



RAISING THE BAR, BUILDING CAPACITY:

Driving Improvement in California's
Continuation High Schools



JOHN W. GARDNER CENTER
for Youth and Their Communities



THE CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN INSTITUTE
ON LAW AND SOCIAL POLICY

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A TWO-PHASE STUDY

Phase 1 (Descriptive Study)– 2007-08

- **Nine Counties** (Humboldt, Alameda, Santa Clara, Fresno, San Joaquin, Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, San Diego)
- **26 School Districts; 37 continuation schools**
- **What is a Continuation High School?**
- **Who are the students in Continuation Schools?**
- **How are these schools staffed and Supported?**
- **What do policymakers and educators need to know?**



PHASE 1 FINDINGS:

- **Enormous variation in Design, Intensity of Effort, and Student Outcomes.**
- **Lack of Clarity about Goals (at all levels of the system)**
- **Incoherent State Accountability System**
- **Generally Opaque or Non-Existent Identification and Placement “Systems”**
- **State/District Funding system that did not reflect the needs of teachers and students**



PHASE 1 FINDINGS

A Very Vulnerable Population (Healthy Kids Survey)

- Homeless youth; or in youth in foster care,
 - Sexually or physically abused,
 - Experiencing substance abuse,
 - Parenting, pregnant,
 - Former incarceration,
 - mental health issues,
 - gang involvement,
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- English learners (“long-term LEP’s and newcomers)



PHASE 1 FINDINGS

We did find Effective Schools; Even if they were outliers.

- CHS students score lower on virtually all state-assessed measures of academic performance (By design)
- BUT: CHS students do at least as well (on average) as Comprehensive schools on CAHSEE pass rates
- Some CHS do better than Comprehensive HS on a range of persistence and course/school completion measures (given similar student profiles).
- ***CHS Could be an effective alternative route to the Diploma.***



PHASE 2 – A FOCUS ON HIGHER-PERFORMING SCHOOLS (2009-11)

What are the characteristics of higher performing schools?

What lessons can we draw from these schools that would inform State/District Policy?



STATE POLICY – Goal Setting

- 1. High Performing Schools Establish and Regularly Articulate Clear Academic Goals and Expectations and Align Systems to Support those Goals**

Lessons for State Policy

Clarify academic goals

Limit involuntary transfer Continuation Schools.

Require districts to articulate a coherent set of identification, placement, and school intake procedures.



STATE POLICY - Accountability

2. Higher-Performing Schools Create Strong School Accountability Norms in the Absence of State and District Standards.

Lessons for State Policy

Hold continuation high schools accountable for results in any new Accountability System

Reward continuous student proficiency-based growth at the school level.

Use a 5 or 6-year graduation rate as a standard accountability measure for students who complete their education in a continuation high school.



STATE POLICY – Data Issues

3. Higher Performing Schools Use Data to Drive Practice

Lessons for State Policy

- Invest in strengthening CALPADS and links to district administrative data
- Support cross-agency data integration strategies at local level
- Include indicators of social emotional learning in accountability system



STATE POLICY – Supporting Equity

4. Higher Performing Schools Focused on Equity Issues

Lessons for State Policy

- Provide continuation students with the option of a state-supported full day of instruction [AB 570-Jones Sawyer]
- Examine demand/supply issues for alternative education
- Lower eligibility for CHS enrollment from 16 to 14 years of age, or 9th grade



DISTRICT PRACTICES – Accountability Issues

5. More Successful Schools Operated in Districts that Held Them Accountable for Student Opportunities and Outcomes

Lessons for Districts

- **Provide clear & transparent district student Identification and placement policies**
- **Align credits between continuation and comprehensive high schools**
- **Track students into and out of CHS**



DISTRICT POLICIES – Supporting Leaders & Teachers

6. Higher Performing Schools Received District Support for Meeting Student Needs

Lessons for Districts

- **Offer on-going, targeted professional development opportunities**
- **Provide incentives for and attention to attracting highly- skilled principals and teachers to CHS**
- **Include CHS teachers & administrators in system-wide efforts to spur reform in secondary schools**
- **Require communication between comprehensive & continuation high schools re: student placement & instructional alignment**



SCHOOLS – Student Behavioral Supports

7. School Leaders & Teachers in Higher Performing Pursued Student-centered, Asset-based strategies

Lessons for Districts

- **Provide guidance to schools on promoting an asset-based, student-focused school climate**
- **Develop discipline systems that focus on positive behavioral supports and interventions**
- **Incorporate strategies and indicators of social emotional learning**



SCHOOLS – Social And Academic Supports For Youth

8. More Successful Schools Attend to Both Academic and Social (community) Supports

Lessons for State and District Policy

- **Provide opportunities for extended/linked learning; community service**
- **Support waivers/incentives for CHS partnerships with youth-serving community & public agencies (E.g., health, mental and behavioral supports and interventions)**
- **Facilitate academic & social connections with higher education**



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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http://jgc.stanford.edu/our_work/alt-ed.html