

HORACE

Empowering Students: Essential Schools' Missing Link

Students are too often the forgotten heart of school reform—its whole purpose and its major resource. How can their power be nurtured and tapped as schools work toward more active learning, more personal and decent school climates, and higher standards and expectations?

THE KIDS PILED OUT OF VANS into the May splendor of the summer camp nestled in the New Hampshire mountains, a mix of excitement and shyness in the way they stood about in clusters, batting away mayflies and wondering what to do next. From high schools as far flung as Zuni, New Mexico and Anchorage, Alaska, New York City and suburban St. Louis, they knew they had come to blaze new trails.

But despite the idyllic setting, their business here was no outdoor challenge. Instead, these participants in the third national conference of the Coalition Student Network would spend the next three days puzzling out their own role in the complex issues of Essential School reform.

How might they take on a more active and independent role in the classroom, using their teachers as coaches and not deliverers of knowledge? Did they have the right to pursue their own interests in the curriculum, or to follow fewer subjects in greater depth? How could they obtain the democratic governance that would give them a true voice in school policy and decision-making? In their brief tenure as students, how could they turn isolated instances of empowerment into a unified nationwide movement that represented their needs and concerns?

In small groups over the next few days, 250 kids from 24 schools

began to trade information, share stories of success and frustration, come up with tentative suggestions. Hesitantly at first and then with growing confidence, they mined their common experiences and began to draft new goals. For this older onlooker, the process evoked poignant memories of early feminist consciousness-raising groups. *Will they let us do this? What if we asked for that?* The very language emerged from a long history of disparagement and disenfranchisement—but in this case the cause was not gender but youth.

"Student voices are the missing link in school reform," TheodoreSizer has said. Despite the rhetoric of change, students are too often its subjects and not its agents, their tenure too fleeting to accumulate real weight. They come to high school eager for the privileges of young adulthood, but school structures trivialize those privileges inside the classroom and out. The student council plans the senior prom; the principal decides who gets expelled; the good student feeds back what the teacher wants.

But in Essential schools from coast to coast, a growing impatience with the tension between theory and practice has lent new energy to serious student involvement. If Sizer's philosophy rests on the belief that all students deserve practice in the habits of mind characterizing a democratic citizenry, many school

STAGES OF STUDENT EMPOWERMENT: What's a Teacher to Do?

by Nancy Mohr, principal, University Heights High School

Stage 1: The Honeymoon

This is terrific; finally somebody cares what we students think. This school is nothing like what I'm used to—you have freedom and you can do whatever you want.

Do not be lulled by the students' euphoria. This will not be easy; their joy will not last without some hard work in setting goals and parameters together. Students give input, but the hard job of designing the curriculum still mainly belongs to the teachers (even if it aims to have students design curriculum). Listening to all voices is not the same as giving all voices equal weight. Discuss together what consensus means—a constant search for a win-win solution. Voting is never useful; it leads to unhappiness, and often to the teacher being outvoted.

Stage 2: I Want You to Take Control

Consensus is sloppy; I need more clarity and control. This doesn't look like school is supposed to look and you aren't doing what teachers are supposed to do. I want to get my way but I'm not sure I want all these other people to take up class time getting their way. You're the teacher; just give us assignments and homework and let's get on with it. Just make sure that you are doing the things I want you to do.

The teacher has to be neither wishy-washy nor autocratic at this stage, instead helping students get comfortable with new feelings and new values: discomfort as a good sign; risk-taking as good; not knowing the answers as a sign of intellectual integrity; being left with new questions as a positive state of affairs. We cannot revert into taking control because we are embarrassed or challenged by the students' expectations. Neither can we revert to passive behavior: It's up to you, not me; what do you want to do? Nor can we try to manipulate or talk the students into what we want them to do. Our best strategy is the curriculum. Designing curriculum that engages students, gives them regular feedback and a sense of accomplishment, and gives them real choice (as opposed to variety) is the teacher's strongest, most powerful tool.

Stage 3: I'm Feeling My Cheerios

You can't teach us that—we don't want it. We want to learn about things important and relevant to us, but who are you to teach them—you're so old, so middle-class, so white, so out of it. We want to do what we want to do and you told us this is our school, so . . . And why don't we have more math, more this, more that?

The teacher can get really confused right about now. It is essential to be centered and filled with conviction about our direction. This makes it easier to be flexible enough to respond to student reactions, yet not keep wavering so students feel we are not in control. We need to be not controlling, but in control; kids pick up the difference right away. Remain calm; be willing to modify plans; but don't get sucked into endless discussions about what's wrong with this class. Better to get kids involved in thinking and working, and engaged intellectually. When

we pay attention to all the cues, we are ahead of the game. If we insist that we know best, well then . . .

Stage 4: Distrust

Sure, you say you want my input, but you hold all the cards. You never follow through on what we want, so why should we bother? Why did you ask us in the first place?

The teacher has to really work at being trustworthy and following through. Don't ask for input if you have no intention of following through. Students much prefer your telling them clearly up front what is genuinely theirs to negotiate. If these parameters come too late, they feel good reason for insurrection. Of course, giving kids only what they want, not what they need, is not the answer. We must insist upon the win-win solution—what they want and need. Another major cause for mistrust is the "loaded" curriculum, essential question, or class discussion, in which the teacher already knows the "right" answers or approaches; students know when we don't trust them to construct their own knowledge.

Stage 5: Don't Blame Me; I'm a Kid

I like to be heard and participate in making decisions, but don't blame me if I don't follow through, get the assignment done, do a good job. After all, I have problems at home, have been sick, didn't know what I was supposed to do, couldn't find anything in the library, lost it, and it was boring. Anyway, it's scary. However tempting it is here to point out students' lack of logic and responsibility, it is not very useful. Kids start out without habits of responsibility and we have to build these habits in, keep good track of them, and keep encouraging students to make progress. As they get in touch with their fear of empowerment, they come closer to attaining it. The teacher's job is help them through regular feedback and reinforcement, not by doing for them, excusing them, and enabling them.

Stage 6: Finally, Genuine Empowerment

I finally feel like I have control over my own learning. I know I can't do it alone; I need teachers to coach and guide me, but I don't need them to give me value. I know I have value; I can think for myself. And when I am out on my own, I know I will be able to make smart decisions, use good judgment, and use my mind well. I also know that I can take what others think and use it and learn from it, not reject it. I am ready to go on learning more . . . it's even fun.

The teacher cannot stop being vigilant; these stages do not move in orderly, predictable ways. Students will cycle through them; each student in a group will be at a different stage. The teacher will always be diagnosing what is going on, then prescribing. We will have a "sense of the group," and within that a sense of where each individual is. This may be difficult, but its rewards are great; this is why we became teachers. When students are genuinely empowered, no one is happier than we are. Then we know we have done our job well.

people argue, schools must structure themselves to provide that. If students are to reason things out on their own, we must ask them to come up with the questions, not just the answers. Individual Essential schools have led this movement by changing their attitudes and practices in small ways and large. And a growing national network is emerging to encourage such changes; the 1994 New Hampshire student conference followed two like forums in Hartford and St. Louis in 1993.

Curriculum and Instruction

How can students begin to take a more meaningful role in their own schooling? Paradoxically, even those eager for change often resist their teachers' attempts to transfer responsibility for learning in new ways, teachers note. "As we give up the totalitarian power structure in our classrooms," says Randy Wisheart, who teaches humanities at Hibberd Middle School in Richmond, Indiana, "we must recognize

the responsibility of providing scaffolding. If we don't teach students how to use their new authority, we shouldn't be surprised by their difficulty in reaching high expectations."

Many Essential school teachers have created such scaffolding by inviting kids to help decide what their studies will include and why, how they will learn, and how well they are progressing. "The entire constructivist tradition is predicated on the idea of student autonomy," argues Alfie Kohn in "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide" (*Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept. 1993), "the chance for students to view learning as something under their control rather than as disembodied, objectified subject matter."

Sometimes this means finding connections between required subjects like history or mathematics and real-world projects that interest students. Seventh-grade students at Thayer High School in Winchester, New Hampshire, for instance, launched a voter-registration drive when they realized a minority of residents were making decisions for the town. Seniors studying Long Island history and culture at North Shore High School in Seacliff, New York actually built a wooden boat over several years, confronting dozens of mathematical problems in the process, then used the vessel to explore the natural history and geography of the nearby Sound. Harmony School middle-schoolers in Bloomington, Indiana conducted a year-long publicity campaign to save a local work of sculpture that had been threatened by vandalism. Any student at Parkway South High School near St. Louis can devise an independent "mastery project" springing from course studies but addressing an individual interest.

Other students exert influence on the course offerings themselves. At Brimmer and May, a small school near Boston, student requests led to a calculus course and one on the Holocaust. At Bronxville (NY) High School, seniors formally proposed to

the school board a five-week internship or community-service project during senior spring, to relate their high school years to the broader world beyond. (The petition was denied pending further study.) Students can create courses not offered at School Without Walls in Rochester, New York by finding someone in the community to teach them or signing up at a local college, as long as the school approves a written proposal including learning goals and evaluation criteria.

Once in the classroom, teachers can help students take ownership of their coursework by discussing with them at the start of a unit what they already know about a subject and what they would like to find out. As kids explore why someone would consider a topic important enough to require, they not only make new connections to their own interests but can also begin to define criteria of excellence based on examples drawn from their own experience.

"I call this 'giving the kids the keys' because it helps kids learn to drive their own education in a supportive context," says Bil Johnson, a CES National Re:Learning Faculty member who has created an advisory curriculum aimed at increasing student ownership of their studies. (See sidebar, page 4.) "If we can involve students routinely in articulating the criteria for excellent work, we go beyond top-down, beyond bottom-up, to 'inside-out' reform."

Once they internalize these standards for excellence, students can practice them by helping evaluate their own and others' work. In San Diego, O'Farrell Community School students turn in self-evaluations with every math quiz in Clyde Yoshida's classes, outlining what they still need to learn in order to do better. Randy Wisheart's students at Hibberd Middle School routinely participate in their own assessment, even going so far as to suggest their course grades and support the suggestion with evidence. (See sidebar, page 6.) At New York's University Heights High School, students sit as



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Giving the Kids the Keys: An Advisory Plan that Involves Students in Setting Standards

by Bil Johnson, National Re:Learning Faculty

Just as a learner's permit allows students to develop the skills of driving under the tutelage of a responsible adult, this advisory curriculum gives them a framework in which they take gradual responsibility for their own success—a system of performance tasks, initially in a coached and guided environment, but finally on their own. Students can be handed the keys to their own future, encouraged to investigate and reflect on what their schooling is about and prove themselves in the "road test" of a graduation exhibition. It is an "inside out" strategy for change, in which students and teachers collaborate to systematically investigate topics that question the nature of schooling—its patterns, its connections, its disciplines.

Since the advisory program is not in the purview of any one department or discipline, it is the ideal setting for such inquiry and reflection. It can draw methods, styles, and activities from all the disciplines, putting knowledge from content area courses to use. The advisory becomes a place where students analyze, evaluate, and synthesize their discipline-based course work, looking for connections between courses and content areas, seeing how the knowledge applies or transfers to other ("real-world") situations, and so on. At the same time, they develop awareness of the school's exit outcomes and the requirements of the graduation exhibition. In the advisory students weekly practice demonstrating the concepts identified in the exit outcomes through inquiry, activity, and assessments.

The framework has four components:

- 1) A series of proposed topics and/or themes.
- 2) Essential questions designed to provoke collaborative inquiry by students and teachers, driving the program forward and focused on constructing knowledge.
- 3) An activities "menu" from which advisory groups can pick and choose how they want to investigate ideas and pursue essential questions.
- 4) Assessments connected to the activities—pushing the inquiry deeper and requiring students to reflect critically and demonstrate understanding.

The framework divides into four five-topic sequences, each of which can be the advisory curriculum during one school year. Each topic extends over four to eight meetings encompassing

a minimum of 200 minutes; depending on the advisory group schedule, the sequence can be completed over a semester or a full year.

In the ninth-grade sequence, students explore systems, patterns, and connections in an academic context and begin to investigate what the school's stated exit outcomes (such as "complex thinker" and "effective communicator") might look like. In the tenth-grade sequence, they continue investigating outcomes (such as "involved citizen," "self-directed achiever," and "collaborative contributor"), and they take a first look at the purposes of the graduation exhibition for which they will prepare during the years ahead. The eleventh-grade sequence examines the curriculum itself and begins to devise performance standards in each area. (An example follows.) The twelfth-grade sequence focuses on the graduation exhibition, generating performance standards in research and writing, preparing and presenting a proposal, creating a visual and oral component, working with a mentor, and using a peer critique team. The final semester of senior year is devoted to carrying out the graduation exhibition in a timely manner so that it meets the standards agreed upon.

A sample unit in the eleventh-grade sequence:

The Purpose and Nature of the Disciplines: Language Arts, Social Studies, and Foreign Languages

Essential Questions: • How does language limit and liberate people? • What can be learned about a culture by simply studying its language? • Are social sciences really "science"? • What is the significance of studying "the history of [any language, culture, etc.]?"

Activities/Assessments: Each of two student groups will conduct a timed debate (in a "fish-bowl" setting) for the other group. Group members will divide into "pro" and "con" positions for each of the issues raised by the Essential Questions (e.g., "Language does liberate people vs. Language does limit people"; "Little/much is learned about a culture from studying its language"). Each group will critique the other's arguments.

For a complete description of this advisory curriculum contact Bil Johnson, Education Dept., Box 1938, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912 (tel.: 401-863-3116).

peer evaluators together with teachers and parents in regular "round-table presentations" that cap study units at every grade level. And when exit exhibitions take place at schools like Walden III in Racine, Wisconsin and Heathwood Hall Episcopal School in Columbia, South Carolina, students are members of each graduation committee.

Inviting students to help set and evaluate their goals leads naturally to the next step: having decided where they're headed, students can participate in shaping the route they will take to get there. For Essential school teachers, this means abandoning the lecturer's stance at the front of the class in favor of a broad choice including individual, small-group, and whole-group activities.

Orienting a course around "essential questions" helps this process. As students break a subject into specific questions, sort themselves into groups to explore these questions, plan and conduct an investigation, and figure out how to share what they have learned with the rest of the class, they exert considerable power over their own learning path and master valuable skills like cooperation and research.

More important still, Ted Sizer points out, is that students gain practice in learning on their own. "The most important reason to give kids authority in the classroom is so they acquire the habit of reasoning out for themselves the intellectual problems we all face," he says. "Ask a group to come up with a solution for the Israeli-Jordanian conflict, for example, and eventually they will discover that the dilemma is about not just religion but water resources as well." In situations like this, teachers can serve primarily as coaches, continually prodding students to question and make sense of the material they work with.

Virtually every Coalition member school has made real changes along these lines, aiming toward a more active and student-centered classroom practice. At Indiana's

Harmony School, students from kindergarten through high school routinely mix in groups exploring different topics, and it's common for kids to coach each other. In one striking example, junior Mariby Parsons and sophomore Chris Evilore wrote and performed a mini-opera that laid out for younger children the rudiments of scientific notation. "They say you learn 10 percent of what you hear, 20 percent of what you see, 30 percent of what you read, and 95 percent of what you teach," Chris says. Hibberd kids also frequently take on the role of teacher before their classes, with peers suggesting what else might help them learn better.

Whatever the pedagogical method, to honor and develop student questioning skills involves a revolution in long-entrenched classroom habits. Jen Prileson, who teaches at Catalina Foothills High School in Tucson, Arizona, describes an "air traffic control" exercise she uses when she consults with schools as a National Re:Learning Faculty member. "Four participants stand in a high place and try to direct a large group of blindfolded people with their arms outstretched to 'land' on a narrow runway," she says. "It's amazing how few of the 'planes' ever ask a question of the traffic controllers—a perfect metaphor for traditional classroom practice."

Governance and Students

Such shifts in attitudes and procedures about curriculum and instruction go a long way toward empowering students in academic matters, but they may not address the social and behavioral areas that play an equally large part in a young person's development. When students have the chance to practice making responsible decisions as a group, they take another major step toward adulthood in a democratic society.

In the classroom, this can begin by regular practice in the processes of group problem-solving, whether in academics or not. As they use crit-

ical dialogues to evaluate various points of view, students learn how to productively disagree, how to reach consensus on general principles or guidelines, and how one person's freedom to choose is limited by obligations to the group.

This habit takes on new dimensions as students begin to play a more active role in their own governance. Several Coalition member schools have put into place student-faculty legislatures complete with constitutions and judiciaries, where students have a powerful voice in determining policy and practice. In New York alone, Bronxville High School, Scarsdale Alternative High School, Ithaca's Alternative Community School, School Without Walls, and University Heights High School are thriving examples of the "just community" model developed by Harvard University's Lawrence Kohlberg. Indiana's Harmony High School, Souhegan High School in Amherst, New Hampshire, and Boston's Fenway Middle College High School also have representative systems that honor every voice.

Governance systems like these tend to put a high priority on having students take responsibility as a group for their own and others' behavior. For example, students met in "town meetings" to address an incident at Fenway, which is located on the campus of an urban community college, in which a peer's offensive language had upset relations with the college clerical staff. The upshot, says Fenway's Linda Nathan, was a "powerful letter to the campus newspaper," a new system of students policing each other's behavior, and a dramatic improvement in school climate.

Democratic student governance systems can also foster the habit of involvement in the larger community's affairs. At Bronxville, a student protest over the town's decision to put parking meters on the street where students parked led to a new policy that one student would routinely attend town council

meetings. Bronxville students have become so accustomed to a political voice, in fact, that in 1993 one senior, Patrick English, ran for mayor of this town of 6,000, garnering 42 percent of the vote and substantial coverage in the national press.

When students experience real practice in the democratic process, school becomes a political laboratory for democracy, not a benevolent dictatorship, says CES Director for Schools Bob McCarthy, who headed Brookline (MA) High School and Hanover (NH) High School during the 1970s, when each instituted a system of citizenship education. "We aimed to encourage a sense of collective responsibility on the part of the student body for the school," he says, "and to develop the skills of bargaining and analysis within this framework."

Interestingly, establishing such democratic systems does not have to wait until things are going smoothly in a school, according to a new book, *Preparing for Citizenship: How to Teach Youth to Live Democratically*, by Ralph Mosher et al. (Praeger, 1994). In fact, a time of turmoil may pose an unique opportunity, the authors argue, to improve the situation by reallocating power in the system to include both faculty and students.

But providing the necessary resources—particularly regular scheduled in-school time for meetings—is vital. So is the willingness to let the system evolve over the course of years, growing and restructuring in pragmatic ways. "School democracy is a learning process," the authors contend. "Confusing democracy with short-term, efficient school management can heighten the frustrations of both students and educators."

A Network of Students

As students begin to take ownership of their learning both in the classroom and in governance, they look for support to others in the same position. Some Essential schools have created a formal arena for

Coaching Students to Assess How They Are Doing

Randy Wisehart and his team partner at Hibberd Middle School in Richmond, Indiana ask their eighth-grade Humanities students to suggest and defend their own course grade, using a number of instruments including this final exercise:

Please indicate your self-assessed grade of ____, and support your opinion with your work from the nine weeks—specifically, your written work, book reviews, daily assignments, tests/assessments, and projects.

You must attach two pieces of your written work (one of which can be your project). You must complete this self-evaluation with your guardian or another adult. Your guardian's signature is required at the bottom of the document.

As you discuss with your guardian what your grade should be, have the following available to support your decision:

- Book reviews
- Writing folder
- Final drafts
- Daily assignments
- Spelling and vocabulary list
- Book list
- Writing list
- "How am I doing?" sheet

Use these questions to guide your discussion with your guardian:

- What were your writing goals? Did you accomplish them?
- How do you learn best? Do you arrange given assignments so you can build on your strengths and weaknesses? Do you need to make any adjustments in your study habits?
- What are the most important things you do as a reader?
- What connections have you made between people and events in your study of U.S. history?
- Are you always pleasant, cooperative, and helpful?
- Do you always try to do your best?
- Do you turn everything in on time?
- Do you use your time well (teachers almost never remind you to get work; you never bother other students)?

When you have completed your evaluation, please turn these things in to your teachers:

- Complete written evaluation
- Spelling-vocabulary list
- Your two best pieces of writing
- Writing list
- Book list
- Your "How am I doing?" sheet

What have we forgotten?

Comments from your guardian: _____

Guardian signature _____ Student signature _____

Teachers complete this section:

We are pleased to support your self-assessed grade of ____, as you have presented and supported it in this document. We think this grade is appropriate because: _____

We are unable to support your self-assessed grade of ____, as you have presented and supported it in this document. A more appropriate grade, we believe, is _____. We think this grade is appropriate because: _____

kids to share their ideas, either in advisory groups or in regular classes such as the Networking class Tom McGuire offers at Thayer High School. To visit that class is like walking into a busy organization's conference room—students sending and collecting e-mail from peers around the country, meeting to plan a national conference of Coalition students, and coming and going to other classrooms to speak with younger students about the school's skill-based graduation outcomes. The room fairly crackles with energy and purpose; McGuire serves merely as a resource for these young adults with an agenda of their own.

Thayer students and others at Parkway South High School, Central Park East Secondary School in New York, and elsewhere gathered Essential school students from across the country at three well-attended conferences in the last two years; they aim to hold regular regional meetings to share ideas and information about school change. At the 1993 meeting in St. Louis, students interpreted the Coalition's Nine Common Principles to reflect their own concerns. (See page 8.) This November, at the Coalition's annual Fall Forum in Chicago, the Student Network will join over 3,000 educators to hold its own conference in parallel.

Unless the structures exist in their schools to support student involvement in change, however, young people often experience the same problems teachers face when they return home inspired with new ideas. "I always leave all pumped up about the changes we can make back home," David Lobenstine, a senior at Central Park East, said at the recent New England conference. "But then we get trapped back into the old routines. Kids lose interest and don't bother to come to meetings. You think, hey, I'm about to graduate anyway. You lose heart."

To combat this tendency, Lobenstine believes, schools must formalize and institutionalize student involvement. "Kids should

see it as a duty and responsibility even if it might not be the first thing they want to do," he says. "The staff is a huge part of it—we really need teachers to help us keep on top of goals and turn our brilliant ideas into the daily life of the school."

"With the right school structure, kids can have a really strong voice in school change," Tom McGuire agrees. "You need to create a setting in which they can engage in an ongoing conversation with their teachers and principal, not just fifteen minutes here and there." The most important part of Coalition student conferences, observes Thayer principal Dennis Littky, takes place in schools both before they occur and afterward. "That's when the ideas get moved into action," he says.

The Coalition Network students ended their New Hampshire retreat by presenting skits and putting forth their own action plans, team by team, before the crowded room. Invariably they included the same elements: workshops, student mentoring systems, networking classes, newsletters, real-world challenges, alternative assessments, more voice in decisions affecting them.

But inevitably they used the same tentative vocabulary: *Talk to the others. Ask permission. If they will let us.* No matter how supportive their individual schools, they knew

all too well what constraints the system had in store for them. If schools are para-ecclesiastical and para-military institutions, as political scientist Ted Kolderie has said, these young people occupy their trenches and their catacombs.

Yet the irreverent energy of their tongue-in-cheek presentations just as clearly revealed the contagious excitement generated when one's reach exceeds one's grasp in new-found and inspiring ways. When his turn came around, a burly student who introduced himself as "Reverend Samuel" and who is the son of a Baptist preacher rose to speak for his group from Salem High School in upstate New York.

"I was at the top of the mountain in New Hampshire," he intoned in gospel rhythms to the clapping, swaying crowd of high school students. "And the Almighty said to me, Let my people go! And I said, *How? Teach me how!* And He said, Go down to the people, and teach them the Coalition ways! And so I say, Get everyone, get the little ones, get the teachers, get the older ones, get everyone in the community involved—come on, can I get an 'Amen'? If you want to be a Coalition, get *everyone* involved!" In delighted unison, the assembled students from Essential schools across this country called out their answer: *Amen!* □

What a Democratic Education Looks Like

- **Equity.** Democratic education raises issues of equity and deals with structural inequality.
- **Political engagement.** Democratic education raises political and social issues and sees the global in the particular
- **Participatory classroom processes.** Democratic education provides students with choice and authority in the classroom, both individual and collective choice.
- **Community.** Democratic education is concerned with the nature of relationships in the classroom. It aims to develop a commitment to the common good and to foster caring relationships.
- **Democratization of knowledge.** Democratic education values student knowledge and the co-construction of knowledge.

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Students Rewrite the Nine Common Principles

1. The school should focus on helping students learn to use their minds well. This includes helping students to: make connections between subjects; understand instead of memorize; go beyond set expectations (do extra credit work because they want to!); and develop life skills (think critically and logically and communicate clearly). Academics should be the top priority of the school and "other activities" should not interfere with a student's education.
2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. The program's design should be challenging to students, yet not beyond their capabilities. It must be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by "subjects" as conventionally defined. In achieving this goal it is important that teachers work together as a team. Curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content. Any decision designed to benefit the students should and must incorporate student input.
3. The school must realize that each student is unique and that learning styles of students often differ. Consequently, teachers need to adjust their teaching to meet all students' needs so that every student is able to meet the school's goals and expectations.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the best of the school's ability. Classes should be small enough to provide the personal attention each student needs. To better utilize time and materials, parents, students, staff, and administration should together make the important decisions for the school.
5. The school should encourage students to work and teachers to coach students in their work as opposed to teachers lecturing and students listening (or not listening) like vegetables. Students will then learn to take the initiative and will be motivated to become more involved in their educations.
6. Upon entering high school, general knowledge of math and language should be completed. The majority of the high school year should be spent learning essential skills. A diploma will be awarded when the student can successfully exhibit knowledge of these skills to the school's community.
7. The school should be a place which is comfortable and inviting to all students. There should be a feeling of respect, trust, and partnership between students, parents, and teachers. In such an environment, students will be given the opportunity to express themselves, and their self-determination will rise, knowing that they can make a difference.
8. The teacher should be a generalist first (a teacher and a scholar of life) and a specialist second (an expert in one particular discipline). Specific classes may then deal with numerous disciplines. Staff will need to expect multiple obligations, including, but not always limited to, teaching, counseling, and managing. As they commit to a student's entire education, they should no longer be viewed as an object of intimidation, but as a model of a lifelong learner.
9. Teachers and students need time to make these changes happen and happen well. Some more traditional programs may need to be sacrificed in order to make the changes work financially and logistically.

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