



*Using ESSA to Redesign
High Schools to
Support Their
Communities in the
21st Century*

Using ESSA to Redesign High Schools to Help Their Students and Communities Thrive in the 21st Century

Cross State High School Collaborative

Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, School of Education,
Johns Hopkins University



Who is Involved

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- Seven states – MA, NY, OH, IL, MS, LA, and NM
- Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University School of Education
 - led by Robert Balfanz
- Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), XQ, and Civic



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Why We Are Working Together to Use ESSA to Redesign Low Performing High Schools



The Great American High School of the 20th Century Largely Succeeded in its Mission

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- Helped our nation progress and was designed to rapidly scale high schooling to all
- Staffing, schedules, how adults were organized, and how instruction was delivered were all designed to enable the standardization needed for rapid growth
- They were also based on the premise that, for most students, high school would be the end of their formal education
- Examples – student-counselor ratios, teachers working independently, etc.



New Mission for our High Schools in a New Century

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- Today all student's need to graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary schooling and/or training
- This means that regardless of student's prior schooling, motivation, or current level of need, high schools need to provide them with the supports, experiences, and instruction required for post-secondary educational success
- We will not achieve this mission if we do not redesign our high schools



To Redesign Our High Schools We Need to Examine our Current Beliefs

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- We need to understand that our existing high schools (in both obvious and subtle ways) shape and limit our thinking of what is possible
- They provide our mental models of what teaching and learning looks like, and how students, teachers, and administrators should act
 - For example, they lead us to believe that human interactions should be determined by roles, rather than relationships



Educational Challenges are Not Equally Distributed Across All High Schools

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- We have concentrated our neediest high school students in a sub-set of high schools that were not designed for the level and intensity of educational challenge they now face
- As a result, many of these high schools are still struggling despite nearly 20 years of school accountability and high school reform efforts
- It's not for a lack of trying or caring



Remaining Low Graduation Rate High Schools -- Are Challenging To Improve

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- **Located in economically and socially challenged locales**
 - 30% in large cities, but most in inner-ring suburbs, struggling towns, and rural areas
- **Intense concentrations of student need**
- **Limited organic capacity** to respond to that need- school, district, and community facing challenges
- **Have been constantly “reforming”** but not succeeding, notwithstanding pressure
- **Proud history** -- many were and remain the center of their community with notable local alumni



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A New Approach is Needed

- **Hopeful, positive, future orientated frame** -- designing a school for the 21st century rather than being seen as failed school in need of reform
- **Goal is not a high school diploma**, but strong pathways through high school to post-secondary and adult success for all students
- **Evidence-based, but locally customized/orientated** -- not a one way for all



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Key Features of our Cross-State Effort

- **School, district opt-in**, strong community participation in redesign, process customized to state's ESSA plan
- **Focus** school and district learning on the evidence-base to **four improvement levers under the control of schools** --
 - **Organizing adults, supporting students, teaching and learning, and post-secondary pathways**
- Regular opportunities for participating schools and states to **share learning and challenges with each other**
- **Link high school redesign to meeting community needs**



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Around the room you will see multiple poster sheets with an image and question or statement. Would you share on 3 insights that are emerging regarding how they relate to seizing opportunities ESSA provides for transforming high schools in your state?



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Broader Sharing of Successes and Challenges Round Robin



Some Initial Learnings

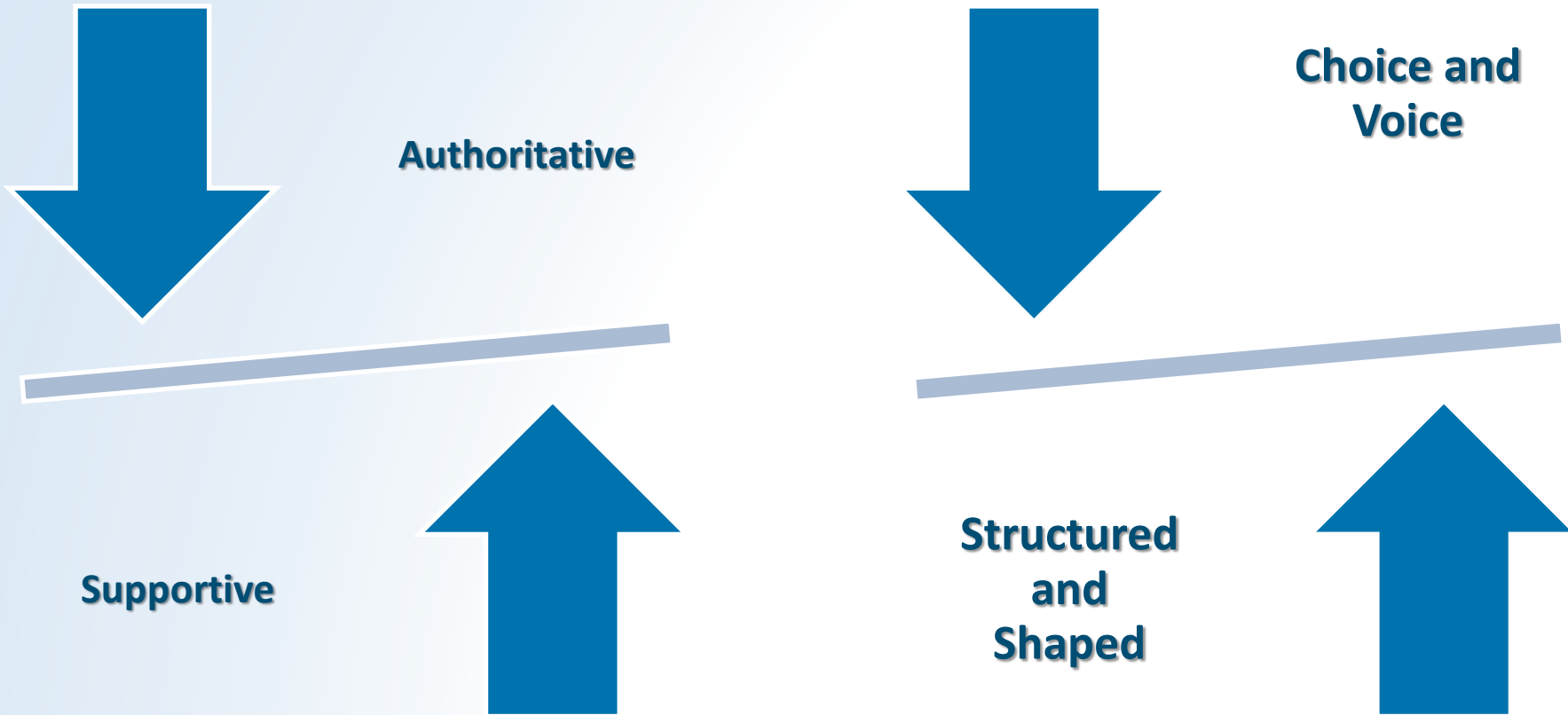
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- Rather classified as district, charter or alternative- high schools HS's with grad rates below 67% typically serve similar student populations
- Key Elements of ESSA are important and need to be given time to maximize impact – needs assessment, community input, resourcing
- Student, staff, and community voice is important – schools need to know who they are designing for
- Need to give school teams time and space to learn, discuss, and understand the implications of the evidence-base



Key Tensions to Balance: Student Supports

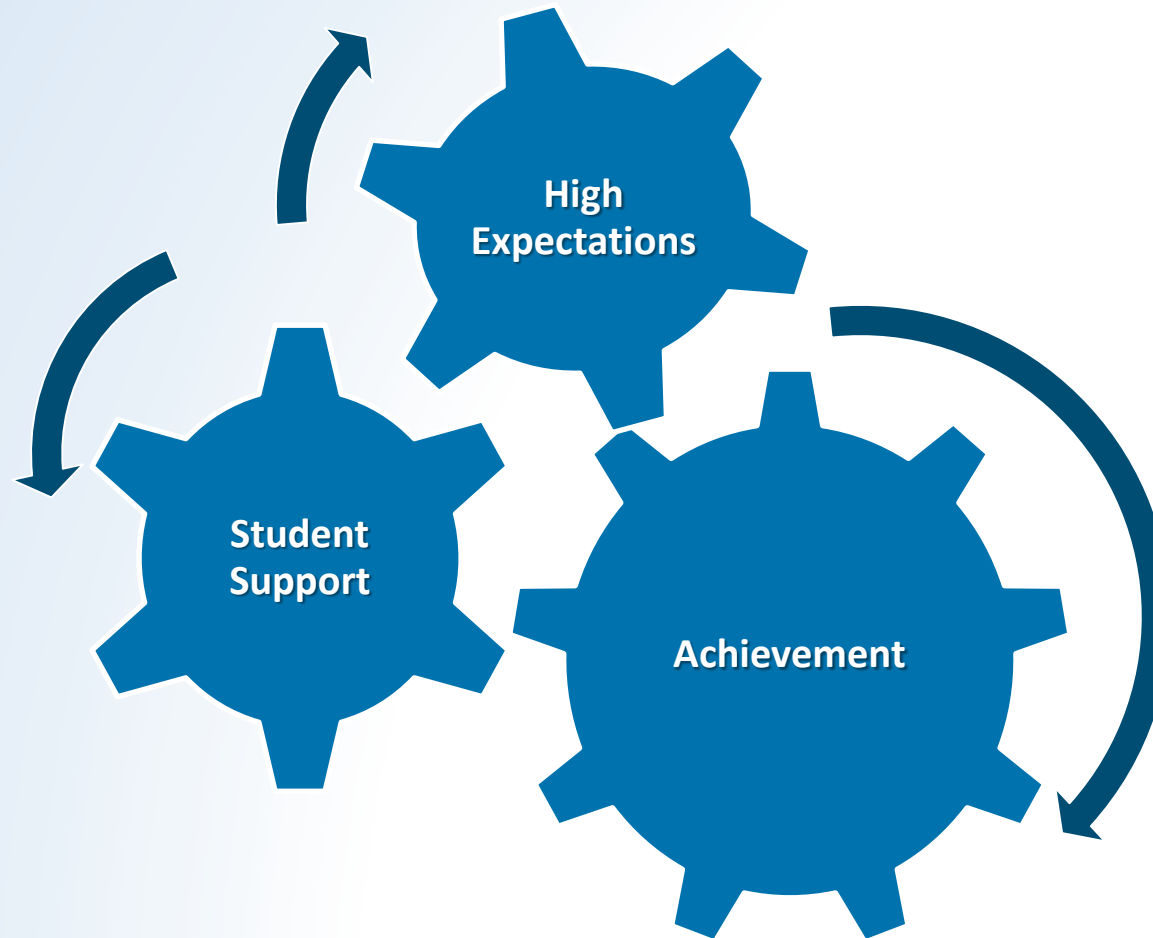
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Teaching and Learning: Navigate Critical Interactions

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Initial Learnings cont.

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- School teams need access to not only what the evidence is, but how-to guides, and tools that speak in practical terms about how to implement them
- Need to consider not only what school practices and structures need to change, but what mindset shifts are needed to sustain them

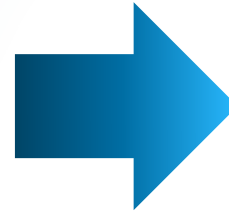


Organizing Adults Mindset Shifts: “It’s Teams, Not Individuals”

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FROM:

- Isolated classrooms
- Every person for him/herself
- Individual perspective
- Bureaucratic
- Hierarchical
- Compliance Driven



TO:

- Integrated teams of adults
- Relational trust
- Team perspective
- Human/End user
- Distributed leadership
- Commitment



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Initial Learnings (cont'd)

- Idea of school redesign can generate enthusiasm for school improvement but redesigning/improving alone in very difficult schools need to be linked into cohorts and networks
- School teams need to be able to iterate their redesigns and get feedback from structured consultancies
- Once redesign plans are approved, school staff needs a period of capacity building, buy-in building, and participatory planning before full implementation begins
- Good use of short term ESSA funds is capacity building, technical assistance, and training linked to redesign or improvement plan



Biggest Learning

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- With Guidance, Support, and Time to build an understanding of the evidence base, participatory school redesign teams, supported by community, staff, and student input understand their challenges and can create high school redesigns which will enable their students and communities to thrive in the 21st century



To Learn More

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- Visit the CSHSC website at www.hsredesign.org
- Visit Everyone Graduates Centre at www.every1graduates.org