



# Evaluation Topic: High Schools

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## National High School and District Grants Initiative

The following reports were written by researchers from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRI). AIR and SRI have partnered to conduct an eight-year evaluation of the foundation’s National High School and District Grants Initiative.

### The National School District and Network Grants Program: Year 2 Evaluation Report

American Institutes for Research and SRI International

April 2004

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/NR/downloads/ed/researchevaluation/Yr3SynthesisReport.pdf>

This report is the second in a series of reports on the evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's National School District and Network Grants Initiative, a program which provides grants to organizations to assist in the creation of small schools around the country. It is based on data collected from 16 organizations, as well as the affiliated schools and school districts. While the report points out that it is still too early in the process to fully evaluate the foundation’s strategy for education reform, lessons can be learned and key questions can be addressed. In general, the evaluation results matched the foundation’s theories, and showed that intermediary organizations could, in fact, help create small high schools that foster personalization, high expectations, and teacher collaboration. The report also identifies key challenges for these small schools, including the effective implementation of innovative teaching approaches, the development of appropriate curriculum content, and the achievement of financial stability. Based on the findings, the report recommends a number of refinements to the program, including providing schools with more support in the development of curricula, creating a strategy to promote the new school culture among staff and students, and offering guidance on where to turn for financial support.

### High Time for High School Reform: Early Findings from the Evaluation of the National School District and Network Grants Program

American Institutes for Research and SRI International

April 2003

[http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/smallschools/Small\\_schools\\_eval\\_2003.pdf](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/smallschools/Small_schools_eval_2003.pdf)

This report, the first in a series of evaluations on the foundation’s National School District and Network Grants Initiative, attempts to show whether these schools are able to implement the reform methods advanced by the foundation and if students are benefiting from being in small schools. Researchers found

that relationships between students and teachers were substantially deeper than those in larger schools, and these relationships helped students feel more engaged with their studies and more committed to their schools. Teachers also felt more engaged and were able to participate in the decision-making process. The report identified a number of problems as well, including difficulty implementing innovative instruction practices, and not having the resources needed to operate the school effectively. The report offers a number of insights to both grantees and funders, suggesting, for example, that the foundation consider providing planning grants.

### **Mapping the Terrain: Year 1 of the Evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's National School District and Network Grants Program**

Linda Shear, SRI International

Becky Smerdon, American Institutes for Research

April 2003

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/researchevaluation/MapTerrain.pdf>

This report introduces the National School District and Network Grants Initiative by describing the foundation's reform strategies and operating assumptions, the goals of the foundation's grantees, and the experiences of these grantees in their first year of operation. The report found that the grantees' strategies match those of the foundation, the grantees have varying methods for implementing these strategies, and the grantees share common challenges, such as difficulty recruiting staff with the proper expertise, lack of support from the district and/or state, and the need to make instructional improvements.

### **Charting a Course: Evaluation Design of the National School District and Network Grants Program**

Becky Smerdon, Mike Garet, Jennifer O'Day, and Luke Miller, American Institutes for Research

Barbara Means and Karen Mitchell, SRI International

April 2003

[http://smallhs.sri.com/documents/Charting\\_a\\_Course.pdf](http://smallhs.sri.com/documents/Charting_a_Course.pdf)

This report describes the methodology being used by the American Institutes for Research and SRI International for evaluating the foundation's National School District and Network Grants Initiative, as well as some of the challenges conducting such an evaluation. The report uses the metaphor of a journey to show how researchers identified the destination, mapped a course, and explored the terrain. In the section entitled, "Reading the Map While Driving," the report discusses the difficulties of taking on such a complex, sprawling subject.

### **Targeted Literature Review of Major Constructs and Their Components: Evaluating the National School District and Network Grants Program**

American Institutes for Research and SRI International

October 2001

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/researchevaluation/GatesLitReview.pdf>

This literature review provides an overview of the key elements of the foundation's National School District and Network Grants Initiative, and examines these elements in the context of the larger body of research about the small schools movement and education reform. It addresses the various reform strategies being used by organizations around the country, as well as the foundation's perspective on these strategies. It also discusses the factors that determine a reform activity's success or failure. There are two glossaries at the end of the report: one defining the different grants in the foundation's program, the other providing definitions of general terminology related to education reform.

### **Evaluating the Gates Foundation National School District and Network Grants Program: Foundation Theory of Change**

American Institutes for Research and SRI International

July 2001

[http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/researchevaluation/BMGF\\_Theory\\_of\\_Change.ppt](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/researchevaluation/BMGF_Theory_of_Change.ppt)

This PowerPoint presentation depicts the theories and strategies behind the foundation's National School District and Network Grants Initiative. It gives a brief overview of how the program works, the attributes of effective schools, and the expected outcomes.

The following reports are studies of Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's school grantees. These studies are not a part of the foundation's overall evaluation efforts and were not commissioned by the foundation.

**Chicago High School Redesign Initiative: A Snapshot of the First Year of Implementation**

Susan E. Spote, Macarena Correa, Joe Kahne, and John Q. Easton

Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago

August 2003

<http://www.consortium-chicago.org/publications/pdfs/p64.pdf>

This report documents the first year of the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative, which transformed three large, traditional high schools into five small schools in the fall of 2002. Based on interviews with principals, teachers, students, and others, the study identifies the program's successes, as well as challenges that can be addressed over the coming years. Positive results of the conversion include stronger relationships between students and teachers, and an improved professional community for teachers. Challenges include a lack of emphasis on instruction, inadequate time for planning, limited facilities, and tension between the small schools and the host schools.

**Notes from the Ground: Teachers, principals, and students' perspectives on the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative, year two**

Susan E. Spote, Macarena Correa, and Joe Kahne

Consortium on Chicago School Research, University of Chicago

September 2004

<http://www.consortium-chicago.org/publications/pdfs/p74.pdf>

This report is a follow-up to the study conducted in August 2003, *Chicago High School Redesign Initiative: A Snapshot of the First Year of Implementation*, and includes data from the original five schools covered in the first report, as well as six additional schools that were opened in the fall of 2003. It examines whether the second wave of schools had similar experiences as the first, as well as the new issues facing the schools that are now in their second year of operation. This information was meant to assist in the planning and implementation of new small schools. Many of the sentiments voiced in the 2003 study were also voiced in the 2004 study, but new problems also arose, such as increased concern over professional development standards, the need for the schools to attract students who actively choose to be there rather than simply accept assignment to the school because of its location, and the need for greater flexibility and autonomy from the district.

**One-to-One Laptops in a High School Environment: Piscataquis Community High School Study**

Great Maine Schools Project

Senator George J. Mitchell Scholarship Research Institute

February 2004

<http://www.mitchellinstitute.org/research/finalLaptopreport.doc>

This report presents the results of a two-year program in which Piscataquis Community High School provided each of its 285 students and all faculty members with a laptop computer for use at school and home. It is based on surveys and/or interviews of students, faculty, administrators, and parents, as well as administrative data, and is meant to provide guidance to other high schools in Maine that may wish to implement a similar program. The report found that the computers and wireless Internet access provided to students and teachers enhanced their computer skills, increased student motivation and interest in school, improved the quality of student work and achievement, and created more opportunities for personalized learning, among other benefits. The program appears to have been most helpful to at-risk and low-achieving students, indicating that such a program could be used to promote greater equity in high schools.

### **Three Years Down the Road: Small School Reform at the Manual Educational Complex**

Patrick J. McQuillan

Lynch School of Education, Boston College

Colorado Small Schools Initiative

August 2004

<http://www.coloradosmallschools.org/docs/Reports/ManualPM6-04.doc>

This case study examines the 2003-2004 school year of the Manual Education Complex (MEC), which was converted from a large comprehensive high school (Manual High) into three small schools three years ago. The author evaluates the success of the conversion process by measuring the schools' progress in seven key areas: personalized relationships, teachers as learners and innovators, common and clear educational focus, literate and numerate graduates, school autonomy, culture of communication, and high expectations for post-secondary attainment. While signs of success such as high graduation and college-going rates are noted, the schools still face many challenges, such as low expectations for students among faculty, poor student attendance, lack of student engagement in coursework, and a general lack of order within the schools.

### **Early College High School Initiative**

The following reports were written by researchers from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRI). AIR and SRI have partnered to conduct a multi-year evaluation of the foundation's Early College High School Initiative.

#### **Early College High Schools: Early Recruitment and Selection Strategies**

[American Institutes for Research and SRI International. October 2004.](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/NR/downloads/ed/evaluation/ECHSSRP04.pdf)

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/NR/downloads/ed/evaluation/ECHSSRP04.pdf>

During the 2003–2004 school years, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported the creation or transformation of more than 20 Early College High Schools (ECHSs). This memo describes the strategies ECHSs have used to recruit students from groups that are traditionally underserved and underrepresented in higher education and addresses the impact of the recruitment and selection strategies on the demographics of the ECHSs' student enrollments. The evaluators found that a majority of ECHSs worked with middle and high schools to recruit students. The ECHSs selected students using varying criteria from school to school. Generally speaking, most schools enrolled either students similar to the district population or a greater proportion of students from racial/ethnic minority groups or low-income families.

#### **Early College High School Initiative: Intermediary Summary Report, 2003–2004**

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/NR/downloads/ed/evaluation/ECHSIntermediaryReport04.pdf>

American Institutes for Research and SRI International. December 2004.

This report draws upon qualitative data collected through interviews and site visits to summarize the early work of 10 ECHS grantee intermediaries. Findings are presented in four key areas. First, the report discusses the degree to which the intermediaries and the foundation share a vision for ECHSs and the ways in which intermediaries have personalized their vision. Second, the report notes the intermediaries' implementation strategies and the ways in which some intermediaries underestimated the breadth of activities that would be required of them. Third, the report describes some typical implementation activities and provides examples of ways that intermediaries both are and are not meeting the needs of their ECHSs. Fourth, the report discusses the intermediaries' capacity and how that capacity interacts with their ability to support ECHSs. Key lessons learned by the intermediaries during the first two years of the initiative include: developing the capacity to adequately support ECHSs in all areas is critical; formal

partner agreements create invaluable foundations; and, middle school outreach needs to be a higher priority.