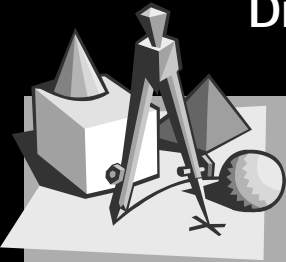


Discussion Guide



A Public
Deliberation on...



High School Reform: What Should A Community Do?

Sponsored by:

Arizona Business & Education Coalition (ABEC)

Arizona Community College Association (ACCA)

Welcome



With support from the Arizona Community Foundation, the Arizona Community College Association (ACCA) and Arizona Business & Education Coalition (ABEC) are sponsoring a series of public forums on high school reform. These forums are part of an ongoing dialogue about education in Arizona, specifically Arizona's High Schools. The purpose of the forum is bring together a variety of stakeholders to engage in *public deliberation* about the issue of High School Reform with the following three goals in mind:

- To generate public awareness about the challenges Arizona high schools face
- To clarify the values held by Arizonans around high schools, and what they are willing to work on collaboratively
- To move communities closer to readiness for high school reform

Many people think that the American high school is in crisis. Large comprehensive high schools started out trying to be something for everyone, and for decades that approach made sense. A uniquely American phenomenon, it sought to gather all youths into a single institution that would prepare them for work or college. Now governors, business leaders, educators, and even the President of the United States agree – the system is broken, the traditional model no longer works. While numerous reform models are in play, communities have typically not been a part of the process. As a recent researcher from the Kettering Foundation wrote, "...public engagement on behalf of school reform may be the best vehicle for achieving meaningful system reform." What is needed is to engage the public in a constructive way in deliberating about this issue, so that they can play a role in the reform process.

We appreciate the support of our partners in convening these forums in your community, including your local school district as well as your local chamber of commerce. If you are interested in continuing with this work, please include your contact information when you sign in at the forum and check off the appropriate box indicating your interest.

Susan Carlson
Arizona Business & Education Coalition

Terry Calaway
Arizona Community College Association

Format



Using this Discussion Guide, you will be given a brief overview of the issue, and then you will be asked to deliberate about three “approaches” to addressing high school reform, and their respective trade-offs and consequences. The approaches are not mutually exclusive, but they suggest different priorities and values for dealing with the issue.

The forum is meant to be an open dialogue among participants, with a neutral moderator. Here are a few ground rules to help guide us through our discussion:

- Everyone is encouraged to participate, no one or two individuals dominate the conversation
- Listen to one another
- Try to understand the other person’s point of view
- Maintain an open mind and explore new ideas
- Speak your mind freely while maintaining respect of other’s opinions
- Remember, this is not a debate
- Address your remarks to the group
- Don’t hesitate to question other participants to learn more about their ideas
- Rather than focusing on any specific school or situation, this is a broad discussion focusing on general issues affecting schools throughout the state

Thank you for your participation and wisdom. The results of these statewide forums will be compiled into a comprehensive report that will be provided to the Arizona Department of Education and partners across the state. Your creative ideas thoughtful feedback are appreciated and will be shared. Perhaps a grassroots approach will develop in your own community.

Welcome to the forum!

What is the Issue?



Consider the following national statistics:

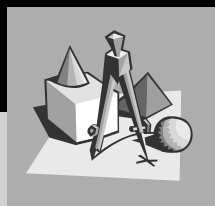
- ❑ States spend on average \$100,000 for every student's, but the pipeline is leaking – 30 out of 100 young people fail to graduate from high school and only 29 out of 100 earn a BA by the time they are 30 years of age. (Grubb & Lazerson, Education Week)
- ❑ "For an ever-increasing number of high school students, particularly seniors, the school year that began this fall promises to be a waste of time, a lost opportunity for learning rather than a launching pad for the rest of their lives." (Gov. Mark Warner, Virginia)
- ❑ Seventy eight percent of students who took the ACT in 2004 were not prepared for college-level biology, algebra or English composition classes. (Grubb & Lazerson, Education Week)
- ❑ "Large comprehensive high schools are a disaster – chaotic, fragmented, purposeless factories." (Grubb & Lazerson, Education Week)
- ❑ Near the end of High School, African American and Latino students have reading skills virtually the same as Anglo 8th graders (Grubb & Lazerson, Education Week)
- ❑ 53% of high school graduates accepted into college need to take at least one remedial math or English course (Grubb & Lazerson, Education Week)
- ❑ On the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), only 36% of seniors are "proficient" in reading, just 17% are proficient in math. One fourth of those who enter four-year colleges and nearly half of those who enroll in two year colleges never return for the second year.

Consider the following Arizona statistics (from AZ Department of Education):

- ❑ For the 2002-2003 school year, Arizona reported a High School (grades 9-12) dropout rate of 8.5%, representing over 25,000 Arizona youth Dropout rates for Hispanic and Native American youth are even higher, 11.8% and 15.3% respectively, accounting for over half of all Arizona dropouts.
- ❑ 52% of the class of 2006 fell far below the standard in math on the Fall 04 AIMS test and 26% of this same group fell far below the reading standard
- ❑ Of the students in the top 25% of their class, nearly 1/3 did not meet the math course requirement

Approach One:

Connect High Schools with their Community



High Schools are more than just a training ground for future workers, in this approach. High Schools are the center of their communities and as such, are the ideal link between families, community service and training opportunities, and much-needed support services. A community-based high school can embrace the cultural richness of the community, can tap the diverse strengths of the community, and can share community-wide accountability for results. Schools with involved parents and engaged community partners are better equipped to educate our young people. Students also need more than just classroom learning. They need opportunities for internships and civic engagement to prepare for 21st century citizenship and employment. Schools can't do it alone, they need the support of their communities with tutoring, mentoring and apprenticeship programs.

What Could Be Done:

- ✓ Recruit teachers that reflect the culture and ethnicity of the community and train all staff in the richness of the community's culture
- ✓ Involve parents in all aspects of school programs
- ✓ Partner with cities, community based organizations, social service agencies and businesses in the community
- ✓ Encourage business and industry to sponsor a class or technical training track for students
- ✓ Become the center of learning for the entire family
- ✓ Establish on-site health clinics and other community services

Trade-Offs & Consequences:

- ✗ Opening a high school campus to the community also means opening the campus to criminal elements
- ✗ Focusing on the community means turning over our young people's education to non-professionals
- ✗ Creating and sustaining community partnerships is time, labor and resource intensive
- ✗ Focusing on a community's cultural identity jeopardizes an overall "American" culture

Approach Two:

Strengthen the Educational "Pipeline"



Proponents of this approach say you can't look just at High School Reform; you must focus on reforming the entire educational pipeline, preK through PhD. Incoming high school students have not been adequately prepared for high school curriculum, and we then graduate high school students who are not prepared for higher education. Focus by states on "reforming education" really means K-8, with almost no input from the key consumers of the products of K-12: colleges and employers. Civic, policy and business leaders must exercise stewardship over *all* education systems and how they interact with each other, and not focus just on one part of the pipeline. A rigorous curriculum is needed for *all* students, with K-12 achievement tied to postsecondary success.

What Could Be Done:

- ✓ Allow dual enrollment for all High School seniors
- ✓ Build more "early college high schools"
- ✓ Offer a "college prep" track of courses for *all* students
- ✓ Align the High School exit test with college entrance tests and workplace expectations
- ✓ Realign senior year to offer options of academic acceleration, career education or community service
- ✓ Focus on shoring up "linkage points" in the pipeline -- from middle schools to High School, and from High School to college

Trade-Offs & Consequences:

- ✗ This approach encourages elitism since it could allow more gifted students to succeed at the expense of average or below average students.
- ✗ A system-wide focus shortchanges high schools and the attention they need right now
- ✗ By focusing on only "academic" excellence, what happens to creative artists or skilled athletes?
- ✗ High-stakes testing has "untested" effectiveness in achieving reform, and unintended consequences

Approach Three:

Design Smaller, Student-Centered Schools



In this approach, the current system of large depersonalizing campuses that don't take into account the individual needs of each student must be restructured into small learning communities that do. Small learning communities would let educators spend more time with, and thereby become more responsive to, the needs of individual students, and would give students a feeling that they belong. Smaller schools allow individualized career counseling, mentoring and hands-on learning so that every student is known by and connected to a network of supportive adults. Offering a wide variety of extra-curricular choices (such as art, music, culture, life skills) would help every student have the same opportunity to succeed at what they are skilled in. High Schools are in need of additional resources in order to create "schools within a school," reduce class size, attract and retain qualified staff, and provide individualized counseling. However this all results in a more effective system.

What Could Be Done:

- ✓ Develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for every student, based on their specific needs
- ✓ Encourage more team teaching to reduce the student/teacher ratio
- ✓ Create parent-student-teacher partnerships for every student
- ✓ Assign a volunteer mentor to each student
- ✓ Create small, interest-based learning communities that focus on experiential learning
- ✓ Deliver more broad-based education, to include arts, music, social development
- ✓ Create a 'virtual' high school that allows students to complete their education entirely customized and on-line

Trade-Offs & Consequences:

- ✗ Emphasis on electives shortchanges acquisition of basic skills
- ✗ Focus on small schools means kids don't learn the life skill of navigating large systems
- ✗ Focus on small size may limit students' exposure to diversity
- ✗ Small costs more -- more administration, staffing, supplies, overhead, and other expenses

Reflections on the Forum



Personal Reflection

- What do you know now about Arizona high schools that you didn't know before this conversation?
- What value is most important to you in high school reform?
- What are you still curious about?
- Is there some individual action that you are going to take as a result?

Next Steps

- Now that you have participated in this conversation and have some sense of the values at stake in high school reform, what would you suggest as a next step?
- In your opinion, how would you assess our readiness to take this next step?

Common Ground

- Did you discover any common ground that we could agree to act on together in our community to improve our own high school(s)?
- Would some members of this group like to meet again to consider taking action on the common ground that we discovered today?

For further information, contact:

Concerning high school reform efforts:

Susan Carlson, ABEC

602.438.3191

carlsonabec@msn.com

www.azbec.org

Concerning the forums:

Bernie Ronan, ACCA

480.641.6123

bernie.ronan@mcmill.maricopa.edu