Lessons from “Model” Continuation High Schools in CA: Supporting Overage & Under-credited Boys and Youth of Color

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Welcome and Introductions

- Jorge Ruiz de Velasco
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- Milbrey McLaughlin
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Informal Poll: Who is in the Audience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District and school staff/educators?</td>
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<tr>
<td>High School Students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonprofit professional (youth workers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have a friend, child, or otherwise know someone how has attended a Continuation High School?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who has never heard of a continuation High School?</td>
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Agenda

- Overview of Alternative School Options in California
  - Why we focused on Continuation High Schools
- CA Continuation High Schools
  - Findings from Initial Descriptive study (2007-2008)
- Follow-up Study of “Model” Continuation Schools and Programs
  - Best Practices, Recommendations
Alternative School Options in California

- County Community Schools:
- District Community Day Schools
- Juvenile Court Schools
- Continuation Schools
**Why focus Study on Continuation Schools**

- Continuation Schools are generally long-term placements.
- Continuation schools serve a wide range of students – despite the persistence of the ½ day design.
- Their Size is also important

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**Alternative Schools in California**

ASAM Data, 2005-06 (except where noted)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School Types</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Court Schools (CBEDS data)</td>
<td>61 schools</td>
<td>12,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>County Community</td>
<td>56 schools</td>
<td>46,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District/County Community Day Schools</td>
<td>295 schools</td>
<td>18,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation Schools</td>
<td>519 schools</td>
<td>116,600</td>
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Alternative Schools in California

- Enrollments in these four alternative options account for more than 10 percent of California High School Students

- Size and scope of the continuation high school program make it clearly a key component of the state’s school dropout prevention strategy

CA Continuation High Schools

Research Questions

- Who are the students in continuation schools?
- How are typical Schools responding to student needs? And why do they respond as they do?
- What are some lessons from model schools -- emerging best practices?
Students
Academic, Social & Behavioral Characteristics

- Academically vulnerable (overage & under-credited); history of chronic absenteeism
- Youth with behavioral challenges, emotionally detached or misfit in traditional schools
- “System” kids – e.g., foster youth
  
  AND students who are quite independent & academically resilient – including gifted students

- Original ½-time design is outmoded – Vast majority of students are not working

Student Demographics
Race & Ethnicity

Statewide - Continuation

- Black - 11%
- Hispanic - 55%
- White - 26%
- Asian - 3%

Statewide - 11th Grade

- Black - 8%
- Hispanic - 42.3%
- White - 34.3%
- Asian - 12.2%
Student Demographics
Race & Ethnicity

Sample - Continuation
- Black: 14.1%
- Hispanic: 61.4%
- White: 17.5%
- Asian: 7%

Statewide - 11th Grade
- Black: 8%
- Hispanic: 42.3%
- White: 34.3%
- Asian: 12.2%

Student Demographics
Gender

Statewide - Continuation
- Boys: 42%
- Girls: 58%

Statewide - 11th Grade
- Boys: 50%
- Girls: 50%
English Learners

- Whereas one in seven of all eleventh graders in California is an English learner, in the schools we visited, almost twice that percentage of students were English learners.

How Do Students Come to Continuation Education?

- By referral – (from Sending High School)
- Voluntarily & involuntarily
- Through a formal process or informal negotiation between schools
- As needed year round or at specific intervals
5 Stage Model of Achievement

- Stage 1: Attendance
- Stage 2: Focus on School (Redevelop an academic identity)
- Stage 3: Complete Work (Standards-based)
- Stage 4: Graduate
- Stage 5: Succeed in Life

Readiness Indicators                      Achievement Indicators

Mission Revisited
New Populations = New functions

- **Academic Re-engagement**: provide diploma programs that reconnect students to learning
- **Social Re-engagement**: attend to students’ social & health needs
  - Mental/emotional and sometimes physical health
  - Develop students’ interpersonal skills
  - Develop student’s civic awareness and responsibility
- **Alternative Pathways**: to post-secondary education or training
Academic Performance

- Difficult to ascertain – lack of longitudinal, comparable outcome data
  - Except for state mandated test scores; schools chose what data they will collect and measure

- CHS students score lower on virtually all state assessed measures of academic performance

- But CHS do at least as well (on average) as Traditional schools on High School Exit Exam.

- Some CHS do better than others (and in comparison to Traditional Schools) on a range of persistence measures

What Gets in the Way?

State Level Factors that Account Mediocre Performance of CHS

- Incoherent State Accountability System
  - Lack of Clarity about goals for Continuation Students
  - Focus on bubble near “proficiency” line
  - Growth not measured

- Funds for Staffing & Services – no additional resources to reflect special challenges and service needs
State Level Factors that Constrain Local Action

- Few of incentives for creating effective post-secondary pathways
  - ROP; Employers; community colleges

- Lack of incentives for effective inter-agency collaboration
  - Probation; HHS (foster youth, parenting, mental health)

Local contexts of Effective Alternative Education Programs

- **Leadership** – commitment, knowledge and skills

- **Political support** – school board members, county board of supervisors, district office-- for alt ed and the population served

- **Active partnerships** – with youth-serving CBOs, county agencies, higher education & the private sector—provide supports and opportunities

- A ’menu’ of alternative education settings in the district enables thoughtful student placement
Features of successful settings

- Well-developed selection, admission and orientation strategies
- An intentional, alternative learning environment
- Clearly defined, supportive pathways to post-secondary education or jobs

Selection and orientation procedures

- Consultation with principals, counselors and teachers from the sending school or referring agency
- Careful review of students’ credit and behavior record—good bet for success
- Student participation voluntary
- 1:1 meeting & contract with students & parents re: attendance and participation
- Controlled entry- aligned with academic modules
- Required orientation program
Dimensions of an Intentional Learning Environment

- Environment: School climate
- Youth-centered
- Knowledge-centered
- Assessment-centered

Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999

An *alternative* learning environment: Knowledge centered

- Systems to align instruction & core curriculum with standards—focus on standards that matter most; creative solutions
- clear goals/expectations; maps to follow
- varied pedagogy and pace;
- Life skills—conflict resolution, interviewing, finances; FAFSA; college apps
- Field trips—plays, music, sports, local community colleges
An *Alternative* Learning Environment: student centered

- Diverse starting points - lots of accommodations - self-pacing
- Multiple opportunities to earn credits
- Links to students’ interests and future
- Pathway to appropriate care: - drugs & alcohol counseling; student support groups
- Teachers say: “Don’t sweat the small stuff…”

An *alternative* learning environment: Assessment centered

- On-going, detailed feedback
- Variable credit
- Celebrations and rewards for progress
- Communications with parents about accomplishments
An alternative learning environment: School Climate

- Caring adults w knowledge of individual students
- Close professional team
- Small classes
- Safe; clear/shared norms for behavior
- “like a family”

Initial Recommendations

- Placement & Selection
  - Written & Transparent procedures
  - Reconsider role of “zero-tolerance”

- Student Orientation
  - Expectations; Opportunities
  - Norms of behavior
  - Supportive personal & institutional relationships
  - Aggressive attendance support and outreach
Initial Recommendations

- **Leadership & Staffing**
  - Recruit and support effective staff
  - Incentives for Teachers
  - Principals play unique roles in these schools – need more training and role-alike networking opportunities

- **Align academic program to diverse student needs**
  - Develop & employ more extensive and appropriate data on academic progress; competency-based
  - Expand Learning Time
    - Most students are NOT working
  - Targeted academic advisory & student support programs
    - Support for credit completion & Exit Exam
    - Future/career planning
Initial Recommendations

- Align academic program to diverse student needs
  - Develop & employ more extensive and appropriate data on academic progress; competency-based
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Initial Recommendations

- Pathways to Care
  - Social Workers/Probation Officers, On campus and Employed Directly by the School.
  - Find and include “informal foster students” in care
  - Direct instruction in interpersonal Skills
    - Groups for boys; gang-involved youth; masculinity
  - Include fathers in parenting teen programs
Initial Recommendations

- Create intentional Pathways to Higher Education
  - Include skills/experience for success in the workplace or college—i/vs resume, letter writing, visits—beyond credit recovery
  - Job/pre-college mentoring
  - Employers
  - Community college

Looking Forward:

California Department of Education Improvement Efforts

- Referrals to best practices website: http://www.sdcoe.net/edoptions
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Copies of reports may be downloaded from the John Gardner Center website:

http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu