more highly educated workforce, high schools can no longer be viewed as an end to ones education, but more as a preparation for post-secondary training and lifelong learning. The need for education change is being

advocated by school reform groups such as The Gates Foundation, whose education mission is focusing initiatives that establish higher learning standards, empower teachers to help students meet those standards, and support students to improve their overall academic performance (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009). Advocates with a more specific curriculum perspective, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning framework, see educational improvements as a key to economic competitiveness for the 21<sup>st</sup> century working environment, and so are prescribing curriculum and instructional changes tailored to prepare students for this future work environment (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Kay 2010).

Many high school students also understand this educational demand. When surveyed, students indicated a high level of expectations and the desire to meet post-secondary learning goals. For instance, in a survey on minority student expectations, student respondents stipulated that they understand the need for long-term preparation, indicating that they will definitely go to college, but feel that they will lack the skills needed to succeed in college by the time they finish high school. Furthermore, students (both minority and white) support the notion of schools requiring higher learning standards (Johnson et al., 2006). Related to student expectations, another study which focused on assessing student engagement, the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), data indicates that in 2009, 91% of survey respondents “expect to attain a HS diploma,” 87% expect to attain some form of post-secondary degree, and 81% expect to attain at least a bachelor’s degree. These findings correspond to findings from another HSSSE question related to respondents’ reasons for going to school. The survey results from the question, “Why do you want to go to school?” show that 73% of the students surveyed expressed that they “want to get a degree and go to college” (Yazzie-Mintz, p. 1 & 5, 2010).

These surveys should demonstrate to educators and parents that most high school students do embrace some notion of high learning expectations. However, the reality that many high schools face is that one in four students fall short of even

finishing high school on time, let alone completing some form of post-secondary training (Stillwell, 2010; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Part of the problem, as the research literature on student dropouts and disengagement indicate, is that many students are steeped in a school-wide belief system that does not hold all students to the same high level of expectation and that many students become disengaged from school (Bridgeland, et al., 2009; Jerald 2006; Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). Administrators and teachers in such schools argue that the curriculum for some students simply should not be attuned to preparation for college. This statement is based on a study of 603 public high school teachers and principals (Bridgeland, et al, 2009), where focus-group participant comments indicate a misalignment between student and teacher expectations. For example, when the teachers and principals were presented with the statement, “We should expect all students to meet high academic standards and provide extra support to struggling students to help meet those standards”, only 32% of teachers and 58% of principals agreed. In another statement, 59% of teachers and 41% of principals agreed with the statement that “We should have a separate track to allow students who are not college-bound to get a diploma without achieving standards.”

Data analysis reveals an emerging theme that involves the presence of several gaps within our education system. These gaps are: an expectations gap (what students expect versus teachers and administrator expectations); an achievement gap (how students fail to achieve expectations); and an engagement gap (how well students are engaged with their school).

### **The Expectations Gap**

Theoretically, the assumption is that teachers, principals and educational staff recognize the need for educational improvements. Thus, for instance, many programs aimed at improving student achievement levels and raising graduation rates are implemented within school systems, such as Small Learning Communities (SLC), career academies, and early intervention strategies. However, in reality, these programs might not always work to meet goals such as lowering student dropout

rates if rigorous learning standards are not be applied equally to all students. Despite students' desires for post-secondary goals, an expectations gap is created between what students expect from their education and what schools are providing (Bridgeland et al, 2009).

### **The Achievement Gap**

The achievement gap has typically been related to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) influenced interventions research and has resonated with district leaders to implement programs that better engage students and prevent dropouts (Johnson, et al., 2006). However, when seen from more of a K-16 perspective, student academic or career achievements add to the definition of the achievement gap, which aim at measuring post-secondary successes. For instance, if a student graduates with a high school diploma, enrolls in college, and ends up being directed to remedial college course work (and rarely finishing any college), these effects provide evidence to demonstrate an achievement disparity between what students learned in high school and how that may or may not have helped them achieve a fulfilling career (Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Conley, 2010). This suggests that what students achieve beyond high school is related to what they learned before they graduate. One measurement that has been used as an indicator of achievement is ACT test results. According to the 2010 ACT test data, of the 40% of U.S. high school graduates who took the ACT, only 24% of test-takers met all four of ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks (English Composition, College Algebra, social sciences, and Biology) and 28% met no benchmarks (ACT, 2010). This achievement disparity is further evidenced when a large number of students enter college each year and drop out after one or two semesters, or perhaps start careers only to find that they do not have the skills to hold a job beyond an entry-level position (Conley, 2010).

### **The Engagement Gap**

How well students are engaged with their school parallels their expectations and achievement. Without meeting expectations or achieving positive results, students can easily become disengaged, resulting in behaviors such as the development of an

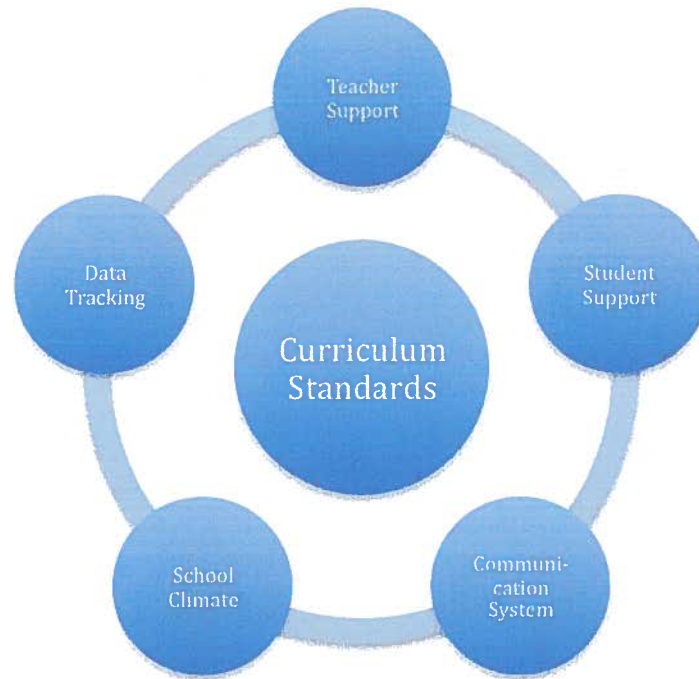
attitude of boredom to the more radical action of dropping out. Yazzie-Mintz (2010) defines engagement as a multi-dimensional concept that relates to a student's cognitive, intellectual, and academic engagement on the one hand (personal), and social, behavioral, participatory, and emotional engagement on the other (their school). Therefore, in order for students to be engaged, schools should "create programs and practices that connect students to schools," bridging personal and school perspectives (p. 1). When these perspectives are bridged, students make the connection between their choices of behavior as they relate to their schools. In other words, as schools teach and encourage behaviors such as self-efficacy and self-regulation, adults in the school provide the meaningful relationships that support students' affiliation with the school. Data from the HSSSE survey present evidence of student disengagement as students indicate their boredom (66% of respondents indicate that they are bored "at least every day in class in high school," p. 6) and consideration of dropping out (21% "considered dropping out at some point during high school," p. 7). Being bored or choosing to drop out is a result of disengagement which students report is due to "a lack of rigor and relevance in their work" (p. 9).

### **How can we as educators and stakeholders fill these gaps?**

As data presented in the literature reveal, there are disparities between students' expectation, achievement, and engagement and that of their schools'.

As worrisome an outlook as the evidence suggests, education reform research is being conducted and the findings are influencing the implementation of many school and district-wide programs (see Ferguson, et al, 2009 for examples). Such initiatives have focused on ways to improve student outcomes related to each of these gaps. Although there are no quick and easy solutions, schools can still focus on ways to overcome elements of these disparities. For instance, a survey of the literature suggests the use of a combination of standards-based curriculum, a student data tracking system, a clear communication network, a teacher-training piece, and an improved school climate to narrow these gaps.

The illustration below (*Figure 1*) presents a framework for high school reform based on current literature and the MSD honors program audit recommendations to help a school system implement changes.



**Figure 1: Framework for High School Reform**

A similar framework of five reform strategies as articulated in Toch et al. (2007) include “improving school climate, strengthening curriculum and instruction, raising graduation requirements, helping freshmen get up to speed, and preventing students from dropping out” (p. 434).

### **The Framework**

Underlying the framework is the conceptualization of a school district as a system, where ecological systemic change involves acknowledging how a change in one part of the school system affects other parts of the system (Reigeluth & Duffy, 2007). Therefore, a clear vision of curriculum change drives the other pieces of the framework as a school system and lies at its center.

The components of the framework include:

- **Curriculum standards** – This is a set of standards that functions as a set of objectives and evaluation criteria that a school district uses to influence curriculum reforms and monitor success. It is based on the skills needed for post-secondary success and lifelong learning. These standards are rigorous and equally applied to all students. Two examples that influence curriculum standards are the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (see Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Bellanca & Brandt, 2010) and The Four Dimensions of College and Career Readiness (Conley 2010). President Obama’s *Race to the Top* fund is another example of a federal grant-based curriculum reform strategy (The White House, 2010).
- **Teacher support** – Districts should provide support to teachers who are adapting curriculum standards, regardless of student backgrounds or academic levels. Teacher support also includes training on using student data, creating a college-going culture in the school, teaching in a more heterogeneous classroom, and learning how to identify students who need extra support to meet the new rigorous standards (Conley, 2010).
- **Student support** – Holding all students to the same curriculum standards means that many students will need extra support. Support for students can come in the form of extra adult-supervised interactions that provide students with opportunities to develop skills through focused activities in initiatives such as after-school programs (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Furthermore, in small learning communities and career academies, need for support can be identified and help provided for students who are struggling. These programs, when combined with early intervention strategies based on interpretation of student data, increase the efficacy of school reform efforts (Bridgeland, et al., 2009). Student support also involves getting parents involved as partners in the process to help students meet post-secondary learning goals (Fann, et al., 2009; Yamamura, et al., 2010)
- **Data Tracking** – Student data can be used to identify students early on to recommend interventions. Essentially, data tracking functions as an early warning intervention system that tracks students by mining data on grades, attendance, and behavior referrals to prevent student attrition or to install

remediation strategies before either becomes an issue (Lachat, 2001; Heppen & Therriault, 2009; Neild, et al, 2007; Allensworth & Eaton, 2010)

- **Communication System** – With a clear set of curriculum standards in place, school districts should have an open and effective communication system that helps keep all schools and stakeholders focused on the curriculum themes of rigor or high expectation. This is achieved through a clear district mission statement and the sharing of data about student performance between grade levels (especially transition grades) among teachers, school leaders, and parents in order to help keep students on a rigorous academic track. An effective communication system ensures that all stakeholders know and understand the meaning of terms such as “high expectations” and rigor (Bridgeland, et al, 2009; Ferguson, et al, 2009).
- **School Climate** – A school climate signals to students the expectations for success and the results of being successful in a positive and supportive way. This means creating an environment where adults in a school help students connect with the school and establish ways to reach the rigorous learning goals. A positive school climate provides engaging experiences to help students build their capacity to learn along with the desire to learn especially related to post-secondary goals (Quint, 2006; Quint et al, 2008).

### **The basis of the framework**

The framework is based on the results of the Monticello School District’s (MSD) Honors Program curriculum audit. In the audit report, several recommendations were made based on the analysis of evidence collected during the audit. After reading a draft of the audit, the MSD Superintendent requested that the audit team elaborate on recommendations in the audit report. This prompted the audit team to review relevant literature related to their recommendations within the context of school reforms.

The audit team believes that the MSD serves as a prime example of the challenges many other school districts face. The MSD schools are often described as “rural

schools with urban characteristics,” that is, the district is a rural district that has to deal with urban issues such as educating a majority-minority student population and students from a low SES environment. To prompt change in the district and fill the gaps described above, the MSD administration leaders decided to increase access to upper-level coursework for all students by opening their traditional honors program to all students, in effect creating a more equitable open-access honors program. Naturally, some stakeholders argued against this change, stating that when more students are added to a rigorous honors course, the curriculum may become diluted, causing traditional honors students to lose out.

How a school district like the MSD handles expectations, in some form, is leading the way for the larger demand for rigorously trained high school graduates and is emblematic of the paradigm shift of school districts toward a greater student-centered accountability model driven by a rigorous curriculum (Lachat, 2001).

The type of reform this paper’s framework exemplifies is simple: As students are offered more rigorous coursework, they are also provided support when needed to meet the new curriculum demands. This dynamic is propelled within a positive school climate and school system that communicates to teachers, students, and parents the high level of academics expected for all students. Teacher support is provided to help teachers assist students within this new environment, but students are still accountable for the work. The system is driven by a district mission, which is influenced by a set of universal research-based curriculum standards.

### **What a school district can do to facilitate change**

Based on our curriculum audit, our team has crafted a list of recommendations, which are supported by existing research literature and represented graphically by the framework above (Figure 1). Additionally, our team has identified several concerns voiced by district stakeholders in relation to how changes in the MSD honors program and the school system in general raised questions and concerns. This section addresses some key concerns by using current school reform literature to answer a few specific questions.

## **How do we create a college- and global workforce-ready culture?**

At the heart of the framework presented above is the notion that a set of curriculum standards drives a school district's curriculum policies and instructional practices. These standards are often based on the abstract notions of education as a means to prepare learners for the global workforce or simply, lifelong learning (Conley, 2010; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). However, as these ideas are operationalized and translated into actual classroom instruction, the intended aim of creating a "college- or global workforce-ready culture" can easily become lost in translation.

One useful way to begin the process of creating this new culture is for districts to clearly define a vision of what it means to be college- or career-ready by articulating this vision in a mission statement. To do so requires districts to have strong leadership that is willing to advocate for change based on an understanding of the need as illustrated in the expectations, achievement and engagement gaps discussed above. A recent report by the Achievement Gap Initiative (AGI) advises that through the mission creation process, district leadership should work with stakeholders to pinpoint particular needs and craft a mission statement. This statement should emphasize, "big picture outcomes of student learning," and strongly articulate the fact that "improving curriculum and instruction is a non-negotiable element" (Ferguson, et al., p. 18, 2010). The district mission should also be based on a purposeful, outcome-based, and rigorous set of academic standards guided by research-based learning principles (McTighe & Seif, 2010). The standards function as a set of analysis and evaluation criteria that school districts can use to influence reforms and monitor success. The district mission of high expectations for post-secondary preparedness is also something that should be communicated to every student (Bridgeland, et al., 2009).

The following is a list of practices school districts can employ in order to operationalize a mission based on the notion of college or global workforce readiness:

- Aim to prepare all students to successfully transition into a college or some form of post-secondary training.
- Publicly acknowledge academic success by displaying current and former students' college acceptance letters.
- Focus freshman year on introducing students to the notion that high school is designed to prepare them for college and career success (Conley, 2010).
- Train school counselors in middle school and high school on ways to better promote, guide, and support some form of college for students (Lee & Rawls, 2010).
- Reward students when they reach particular learning benchmarks such as scoring well on a standardized test or completing a challenging course (Qunit, et al., 2008).
- Redesign classroom space to better accommodate learner-centered education and the use of collaborative learning technologies (Pearlman, 2010).
- Publicly acknowledge how data are an essential component of the school system (Bambick-Sanoyo, 2010).
- Use freshman academies and SLC to create a community of support for 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition (Bridgeland, et al., 2009).
- Have teachers build better relationships with students by greeting them when they enter and leave the building. In order to engage students with their learning environment, students should connect with an adult member of the school community (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010).
- Hang posters around the school that clearly state the academic expectations to remind both teachers and students of the level of rigor expected and how it is judged (Ferguson, et al., 2010).
- Engage parents early on with information on their children's post-secondary options and how they can help their children meet rigorous academic goals (Yamamura, et al. 2010).

This list is not exhaustive, with more examples showing up in the literature that are shown to at least anecdotally have some effect on the improvement of student performance. The key is to sustain a culture throughout the entire school system where students can visibly see and experience the college and global workforce culture every day throughout their interactions with the school system and develop a sense of intrinsic motivation to achieve academic goals (Christensen et al., 2008).

### **How can teachers be supported in teaching classes at various levels?**

As district-wide curriculum changes are implemented based on a district vision for more rigorous coursework for all students, teachers may face new issues that their training has not prepared them for. For instance, some faculty may not know how to adapt their instruction to fit a more rigorous curriculum to an academically heterogeneous group of students. To overcome this issue, teachers can be supported primarily through professional development initiatives aimed at integrating curriculum standards, such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, into their instruction; developing a more district-wide open communication system; and training in how to effectively utilize student data.

One vein of professional development involves getting teachers to know and understand that their district's curriculum policy is based on high expectations of post-secondary preparedness applied to all students. Such knowledge is aimed at debunking any thoughts that certain students should have a less rigorous academic track (Bridgeland, et al. 2009; Johnson, et al., 2006). Regardless of how heterogeneous a class might be, all students should be held to the same rigorous standards while providing extra support for those who have shortfalls. Professional development initiatives can focus on several key areas: training teachers on the knowledge related to subject content, instructional strategies focused on improving students' cognitive skills, and information related to post-secondary college and career requirements (Conley, 2010).

The classroom does not exist in a vacuum; it is part of a school system. Teacher support is also about communication among grade levels, academic departments,

individual schools, and the school district. As a holistic system, each entity in a school system should refer to a common language when discussing curriculum and instruction as they revolve around the district mission. This facilitates the sharing of classroom and lesson plans to colleagues who can support each other by discussing best practices, especially when they are referring to ways to help students meet high-level curriculum demands (Ferguson, et al, 2009). Therefore, communication may take the form of discussions between teachers, parents, and students related to universally applied terms such as achievement, staying on track, how to understand feedback, and how coursework relates to college or a career (Bridgeland, et al, 2009).

Another aspect of teacher support involves understanding how the process of tracking student data can be used to improve curriculum and instruction. In other words, teachers need to understand how to use student data. Looking at data outside of the school system does not help teachers per se, but using the data to inform particular instructional choices and assess support needs can be beneficial when done correctly. One facet of this idea is how comprehensive student data can be shared across grades omni-directionally. Such data can help teachers and principals identify what kinds of student classroom support are needed, provide feedback related to what classroom support can be provided at earlier grade levels, and what type of instruction has or has not been effective. When teachers effectively understand how to use student data, they are then able to easily identify what has worked and not worked by longitudinally tracking student data. Using the data, teachers working with district curriculum leaders can create predictors for student success and identify patterns that may lead to failure to both verify instructional practices and gauge when to implement interventions before it is too late (Lachat, 2001).

### **How do you assess student preparedness for rigorous courses?**

It is easy to place students into a rigorous course, but the question remains of how teachers and district administration can effectively assess student preparedness for

those rigorous courses to help students succeed. Preparedness is something that can be tracked throughout a student's education that uses data to create interventions when students need them. Therefore, a student data tracking system needs to be implemented for determining whether students are prepared for rigorous coursework . This tracking system should focus on student-level data as they progress through the school system over time and function as an early warning system that is shared among teaches, administrators, and parents (Jerald, 2006; Lachat, 2001).

Many would argue that the issue is really a matter of preventing school dropout, so the solution might be doing whatever it takes to lower the dropout rate, but the central argument this paper is advocating is that improving rigor is the key to long-term student success. The issue, however, boils down to improving the disparities within gaps of expectations, achievement, and engagement – all of which contribute to the choice to drop out, or otherwise disengage from school. Student choices that lead to the creation of the gaps are especially apparent within the data between 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade, where certain factors can predict student outcome in later grades (Jerald, 2006). For instance, students who signal outcomes such as a final grade of 'F' in math or English in 6<sup>th</sup> grade are 75% more likely to drop out of high school (Neild et al., 2007).

Drawing from the data that can be used to predict student dropout, assessing preparedness means using this same student data to help schools prevent dropouts as well as predict readiness. Data collection should then focus on items such as previous student attendance patterns, course performance, and variables related to overall educational engagement (Heppen & Therriault, 2009). For instance, students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade who miss more than 10% of instructional time should signal that they are on the path to unpreparedness (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Also, if student performance in the freshman year results in one or more 'F's, or a GPA of less than 2.0, students should be provided a form of intervention to get them on track for preparedness.

Essentially, the process involves not just assessing preparedness for rigorous courses, but assessing whether students are fully engaged in school by:

- Focusing on patterns that predict or signal failure such as behavioral problems, low attendance, or low grades,
- Focusing data collection on behavioral and attendance patterns in 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades, and
- Paying particular attention to student grade and attendance data in 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

**What interventions need to be in place to help students be more successful within the academic expectations of rigorous coursework?**

When analysis of student data indicates a need for intervention due to the presence of certain data indicators (discussed in the section above), schools can take several courses of action to address specific issues. More broadly though, intervention is about instituting an overall intervention culture driven by the notion of high expectations that taps into the larger stakeholder culture (Yamamura, et al., 2010). In either student or school-wide focus, common features of intervention strategies include creating an engaging student climate, raising expectations of academic rigor for all students, and lengthening learning periods during the school day (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). The idea behind any form of intervention is to prevent students from getting off track in the first place, and if they are off track, to help them realign themselves with curriculum expectations. However, this can be a dilemma when students enter high schools without the appropriate academic skills to adequately perform in rigorous courses.

One type of intervention strategy that can be implemented to help students improve their overall success, especially when there is an achievement issue, involves making scheduling changes. For example, scheduling students in a double-blocked class schedule provides a chance for them to earn more credits per year while enrolled in classes scheduled with longer class periods. Additionally, if high school freshmen have been identified as being in need of academic intervention, these students can be enrolled in 'catch-up' courses focusing on improving reading and

math skills that are taken alongside regular courses (Quint, 2006). At times however, the poor performance may need a different type of intervention such as counseling, especially when the issue is from outside the school (Jerald, 2006).

In addition to individualized intervention strategies, broader interventions have been shown to improve student success as they encounter a rigorous academic environment. Of note is how some high schools create small learning communities (SLC), which are self-contained groups of teachers and students. When a SLC is especially created as a freshman academy, intervention becomes part of a community culture where a small group of students and teachers support each other to become engaged in their coursework (Quint, et al., 2008; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009)

#### **What specific literature discusses these issues?**

School reform is a complex and ever-expanding topic. Due to the limitations of this report, only a handful of articles were consulted to explain why particular changes related to the framework are needed and how changes might be implemented. Readers are encouraged to conduct their own research and examine reports on what has worked within the context of the framework. The following is an illustrative list of key literature on topics presented in this paper.

#### **School reform**

Two recommended readings for an understanding into major issues of high school student attrition include publications by Allensworth and Easton (2007) and Bridgeland, Dilulio, Jr. and Balfanz (2009). Allensworth and Easton's article presents findings on factors that contribute to freshman students' course performance. They note that it is what the freshmen do while they are in high school rather than their backgrounds and high school preparation that most influence their freshman performance (2007, p. 2). Bridgeland et al.'s study extends Allensworth and Easton's research. High school dropouts, if appropriately challenged and given support, can graduate from school and be economically productive (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

### **Student data tracking**

Lachat's paper (2001) discusses how the Breaking Ranks Model of High School Reform is used to improve learning opportunities and facilitate student achievement. The author advocates holding all students accountable to a set of performance standards. Reform program initiatives are thus data-driven; they enable school policy makers and teachers to utilize the data for assessment, feedback and continuous improvement.

### **Curriculum Standards: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and College Readiness Standards for Success**

Two books are must-reads for educators seeking answers on how to prepare students for post-secondary success and the global workforce: Trilling and Fadel's (2009) "*21st century skills: Learning for life in our times*," and Conley's (2010) "*College and career ready: Helping all students succeed beyond high school*." Trilling and Fadel elaborate on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century framework and its focus on attaining specific student outcomes and providing innovative support systems. Conley (2010) advances another approach to get students college-ready and career-ready. He expounds on his model, *The Four Dimensions of College Readiness*, in his book.

### **School Reform**

The report by Ferguson and associates (2010) highlights 15 exceptional high schools from Massachusetts, Illinois, Ohio, Maryland, Texas and Washington, DC. The authors document stories of how key principles, processes, and practices can improve student achievement and narrow the gap. Quint, Thompson, and Bald (2008) provide further accounts of school reform success. They published findings based on studies of exemplary high schools from the Midwest, the Great Lakes region, the South, Texas and New England.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has compiled reviewed a list of relevant information related to school reform within the context of a framework for high school reform developed through

the MSD curriculum audit. This framework is set within a larger context of disparities identified in current literature as gaps in expectations, achievement, and engagement and how the literature discusses actions school districts can take to bridge these gaps.

In whatever form reforms take, most school districts are doing something to handle the issues articulated as gaps. Within this environment of school change many stakeholders will also agree that reform is defined within the broader context of preparing students for the global workforce by expecting students to meet the demands of a more rigorous curriculum. However, change in rigor alone is not the answer, nor should a more rigorous curriculum be applied only to some students. Change needs to be combined with relevant and good instruction that is personalized to meet student needs, and focused on an overall goal of post-secondary preparedness in whatever form that may take. Such efforts are the only ways our schools will prepare students to meet the future global workforce expectations.

## Strategies For Reform

Reform Focus	Strategy	Literature
Curriculum Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts adopt a set of standards to drive instructional practices based on preparing graduates for the global workforce and to be lifelong learners</li> <li>• Develop standards that aim to prepare <i>all</i> students to successfully transition into a college or some form of post-secondary training</li> </ul>	Trilling & Fadel (2009) Bellanca & Brandt (2010) Conley (2010)
Teacher Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train teachers to track and use student data especially between grades (omni-directional)</li> <li>• Train teachers to adapt their curriculum to a heterogeneous group of students</li> <li>• Encourage information sharing among grades and schools on best classroom practices teachers use to help students meet high-level curriculum standards</li> <li>• Train teachers on incorporating strategic learning strategies into their everyday teaching</li> </ul>	Bridgeland, et al. (2009) Johnson, et al. (2006) Ferguson, et al. (2009)
Student Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use freshman academies and SLC to create a community of support for 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition</li> <li>• Use an early warning data system to flag students in need of support as they progress through the school system</li> <li>• For struggling students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, have students in a double-blocked schedule</li> <li>• Enroll 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in reading or math intensive training when needed</li> <li>• Provide just-in-time skills and content builders for students who need remediation on specific topics in a specific course</li> <li>• Providing counseling intervention services for issues outside of the school</li> <li>• Have students take learning modality surveys (e.g., VARK) so they can better understand their learning styles</li> <li>• Educate students starting in elementary school level on strategic learning strategies that can help them be successful</li> <li>• Use PSAs to educate the community on how to build a college going culture</li> <li>• Re-imagine the resource room and library as learning hubs</li> </ul>	Bridgeland, et al. (2009) Jerald (2006) Lachat (2001) Kennelly & Monrad (2008)
Communication System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulate the curriculum vision with a mission statement that:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Emphasizes the long term learning goals</li> <li>○ Is based on purposeful, outcome based, and rigorous set of academic standards</li> <li>○ Evaluates and monitors its success</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Publicly communicate to stakeholders how data are an essential component of the school system</li> </ul>	Bridgeland, et al. (2009) Ferguson, et al. (2009)

## Strategies For Reform

Reform Focus	Strategy	Literature
Data Tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student data functions as an early warning indicator informing the need for intervention</li> <li>• Data collection begins in elementary grades and follows students through their schooling</li> <li>• Evaluate students for dropout predictors in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Final grade of 'F' in math or English</li> <li>○ Attendance below 80% for the year</li> <li>○ An 'unsatisfactory' behavior mark</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Evaluate students for dropout predictors in 9<sup>th</sup> graders:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ One of more 'F' in any course</li> <li>○ Low GPA (below 2.0, or 'C')</li> <li>○ Missed more than 10% of instructional time</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Lachat (2001)            Heppen &amp; Therriault (2009)            Neild, etal (2007)            Allensworth &amp; Eaton (2010)</p>
School Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers are visibly greeting students at the beginning of the school day and say goodbye at the end of the day</li> <li>• Teachers discuss long term post-secondary plans with students</li> <li>• Provide engaging experiential learning opportunities to help students build their capacity to learn along with the desire to learn especially related to postsecondary goals</li> <li>• Publicly acknowledge academic success by displaying current and former students' college acceptance letters</li> <li>• Reward students who reach particular learning benchmarks such as scoring well on a standardized test or completing a challenging course</li> <li>• Hang posters around the school that clearly state the academic expectations to remind both teachers and students of the level of rigor expected and how it is judged</li> </ul>	<p>Quint (2006)            Quint et al. (2008)            Yazzie-Mintz (2010)            Ferguson, et al. (2010)</p>

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