

## **Questions to Consider about Conversions of Large High Schools**

1. Will the individual schools each have 400 or more students enrolled?
2. Will the start and end times for the schools be controlled by a district busing schedule?
3. Will the schools share a common schedule and bell system?
4. Will students be able to enroll in courses in other schools in the building?
5. Will any teachers teach in more than one school in the building?
6. Will schools in the same building share classroom space beyond such “common” areas as the auditorium, gym, cafeteria, and entryway?
7. Will students and staff from School A need to use another school’s hallways to get from one School A classroom to another School A classroom?
8. Will one person make final decisions regarding matters of building use once the initial parameters have been established?

*[“Yes” answers to any of the first eight questions move the school in the direction of comprehensiveness and lessened autonomy. “Yes” answers may be based on necessity or on preference, depending on the particular circumstances of a school or district. Either way, it’s important to understand the implications of those decisions, and know they will almost certainly affect the quality and nature of a school conversion.]*

9. What will be the process for staffing each new school?
10. Will students choose or be assigned to their small school?
11. What is the recruitment policy? What forms of outreach will be conducted to communicate with prospective students, their parents, and the broader external community?
12. What plan will be used to determine that the demographics of each small school fall within an acceptable range? If no such plan exists, will it be acceptable for one school to enroll a disproportionate percentage of middle-class students, or poor students, or white students, or males, or English language learners?
13. Will the conversion to small schools take place all at once, or will the conversion occur in stages – with 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders in small schools, for instance, while 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders finish out with the (approximate) curriculum and structure of the current comprehensive school?
14. Will each school be distinctive from the other schools in the building? Will distinctiveness be actively encouraged or merely tolerated? Will schools be distinctive from their inception, or will they develop their distinctiveness over time? What impact will this have on the procedures whereby students choose or are assigned to small schools?
15. What will be the *primary* “delivery system” for providing learning experiences for students: school-based courses, internships, project-based learning, independent study, Web-based courses, distance learning courses, something else? How will the design of the school – its daily operation and organizational structure – reflect this?

16. How much responsibility will advisors have in assisting students and families plan the student's learning program? Will they help students/families select from a set of predetermined courses or activities, or develop a range of activities based on student needs and interests?
17. How will decision-making take place in each new small school? If some form of collaborative decision-making is used, as is often the case in small schools, what are the implications for those in leadership roles in the school? How will the time demands of collaborative decision-making be balanced with the time demands inherent in opening a new school?
18. If different forms of curriculum, pedagogy, and/or assessment will be used in the new school, what are the plans for professional development? Are these plans understood and supported by both the staff and the district leadership and middle management? Will these plans require changes in practice or funding on the part of the district? If so, will these changes be made prior to or simultaneous with the opening of the school?
19. What are the explicit plans for creating separate cultures in each of the new small schools? How will students and families be made welcome in each new school? In what ways will they learn about the school and contribute to the development of its culture?
20. How will the school respond to demands from some parents or students to be "more like" or "more different from" another school in the building?
21. What will be the plan for implementing the various components of the school as it is currently envisioned, assuming that not everything can be done at once?
22. How will athletic teams and other extracurricular activities, such as band, be handled? Will each school have its own separate teams and activities, or will the building be considered a single entity?

For more information about conversions of large schools, check out the Small Schools Project web site at: <http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/tools/getstarted>. In particular, look for the short paper on "Prior Agreements with Districts."