



Replicating the Turnaround of Ohio's Lowest-Performing High Schools to Significantly Improve Graduation Rates and Readiness Nationally

Presented to the Obama Transition Team by KnowledgeWorks Foundation

In response to statewide concerns regarding rising high school drop-out rates, declining scores on the state student achievement exams, and increased problems with school violence and truancy, Ohio high schools partnered with KnowledgeWorks Foundation to craft comprehensive high school improvement efforts. KnowledgeWorks Foundation worked with secondary schools throughout Ohio established small school models through the Ohio High Schools Transformation Initiative (OHSTI) and instituted Early College High Schools (ECHS) to boost opportunity, choice, and relevance for all Ohio students, particularly those in struggling urban districts.

Working in partnership with like-minded organizations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ohio Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Education, the Ford Foundation, and the Kellogg Foundation, KnowledgeWorks and its school partners implemented research-based improvements designed to change school culture, boost student achievement, and move Ohio's secondary school instruction into the 21st century.

KnowledgeWorks' Ohio High School Results

After six years of intensive and productive work, Ohio's KnowledgeWorks high schools are demonstrating significant results, including:

- High school graduation rates in OHSTI schools **increased by more than 31%** to 82.4 percent in 2007
- The graduation gap between OHSTI high schools and all Ohio high schools closed dramatically, by more than **77%**
- The growth in graduation rates for white, Black, and Hispanic OHSTI students **exceeded the state growth rate** for those groups between 2002 and 2007
- **89%** of OHSTI sites reported improvement on both the math and reading pass rates on the Ohio Graduation Test
- ECHS students earned more than **10,000 hours of college credits** between 2003 and 2007
- **52%** of ECHS students are on track to complete 60 hours of college credit before high school graduation
- **99%** of 10th grade ECHS students are enrolled in a college course
- ECHS 10th graders **outperformed the State** in reading, writing, math, social studies, and science on the 2008 Ohio Graduation Test

The Keys to High School Improvement

There is no magic bullet to high school improvement. It requires hard work and determination. To start, the adults in the school must believe, really believe, that EVERY student in the school will be successful in college.

KnowledgeWorks Foundation's work with OHSTI and ECHS schools resulted in a clear set of understandings that drive effective secondary school improvement. What was learned?

1. These schools succeeded because they realized failure was not an option.
2. Working together, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and parents set high expectations with a common focus.



3. Schools provided time for staff to collaborate and offered performance-based instructional strategies.
4. Leaders invested in ongoing, job-embedded professional development while holding teachers and students accountable for success.
5. Through shared responsibility, the learning community experienced shared successes.

Building a Receptive Learning Environment for School Improvement

These best practices for a research-based approach to high school improvement include the following lessons:

- State, district, and school policy policies and practices must first *address institutional structure*, including the implementation of small, personalized schools in previously failing traditional high schools
- Curriculum must be constructed to *meet the needs of tomorrow's colleges and tomorrow's workplaces*, reflecting 21st century realities and opportunities
- *Ongoing data monitoring*, at the individual student level, the classroom level, and schoolwide is a key and essential component to school improvement
- Instructional approaches must be *personalized* through growth plans and short-term benchmarks
- *Teachers must be empowered* to bring change and improvement, and they gain that empowerment through relevant professional development opportunities
- Districts must identify ways to *reduce teacher loads*, both in terms of number of students and number of classes taught each day
- Successful high schools must *establish planned, purposeful connections* with postsecondary education, business, and the community at large.

Expanding Our Success in Ohio

To date, KnowledgeWorks Foundation's high school improvement efforts have affected more than 25,000 students and have provided results-based training to more than 2,000 educators. The successes experienced through OHSTI and ECHS are achievements that can be replicated in school districts and high schools throughout the nation. EdWorks, the division of KnowledgeWorks that has developed and perfected these school improvement models, partners with school districts and high schools to provide rigorous curriculum and instruction, supportive school climate and culture, aligned assessments, and comprehensive student support.