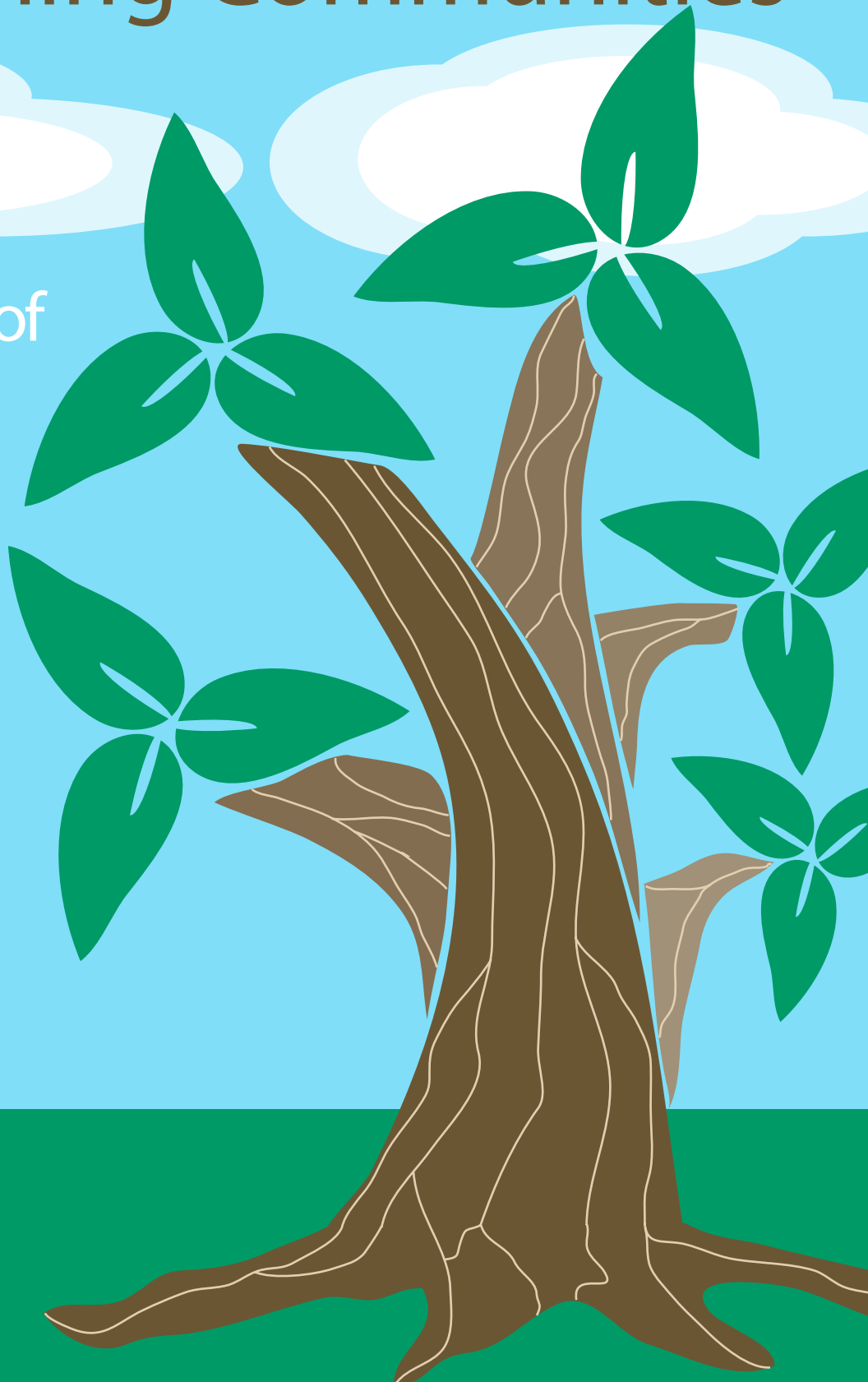


# from High School to Learning Communities

Five Domains of  
Best Practice





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Best Practice

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# The Aim of This Publication

*From High School to Learning Communities — Five Domains of Best Practice* brings together a knowledge base, tools, and resources for implementing and deepening small learning community practice. Its aim is to provide guidance to school staff and stakeholders in the demanding work of transforming 20th-century comprehensive high schools into 21st-century learning organizations.

All high school staff members have an interest in improving their practice. They want what is best for their students. They may envision adding small learning communities to their current offerings but not see the need to **transform** their school. However, the research base and professional consensus on which this publication rests provide encouragement for **improvement through transformation**. Research points out the failure of efforts to graft small learning communities onto traditional high school structures. In response, many small schools networks, as their names suggest, have sprung up to support school staff members who circumvent existing school structures and develop autonomous small schools.

*From High School to Learning Communities — Five Domains of Best Practice* is designed to support well-planned, schoolwide reorganization into small learning communities. This guide offers five domains of research-based SLC practice and a cyclical process of improvement as a framework for organizing staff members' efforts to:

- Rethink their current practice
- Develop new structures and routines
- Sustain long-term efforts to implement fully functioning and effective learning communities



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# Small Learning Communities:

## The State of the Art

### A BASIC DEFINITION OF A SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITY:

*An interdisciplinary team of teachers shares a few hundred or fewer students in common for instruction, assumes responsibility for their educational progress across years of school, and exercises maximum flexibility to act on knowledge of students' needs.*

## What's in a Name?

The term applied to the practice of organizing high schools into smaller units has undergone many changes over the last four decades. Houses and schools-within-schools came on the scene beginning in the 1960s; magnet programs, career academies, and mini-schools in the 1970s; charters in the late 1980s and 1990s; and finally, small learning communities today. The evolution in terms is significant. It parallels development in our thinking about the crucial ingredients of effective education. The earlier terms emphasized small structure and curricular specialization and choice: both crucial to improved teaching, yet not the complete story. Small learning community, in contrast, encompasses these elements and more: a focus on the learner and learning, and in particular, the active and collaborative nature of teachers' and students' work.

Concurrent with the reorganization of comprehensive high schools into small learning communities are initiatives to create new small schools. The small schools networks emphasize the importance of autonomy and flexibility in functioning within large, rigid educational bureaucracies (Cotton, 2001). The small schools movement, however, also speaks to student-centered curriculum and instruction and collaboration among all members of the community (Fine & Somerville, 1998; Wasley et al., 2000). Research and experience have led advocates of small learning communities and small schools to a shared, basic notion of small unit schooling:

**An interdisciplinary team of teachers shares a few hundred or fewer students in common for instruction, assumes responsibility for their educational progress across years of school, and exercises maximum flexibility to act on knowledge of students' needs.**

The term small learning communities is used here in its generic sense. It refers to all school redesign efforts intended to create smaller, more learning-centered units of organization including small schools and career academies. A list of publications reporting evidence of positive effects of Small Learning Communities on student achievement and other outcomes is located in the Appendix.

**Professional consensus.** Just as small learning community research and practice have evolved, so has professional consensus on secondary school redesign. Policy guidelines for middle-level schools began to incorporate recommendations for creating small learning communities in the 1980s and 1990s and have sustained these guidelines to the present. *This We Believe*, the National Middle School Association's statement of their position on effective middle level school practice (1982, 1995, 2003), has long advocated teacher teams and organization of large middle schools into small learning communities. Their most recent position paper states: "The interdisciplinary team ... working with a common group of students is the signature component of high-performing schools, literally the heart of the school from which other desirable programs and experiences evolve" (2003, p. 29).

*Breaking Ranks*, a publication of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, called for the creation of "small units in which anonymity is banished" in 1996 (p. 45). *Breaking Ranks II* identifies seven cornerstone strategies for improving student performance, one of which is to:

“Increase the quantity and improve the quality of interactions between students, teachers, and other school personnel by reducing the number of students for which any adult or group of adults is responsible” (NASSP, 2004, p. 6). The other cornerstone strategies complement this reduction in the scale of schooling by establishing “the essential learnings a student is required to master” and by implementing “schedules flexible enough to accommodate teaching strategies consistent with the ways student learn most effectively” (p. 6). Taken together, the strategies describe a form of school organization that diverges sharply from the traditional, comprehensive high school.

## Five Domains of SLC Best Practices

In *New Small Learning Communities* (2001), Cotton identified several conditions and practices that distinguish successful small learning communities:

- Self-Determination—Autonomy in decision making, physical separateness, self-selection of teachers and students, and flexible scheduling must all be present to allow small learning community members to create and realize their own vision.
- Identity—Small learning communities profit from developing a distinctive program of study that originates in the vision, interests, and unique characteristics of their members.
- Personalization—Small learning community members know each other well. Teachers are able to identify and respond to students’ particular strengths and needs.
- Support for Teaching—SLC teachers assume authority as well as responsibility in educating their students. School leadership does not reside only in the administrative staff; administrators teach, and teachers lead.
- Functional Accountability—SLC teams use performance assessment systems that require students to demonstrate their learning and the SLC to demonstrate its success.

This publication also identifies best practices but places them in a different kind of framework. The best practices that confirm and extend those identified by Cotton are organized into five domains. The framework is designed to convey how small learning communities are organized and operate within a multilevel educational system. The framework helps to answer questions both about what constitutes SLC practice and what is needed to support SLC practice at multiple levels of organization.

The best practices are drawn from a review of research (Oxley, 2006) on a variety of approaches to small unit organization: small schools and career academies; small learning communities; houses; and schools-within-schools. SLC strategies that qualified as best practices were features of SLCs found to have positive effects on student achievement in at least two research studies. The research base does not demonstrate that the best practices have independent, causal effects on student achievement, only that they are associated with effective SLCs.

The tree image shown in Figure 1 on page 6 illustrates the nature of the relationships among the five domains. The structural supports for a tree's foliage are its branches. In SLCs, teaching and learning teams—the interdisciplinary teams of teachers and the students they instruct—are the basic structural supports for SLC work that results in student learning. Each branch supports a cluster of three of leaves, the oxygen-generating element of the tree. One leaf cluster includes rigorous, relevant curriculum and instruction practices; a second leaf cluster encompasses inclusive program practices; and a third, continuous program improvement strategies. The branches stem from the tree trunk, the structural support for the entire tree. In like fashion, SLCs depend on school/building and district-level policies and practices to support their growth and sustain their operation.

Each domain—and set of SLC practices belonging to it—are described briefly below and in greater detail in separate sections of this publication. The effectiveness and implementation of particular practices depend on the implementation of others, and it is their combined action that most likely produces a meaningful impact. Consequently, as the tree image suggests, it is important to consider the five areas and the individual practices as pieces of a larger whole.

## 1. Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Teams [ The branches ]

SLC practice begins with interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams: the fundamental building blocks of 21st-century schooling. Successful teams occupy the center not only of teaching and learning, but also program improvement efforts and school- and district-level policy making. Teachers organize themselves into interdisciplinary teams. They also organize around the students the team shares in common. Team members share time to collaborate on program design, lead learning activities, and troubleshoot students' progress over multiple years of study.

The student group is kept small by design, never exceeding more than a few hundred members. Students come to know each other and their teachers well. That is because SLC teams organize instruction to gain more instructional time with fewer students and SLC teams stay with students for more than a year.

## 2. Rigorous, Relevant Curriculum and Instruction [ First leaf cluster ]

Teaching and learning teams position teachers to form meaningful relationships with students as well as facilitate a more authentic, active form of student learning. Without the considerable autonomy and flexibility that teaching and learning teams bestow, it is extremely difficult for teachers to design student work that is both challenging and personally meaningful to students.

With a large block of time, the interdisciplinary team can organize fieldwork, involve community partners, and allow students to go where their questions lead them. Teams can integrate discipline-based content in learning activities to create program coherence, opportunities for learning content in different contexts, and connection to real-world issues.

### 3. Inclusive Program and Practices

[ Second leaf cluster ]

Small learning community practice offers a student-centered approach to reducing the achievement gap that exists among students of different educational, cultural, and social class backgrounds. In successful SLCs, students choose to enter a particular SLC on the basis of their curricular interests and irrespective of their history of achievement. SLC teams include educational specialists, collaborate with students' parents, use time and resources flexibly, and tailor instruction to meet all students' needs for mastering challenging curricula.

Ineffective SLCs replicate or even exacerbate existing inequities in educational opportunities. Regional educational laboratory staff members who monitor implementation of federally funded SLC projects found that schools often form SLCs around existing honors and Advanced Placement courses for high-achieving students and programs for at-risk students. They seldom include special education students in SLC classes. For this reason, implementation of inclusive SLC programs and practices demands special attention.

### 4. Continuous Program Improvement

[ Third leaf cluster ]

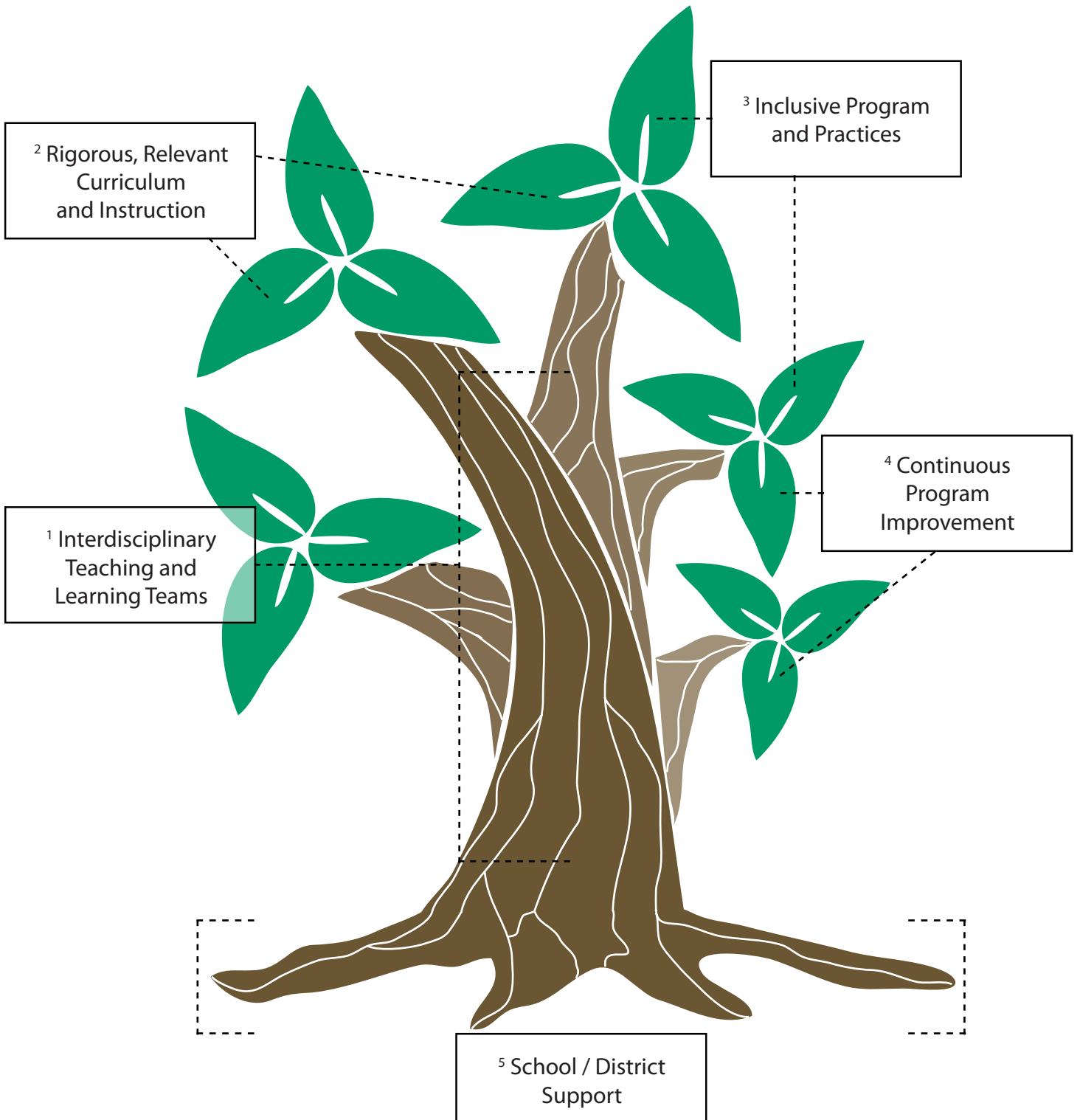
Integral to SLC teaching and learning is the interdisciplinary team members' inquiry into the effectiveness of their practices. Descriptions of research-based practices are abstractions of the activities and routines that teams and students actually follow in schools. The actual activities reflect the unique conditions and needs of the particular teams and students involved. Consequently, an integral part of the work of teacher teams is disciplined reflection on their practice to ensure that all students are learning. Teams' reflection on practice is never-ending; implementation of curricula and learning activities requires long-term refinement and adjustment as conditions and needs are continually changing. To ensure that students continue to make progress, SLC teams engage in a continuous cycle of program improvement efforts. Teams assess their practice by analyzing student work and soliciting feedback from students, parents, and SLC partners.

### 5. Building/District-Level Support for SLCs

[ The tree trunk ]

All of the above practices must be supported by building- and district-level structures and policies, which form the "tree trunk." Building and district practices constrain what teachers and students are able to do. For SLCs to flourish, the larger school and district must operate in a manner that supports them. A fundamental requirement for making the kind of adjustments necessary to support SLCs is to give teachers and their students a major role in decision making.

## Five Domains of SLC Practice



## Ecological Facts of SLC Implementation and Practice

**FACT 1.** SLC organization and curriculum and instruction are mutually supportive practices, dependent on one another to realize positive effects on student learning.

“Small is not enough” is a refrain of small learning community initiatives around the country (Fine & Somerville, 1998; Wasley et al., 2000). Small size creates the conditions to carry out student work that is active and collaborative. Small size is not an end in itself. Teachers who lack knowledge of and training in innovative teaching practices may not be able to envision what comes after creation of a small community.

The converse is also true. Innovation in curriculum and instruction alone is not sufficient to increase student learning. As detailed in the next section, the size of the school community, establishing an interdisciplinary team, and providing common planning time also matter. Educators, who are otherwise enlightened about curriculum and instruction, may still underestimate the importance of the structure within which they work (Cuban, 1986, 1992, 1993). As a result, they overestimate the extent to which structural reforms have actually been made (Jackson, 1990).

Researchers repeatedly find that implementation of the structural elements of small learning communities is incomplete (Felner et al., 1997; Oxley, 2001). An interdisciplinary team lacks common planning time or teaches only a few of its classes in the small learning community; a small learning community has hundreds of students, offers only a few courses, or fails to admit a mix of students. Such missing structural elements prevent teachers from realizing the fruits of their planned curriculum and instruction improvements.

Significant investments of time, effort, and funds in professional development and curriculum and instruction planning are needed to transform small communities into small learning communities. Without implementation of key SLC organizational structures, these investments are quickly dissipated. Teachers become cynical, reluctant to try again. This is the history of school reform that faculty members at most any high school can recite.

**FACT 2.** Small learning community practices cannot be fully implemented unless the larger organization also changes to accommodate the new practices.

An inconvenient fact of small learning communities is that they cannot be simply added onto the existing school organization (Cook, 2000; Muncey & McQuillan, 1993; Oxley, 2001; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992). The larger school structures and operations limit small learning communities in three ways:

1. Traditional practices in place at the building level often compete with those in small learning communities. When administrative, counseling, and special education staff continue to operate at the school level, they carry out their roles without the intimate knowledge of students that small learning community staff have. In turn, small learning community staff members are unable to engage in decision making and student support that maximize their responsiveness to student needs.
2. The simultaneous operation of old and new forms of school organization is less cost-efficient in a time of already inadequate resources. Under these circumstances, fledgling small learning communities seldom receive the levels of staff, materials, and space they require to function optimally. Grants used to establish small learning communities may obscure this fact, but only until the funds expire.
3. Practices that are inconsistent or contradictory with small learning community practices communicate that small learning community practices are exceptions to more general, higher, or better “laws” governing education. The continued existence of older practices seems to say that small learning communities constitute a remedy only for certain students (e.g., students who are low achieving, in transition to high school, or in the last years of high school) or one that is possible only under special budgetary conditions.

## Informing Versus Prescribing SLC Practice

The five domains of research-based practices provide more precise information about the shape of reforms needed to establish effective small learning communities. They provide guidance, but they may also seem to threaten practitioners’ spirit of local innovation.

It is important to recognize that the research-based practices identified here are abstractions of the highly varied practices actually in place in the schools studied. It seems likely that the particularities of local practice are part of what makes an SLC successful—building on the school’s unique history and character. In other words, the personalization and local identity of SLC reforms may be as important to their implementation success as personalization and identity are to students’ academic success.

This publication intends to inform school staffs, not to prescribe their practice. It is a resource for staff members’ own informed discussions about how to improve their practice.



# Domain 1:

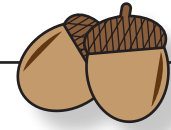
## Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Teams

### Best Practices Checklist:

- SLC interdisciplinary team (or teams) is organized around no more than a few hundred students
- Students remain with their team for multiple year
- SLC team members instruct more that half their class load in the SLC
- SLC team shares planning time in common
- Teacher team actively collaborates on curriculum, instruction, and student progress
- Building space is sufficient to create a home base SLC for collaboration

# Why these practices are essential

## In a Nutshell...



### RESEARCH AND EXEMPLARY SLCs DEMONSTRATE...

*...that the size of the learning community affects the quality of students' relationships with peers and teachers and ultimately students' educational outcomes. In smaller schools students are more likely to form relationships that bind them to school, and teachers are better able to identify and respond to students' needs. Small learning communities are maximally effective when interdisciplinary team members share students in common and are thereby able to pool their knowledge of students, communicate consistent messages, and create coherent instructional programs. Common planning time is essential for team collaboration. Team collaboration heightens teachers' shared sense of responsibility for students' learning. Teams that instruct most of their classes in the SLC avoid conflicts with teaching responsibilities outside the team that might make team collaboration and the scheduling of common planning time difficult. Dedicated building space also facilitates team collaboration and in addition reinforces students' identification with the SLC.*

## In Detail...



SLC INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM (OR TEAMS) IS ORGANIZED AROUND NO MORE THAN A FEW HUNDRED STUDENTS

**SLC interdisciplinary team.** The central feature of a high-functioning SLC is an interdisciplinary team (or teams) of teachers who work closely together with a group of students they share in common for instruction. Traditional schools organize teachers around subject areas. SLCs organize teachers across subject areas to create a more student-centered form of schooling. Researchers find that SLC teachers enjoy greater interdisciplinary collaboration and consensus (Oxley, 1997b) and instructional leadership, including program coordination (Wasley et al., 2000) than teachers in traditional schools.

**No more than a few hundred students.** Decades of research on school size provide substantial evidence that smaller high schools are associated with more favorable student outcomes than larger high schools (Cotton, 2001; Gladden, 1998). Smaller high schools have greater holding power: students are less likely to drop out, more likely to attend, and more likely to participate in school activities (Lindsay, 1982; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987). Smaller high schools experience less student disorder and violence (Garbarino, 1978; Gottfredson, 1985; Haller, 1992).

And smaller high schools—despite having a more restricted set of curricular offerings—are associated

with greater academic achievement (Fowler & Walberg, 1991) [although the findings are more mixed]. Recent, more precise, analysis has been able to tease out the effect of size from that of other factors that vary with school size. This research points out that smaller high schools are not only associated with higher achievement but greater equity in achievement (Lee & Smith, 1995). That is, the achievement gap usually found among students of different ethnicities is reduced in smaller high schools.

Exactly how small should a small learning community be? This is obviously one of the central questions in establishing small learning communities. One study of high schools—not small learning communities—suggests that a size of 600 is an appropriate target (Lee & Smith, 1997). But this finding pertains to schools with traditional curriculum and instruction organization. It is also inconsistent with a basic premise of small learning communities—that all members of the community know each other—since it is impossible for teachers to know even the names of more than 500 students (Panel on Youth, 1973).

Small learning community practice counsels smaller schools of 200–400 (Cook, 2000; Fine, 1994). Nationally, some of the most successful small learning communities have as few as 100 students (Ancess, 1995). This size is comparable to Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer, 1992) and National Association of Secondary School Principals (1996) recommendations that teachers instruct approximately 90 students at any one time.

#### STUDENTS REMAIN WITH THEIR TEAM FOR MULTIPLE YEARS

Small learning communities that have attained national prominence on the basis of their students' success encompass the entire four years of high school study (Cook, 2000; Meier, 1995). Common to prominent high school reform models that have also proven successful are small learning communities that extend across at least two years of study (<http://drake.marin.k12.ca.us>; Legters, Balfanz, & McPartland, 2002).

A mechanism of this success may be the cross-grade coherence and consistency of the academic program (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001a, 2001b; Wasley et al., 2000). Students are more likely to learn when new material builds on their prior knowledge (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). Moreover, students are more motivated to learn when teachers peg academic challenge just ahead of students' level of competence (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993). Teachers in multi year SLCs can use the knowledge they gain about students in one year to shape their subsequent learning experiences (Fine & Somerville, 1998). A second mechanism of these successful multiyear SLCs may be that they promote connections between older, more competent peer role models and younger students, another factor shown to enhance learning (Benard, 1990; Fazio & Ural, 1995).

Research indicates that small unit organization confined to just the ninth-grade level, as in interventions designed to ease students' transition to high school, has “positive though modest effects on students' academic outcomes” (Quint, Miller, Pastor, & Cytron, 1999). These researchers concluded that broader intervention was required. The “Talent Development High School” model,

which combines a ninth-grade Success Academy with 10th- through 12th-grade career academies, employs a separate transition year unit subdivided into smaller groupings and a specially designed curriculum. Ninth-graders in this model passed state exams in some areas and were promoted at higher rates than before the academy was implemented (Balfanz, McPartland, Jordan, & Legters, 1998). More recent research on this model replicated these findings. Ninth-graders in the Success Academies were promoted, earned credits, and attended classes at moderately higher rates than students in regular high schools (Kemple, Connell, Legters & Eccles, 2006).

A study of First Things First, a model in which students are organized into continuous ninth-12th grade small learning communities, conducted by the same researchers also demonstrated positive effects on ninth-graders (Kemple, Connell, Legters & Eccles, 2006). However, the researchers did not directly compare student outcomes in the two models to determine if continuous enrollment in SLCs yielded more pronounced gains.

Other research suggests that the Talent Development model may not be as effective as continuous ninth- through 12th-grade small learning communities (Oxley, Croninger, & DeGroot, 2000). Researchers who compared ninth-graders in a Success Academy with those in a comparable school organized into ninth- through 12th-grade SLCs reported that Success Academy students disliked being separated from the advanced students while ninth-graders in the ninth- through 12th-grade SLCs valued upper level students for “setting examples for the younger ones” and “show(ing) us around.” In addition, high teacher turnover emerged as an enduring problem in the ninth-grade Success Academy unlike in the ninth- through 12th-grade SLCs where teachers also taught students at other grade levels and found satisfaction in seeing students mature into graduating seniors.

Schools that offer themed initial 9th- through 10th-grade and advanced 11th- through 12th-grade SLCs or career pathways (Allen, 2001; Legters, Balfanz, & McPartland 2002) postpone transition to advanced SLCs until students reach 11th grade. In these two-year SLCs, teachers can still capitalize on knowledge of students from one year to the next (instead of having to start fresh with each new entering class of students) and can employ upper grade students as role models. In addition, this model increases student choice and opportunities for exploration.

Further failure to reorganize the upper grades into SLCs may indicate that staff is not persuaded that SLCs represent a more effective form of schooling, appropriate for advanced students as well as those with special needs such as transition or remediation (Allen, 2001; Ready, Lee, & LoGerfo, 2000). Most often under these circumstances, lower grade SLCs also suffer from lack of full implementation.

### SLC TEAM MEMBERS INSTRUCT MORE THAN HALF THEIR CLASS LOAD IN THE SLC

In the most successful learning communities, teachers instruct all (Cook, 2000; Meier, 1995) or at least most of their classes within their SLC (<http://drake.marin.k12.ca.us>).

Teachers who divide their time between their SLC and classes outside their SLC run the risk of

shortchanging their SLC's requirements for collaboration. Successful small learning communities devote regular time to student advisement, curriculum planning, and collaboration on problems of practice in addition to individual teacher preparation. At Urban Academy, a U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School of Excellence and small learning community of just 100 students, teachers devote one hour/week to student advisement, two-and-a-half hours every two weeks to curriculum planning, and three hours/week to a staff meeting—a total of more than five hours/week on average (Ancess, 1995).

Practically speaking, it is difficult for teachers to dedicate this much time to a small learning community when it is not their primary commitment. In addition, the more classes SLC teachers instruct outside their SLC, the more difficult it is to schedule common planning time for SLC teams.

### SLC TEAM SHARES PLANNING TIME IN COMMON

Common planning time facilitates collaboration among interdisciplinary team members. Research frequently identifies common planning time as a feature of successful teaming and academic programs linked to positive student outcomes (Felner et al., 1997; McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, & Legters, 1998; Newmann et al., 2001a, 2001b; Oxley, 1997b). It is a nearly constant item on short lists of SLC practices necessary for maintaining a focus on instructional improvements (for example, [www.nwrel.org/scpd/ssl/elements.shtml](http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/ssl/elements.shtml)).

Among successful small learning communities, common planning time comes during shared preparation periods during the school day (<http://drake.marin.k12.ca.us>), a single late start or early release day each week, or a block of time during which students leave school to do community-based service/study (Meier, 1995). Common planning time does not guarantee improved teaching and learning, however. Teams must devote this time to curriculum and instruction planning and problem solving that increase program coherence and academic challenge (Newmann et al., 2001a, 2001b).

### TEACHER TEAM ACTIVELY COLLABORATES ON CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND STUDENT PROGRESS

SLC teacher teams that spend common preparation time actively discussing and planning curriculum and instruction improvements, as well as troubleshooting student progress, contribute to small learning communities' effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Oxley, 1997b; Wasley et al., 2000).

Successful small learning communities do not appear to depend on extraordinary individuals as much as on regular collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Wasley et al., 2000). Collegial exchange among team members serves to broaden input and deepen consideration of the educational problems they face. Ancess' (1995) description of a problem-solving session held by the staff of a successful SLC provides a compelling illustration of a school that learns (Senge et al., 2000). Sharing ideas and observing each other's work provides an effective form of professional development by expanding individual members' teaching repertoires and socializing new team members (Darling-

Hammond et al., 2002).

Team members' collaboration also engenders a sense of shared responsibility for their students' success (Wasley et al., 2000). Teams able to pull together in the same direction across disciplines and grades felt more efficacious and committed to students' ongoing learning than teachers working in traditional schools.

## BUILDING SPACE IS SUFFICIENT TO CREATE A HOME BASE FOR SLC COLLABORATION

Physical proximity of the SLC interdisciplinary team's classrooms is a requirement for effective small learning community functioning.

Research repeatedly finds that physical proximity is instrumental to key small learning community functions. Physical proximity of teachers' classrooms facilitates teacher collaboration (Christman, Cohen, & Macpherson, 1997; Wasley et al., 2000), promotes interaction among teachers and students (Anness, 1995; Oxley, 1990), and helps to establish a separate identity and sense of community among members (Raywid, 1996).

Small learning communities may make do with a single, large classroom or pair of adjacent classrooms. However, teacher collaboration and students' identification with their SLC will likely suffer. The inability to designate more adequate space may also reflect a lack of schoolwide commitment to SLCs and the need to make painful adjustments to optimize their functioning. Other SLC requirements are likely to be compromised, as well.

In contrast, SLCs that provide a space where teachers and students can interact before and after class generate a feeling of belonging and a clear sense that teachers care about students: "... students learn that a school can be both educational and personal" (Anness, 1995, p. 8).

## Featured Tools/Practices



### INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM SELF-EVALUATION CHECKLIST

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

All members of an interdisciplinary team should complete this checklist individually. Afterward the team leader should facilitate a meeting where responses are shared and consensus is reached. The agreed-upon answers should be recorded on a master sheet, kept in the team master notebook, and reviewed on a regular basis.

Self-Evaluation Checklist	Always	Frequently	Infrequently	Never	Comments
1. Our team meets on a regular basis.					
2. All team members are present at our team meetings.					
3. All team members stay for the duration of our meetings.					
4. Our team talks about the ways to best meet the needs of students.					
5. Our team works effectively with the resource personnel, such as our counselor and our SLC/house leader					
6. The members of our team support the efforts of our team leader.					
7. Every member of our team participates in the decision-making process.					
8. The team's decisions are implemented.					
9. Our team builds capacity by rotating roles and leadership activities.					
10. Our team has goals and objectives for the school year.					

11. Our team periodically evaluates its goals and objectives.					
12. Our team members use team common planning time to correlate subject matter and to plan for interdisciplinary instruction.					
13. Our team members use common planning time to conduct student and parent conferences as needed.					
14. Our team discusses ways to use our SLC instructional block effectively.					
15. Our team groups and regroups students for instruction within our team.					
16. Our team changes our "regular" schedule to accommodate teacher and student needs.					
17. Our team has an agenda for all team meetings.					
18. Our team follows the agenda at our meetings.					
19. Our team planning time is kept strictly for team business.					
20. The team paces itself and allows for "ups" and "downs," cycles of hard work and relaxation.					
21. Our team coordinates the amount of homework given to students so that it is spread out over the week.					
22. Our team coordinates test days so that students do not have more than one test on a given day.					
23. Our team has established team procedures and policies for our students.					
24. Our team defined and built a common set of learning goals/student proficiencies and benchmarks.					
25. Our team plans, implements, and evaluates at least two interdisciplinary units a year.					



Comments:

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## Reducing Teachers' Student Load To Meet Diverse Learning Needs

At a high school of 1,800 students in a northeastern urban school district, school leaders designed SLCs to be accessible to students with special learning needs. The leaders reached a consensus that their Title 1 reading instructors would be better deployed to teach regular English classes and work with the other members of their interdisciplinary team to teach reading skills across the curriculum. Similarly, school leaders assigned special education teachers to the interdisciplinary teams to help the content specialists differentiate their instruction. Students with special learning needs who would have been assigned to resource rooms were instead assigned to the same core classes as other students. Finally, school leaders eliminated pre-algebra classes in favor of increasing support for all students in on-grade level algebra.

To position teachers to work effectively with heterogeneous classes, each SLC teacher of a core content area taught four classes of students instead of the usual five but for the same 25 periods of instruction. This arrangement gave them more time with fewer students both to pursue both differentiated instruction and thematic learning activities that distinguished each learning community.

As the schedules below indicate, teachers used the extra five periods to offer Seminar on Wednesday. During Seminar, teachers grouped students homogeneously for differentiated learning activities. Special educators helped teachers develop packets of materials for the curriculum units they taught to allow students to study material they failed on the test before retaking the test. While these students worked through the packets, students who had passed the test worked on other challenging assignments leading to honors credit.

SLC teams of English, social studies, science, math, and special education teachers instructed 120 students for ninth and 10th grades using the following schedule:

Ninth-Grade Student Schedule						
Time	Period	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:39 – 9:28	1	Algebra 1	Science	Seminar (remed./honors work)	English	History
9:28 – 9:52	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory
9:52 – 10:41	2	Science	Algebra 1	Seminar (remed./honors work)	History	English
10:41 – 11:30	3	Science	Algebra 1	Seminar (remed./honors work)	History	English
11:30 – 12:19	4	PE/Key	PE/Key	PE/Key	PE/Key	PE/Key
12:19 – 12:49	5	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:49 – 1:38	6	English	History	Seminar (remed./honors work)	Algebra 1	Science
1:38 – 2:32	7	History	English	Seminar (remed./honors work)	Science	Algebra 1

Ninth-Grade Algebra 1 Teacher Schedule						
Time	Period	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:39 – 9:28	1	Algebra 1 A*	Algebra 1 B	Seminar (remed./honors)	Algebra 1 C	Algebra 1 D
9:28 – 9:52	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory	Seminar (remed./honors)	Advisory	Advisory
9:52 – 10:41	2	Algebra 1 B*	Algebra 1 A	Seminar (remed./honors)	Algebra 1 D	Algebra 1 C
10:41 – 11:30	3	Algebra 1 B	Algebra 1 A	Seminar (remed./honors)	Algebra 1 D	Algebra 1 C
11:30 – 12:19	4	Prep	Prep	Prep	Prep	Prep
12:19 – 2:49	5	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:49 – 1:38	6	Algebra 1 C*	Algebra 1 D	Seminar (remed./honors)	Algebra 1 A	Algebra 1 B
1:38 – 2:32	7	Algebra 1 D*	Algebra 1 C	Seminar (remed./honors)	Algebra 1 B	Algebra 1 A

\*A, B, C, and D refer to the teacher's four different classes of students

## Teaching Fewer Students with More Instructional Time: Alternate Day Block Schedule

A high school of 1,300 students in the Pacific Northwest formed five ninth/10th-grade theme-based SLCs. An interdisciplinary team of three teachers—an English, social studies, and math or science teacher—depending on the SLC theme taught students within each SLC for two years. The teams pursued project-based learning as the chief mechanism for infusing the SLC theme into the curriculum.

In order to support teachers' efforts to create a more personalized and engaging program of study, school leaders created a project period that each teacher taught in addition to their content area to students in their SLC. Teams taught three or four different classes of students for four or five periods, respectively. In addition, each team had common planning time, 90 minutes each day, to collaborate on project development.

Creation of the project period required school leaders to deploy more teachers as content area specialists. In effect, they traded off one of students' electives to increase instructional time in the core curriculum. Teachers on special assignment and assistant principals with certification in a core content area were used to teach the additional sections.

Student Schedule					
Period	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:20 – 9:43	1 English	5 Project	1 English	5 Project	1 English
9:55 – 11:18	2 Social Studies	6 Science	2 Social Studies	6 Science	2 Social Studies
11:23 – 12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:05 – 1:28	3 Math	7 Elective	3 Math	7 Elective	3 Math
1:40 – 3:03	4 Elective	8 Elective	4 Elective	8 Elective	4 Elective

Teacher Schedule					
Period	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:20 – 9:43	English	Project	English	Project	English
9:55 – 11:18	English	English	English	English	English
11:23 – 12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:05 – 1:28	English	English	English	English	English
1:40 – 3:03	Planning	Planning	Planning	Planning	Planning

\*Shaded area represents SLC program.

# Domain 2:

## Rigorous, Relevant Curriculum and Instruction

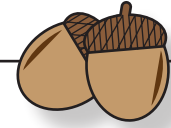
### Best Practices Checklist:

- Interdisciplinary curriculum organized around topics of interest to students and essential skills and knowledge
- Rigorous, standards-based curriculum
- SLC encompasses at least a half-day block of students' instructional day
- SLC teachers collaborate with community partners
- Students engage in active, authentic inquiry

# Why these practices are essential

## In a Nutshell...

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### RESEARCH AND EXEMPLARY SLCs DEMONSTRATE...

...authentic pedagogy involving active student inquiry into real-world problems with requirements for in-depth study and critical evaluation of information is associated with higher student achievement than traditional curriculum and instruction. SLCs with documented success are those that have created engaging interdisciplinary curricula through collaboration with community-based partners and at the same time established high standards for student proficiency in key discipline-based content areas. The most powerful programs encompass at least half the student's instructional day and more than one year of study. Interdisciplinary teacher collaboration on curriculum and instruction increases the program's coherence and opportunities to reinforce essential skills and knowledge across multiple contexts.

## In Detail...

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### INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM ORGANIZED AROUND TOPICS OF INTEREST TO STUDENTS AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

A distinguishing attribute of successful small learning communities is a curriculum that has relevance to the world outside school and personal meaning for students. Recent research indicates that relevant student learning experiences are not incompatible with a rigorous curriculum. AIR & SRI International (2005) found that teacher assignments in new, small schools were both more rigorous and relevant in small schools than in comprehensive high schools used for comparison. Most rigorous assignments were also relevant.

At a minimum, effective small learning community programs include interdisciplinary content to give students opportunities to explore topics within authentic contexts not limited by the boundaries of academic disciplines. Curricular themes, career interests (Legters et al., 2002; McPartland et al., 1998), and cross-disciplinary inquiry (Ancess, 1995; Meier, 1995) create meaningful connections among courses.

Courses integrate college and career preparation (Little, Erbstein, & Walker, 1996) and blend classical studies with multicultural content and students' own lives and interests (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002).

A critical ingredient of an interdisciplinary program is coherence. Cross-subject as well as cross-grade

teacher collaboration are essential vehicles of program coherence (Newmann et al., 2001a, 2001b; Wasley et al., 2000). Research on learning and cognitive development (Bransford et al., 1999; Caine & Caine, 1991) indicates that coherence and consistency in academic programs allow students to incorporate new understandings into prior knowledge and to alter prior knowledge when necessary. Coherent programs give students recurrent opportunities to practice and to apply knowledge and skills in new contexts.

## RIGOROUS, STANDARDS-BASED CURRICULUM

Holding all students to high standards to ensure educational equity and access to postsecondary education and jobs is a centerpiece of all current major school reform initiatives (Legters et al., 2002), including the creation of small schools and small learning communities (Fine & Somerville, 1998). Successful small learning communities establish standards for student proficiency that agree with the community's goals and values and at the same time equal or exceed state standards (Ancess, 1995).

In practical terms, holding high standards for academic achievement means offering a strong core curriculum to all students (Sizer, 1992). To accomplish this, staff must first eliminate academic tracks and courses that water down content ([www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/background/brochure.asp](http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/background/brochure.asp)) and provide support sufficient to enable all students to access the core curriculum (Weinstein, 1996).

## SLC ENCOMPASSES AT LEAST A HALF-DAY BLOCK OF STUDENTS' INSTRUCTIONAL DAY

Small schools advocates argue that students' entire school day must be organized within their small learning community in order to give teachers the degree of autonomy and flexibility they need to be responsive to students (Fine & Somerville, 1998).

Research shows that small units that encompass half the instructional day have favorable effects on students' sense of community and academic achievement (Felner & Adan, 1988; Felner et al., 1997; McMullan, Sipe, & Wolf, 1994; Oxley, 1990, 1997b). In all cases, the half-day arrangement included courses in four core academic disciplines. Students in half-day units were assessed relative to those in no unit or units organized around only one or two classes; they were not compared to students in all-day units. Consequently, it is not possible to say how much stronger the effect of an all-day arrangement may be.

What is clear from both research and practice is that students register much less sense of community from a two-course block such as the language arts/social studies blocks frequently found in high schools (Oxley, 1990; Oxley et al., 2000). Moreover, teachers report that splitting up the SLC block of classes among classes outside the community also diminishes the small learning community's impact.

## SLC TEACHERS COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Teachers in successful small learning communities create collaborative relationships with community partners. Teachers work with community partners to design curricula grounded in real-world

work and service (Ancess, 1995). Community partners enable teachers to extend classwork into community contexts related to the topics and problems under study (Allen, 2001).

Collaboration with community partners also presents opportunities to conduct more authentic assessment of student work by including outside experts in the review process (Ancess, 1995). Community partner participation is also vital to teachers' reflection on their own work and continuous program improvement efforts (Christman et al., 1997). Community partners can be an important source of outside, yet informed, opinion about the SLC program.

#### STUDENTS ENGAGE IN ACTIVE, AUTHENTIC INQUIRY

Students in successful small learning communities actively explore topics, problems, and questions and produce authentic demonstrations of their knowledge (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Meier, 1995; Oxley, 1997b).

SLC students play an active role in designing and carrying out academic work. They help teachers identify problems to study, questions to research, books to read, and methods of demonstrating their knowledge and understanding (Ancess, 1995; Meier, 1995). They work individually and collaboratively using class conversations to express and revise their thinking. They work inside classrooms and in the community alongside individuals with authentic expertise in the problem area under study. SLC students frequently engage in project-based learning that requires them to collect and critically analyze information, defend their conclusions, and make in-depth oral and written presentations of their findings (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Meier, 1995; Wasley et al., 2000).

Research finds that student work that involves this active mode of acquiring knowledge—authentic pedagogy—is linked to heightened student achievement (Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995a, 1995b).





### INCREASING TIME IN THE SLC INSTRUCTIONAL BLOCK TIPSHEET

- Make lunch, study hall, advisory, and all possible time periods part of the block in order to gain as much instructional time as possible.
- Designate core teachers to teach certain electives to be included in the SLC block.
- Schedule students who need an extra period of instruction with one of their SLC teachers. For example, if you have three heterogeneous groups of students in 10th-grade English, and one-third of each class needs extra support to reach proficiency, schedule all three groups together for an additional period with their SLC English teacher.
- Integrate some elective offerings within core content classes (for example, photography with science). Time in the electives can be used to teach and reinforce core content.
- Design ZAP (Zeros Aren't Permitted) and other “no-failure” policies within the flex block to provide time for students to complete missed assignments with directed teacher assistance. In block schedules, teachers often have longer lunches than they are contracted for, and can use the extra time for one-on-one student interventions.
- Set SLC teacher planning opposite SLC student lunches or study halls in order to provide access to students for Personalized Education Plans, tutoring, retesting, etc.



# Domain 3:

## Inclusive Program and Instructional Practices

### Best Practices Checklist:

- SLC membership is based on student and teacher interests and choice
- Teachers make innovative flexible use of use time and space to meet needs of all students
- Instruction is tailored instruction to diverse students' needs
- Special educators/remediation specialists work as integral members of SLC team
- Counselor works as integral member of SLC team
- Teachers advise/mentor students
- Teachers collaborate with parents

# Why these practices are essential

## In a Nutshell...

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### RESEARCH AND EXEMPLARY SLCs DEMONSTRATE...

*...students' and teachers' choice of their SLC on the basis of its curricular program is more likely to create memberships in which teachers and students share the same interests and goals while the students themselves vary in social class, ethnicity, and history of academic achievement. SLCs that use pedagogical style as the basis of choice or random assignment to determine membership generate less diverse student groups and less buy-in, respectively. Practices associated with success in serving diverse students in SLCs include SLC teams comprising special and ELL educators, subject area teachers, and counseling staff; student advisement; and parent collaboration. Teachers combine these collaborative arrangements with instruction tailored to students' diverse needs in high-functioning SLCs. Adapting instruction to students' needs includes using the flexibility afforded by SLC organization to make multiple, varied arrangements for learning.*

## In Detail...

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### SLC MEMBERSHIP IS BASED ON STUDENT AND TEACHER INTERESTS AND CHOICE

Small learning community research and practice indicate that success depends in large part on a self-chosen membership that shares a commitment to the SLC's unique focus or mission (Allen, 2001; Aness, 1995; Cook, 2000; Meier, 1995).

Students' ability to choose their small learning community is consistent with a student-centered approach to education. Use of random assignment or admissions criteria to determine SLC membership eliminates the freedom students have, even in traditional schools, to match their interests with the courses they take. However, traditional schools offer choice in courses at the expense of program coherence and sense of community. SLCs can offer choice at the program level, if not the course level, and—with sufficient flexibility—can also provide many choices within the program.

Students' exercise of choice of SLC places a premium on informing middle school students and their parents about high school SLC programs. Student choice also challenges schools to develop a set of SLC programs that responds to a range of students' interests and offers equal challenge and opportunity for success.

If the school staff meets these challenges, the payoff appears to be more informed and empowered students and potent learning communities where members have the opportunity to develop their interests with teachers and with peers who share them. In a study of high schools organized into

small learning communities, researchers compared students who chose an SLC on the basis of curriculum theme with those who were randomly assigned to a subunit (Oxley et al., 2000). In the two study schools whose SLCs are organized around curriculum themes and career interests, entering students generally chose SLCs different from those their best friends selected and got to know students they otherwise would not have met. In these schools, students developed positive identifications with SLC teachers and peers based on shared learning interests and styles. In the third study school with transition-year subunits to which students are randomly assigned, students struggled to overcome their teachers' negative perceptions of first-year students and to distinguish themselves from less serious students.

SLCs whose curricular programs intentionally or unintentionally attract lower or higher achieving students create tensions among SLCs and long-term instability of small unit organization (Oxley, 2001; Ready et al., 2000). In the study described above (Oxley et al., 2000), researchers also compared students in schools with SLCs organized around curricular emphases with students in a fourth school whose SLCs were organized around differing pedagogical philosophies (e.g., cooperative learning). Students in SLCs organized around pedagogy style tended to choose an SLC on the basis of friends' choices and parents' beliefs about the SLC's effectiveness and level of difficulty. These SLCs became identified with relatively homogeneous groups of students in terms of ethnicity, social class, gender, and academic aspirations.

SLCs organized around curricular themes are not immune to attracting socially or academically homogeneous groups of students. For example, Wasley et al. (2000) found that schools-within-schools, especially those with math and science themes, tended to attract higher achieving students than the host school's traditional classes.

SLC staff members' ability to hold equally high standards and provide students an equal opportunity to succeed is vital. Randomly assigning students to SLCs neither ensures equal standards and opportunities nor engenders the kind of student motivation and interest that curricular themes do.

#### TEACHERS MAKE INNOVATIVE FLEXIBLE USE OF TIME AND SPACE TO MEET NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS

Teachers respond flexibly to student learning needs in part by taking full advantage of blocks of instructional time and physical space to organize instruction in accordance with those needs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Kemple & Herlihy, 2004; McPartland et al., 1998; Oxley, 1997b; Ratzki & Fisher, 1990).

Traditional schools typically require students who fail to master the curriculum in the allotted time to repeat failed classes and grades or participate in separate remedial courses or programs. SLC structure gives teachers greater flexibility to tailor instruction to the interests and needs of a heterogeneous group of students. Successful SLCs adjust instructional time on an ongoing basis. SLC teams create double as well as single periods of instruction during the week; teach extra periods of instruction in core courses to fewer classes of students by fully integrating an elective into the core program; and gather up minutes that are allocated but not needed for passing between adjacent classrooms and use them to lengthen advisory or other classes (Oxley, 1997a, 1997b). They create

advisory periods of varying lengths of time during the week and arrange for students to carry out community service to create teacher planning time (Meier, 1995). Interdisciplinary teams double instruction time in English and math, permitting students to complete Algebra 1 by the end of ninth grade even if they spent the first half of the year in pre-algebra (Kemple & Herlihy, 2004).

#### COUNSELOR WORKS AS INTEGRAL MEMBER OF SLC TEAM

School counselors are assigned to particular SLCs in order to work closely with SLC teams in responding to students' needs. In this way, counselors and teachers are more likely to intervene with students in an informed and consistent manner.

Staff members of successful small learning communities interact with students across multiple roles and contexts: as teacher, advisor, student admissions coordinator, and so on (Anness, 1995; Oxley, 1990, 1997b). In such communities, counselors use their individual and group process skills to help teachers organize student advisories, parent conferences, and classroom groups as well as to counsel students (Oxley, 1993). Counselors with teacher certification may also teach in the SLC.

#### SPECIAL EDUCATORS/REMEDATION SPECIALISTS WORK AS INTEGRAL MEMBERS OF SLC TEAM

Teaching specialists, including special education staff, are assigned to SLCs and work closely with the teacher teams to organize and carry out instruction and student support (Oxley, 1993, 1997a, 1997b).

Specialists' integration with teacher teams replaces the traditional school practice of addressing students' learning needs in separate, specialized contexts apart from mainstream classrooms. Integrated teams—with their augmented range of expertise—work with inclusive classes to provide consistent instructional interventions, to avoid negative student labels, and to give special education students the same choices as other students. These practices are consistent with communal school organization as well as special education inclusion (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996) and the goal of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to meet students' needs in the least restrictive environment possible.

Unfortunately, the record of small learning communities' inclusion of special education students has been weak (McMullan et al., 1994; Wasley et al., 2000). Exclusion of special education students from SLCs may seem to lighten the instructional burden, but at the same time excludes special educators with pedagogical expertise needed to help content-area specialists diversify their instructional strategies. Yet, there is broad consensus that use of diverse instructional strategies holds a key to educational effectiveness (Legters et al., 2002).

#### INSTRUCTION IS TAILORED TO DIVERSE STUDENTS' NEEDS

Teachers group students for specialized instruction within the team and diversify learning activities to increase routes to mastery (Legters et al., 2002; McPartland et al., 1998; Oxley, 1997a, 1997b). SLC

teams design and provide the support needed. A special education teacher assigned to an SLC team collaborates with four content teachers to differentiate instruction for groups that include students who are not passing tests and those who require more challenging assignments. The special educator teams with a content teacher within his/her classroom or divides the entire group of students into five smaller classes for instruction (Oxley, 1997b). Teams develop multiple means for students to demonstrate equal standards of proficiency (Ancess, 1995). In sum, SLC teams take responsibility for meeting all their students' needs rather than refer students to teachers without knowledge of these students or ability to provide coherence and continuity of instruction (Wasley et al., 2000).

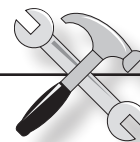
#### TEACHERS ADVISE/MENTOR STUDENTS

Staff members of successful SLCs meet regularly with small groups of advisees to monitor and troubleshoot their academic progress (Ancess, 1995; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Oxley, 1997b; McPartland et al., 1998).

Each SLC teacher advises and mentors a small group of students on a regular, ongoing basis as a means to further personalize teaching and learning (Legters et al., 2002). Advisories with teacher/student ratios that range from 1:25 to 1:10 meet once a day to once a week. Teachers discuss personal as well as academic issues of concern to students (e.g., rules, graduation requirements, difficulties students are having) and contact parents as needed.

#### TEACHERS COLLABORATE WITH PARENTS

The small learning community conception of teaching and learning rests on the view that optimal teaching occurs in a context in which teachers, students, and parents know each other and share a commitment to the school's particular mission (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Oxley, 1994b). The broad base of collaboration serves to expand teachers' knowledge of students' learning needs and the means to increase the consistency of students' educational experiences. Parent collaboration allows for more consistent communication of expectations and strategies for learning, which is key to program coherence and increased student achievement (Newmann et al., 2001a, 2001b).



### Creating Flexible Schedules for SLC Instructional Blocks

Key components:

- Create an instructional block so that SLC teachers can use time flexibly (see next page for an example). This requires:
  - Placing SLC courses in consecutive periods
  - Ensuring that students do not have classes outside the SLC during those periods
- Train teachers to design alternate schedules within the flexible block that allow them to regroup students for targeted instruction and “double-dose” opportunities.

At HHS, a suburban school of 2,350 students in the Northwest, all ninth- and 10th-graders are assigned to interdisciplinary SLC teams with three teachers: social studies, English, and science. While the school as a whole uses a trimester block schedule with 80-minute periods, SLC teams meet with their students on a different schedule: In a normal rotation, team members teach three classes of students over three periods of 55 minutes each (165 minutes) daily over three trimesters.

Because students are scheduled within an instructional block for these three classes, their teachers have complete flexibility in grouping students and using class time. SLC teams regularly use four schedules within their flexible block, depending on the academic needs of their students:



## Normal Rotation

M, T, W, Th, F

Period 1 (55 minutes)	Period 2 (55 minutes)	Period 3 (55 minutes)
Group A – Science Group B – Social Studies Group C – English	Group A – Social Studies Group B – English Group C – Science	Group A – English Group B – Science Group C – Social Studies

## Extended Rotation

This schedule is used for science labs, experiential learning, group projects, and other instructional approaches that work best in longer class periods. Teachers follow the normal rotation of three 55-minute periods two days a week; on the other three days, they have two 80-minute periods like the rest of the school.

M, F—Normal rotation as above; 55 minutes with each group

TUESDAY

Period 1 (80 minutes)	Period 2 (80 minutes)
Group A – Science Group B – Social Studies Group C – English	Group A – Social Studies Group B – English Group C – Science

WEDNESDAY

Period 3 (80 minutes)	Period 1 (80 minutes)
Group A – English Group B – Science Group C – Social Studies	Group A – Science Group B – Social Studies Group C – English

THURSDAY

Period 2 (80 minutes)	Period 3 (80 minutes)
Group A – Social Studies Group B – English Group C – Science	Group A – English Group B – Science Group C – Social Studies

## Advisory Rotation

Although HHS doesn't have a schoolwide advisory program, this SLC team believes their students need one. They adjust their schedule weekly to accommodate an advisory period. By opening the accordion walls between classrooms, the teachers gather all 90 students together for advisory periods.

M—Normal rotation; 55 minutes with each group

T, W, Th—Extended rotation or normal rotation—as needed—based on curriculum and instructional approaches

### FRIDAY

Period 1 (35 minutes)	Period 2 (35 minutes)	Period 3 (35 minutes)	Advisory Period (50 minutes)
Group A – Science Group B – Social Studies Group C – English	Group A – Social Studies Group B – English Group C – Science	Group A – English Group B – Science Group C – Social Studies	90 students, open walls. Sustained silent reading and advisory activity.

## Project Rotation

This schedule is used when students are working on extended group projects, which are often cross-curricular. Teachers see each group for one 110-minute period and three 55-minute periods each week.

M, F—Normal rotation or advisory rotation; 35–55 minutes with each group

### TUESDAY

Period 1 (110 minutes)	Period 2 (55 minutes)
Group A – Science Group B – Social Studies Group C – English	Group A – Social Studies Group B – English Group C – Science

### WEDNESDAY

Period 2 (110 minutes)	Period 3 (55 minutes)
Group A – Social Studies Group B – English Group C – Science	Group A – English Group B – Science Group C – Social Studies

### THURSDAY

Period 3 (110 minutes)	Period 1 (80 minutes)
Group A – English Group B – Science Group C – Social Studies	Group A – Science Group B – Social Studies Group C – English

# Domain 4:

## SLC-Based Continuous Program Improvement

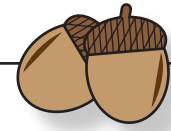
### Best Practices Checklist:

- Teams reflect on practice and engage in continuous improvement with stakeholders and other critical friends
- Teams use a variety of student data to reflect on practice
- Teams use input from stakeholders and other critical friends to reflect on practice
- Teams set and pursue professional development goals that match SLC improvement needs

# Why these practices are essential

## In a Nutshell...

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### RESEARCH AND EXEMPLARY SLCs DEMONSTRATE...

*...SLCs operate most effectively when teachers work as learning teams: they ask questions about the adequacy of their practice; gather and analyze information designed to answer their questions; and make decisions about how to modify their practice with input from students, stakeholders, and knowledgeable colleagues. Learning teams also develop their own professional development plans and as a result are better able to apply their training to program needs.*

## In Detail...

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### TEAMS REFLECT ON PRACTICE AND ENGAGE IN CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND OTHER CRITICAL FRIENDS

Research indicates that small learning communities will realize their promise only if SLC teams engage in a continuous process of improvement (Christman & Macpherson, 1996; Oxley, 2001).

Full implementation of small learning communities—as well as ongoing efforts to deepen practice—requires regular team reflection on practice, including analysis of students’ work and perceptions of the program. Building-level examination of student outcomes may complement SLC teams’ reflection on their practice but cannot replace it.

SLC teachers, who embody a spirit of inquiry and demonstrate an interest in learning, help to establish a *modus operandi* for the entire community (Senge et al., 2000).

### TEAMS USE A VARIETY OF STUDENT DATA TO REFLECT ON PRACTICE

School staff members’ experience suggests that a variety of data is helpful to reflecting on practice. Students’ work, grades, and standardized test scores are key pieces of data to examine. Teams may also need to find out what students do after they graduate, what educational opportunities they are able to pursue, and what course levels they are able to take. This becomes practicable when SLC teachers and their partners assemble a simple telephone survey and call graduates to see what they are doing. The information they gather will tell them if students’ level of mastery of the SLC curriculum was adequate to gain them admission to higher education or job training opportunities and to avoid remedial coursework.

Teams may also find it important to gather information on incoming students' backgrounds to determine if the SLC program succeeds in attracting a diverse group of students. Students' ethnicity and socioeconomic status are often apparent to teachers, but systematic examination of such data may reveal patterns that teachers did not detect informally. Persistent trends in admitting students from lower or higher income levels may indicate the need to review how information about the SLC is conveyed to students and parents, as well as how students and parents experience the program once in it.

#### TEAMS USE INPUT FROM STAKEHOLDERS AND OTHER CRITICAL FRIENDS TO REFLECT ON PRACTICE

When considering ways to improve practice, teachers can benefit from students' routine involvement in identifying problems and weaknesses and possible solutions (Ancess, 1995). Improving practice also requires consideration of the perceptions of parents, administrators, and other teachers whose outside perspective can broaden that of SLC teachers (Oxley, 1997b). In order to involve stakeholders in a meaningful way, SLC teachers must provide them with adequate information, especially access to classrooms and student work. Research organizations such as regional educational laboratories and universities can also help teams develop practical student data collection and analysis routines they can use on an ongoing basis (Christman & Macpherson, 1996).

#### TEAMS SET AND PURSUE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS THAT MATCH SLC IMPROVEMENT NEEDS

SLC teams identify and develop professional development opportunities that help them pursue their mission and specific improvement goals (Christman & Macpherson, 1996; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Wasley et al., 2000).

SLC teams avail themselves of both external and internal professional development, but to a large extent arrange for exchanges among colleagues to enhance professional skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). What is distinctive in either case is SLC teachers' own identification of the particular kind of professional development they need. As a result, SLC teachers have a better grasp than traditional teachers do of how the professional development fits with their goals and plans and how they will put new knowledge and skill to use (Wasley et al., 2000).



## INDIVIDUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1. First, summarize your team's plan for improving its curriculum and instruction program:

2. Describe your plan for improving your own skill/knowledge:

3. Explain how your plan supports your team's plan:

4. Identify what professional development opportunities you require to develop this skill/knowledge. Specify professional development content and length of time involved.

Content:

Length of time involved:

5. Describe what your instruction will look like when you gain the skill/knowledge you want. Specify what someone could expect to see at both an early and later stage of your skill development.

By \_\_\_\_\_ (early stage of skill development), one could expect my instruction to look like:

By \_\_\_\_\_ (later stage of skill development), one could expect my instruction to look like:

Teacher's signature and date

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Administrator's (evaluator's) signature and date

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## SLC TEAM-LED INQUIRY INTO PROGRAM & PRACTICE

SLC Team Inquiry —▶	Data Collection & Analysis —▶	Decisionmaking
Program implementation:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are we meeting the program implementation goals we set? Why?/Why not?</li> <li>• What do students think about C &amp; I reforms?</li> <li>• How do teachers &amp; students perceive their relationships with each other?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team review of materials and learning activities with community partners</li> <li>• Student questionnaire about program likes/dislikes: tally item responses, compute simple descriptive statistics (%s)</li> <li>• Student, parent focus groups on perceptions of community/ collaboration, availability of support: record and compile comments</li> </ul>	
Student characteristics:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are we attracting to this SLC?</li> <li>• How do our students compare to the students entering other SLCs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team's pooled knowledge of students and parents</li> <li>• Existing school data on student educational background, ethnicity, gender, family income, special education status disaggregated by SLC: display data in histograms</li> </ul>	<p>e.g., our SLC attracts higher nos. of low achievers: we need to increase course challenge and/ or communicate program offerings more clearly</p>
Student behavior:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did team interventions with individual students work?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team review of their progress with targeted students</li> </ul>	
Student achievement:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is students' work getting better in targeted areas?</li> <li>• What weaknesses in knowledge and skills do students exhibit? What proportion of which students exhibit these weaknesses?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team review of student work, e.g., papers, presentations</li> </ul>	
Student success beyond school:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did our graduates follow through with post-high school plans?</li> <li>• How many had to take remedial courses in college?</li> <li>• What skills do employers require for hiring &amp; promotion?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of graduates one year after graduation: tally responses to items, compute simple descriptive statistics (%s)</li> <li>• Interview employers in areas where students are likely to go</li> </ul>	<p>e.g., many students have to take remedial math in college: we need to raise our standards for course passing.</p>



# Domain 5:

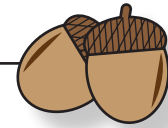
## Building and District Support for SLCs

### Best Practices Checklist for Building-Level Support:

- Building-wide improvement goals align with SLC needs
- Academic department goals align with SLC needs
- Building-level provisions for staff planning/development meet SLC needs
- Class scheduling and staffing are adjusted to strengthen SLC programs
- Academic track/alternative program changes are made to increase choice and academic challenge across all programs and SLCs
- Building-level policies are enacted to strengthen building and SLC self-governance

# Why these practices are essential

## In a Nutshell...



### RESEARCH AND EXEMPLARY SLCs DEMONSTRATE...

*...SLCs that have the most success with their students are not add-ons to the existing school organization. They are the fundamental building blocks of school organization and the center of school activities. Restructuring schools in this manner depends on aligning policies and practices across all organizational units. Schools' improvement plans—including their provisions for professional development—serve the goals and objectives of SLC programs. Academic areas operate to advance SLC program development.*

*Successful SLCs also depend on the adoption of new principles of organizing and governing staff and students at the building level. Most centralized functions and resources, including staff, are shifted to SLCs to empower teacher cadres with extensive knowledge of students to respond effectively to students' learning needs. Administrators and content-area leaders participate directly in as well as provide necessary forms of support for SLCs. SLC program needs drive class scheduling. Staff restructures or eliminates at-risk and honors programs so that student achievement level is not a de facto determinant of SLC membership, and high standards are a feature of all programs.*

## In Detail...



### BUILDING-WIDE IMPROVEMENT GOALS ALIGN WITH SLC NEEDS

The school's improvement process and goals must be consistent with SLCs' practices and needs for improvement.

Numerous unrelated school goals and reforms detract from full and faithful implementation of any one promising reform (Cohen, 1995). Frequently reforms, including SLCs, do not advance beyond an initial stage of implementation before a new reform initiative emerges and fragments existing reform efforts. School improvement efforts that encompass sustained coherent strategies are more likely to promote successful student outcomes (Newmann et al., 2001a, 2001b).

### ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT GOALS ALIGN WITH SLC NEEDS

Academic department goals must support SLCs' interdisciplinary teamwork. The emphasis of instructional leadership must be to accommodate interdisciplinary needs and approaches to teaching (McMullan, 1994; Ratzki & Fisher, 1990).

Cross-disciplinary teams may operate in tandem with cross-SLC academic discipline–based teams. Both serve important ends. Academic discipline–based planning helps to ensure that interdisciplinary programs incorporate important discipline-based knowledge and skills and are aligned with content standards. Experts in curriculum integration (e.g., project-based learning) do not see academic disciplines as detractors, but rather as the wells from which interdisciplinary programs draw (Allen, 2001; Beane, 1995).

Practically speaking, however, the operation of both SLC and academic discipline–based teams can create competition for reform priorities and available planning time (McMullan, 1994; Oxley, 2001). SLC teams combine teachers from academic departments whose preferred pedagogical approaches may differ, and their efforts to develop authentic curricula often lead them to deviate from pacing and content of standardized discipline-based curricula. SLC teams’ curriculum development work also requires large blocks of time while planning time must also be allocated to departments and schoolwide staff meetings. How instructional leaders resolve these conflicts says a lot about the school’s commitment to small learning community/student-centered practice and ultimately decides the success of SLC implementation.

#### **BUILDING-LEVEL PROVISIONS FOR STAFF PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT MEET SLC NEEDS**

Building-level provisions for professional development should reflect a sustained commitment to building capacity and consensus among teachers, parents, and administrators for implementing SLC essential practices (Christman & Macpherson, 1996; Wasley et al., 2000).

Different school improvement initiatives tend to travel along different channels, involve different groups of people, and have weak links to teacher practice (Cohen, 1995). Professional development is needed as a tool to create a coherent framework for school reform activities. Professional development should be designed to help teachers strengthen connections among their efforts to develop more engaging and authentic curricula, raise standards for student performance, and build community—in short, it should carry out a coherent vision of SLC practice (Christman & Macpherson, 1996).

#### **CLASS SCHEDULING AND STAFFING ARE ADJUSTED TO STRENGTHEN SLC PROGRAMS**

In schools with successful small learning communities, changes in class scheduling and staffing were made to allow SLC teams to implement innovative curriculum and instruction programs (Acess, 1995, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Oxley, 1990, 1997b; Ratzki & Fisher, 1990). These programs use a variety of strategies to reduce the number of students that teams instruct and to extend the amount of instructional time they have with students. Increased instructional time with fewer students allows teams to be more responsive to individual student’s needs and to pursue community and project-based learning requiring large blocks of time.

Shifts in building-level staffing and class scheduling to reduce student/teacher ratios and increase instructional time include allotting more non-instructional staff time to teaching (Gambone, Klem,

Moore, & Summers, 2002; Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1997), folding separate remedial programs into core subject-area instruction (Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1997; Oxley, 1990, 1997b), creating more planning time for teachers (Ancess, 1995; Gambone et al., 2002; Meier, 1995; Oxley, 1997b) and creating a 4x4 extended-period block schedule (Gambone et al., 2002).

Staffs of schools qualifying for schoolwide Title I funds folded separate reading classes into regular core subject-area classes. They also assigned reading specialists to SLC teams to help organize reading-across-the-curriculum, as well as teach core subjects (Oxley, 1990, 1993). The reading classes with reduced class size were transformed into an extra period of instruction per week in each of the four core content areas. Instead of the usual practice of teaching five classes of students five periods each for a total of 25 periods per week, team members taught four classes for the same number of periods of instruction. In this way, teams reduced the number of students with which they worked from 150 to 120 and increased the amount of instructional time they had with each class.

In a school without federal funding, SLC team members who implemented project-based learning were given a project period to teach in lieu of a sixth class of students (Oxley, 2001). They used the period to extend instructional time in their core subject to pursue projects. Since each SLC teacher taught one fewer core subject-area class, administrators augmented staffing in these areas through reclaiming some staff members' non-instructional time.

In another transformed school, teachers in one small school work exclusively with 100 students. Each staff member carries out student advisement and admission as well as teaching to minimize the student-teacher ratio (Ancess, 1995; Raywid, 1996). Dual certification, which some U.S. teachers and all German teachers have, is another means of allowing teachers to teach the same students across courses to reduce the overall number of students they teach. In German secondary schools, including those that have been restructured into learning communities, each teacher instructs 90 students (Ratzki & Fisher, 1990).

#### ACADEMIC TRACK/ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM CHANGES ARE MADE TO INCREASE STUDENT CHOICE AND ACADEMIC CHALLENGE ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS AND SLCs

Schools that organize small learning communities simultaneously revamp dropout programs and academic tracks in order to make student choice and academic challenge viable SLC educational strategies (Fine & Somerville, 1998; Oxley, 1994a, 1997b).

To the extent that small learning communities coexist with dropout and tracked programs, they become a de facto track. Students, parents, and teachers look to higher academic track courses for academic challenge, to dropout programs for remediation and socialization, and to small learning communities for something in between. Students' history of academic achievement drives program choice rather than substantive curricular interests. It is difficult for teachers and students alike to pursue high academic standards where programs imply judgments of student ability (Weinstein, 1996).

Research shows that academic tracks are associated with assignment of disproportionate numbers of white, middle-class students to higher tracks and ethnic minority, lower-class students to lower tracks (Oakes, 1985, 1995). SLCs that operate as de facto tracks replicate these social class disparities (Ready et al., 2000) as well as the inadequacies of remedial programs (Grannis, 1991; Wong & Wang, 1994). Consequently, dropout programs and tracked courses must also offer student choice and distinctive, substantive program offerings.

The necessity of school-level detracking does not rule out the practice of grouping students within SLCs on an ad hoc and fluid basis. Several SLC models create opportunities for remediation within the SLC's elective offerings (McPartland et al., 1998; Oxley, 1993). For example, tutorial and independent study periods can be linked to core courses to provide additional support.

#### **BUILDING-LEVEL POLICIES ARE ENACTED TO STRENGTHEN BUILDING AND SLC SELF- GOVERNANCE**

A distinctive feature of successful small learning communities is SLC teams' representation and active participation in building-level decision-making bodies (Cook, 2000; Oxley, 2001; Ratzki & Fisher, 1990).

Governance councils in schools with small learning communities make SLC representation commensurate with SLCs' status as the major unit of building organization. These councils may contain representatives of additional groups, including special education and academic disciplines. Administrators assume supervisory and teaching roles in SLCs in addition to carrying out building-level administrative tasks. In schools that have successfully implemented small learning communities on a schoolwide basis, the principal facilitates a shared decision-making process and serves as an integral member of an SLC team (Cook, 2000; Ratzki & Fisher, 1990).

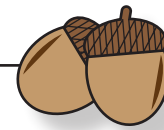
Assignment of administrators to SLCs is consistent with the idea that SLC staff members are better positioned than centralized staff to respond to their students' needs. They have more knowledge of their students, easier access, and can make consistent interventions across their students' classes. To the extent that SLC teams look out for their students' needs, including discipline, they free up centralized staff to take on instructional leadership and teaching roles within SLCs. Administrators' participation in SLCs reduces student-teacher ratios and increases the diversity of academic expertise and support available to students within their SLC. In a larger sense, administrator participation in SLCs leverages the transformation of traditional school structures that compete with small learning communities in the areas of decision making and resource allocation (Oxley, 2001).

### Emerging Practices for District-Level Support:

- ❑ District standardizes policies needed to support SLC operation
- ❑ District policies strengthen building-level self-governance
- ❑ District teachers' union negotiate contract provisions for meeting SLCs' staffing needs
- ❑ District provisions for professional development increase SLC teams' capacity for instructional innovation
- ❑ District staffing and budgeting practices give schools flexibility in allocating resources to meet SLC needs

# Why these practices are essential

## In a Nutshell...



STUDIES OF RESTRUCTURING DISTRICTS SUGGEST...

*...districts can play a supportive role in SLC development and institutionalization when they standardize policies that support SLC development across all schools, negotiate teachers' union contracts that enable SLC staff members to hire teachers needed to maintain program integrity, and shift authority to schools while holding them accountable for meeting academic standards. Increased school authority must be accompanied by increased flexibility in how school staff allocates resources including staff positions. Finally, districts can support SLCs' instructional innovation through professional development that recognizes the centrality of SLC team collaboration and resources needed for it, e.g., planning time, student data system that disaggregates data by SLC.*

## In Detail...



DISTRICT STANDARDIZES POLICIES NEEDED TO SUPPORT SLC OPERATION

Reviewing and modifying district policies to increase support for SLC development appear to offer greater advantages over granting policy waivers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Raywid, Schmerler, Phillips, & Smith, 2003; Rizzo, 2000). Districts will sometimes grant schools waivers from standard policies to enable staff to pursue key, innovative small learning community practices. School schedules that permit regular late starts for team planning or curricula that integrate content of multiple subject areas are examples of practices that have been impossible or difficult to pursue without exceptions to district policies. But waivers are readily rescinded or allowed to lapse under new leadership. They may also create tensions among schools operating under unequal policies. Perhaps most important, policy by waiver communicates that regular policies are adequate for most schools rather than being unresponsive to local school needs or, worse, inconsistent with new empirically based knowledge. In such a policy environment, school staff members are less likely to persist in developing innovative practices that become optimally effective and sustainable.

DISTRICT POLICIES STRENGTHEN BUILDING-LEVEL SELF-GOVERNANCE

The general shift of decision-making authority from district to school and from school to teachers to increase their influence over school policy and practice is a key feature of successfully restructured schools (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Rizzo, 2000). Deregulation that provides autonomy for schools to pursue their vision of high intellectual standards including the authority to hire staff consistent with the school's vision contributes to the capacity of school staff to work well as a unit. Staffs of such schools were able to form strong professional communities capable of offering authentic pedagogy and promoting student achievement.

School autonomy in allocating resources, determining the curricular and instructional program, and scheduling the school day and year as well as autonomy in staff hiring appear to be vital to small learning community functioning (AIR & SRI, 2004). These autonomies of practice go against the grain of the traditional, top-down approach to educational management, which emphasizes schools' compliance with district directives and allocates considerable resources to oversight rather than to the empowerment of school-level professionals.

#### DISTRICT AND TEACHERS' UNION NEGOTIATE CONTRACT PROVISIONS FOR MEETING SLCs' STAFFING NEEDS

SLCs' unique program identities and offerings create special staffing demands and, in turn, a need for policies to fill them (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Raywid et al., 2003). In many districts, teacher hiring that is based on seniority has proven a barrier to staffing SLCs with teachers needed to carry out the SLC's particular program. A teacher with special SLC qualifications such as dual certification, ability to teach two particular levels of math, or interest in program themes can make or break an SLC program. Districts such as New York City point the way to more flexible policies. The New York City Board of Education negotiated a teachers' union contract that allows schools to suspend seniority with 50 percent agreement of staff. The effect was to give staff flexibility in teacher hiring without jettisoning considerations for seniority altogether. Ultimately, the teachers' union supported a peer selection process in which SLC staff members interview and select staff.

#### DISTRICT PROVISIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INCREASE SLC TEAMS' CAPACITY FOR INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATION

District support for SLCs, particularly instructional innovation is most effective when it takes the form of a professional development strategy that strengthens the effectiveness of collaboration among SLC team members (Supovitz & Christman, 2005). Such a strategy legitimizes SLC leadership, creates opportunities for SLC teachers to meet as a team, and helps teams secure professional development tailored to their needs.

An effective district professional development strategy further builds SLC teams' capacity to improve their practice by helping teams develop data on their students' achievement. At a minimum, districts support teams' examination of their practice in relation to student outcomes by disaggregating school-level student data by SLCs and making these data available on a timely basis (AIR & SRI, 2004; Supovitz & Christman, 2005).

#### DISTRICT STAFFING AND BUDGETING PRACTICES GIVE SCHOOLS FLEXIBILITY IN ALLOCATING RESOURCES TO MEET SLC NEEDS

Several districts altered their school staffing and funding methods to give school staffs more flexibility in allocating resources to support innovative SLC practices. For example, some districts adopted student-based budgeting, which allots a given amount of dollars per pupil plus extra funds for students with special needs. This method contrasts with allocating staff positions to schools and



determining teacher salaries on the basis of average teacher salaries, which disadvantages schools with inexperienced teachers. Other districts continue to assign staff positions to schools but allow salaries for positions to be converted into other positions. For example, salary dedicated to an administrator position could be used instead to hire two lower level staff members (Allen & Steinberg, 2004).

Ability to allocate resources in accordance with the particular needs of small learning communities appears crucial to realizing their full potential (Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1997). Just as existing patterns of resource allocation have evolved to support comprehensive school organization—large numbers of specialized staff, course, and tracks, so resources need to be reallocated to support small learning community practices—lower student/staff ratios, more instructional time devoted to the core curriculum, and greater integration of special needs instruction with regular instruction. This appears to be as true at the district level as at the building level.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TO SUPPORT SLC IMPLEMENTATION

Step 1. Take inventory of all existing school improvement activities and their requirements.

Step 2. Modify or eliminate activities to align them with the school’s vision/mission and use funds more efficiently.

School/District Vision/Mission (to reflect consistency with SLC best practices):

List all school improvement activities and programs (e.g., Title 1).	Note time, funds, staff used to conduct activities and programs.	Describe how activities and programs can be modified or eliminated to align with school vision/mission and use funds more efficiently.

Step 3. Take inventory of all needed, planned, and occurring professional development activities and their requirements.

Step 4. Modify or eliminate activities to align them with the school's vision/mission and meet requirements for effectiveness.

List professional development planned /occurring in and not in direct connection to SLCs	Note time, schedule, expertise, support, staff, funds required to make PD effective	Describe how PD will be modified or eliminated to align with school vision/mission and meet all requirements for effectiveness



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# Appendix

## Recent Evidence of Positive Effects of Small Learning Communities: Publications, 2000–Present

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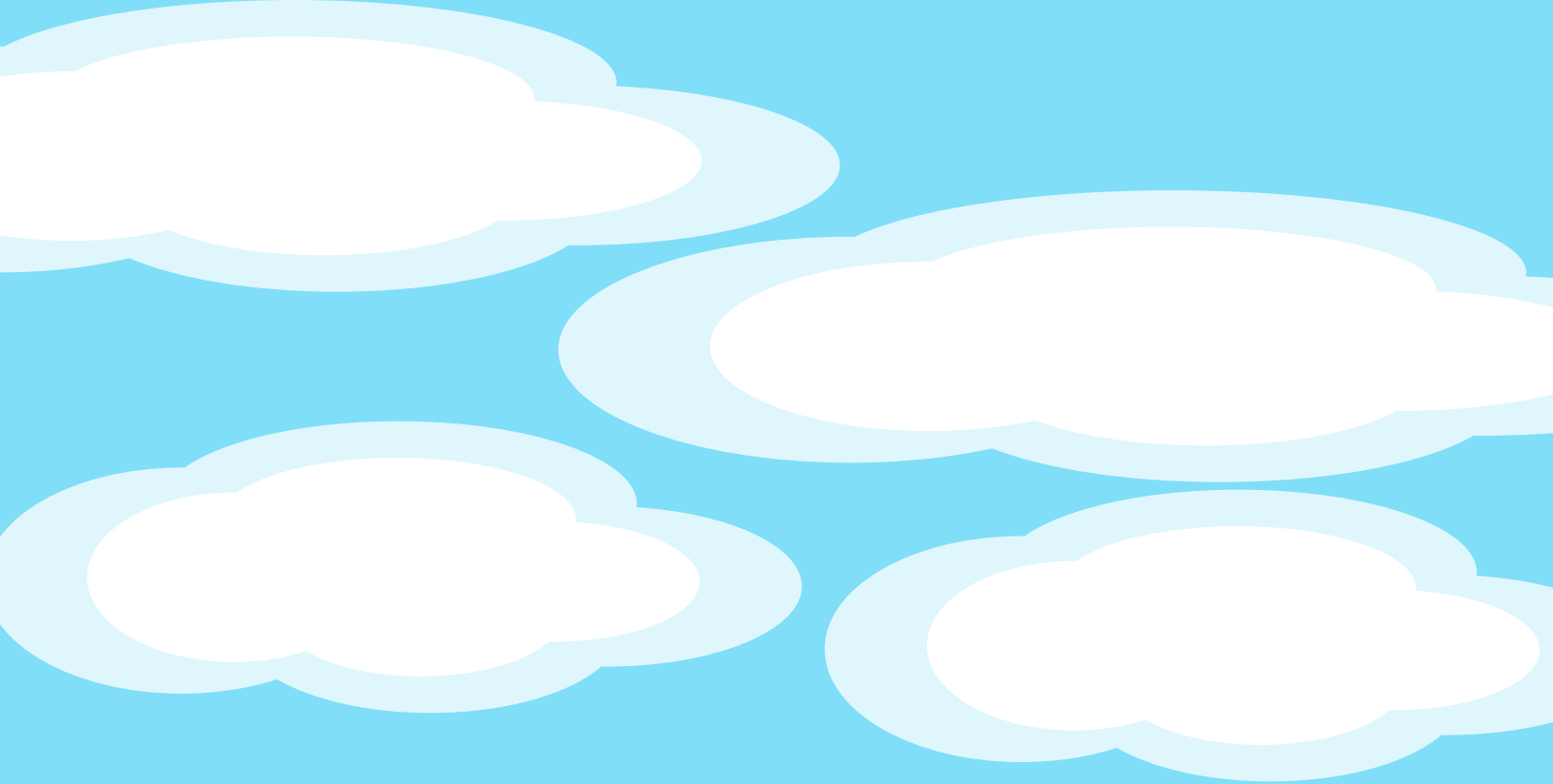
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