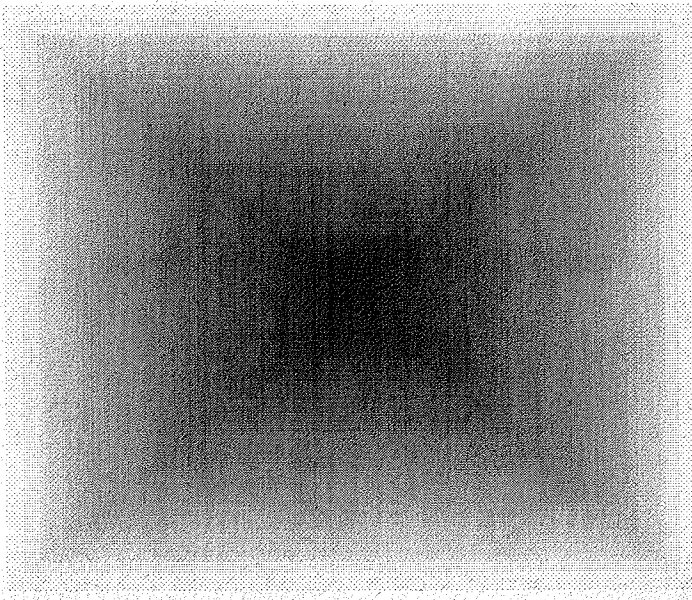


MOORHEAD HIGH SCHOOL  
MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA

# **HIGH SCHOOL ENHANCEMENT COMMUNITY TASK FORCE**

RECOMMENDATIONS DOCUMENT



MOORHEAD PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
MOORHEAD HIGH SCHOOL  
MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA

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21 NOVEMBER 2001

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## I. Background

*"All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their mind wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible."*

*From Seven Pillars of Wisdom - T.E. Lawrence as quoted in Breaking Ranks*

**R**esponding to a study of the Moorhead Public Schools presented in February 2001, the High School Enhancement Community Task Force and its recommendations are an integral part of a proposal presented to the Moorhead School Board by Dr. Larry Nybladh, Superintendent of Schools, to:

*"...proactively address primary focus areas which will enhance the*

*- educational effectiveness,*

*- economic efficiency, and*

*- future position of Moorhead Area Public Schools*

*through research-based decision making, community collaboration and consensus building."*

Eight Primary Focus Areas were identified by Dr. Nybladh, each a unique, complex and challenging area of the Moorhead School District, that require extensive additional research and discussion in the decision making process. A timeline was established to have individual Focus Areas build upon the results of previous groups.

For Focus Area Number Five: High School Enhancement, the recommendation report from the High School Enhancement Research Study Group established the beginning discussion points for the High School Enhancement Community Task Force. The Community Task Force recommendations are provided to Dr. Nybladh, Superintendent, and the Moorhead School Board as well as the Facility and Grade Level Configuration Model Community Task Force for their consideration.

Members of the Task Force were selected based on the perspective they represent and/or expertise they would lend to the process. Each group's members are identified in Appendix A. Special thanks is extended to members of both groups, each a unique individual who has provided essential, pertinent and relevant perspective to this process.

During the process, extensive research was provided to the Community Task Force as well as the opportunity to review and evaluate two case studies: The School of Environmental Science in Apple Valley, Minnesota – an alternative high school for grades 11 and 12; and a second high school planned at about the same time in Chaska, Minnesota, designed in a "house" concept to deliver education – but now delivering education in a traditional manner.

## II. Envision

“...a *comprehensive high school* that reawakens the potential of all learners, staff, and a community.  
... a renaissance school that gives focus, coherence, and spirit to learning.

... a school as a learning community where learner outcomes, the learning process, school organization, staffing and partnerships with other organizations are fully identified, aligned and unified.

... a school with an environment so rich in discovery opportunities that learning is a naturally occurring, self-motivating phenomenon.

... a school designed to display and demonstrate learning – all at costs no greater than that of schools today.”

*(A New Vision For the Comprehensive High School, 1992, Dr. George Copa, College of Education - University of Minnesota)*

**M**oorhead is at the crossroads of its education system and has been provided this unique opportunity to establish itself as a leader of education, not only in Minnesota – but also in America. This leadership role comes not only for Moorhead as any one entity (i.e. school board, administration, community members, city of Moorhead leadership, teachers, support staff, students), but for its whole being as a team and community striving for the same VISION – the same MISSION – a unified entity focused on the increased excellence of education in the Moorhead Public Schools. To do so with conviction will create a vital and self-perpetuating environment that will make learning and teaching a truly rewarding experience of success.

We acknowledge the vision statement “Learning – A Journey Together” developed by the Moorhead High School Building Leadership Team (BLT) and endorse the direction established by the High School Enhancement Research Study Group in its report. We recommend that this document be reviewed to strengthen the vision statements related to “curriculum” and “leadership” (Appendix B) as presented to the High School Enhancement Task Force. We further recommend this document be one that is continually reviewed by all stakeholders and revised as necessary to address the evolution of American education, particularly how such changes affect this process at Moorhead High School.

We envision the immediate implementation of a long-term visionary planning process to establish the needs for a truly inviting and innovative educational model in Moorhead that:

- is flexible to change with new discoveries or lessons that are learned as the plan is implemented.
- is revolutionary in its creative methods to address the variety of learning types present in society.
- is collaborative within the school community itself (administrators, educators, and students), and the community which it serves.
- addresses successful educational delivery in the growing needs associated with the increased diversity within the school community.
- seeks out educational partners from the community and world at large to assist and expand education thinking as far as possible.

We envision that the decisions made to stretch outside the “box” for creative educational solutions, ones that are either at the cutting or leading edge of education, will provide the impetus and opportunity for both the population and economic growth in the City of Moorhead.

### III. Summary of Findings

**M**oorhead High School is organized on a disciplinary (subject matter) basis, where teachers are hired based on their teaching practice background and expertise.

- Typically, programs are delivered in self-contained classrooms on the same basis. Some experimentation is currently practiced with alternative teaching and learning methods through collaborative student/teacher projects.
- Methodologies in teaching continue to change due to the Minnesota Graduation Standards established to better define successful educational outcomes relevant to the real work in today's world.
- In 1996, the report *Breaking Ranks* sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals became a revolutionary challenge to the institutions of high school education. Improvement in high schools will require that high schools alter themselves and preserve what is best while offering new innovations. The six main themes that are intertwined within the report:
  1. Personalization of the school system  
Better education depends upon personalizing the high school experience for students. High schools must break down into smaller learning units and teachers must use a variety of instructional strategies to accommodate individual learning styles and engage students. Personalization will be helped by every student having an Adult Advocate and a Personal Plan for Progress.
  2. Coherency  
High schools should be clear about the essentials that students must learn to graduate. Disciplinary departments should be reorganized so that subjects are more closely linked and should align what they teach with what they test. Learning must make sense to students in terms of the real world and the application of what they know.
  3. Time  
Teaching and learning need room for flexibility. High school schedules should no longer equate seat time with learning. Class sizes should allow full time teachers to give more attention to individual students and the length of the school year and day should be adjusted.
  4. Technology  
High schools must develop a long-term plan for using computers, CD-ROMs, and videodiscs and offer technologies in all aspects of teaching and learning. The curriculum should be conveyed through technology and teaching strategies should employ technology wherever appropriate.
  5. Professional Development  
Educators cannot improve high schools without the proper preparation to take on new roles and responsibilities. Continuing in-service education must have a valued place in the day-to-day professional life on the job. Each educator in the school, including the principal, should have a Personal Learning Plan.
  6. Leadership  
Leadership in each high school must begin with the principal, but must include teachers,

students, parents, school board members, the superintendent, and community residents who contribute to making schools better.

- The focus on curriculum is core to improving the high school educational process.
- Each high school community will identify a set of essential learnings – above all, in literature and language, mathematics, social studies, science, and the arts – in which students must demonstrate achievement in order to graduate.
- The high school will integrate its curriculum to the extent possible and emphasize depth over breadth of coverage.
- Teachers will design work for student that is of high enough quality to engage them, cause them to persist, and, when successfully completed, result in their satisfaction and their acquisition of learning, skills, and abilities valued by society.
- The content of the curriculum, where practical, will connect itself to real-life applications of knowledge and skills to help student link their education to the future.
- Assessment of student learning will align itself with the curriculum so that students' progress is measured by what is taught.
- Each student will have a Personal Plan for Progress to ensure that the high school takes individual needs into consideration and to allow students, within reasonable parameters, to design their own methods for learning in an effort to meet high standards.
- The high school will promote cocurricular activities as integral to an education, providing opportunities for all students that support and extend academic learning.
- A high school will reach out to the elementary and middle level schools from which it draws students to collaborate with those schools to understand what kind of foundation students need for success in high school and to respond to the needs of the elementary and middle schools for policies at the high school that reinforce earlier education.

## IV. Recommendations

**1** Stakeholders should immediately acclaim and move forward with planning and implementation of smaller learning communities. The following specific items should be considered as part of this collaborative process. The district should promote the:

- Creation of “small learning communities” where students can experience a sense of belonging, with emphasis on the individual as a unit and core curriculum learning. These should be first implemented in the form of 9th and 10th grade houses or other configurations.
- Implementation of a variety of academies that would benefit students focusing on learning in areas of their interests and talents, each using an appropriate core curriculum.
- Planning, development and implementation of a comprehensive and detailed educational curriculum that engages the student.

**2** Current research (*Breaking Ranks*) should be used to establish a conceptual foundation for the vision of Moorhead High School, its organization and educational delivery model. The following concepts should be considered.

- Further study of alternative scheduling, such as a four period day.
- Each student would have the opportunity for an unique teacher/student relationship, such as advisor advisee.

**3** The prescriptive actions and directions currently considered best practices should become the foundation for specific directions for teaching practitioners at Moorhead High (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde, 1998). However, these practices should never become the end – only the means to delivering a higher level of education.

**4** Determine major space needs and special concerns for facilities as identified by the High School Enhancement Research Study Group for facilities on page 15. Determine alternative ways to utilize unique existing spaces within the community and explore modification and/or construction of new spaces to accommodate programming needs for the emerging educational model.

**5** Establish an assessment plan capable of determining and comparing the effectiveness of any new model in terms of student achievement.

## V. Epilogue

In the November 14, 2001 issue of *Education Week* there is an article entitled “Lessons From a Fish Market: The Burdens and Joys of Professional Teamwork.” Many have heard of the Seattle fishmongers who have reinvented themselves and now are a public icon for their long-standing model of teamwork in the workplace. Now, it seems, a video named *Fish* has routinely become commonplace in school districts “... bringing a message of passion and purpose to teaching and learning...” The message they proclaim speaks of knowing each other’s strengths and having the opportunity to learn through observing each other’s *practice* on a daily basis. “The market is effective because the values, behaviors, and norms of its employees are well-aligned. Through a ...powerful social code of expectations, participants in this unusual community learn the nuances of the work and keep it ... ‘fresh.’”

The article continues by indicating the key to making education successful “...lies in coherence around the work and goals. While it is true that reaching a consensus on mission may be ... difficult, ... the foundations needed to realize that mission coherently – communication, leadership, and self-evaluation – are universal. In public schools, we need to think about learning communities in ways that deepen teaching and learning – deepen our knowledge of content, of each other as adults, and of our children and their families and communities. Everything we do needs to focus on the core of schooling: how children learn, how teachers teach, what gets taught to whom, and how schools are organized to support teaching and learning.”

An interesting story in this piece notes that in 1945 a man named Henry Atwell made a survey of 200 teachers in New York – and “...more than 60% said they wanted certain practices and resources: a professional library, a supervisor who acts as a consultant or technical adviser, demonstration lessons, grade conference to discuss common problems, visits to outstanding schools, participation in the formulation of school policies, individual conferences with the supervisor, inter-visitation of teachers, after-school conferences for open discussion of problems, and in-service courses and workshops. Why is it that 56 years after the Atwell survey, many of us are still *talking about* this wish list instead of *doing* something to make it a reality?” (Burney, 2001).

The Moorhead High School Enhancement Task Force has taken the opportunity to boldly speak out and not be silent, to be an advocate for a new learning model. The Building Leadership Team has set out the beginning of a vision, “Learning – A Journey Together,” one that speaks to: “... collaborative relationships in our learning, work and activities. ... *grow(ing) together* as a coordinated teaching and learning community.” (Building Leadership Vision Statement, Moorhead High School, 2001)

Will this require a new facility? Possibly – but before this one question is answered, there come thousands of others relating to shaping and molding this model. The collaborative efforts of many “Educational Sculptors from the Community, Administration, Teachers and Students” must plan and clearly define:

- How does this model fit into the holistic vision of education in the Moorhead School District?
- What is this new model organized like? How does it work? What is the curriculum that supports our model?
- How does the schedule work within our model?
- What educational partners can be established?



- Where is the leadership for our model?
- How does the educational accountability work? And there are many more!

In determining this new model there will then be a better understanding of what the facility implications will be. And the options are endless when combined with all other recommendations provided the district.

Our direction provides for both the challenge and flexibility to create the new high school model and prove the validity of its program. We believe the studies and research are correct, an even better system of education is possible, and we believe it is for Moorhead!

## **APPENDIX “A”**

### **Moorhead High School Enhancement: Instructional Delivery for High School Students**

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## APPENDIX "B"

### OUR VISION FOR MOORHEAD SENIOR HIGH :

## *"Learning--A Journey Together"*

### A FRAMEWORK TO BUILD UPON

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*Our future success will be built upon our strengths in a way that fosters meaningful, collaborative relationships in our learning, work, and activities. We want to model enthusiasm and learning for life as we adapt to the changing physical and curricular needs of our teaching and learning. We will demonstrate a commitment to provide an emotionally and physically safe environment that is well maintained, showing our school pride. We desire to grow together as a coordinated teaching and learning community.*

*This vision statement was developed by staff, students, and parents, to provide a framework for our improvement efforts and the standards to evaluate our progress by. It is not what we are, but what we want to become.*

### The Supporting Goals / Ideas

- 1.) Attention to Individual Students -- we will:
  - A.) Be organized into smaller groups of students within the school & classroom for more personal learning & interaction in larger, flexible spaces.
  - B.) Monitor the academic, behavioural, & social progress of students to offer needed help & recognition as they move into and through the curriculum.
  - C.) Foster a sense of belonging for students that builds school / community connections by respecting individual / cultural differences or those with special needs.
  - D.) Develop an awareness of positive personal qualities to develop useful, flexible career plans.
  - E.) Listen to and involve students in decisions that impact their learning & school life to develop their skills as responsible adults.
- 2.) Student Development -- we will:
  - A.) Motivate students to accept responsibility for their learning, decisions, & actions in courses that are challenging and meaningful -- emphasizing rewards for success.
  - B.) Define high, clear & widely communicated expectations for student behavior that is upheld consistently throughout the school by both adults & students.
  - C.) Develop personal character that shows fairness & respect towards self & others through the mentoring involvement of faculty & support staff.
- 3.) Curriculum & Instruction -- we will:
  - A.) Offer challenging & flexible academic/vocational curriculum options reflecting real life, involving student interests, strengths, & research data to guide collaborative staff planning.
  - B.) Use current technology as a tool to enhance new opportunities for students & staff in all areas of authentic learning with our community & the world beyond.
  - C.) Be a center of our community with curriculum that reflects our local values & priorities for students, their families, & community events.
  - D.) Develop student skills in collaborative work with each other toward real life goals that reflect their best personal effort.

- 4.) Faculty & Support Staff -- we will:
  - A.) Nurture a positive environment for students by modeling enthusiasm & learning for life.
  - B.) Stimulate collaboration between subject areas in planning, mentorships, time, expertise, & invitations to participate.
  - C.) Foster a variety of staff development options that highlight staff contributions to active learning strategies.
  - D.) Be committed to positive conversation about students & adults in the school community.
  - E.) Promote the professional growth of faculty & support staff through an engaging personal, peer, & administrative supervision program that recognizes high expectations & achievements of all staff.
- 5.) Parent / Community Partnerships -- we will:
  - A.) Promote multiple, flexible methods for parents to stay in touch & involved with students, faculty & administration using technology to expand the boundaries of our resources.
  - B.) Demonstrate regular parent / community involvement in various advisory & decision making groups, classroom resource, or volunteering.
  - C.) Encourage members of the staff to participate in community leadership roles.
- 6.) Leadership -- we will:
  - A.) Encourage administrators to be visible, widely involved, & accessible.
  - B.) Facilitate school improvement based upon research & strong support of faculty & their involvement in responsible decision making.
- 7.) Climate / Social Environment -- we will:
  - A.) Demonstrate a commitment to provide an emotionally & physically safe, positive, healthy, & supportive environment.
  - B.) Foster respectful, considerate, caring, & cooperative behaviour toward people & property.
  - C.) Enjoy high levels of school spirit through broad participation across the grades in school wide celebrations, pep fests, spirit nights, curricular & non-curricular activities.
  - D.) Develop open communication between students, staff, administrators, and the school board.
  - E.) Actively promote the successes & achievements of the school community in the local media.
  - F.) Support & communicate the vision among the schools & residents with regular evaluation of our progress toward our goals.
- 8.) Buildings & Grounds -- we will:
  - A.) Reflect current research & user needs for accessible, inviting, and active student learning that is open to future opportunities with comfortable spaces for students and adults.
  - B.) Adapt to the changing physical needs of teaching / learning in space, natural light, design, & instructional technology.
  - C.) Demonstrate a year round commitment to a well-maintained facility to show school pride in its care both inside & out.
  - D.) Reflect the talents, interests, & skills of students with examples of botanical research, art, landscaping, design, & other aesthetic qualities that promote a warm, inviting atmosphere.

A framework needs someone to complete the parts...where will your talents  
make the greatest impact?

Summary of Our Views Sept. 27, 2001

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# Research and Recommendations

Prepared by the  
Moorhead High School Enhancement  
Research Study Group

For the Superintendent of Schools, the High  
School Enhancement Community Task Force,  
and the Facility and Grade Level Configuration  
Model Community Task Force.

October 2001

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## **Learning: A Journey Together**

Attached is the stated purpose of the study and the findings and recommendations of the High School Enhancement Research Study Group. You will find that the recommendations are in concert with the vision statement and goals distributed on October 2. The issues identified have all been discussed on several occasions over the course of the last couple of years. We feel the findings and recommendations reflect the changes necessary for Moorhead Senior High School to be the most inviting and innovative high school in the region.

Please review the information closely and ask any of the members of the research study group for clarification if needed. The BLT will be acting on the report on Tuesday, October 9. It is important that you share your feedback with the chairperson of your functional committee before Tuesday. The more unity we have on these issues now the more likely we will eventually see the fruits of our labor.

The recommendations of the Research Study Group and BLT action will be forwarded to the High School Enhancement Community Task Force, the Facility and Grade Level Configuration Model Community Task Force, and the Superintendent of Schools.

The High School Enhancement Research Study Group members are: Lisa Ferguson, Ryan Lyson, Mark Jenson, Maribeth Plankers, Becky Meyer-Larson, Karin Schumacher, Eric Stenehjem, Gene Boyle, Russ Henegar, Lynne Kovash, and Mike Siggerud.



# Changes in Teaching and Learning

National educational reform came in response to the question of whether or not American children would be able to meet the demands of increasing technology and a rapidly growing global economy. Parents, educators, business leaders, and politicians have been compelled to take a serious look at the national education system. As a result of this scrutiny, American education has undergone an unprecedented reform in an effort to prepare high school graduates with the skills to live, work and compete in a changing world.

The passage of Goals 2000: Educated America Act in 1994 created national education standards and made them part of federal law. These have become the foundation for standards reform throughout the nation. Standards do not determine a curriculum but rather focus efforts on what students should know and be able to do.

Due to a growing concern about student achievement nationwide, the Minnesota Legislature began discussion about improving education in Minnesota. The legislature adopted the two-tiered graduation rule in the mid 1990s. One tier established basic requirements standards with levels of achievement required for graduation. The other tier set rigorous standards against which student application and performance would be scored.

The movement to Graduation Standards in Minnesota has required a transformation in how teachers teach, how students show evidence of learning, and how students and teachers assess student learning. This transformation has required research and training in best practices for teachers. The term best practice has been borrowed from the professions of medicine and law, where “good practice” and “best practice” are everyday phrases used to describe solid, reputable, state-of-the art work in a field. If a practitioner is following best practice standards, he or she is aware of current research and consistently offers clients the full benefits of the latest knowledge, technology and procedures.

Experts and practitioners from fields such as art, science, mathematics, reading, writing and social science all met to define their own field’s best practices and arrived at very similar findings. The findings are listed below.

In the book, Best Practice, New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America’s Schools, the reports and recommendations from the national curriculum reports were grouped and given in a whole set of ideas comparing past practice in teaching with more desired practice in teaching.

The recommendations are listed:

- LESS whole class, teacher-directed instruction (e.g. lecturing)
- LESS student passivity: sitting, listening, receiving and absorbing information
- LESS presentational, one-way transmission of information from teacher to student
- LESS prizing and rewarding of silence in the classroom
- LESS classroom time devoted to fill-in-the-blank, dittos, workbooks, and other “seat work”
- LESS student time spent reading textbooks and basal readers
- LESS attempt by teachers to thinly “cover” large amounts of material in every subject area
- LESS rote memorization of fact and details

LESS emphasis on the competition and grades in school  
LESS tracking or leveling students into “ability groups”  
LESS use of pull-out special programs  
LESS use of and reliance on standardized tests

MORE experiential, inductive, hands-on learning  
MORE active learning in the classroom, with all the attendant noise of students doing, talking, and collaborating  
MORE diverse roles for teacher, including coaching, demonstrating, and modeling  
MORE emphasis on higher-order thinking; learning a field’s key concepts and principles  
MORE deep study of a smaller number of topics, so that students internalize the field’s way of inquiry  
MORE reading of real texts; whole books, primary sources, and nonfiction materials  
MORE responsibility transferred to students for their work; goal setting, record keeping, monitoring, sharing, exhibiting, and evaluating  
MORE choice for students (e.g. choosing their own books, writing topics, team partners, and research projects)  
MORE enacting and modeling of the principles of democracy in school  
MORE attention to affective needs and the varying cognitive styles of individual students  
MORE cooperative, collaborative activity; developing the classroom as an interdependent community  
MORE heterogeneously grouped classrooms where individual needs are met through inherently individualized activities, not segregation of bodies  
MORE delivery of special help to students in regular classrooms  
MORE varied and cooperative roles for teachers, parents, and administrators  
MORE reliance on teachers’ descriptive evaluations of student growth, including observational/anecdotal records, conference notes, and performance assessment rubrics

The information contained is best practice and is backed by educational research, draws on sound learning theory, and under other names has been tested and refined over many years. There are thirteen interlocking principles, assumptions or theories that characterize this model of education:

Student Centered -- The best starting point for schooling is young people’s real interests all across the curriculum. Investigating students’ own questions should always take precedence over studying arbitrarily and distantly selected “content.”

Experiential -- Active, hands-on, concrete experience is the most powerful and natural form of learning. Students should be immersed in the most direct possible experience of the content of every subject.

Holistic -- Children learn best when they encounter whole ideas, events, and materials in purposeful contexts, not by studying subparts isolated from actual use.

Authentic -- Real, rich, complex ideas and materials are at the heart of the curriculum. Lessons or textbooks that water-down, control, or oversimplify content ultimately disempower students.

Expressive -- To fully engage ideas, construct meaning, and remember information, students must regularly employ the whole range of communicative media -- speech, writing, drawing, poetry, dance, drama, music, movement and visual arts.

Reflective -- Balancing the immersion in experience and expression must be opportunities for learners to reflect, debrief, abstract from their experiences what they have felt and thought and learned.

Social -- Learning is always socially constructed and often interactive; teachers need to create classroom interactions that “scaffold” learning.

Collaborative -- Cooperative learning activities tap the social power of learning better than competitive and individual approaches.

Democratic -- The classroom is a model community; students learn what they live as citizens of the school.

Cognitive -- The most powerful learning comes when children develop their understanding of concepts through higher-order thinking associated with various fields of inquiry and through self-monitoring of their thinking.

Developmental -- Children grow through a series of definable but not rigid stages, and schooling should fit its activities to the developmental level of students.

Constructivist -- Children do not just receive content in a very real sense, they re-create and re-invent every cognitive system they encounter, including language, literacy, and mathematics.

Challenging -- Students learn best when faced with genuine challenges, choices, and responsibility in their own learning.

These ideas are being used in classrooms throughout the country and have been shown as a real, practical, manageable way to organize teaching and learning for students.

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A. 1998. *Best Practice, New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America's Schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## Small Secondary Schools

Beginning in 2003, a new state law will prohibit Florida school districts from building schools for more than 500 elementary students, 700 middle school students, or 900 senior high school students. This is one of the most flamboyant and recent actions illustrating the new, nationwide movement toward replacing large, ostensibly efficient but relatively impersonal schools with smaller learning environments.

There is a growing and compelling body of emerging literature advocating a return to “small schools.” Some of this rethinking of the nature of schools has taken place in the wake of Columbine and other “big school” tragedies, but most of the arguments for reducing the size of schools have resulted from other research and needs focused in student success and achievement.

A persuasive body of research has recognized that the impersonality of large schools has resulted in a student anonymity that leaves youngsters disconnected with the personal and social support that schools can provide.

The term “small schools” has many different definitions, depending on individual school needs and circumstances. This ERIC report summarizes the differences:

Some small schools operate in a structure totally their own, but most exist within a building that houses other schools. In the latter circumstances, the small school either may be one of several small schools that combine to fill the building, all with equal decision-making authority over building-wide issues; or it may be the only such school in a building otherwise housing a single, larger “host” school that makes all building-wide decisions and may exercise some controls over the small school as well.

Some schools identified as small schools are really just special programs within a “parent” school, usually developed for a special student population such as limited English speakers. Most aspects of their operation are controlled by the host school administration, and the teachers may have duties in both the parent and small schools. These schools are often less successful than the small schools that achieve the separateness and autonomy necessary to distinctiveness.

Small schools with a building of their own obviously have greater control over their operations and are not limited by having to share resources. Such facilities are, however, often harder to locate. Especially in urban areas, it may appear nearly impossible to find unused space unattached to an existing school.

## Classification

Different cities and school districts design their small schools very differently, and to different purposes. Although labels differ, four broad types of small schools are distinguishable:

**House Plans.** In a house plan students and teachers may remain together for some or all coursework. A house can be organized on a one-year or multiyear basis. It is usually overlaid upon the department structure of the traditional middle or high school that hosts it, which restricts the amount of change the arrangement can create.

**Mini-schools.** This arrangement has some of the properties of a house plan and is also dependent on its larger host school for its existence. But mini-schools almost always serve students over a several-year period, and they usually have their own instructional program, giving them more distinctiveness from one another than houses usually achieve.

**Schools-within-schools.** These are separate and autonomous units with their own personnel, budget, and program, authorized by the board of education or superintendent. They operate within a larger school, sharing resources and reporting to the school principal on matters of safety and building operation. Both students and teachers choose to affiliate with such a school.

**Small Schools or Schools-within-a-building.** These have the properties of a school-within-a-school, but differ in that each is an entirely new, separate, and independent school -- as opposed to one carved from an existing larger school. They have their own organization, instructional program, budget, and staff (Raywid, 2001).

The National Association of Secondary Schools, in their landmark document "Breaking Ranks" states that "High schools will create small units in which anonymity is banished...Students take more interest in school when they experience a sense of belonging." It also states "Some students cope in large, impersonal high schools because they have the advantage of external motivation that allows them to transcend the disadvantages of the school's size. Many others, however, would benefit from a more intimate setting in which their presence would be readily and repeatedly acknowledged." NASSP recommends that schools should be divided into self-operating small learning communities with a maximum size of 600. They go on to recommend:

"Scaling down represents only a first step in implementing a philosophy that permits students to flourish as individuals and lends credence to the idea that educators care about their schoolwork. Each house or unit within a school that tries to reduce its scale, for instance, should have its own separate faculty so as to limit the number of teachers with whom a student comes in contact during the high school years. Physical demarcations should be employed to underscore the separateness of the units even if this means building a brick wall at the end of a corridor, though the separate units would cooperate to mount programs that require a critical mass of students. Size should be reduced, moreover, in tandem with efforts to treat students fairly and equitably" (NASSP, 1996).

This model is being adopted by the Minneapolis Public Schools for 2002-2003. In their “Best practice analysis” summary of findings they state that:

- Small learning communities have been successful in raising student achievement, increasing student engagement, and increasing teachers’ sense of professional community.
- Graduation rates and GPAs for students in SLCs show significant improvement.
- Attendance at SLCs for at-risk students is higher than traditional schools.
- SLCs share 10 critical success factors defining SLC composition, the student experience and the degree of independence (Minneapolis School Board, 2001).

The Citizen’s League of the Twin Cities has also strongly endorsed small learning communities as a way of addressing the dropout problems in the metro area. They state:

“Large anonymous high schools make it easier for students to become disengaged from learning and, ultimately, disappear from the picture altogether. There is a persuasive body of literature that *small schools, as distinct from smaller class size, produce substantial improvements in many areas*. Among the improvements are that students learn more, make more rapid progress toward graduation, are more satisfied with small schools and fewer drop out than from larger schools. Most relevant to this Committee’s work, these effects are particularly true for disadvantaged students who may be more dependent on schools for their success. Raywid concluded that these findings: “have been confirmed with a clarity and level of confidence rare in the annals of education research” (Citizens League, 2001).

Chicago is also adopting this model, as have other large city schools.

The U.S. Department of Education recently funded the Smaller Learning Communities Grant Program, based on its own research. The successful proposals all had the common approach of creating independent, small heterogeneous learning communities out of large school settings. The Department says:

Approximately 70% of American high school students attend schools enrolling more than 1,000 or more students; nearly 50% of high school students attend schools enrolling more than 1,500 students.

Research suggests that:

- Smaller learning environments are a condition for boosting student achievement (Williams, 1990).
- School size has positive effects on student outcomes as evidenced by students’ attendance rates, frequency of disciplinary actions, school loyalty, use of alcohol or drugs, satisfaction with school and self-esteem (Raywid, 1995 and Klonsky, 1995).
- An effective size for secondary schools is in the range of 400-800 students (Williams, 1990).

- Enrollment size has a stronger effect on learning in schools with large concentrations of poor and minority children (Cotton, 1996).
- Research ultimately confirms what parents intuitively believe: that smaller schools are safer and more productive because students feel less alienated, more nurtured and more connected to caring adults, and teachers feel that they have more opportunity to get to know and support their students” (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Gregory, 1992; Stockard & Mayberry, 1992; U.S. Dept. of Ed).

The Center for School Change, University of Minnesota Humphrey Institute, is involved in a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, working with St. Paul, West Clairmont, Ohio, and Cincinnati, Ohio, to develop several models of how large high school buildings can be converted into small, more personalized schools.

Their recently released study, “Smaller, Safer, Saner Successful Schools,” documents 22 case studies of small schools throughout the nation. The key conclusions of the report states that smaller schools, on average, can provide:

- a safer place for students
- a more positive, challenging environment
- higher achievement
- higher graduation rates
- fewer discipline problems
- much greater satisfaction for families, students, and teachers (Nathan, et. al. 2001)

#### **Characteristics of small learning communities:**

- “Average” students will be less anonymous; school becomes more inviting and personal to students.
- The SLC has a high degree of decision making autonomy within the larger building.
- The SLC may have its own administration, counseling staff, special ed staff, etc. as well as its own teaching staff.
- Usually requires instructors to teach multiple preps in the same subject area.
- SLCs are limited to a maximum of 600 students in four grades.
- SLCs are usually heterogeneous in make-up.
- Only activities that are impossible to replicate in a small school, e.g. industrial tech classes, are taught in the larger building context.
- NASSP recommends physical barriers between the SLCs for more total independence.

## **Academies**

Another driving force for school change has been the perceived need for skilled entrance-level members of the work force. Career academies, focused on a context for learning that prepares a student for a vocation that matches his or her interests and skills have developed to fill this void.

Along with this has been the recognition that “constructivist learning,” or learning and assessment that is in a context of a student’s choice, results in a greater level of student achievement and interest.

As an alternative small-school approach, many schools have formed “career” academies as small learning communities or magnets. Typically, they include business, travel and tourism, information technology (all frequently sponsored by the National Academy Foundation), education, trades and health care. Other magnet schools include schools for the arts or International Baccalaureate schools.

Several examples of academy based schools can be found in “Smaller, Safer, Saner Schools.” Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas, has a student population of 1,250. Built in 1936, it has academies in several student interest areas:

- The Business Academy, which helps students obtain a successful career in business.
- FAST (Foundations in Applied Skills and Technology), which prepares students for work in technology and the trades.
- Health Careers/Life Sciences which helps students develop skills needed for post-secondary education or employment in the fields of health and life sciences.
- Hospitality, which teaches students the skills needed in careers such as hotel/motel management, travel and tourism, restaurant management, catering, or childcare.
- Humanities, which helps students in a rigorous academic environment to be successful at the university level.
- Performing Arts, which helps students develop skills in music, dance and drama in areas such as performance and production.
- Visual Arts Academy, which instructs students in the visual arts, graphic arts, and industrial arts.
- Opportunity Center which helps students build stronger academic skills and a greater sense of confidence so that they can transfer into one of the seven other programs. It focuses on ninth graders who have been unsuccessful in previous schools (Nathan et. al. 2001).

An example of a school-wide thematic approach is the School of Environmental Studies, on the grounds of the Minnesota Zoo in Apple Valley. Serving 400 students, it is part of the Rosemount (Dist. 196) school system. It is a “school of choice,” selected by students primarily because they wanted to attend a more personalized school, not because they wanted a career in science. Courses are interdisciplinary, students have their own workspace, and school design allows for considerable flexibility (Ibid).



## Common characteristics of academies

- Can exist in either a self-contained SLC or part of a total school approach.
- Students select an academy based on aptitude and interest.
- Core curricular courses are taught in a context that students are more comfortable with and have a greater aptitude for.
- Academies may include a strong vocational or post-secondary content.
- Has many of the other advantages of the small learning communities, but may not include looping of core curricular teachers. A typical student will have more teachers throughout high school than a student in a SLC.
- Anonymity of students is reduced by identification of special interest cadres that ultimately end up taking many classes together.

The Public Agenda, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and released in September 2001, surveyed 801 parents with children currently in high school and 920 public high school teachers. They are the first phase of a larger study that will compare the views of high school students, parents and teachers from both larger and smaller high schools on a range of academic and social factors. The complete study is set for release in December 2001.

Although other issues that parents and teachers are more familiar with such as class size and teacher pay arose as greater concerns in the survey, it showed that parents and teachers see a number of advantages to smaller high schools, and some serious drawbacks to larger ones:

- Majorities of parents (66%) and teachers (79%) say smaller high schools offer a better sense of belonging and community and are more likely to tailor instruction to meet individual needs (parents, 76%; teachers, 65%).
- More than two-thirds of parents and teachers (69% in both cases) say smaller schools are more likely to identify teachers who are not performing well.
- Large majorities of both groups (parents, 65%; teachers, 71%) say smaller schools would be better at helping students in large urban districts.
- More than two-thirds (parents, 68%; teachers 70%) say larger schools are more likely to have a lot of discipline problems.
- Majorities of both groups (parents, 56%; teachers, 62%) say larger high schools are more likely to have students who are alienated or socially isolated (Public Agenda 2001).

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# Schedule Reform Proposal

For many years, educators have given attention to the issue of how time is best used to meet the needs of the curriculum, attention to students, instructional approach, and teacher load. The most commonly implemented solution is the 4x4 block schedule.

The block schedule, or four period day, generally divides the school day into four periods of approximately 90 minutes, for each of four “blocks” or quarters of the school year.

Here are many of the commonly asked questions/concerns about the “block” schedule:

*Q. How much content will be lost from each course?*

A. Between 0 – 18% reduction depending on the course and teacher’s inventiveness. Lab type classes may actually increase curriculum whereas presentation type courses may see a reduction in curriculum.

At present: 55 minutes x 172 days = 9460 minutes or 157.7 hours per 1 credit course

Block: 90 minutes x 86 days = 7740 minutes or 129 hours per 1 credit course

The difference of 29 hours = 18%

*Q. Will the teacher’s day be longer?*

A. There would be no change in the length of a teacher’s day.

At the present time teachers work a 7.5-hour day with 1/2 hour duty free lunch and 55 minutes for preparation. A normal day is from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. allowing 30 minutes before the first class and 30 minutes after the last class for collaboration, team meetings, makeup work, etc.

With a “block” schedule teachers would also work a 7.5-hour day with 1/2 hour duty free lunch and 55 minutes for preparation. The 90-minute prep time would include the present 55-minute prep and may include curriculum development, team meetings, student makeup time, faculty meetings, etc., similar to what teachers presently do before and after school. The time prior to the first class and after the last class would be reduced from 30 to 15 minutes each and added to the 55-minute prep time.

Teacher-student contact time is, and will remain, balanced throughout the district at all levels. The location of the prep time during the day is different at each level, elementary, junior high and senior high.

*Q. How will a student’s day be affected?*

A. Most students, approximately 83%, will spend more time in school. Presently, 17% of the students take 7 classes per day and 83% take 6 classes. 55 minutes x 6 = 330 minutes or 55 x 7 = 385 minutes.

With a “block” schedule 90 minutes x 4 = 360 minutes. Students presently taking 6 courses will be in school 30 minutes more and students taking 7 classes will be in school 25 minutes less. Over the course of the year, and the four years at MHS, students will be in school 1/2 hour more per day which will allow them time to take more courses. Study halls would be eliminated allowing better utilization of teachers and more productive use of student time.

*Q. Will credits be added for graduation?*

A. The number of credits needed for graduation would be increased to 26 – 28. Presently, we require 21 credits and 24 Grad Standards.

With a “block” schedule, an increase to 26 – 28 credits would assure an equivalent to or additional time in the classroom for each student. There is not to be an increase in specific course credits above the present level as it would be counter productive to allowing more student choice. Additional courses will need to be added to meet student needs and requests.

*Q. Will there be an opportunity to add courses to offset the loss of content?*

A. Additional courses to provide the necessary increase in total credit requirements or to extend curricular offerings may be necessary in some departments. The process to be used for this will be the same as the existing process.

*Q. Will adequate training of staff be provided?*

A. It is estimated that approximately \$50,000 to \$70,000 will be necessary to train and retrain teachers to effectively organize and instruct students in the longer time slot. The training would be based upon what other districts have done and what the MHS staff determines appropriate.

The training should start as soon as the formal approval is given and continue throughout the first two years of implementation.

*Q. Will adjustments be made for music and possibly foreign language to have year long classes?*

A. The integrity of the music program would be assured. The staff will have the opportunity to recommend curricular change that will potentially enhance the program while supporting the goals of the overall school.

Foreign language courses have adapted well to the longer periods of time and the opportunity to visit with schools that have made the adjustment will be provided. Necessary modifications that best meet student needs will be considered.

*Q. Will it cost more?*

A. There will be an increase in providing more opportunities for students. The major increases will be for the initial training estimated at between \$50,000-70,000. This schedule will require approximately four more teachers at a cost of \$120,000 with \$70,000 being offset by eliminating

the transportation costs of the 7:30 “early bird” classes. There will be some additional startup costs associated with the purchasing of course materials for new courses. Some of this will be offset over the years by not needing as many textbooks since they can be used twice throughout the year instead of once.

*Q. How will it affect special education students?*

A. Most special education teachers report that the special education students adapt well to the new schedule. Different disabilities require different accommodations. Having fewer classes to deal with in a day appears to be an advantage to many students with or without special needs.

*Q. How will it affect Advanced Placement classes?*

A. A variety of accommodations have been used to meet the needs of these students. Some schools have extended the AP classes to three quarters while others have covered the material in one semester. It appears that courses offered in the first semester with “study groups” in the spring to prepare for the May exams have been well accepted. This requires additional review.

*Q. How will it affect students transitioning into or out of the high school from other schools or the Red River Area Learning Center?*

A. There appears to be minimal adjustments necessary for transitioning students. There are more opportunities to begin over or start new classes with the four period day.

*Q. Will there be homework and is make-up work a major problem with longer class periods?*

A. There will be as much or more student homework. For those classes that normally have homework slightly more will be expected. For the individual student the total amount should remain about the same as the present 6 hour day since there are fewer classes per day.

# Facilities

“As we move into the next millennium, changing societal expectations for public education threaten to completely restructure our paradigms of what constitutes an education” (Lackney, 1999).

This statement reflects the need to look at our educational system not only from a curricular standpoint, but also from the area of facilities. We need facilities that allow us to be flexible, through a variety of learning settings beyond the traditional classroom.

The building known as Moorhead Senior High was occupied in 1966. As you walk through this building you will notice many things:

- The majority of classrooms have no natural light.
- Classrooms are small.
- Hallways and locker combination make for congested hallways.

We feel that it is time for some major changes up to and including the possibility of a new high school. In order to truly embrace the new curricular and scheduling needs, the type of facility we have will either enhance our opportunity or make it very challenging. We need to ask ourselves: *Do facilities drive the opportunities we can give our students, or do well researched curricular ideas drive the type of facilities we have?*

Why facilities drive education:

1. Flexibility limited by existing space
2. Traditional classrooms the accepted norm
3. New arrangements hard to create
4. Limited community use possible
5. Facilities do not accommodate new technology (Lackney).

The needs we have identified are:

**1. Dry Floor Space.** Not only do current state standards dictate that more space is needed, but the addition of Title IX enhancements, the ninth grade, the growth of special education and its requirements, larger class sizes, and more course offerings all place a strain on the existing facility.

**2. Pleasant, attractive space for students to study and socialize.** Our students have no place to socialize or eat in a pleasant atmosphere. Hallways are congested and noisy during lunch periods. Students share lockers in order to be closer to the classrooms they use. The media center, which may be the most pleasant place to study, is too crowded to take an overflow from the study halls or the hallways.

**3. The Media Center.** This area should be the hub of activity during this day of technology. However, because of the many new services a media center must provide, our media center is at capacity most days. Students who are in PSEOP, work release or others who would appreciate use of the facility on an as needed basis have little access. There are only enough computers for one class to use.

**4. Natural Light.** Of the 66 original classrooms at Moorhead High, only 14 have natural light; 38 are below ground level. Recent studies have concluded that lack of natural sunlight may contribute to seasonal affect disorder as well as decrease academic performance.

**5. Career Center.** There is none. One of the major needs that students identify at Moorhead High is a useful career center. As we move into academies and smaller learning units, we need to have the information readily available so students can make researched choices on future vocational possibilities.

**6. Visual and Performing Arts Space.** It is amazing what our students and faculty in the arts do with the limited space they have to work with. Needed are a black box lab theater, adequate dressing rooms for performers, sufficient practice space for musicians, and space designed to enhance the teaching of visual arts, including adequate natural lighting.

**7. Classrooms and Teacher Work Areas.** Our vision for the future includes a building that supports “houses” for 9th and 10th grade students and academies for 11th and 12th grade students. Teacher work centers that promote the sharing of ideas, curriculum, and student concerns are critical.

**8. Independent Study Research Centers.** The concept of “constructivist” teaching as well as the requirements of many colleges requires a facility that supports individual research by students.

**9. Assessment Center.** Many school districts have centers that facilitate testing of new students for appropriate placement in classes.

**10. Reading Center.** Because reading is so critical to success in school and beyond, a properly equipped reading center, staffed by reading specialists, is an important part of any school facility.

**11. Aquatics Center.** Our current swimming pool lacks adequate, comfortable seating and outside access. There are concerns about the short range condition of the pool and its maintenance.

**12. Administrative Center.** Most newer schools have administrative centers that are centrally located for easy access, visibility, and functionality.

**13. Counseling Center.** Counselors should have pleasant facilities that are removed from administration, comfortable for students and families, private, and adequately sized to accommodate modern counseling responsibilities.

Source: A presentation delivered at the School Facilities Pre-conference Workshop, Pupil Transportation Administrators' Conference, Jeffery A. Lackney, Ph.D., A.I.A. April 21-23, 1999, Jackson, MS.

Additional information on school facilities can be found at <http://www.edfacilities.org>

## High School Enhancement

Moorhead Senior High School is a school of excellence. Throughout its history it has consistently provided high quality educational experiences. Moorhead High graduates have distinguished themselves by being among the brightest students in the nation based on nationally recognized tests. This has been accomplished as a result of having a dedicated teaching and support staff, capable students and the support of a caring community.

The curriculum and delivery methodologies have changed in an effort to better meet the needs of students. There are schools-within-a-school, e.g. gifted/talented and at-risk, "Best Practices," and vocational. Advanced Placement courses have greatly increased in the past three years and research on schedules, academies, and advisor-advisee programs are on-going. A transition program for incoming ninth graders has lessened the anxiety levels for students and their parents.

The building, within which the educational experience occurs, was outmoded prior to it being occupied in 1966. Of the 68 classrooms in the original structure only 18 have natural light and 38 are below ground level. The rooms are too small to facilitate modern educational instruction. The building was built to house grades 10-12 with one special education teacher. The expansion of special education, the addition of girl's athletics and the addition of 9th grade students has further compromised the functionality of the building.

With its present enrollment, Moorhead Senior High ranks in the top 5% of schools nationally in number of students. Although the size has some definite advantages, there are also disadvantages. The size of the student body along with the configuration of the building can lead students to feel they are merely a number instead of being valued as a unique individual. Efforts by teachers and administrators to create SLCs (Small Learning Communities) has been on-going. The BLT (Building Leadership Team) through the functional committees and sub committees has attempted to address this concern and make the school a more "user-friendly" environment.

At present, there is strong faculty support to encourage the development of schools-within-a-school initiatives ("Best Practices," gifted/talented and at-risk, etc.). There is growing support to develop an alternative four period daily schedule.

There is some support, but less, for academies and even less for a formal advisor-advisee program. The feeling is that additional information and understanding of these concepts is necessary. Faculty groups interested in promoting these concepts are encouraged to continue their research and propose curricular change through the formal processes in place.

The High School Enhancement Research Study Group has reviewed the school's history, identified its immediate and long-range needs and recommends the following:

- Support the existing school-within-a-school programs, e.g. independent study labs for gifted/talented and at-risk students, "SLC" groupings, and 9th grade transition initiative and encourage continued development of this philosophy.



- Promote the development of a four period day schedule with implementation in the fall of 2003.
- Encourage those interested in academies to continue to refine the proposals, educate fellow staff and community, and promote implementation.
- Allow the concept of advisor-advisee to be integrated into initiatives such as school-within-a-school, academies, etc. when deemed appropriate.
- Construct a new high school that is designed to meet the educational needs of 21st century research-based delivery models.