

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Foundation's education grant programs are predicated on three essential components of powerful teaching and learning (adapted from How People Learn: Bridging Research and Practice, National Research Council, 1999)

ACTIVE INQUIRY: Students are engaged in active participation, exploration, and research; activities draw out perceptions and develop understanding; students are encouraged to make decisions about their learning; and teachers utilize the diverse experiences of students to build effective learning experiences.

IN-DEPTH LEARNING: The focus is competence, not coverage. Students struggle with complex problems, explore core concepts to develop deep understanding; and apply knowledge in real world contexts.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: Clear expectations define what students should know and be able to do; students produce quality work products and present to real audiences; student work shows evidence of understanding, not just recall; assessment tasks allow students to exhibit higher-order thinking; and teachers and students set learning goals and monitor progress.

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HELPING ALL STUDENTS ACHIEVE

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is committed to working with and encouraging outstanding schools, school districts and school networks that have focused time, energy and resources on helping all students achieve. Schools today face new and different challenges, but few have the time or resources to make the changes necessary to help all students achieve. The schools, districts and networks the Foundation is investing in all reflect a common set of attributes that research and best practices show are necessary to create a rich teaching and learning environment where every student thrives.

ATTRIBUTES OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOLS

COMMON FOCUS: Staff and students are focused on a few important goals. The school has adopted a consistent research-based instructional approach based on shared beliefs about teaching and learning. The use of time, tools, materials, and professional development activities are aligned with instruction.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS: Staff members are dedicated to helping students achieve state and local standards; students are engaged in an ambitious and rigorous course of study; and students leave school prepared for success in work, further education and citizenship.

PERSONALIZED: The school is designed to promote sustained student relationships with adults where every student has an adult advocate and a personal plan for progress. Schools are small. No more than 600 students (less than 400 strongly recommended).

RESPECT AND RESPONSIBILITY: The environment is authoritative, safe, ethical, and studious. The staff teaches, models, and expects responsible behavior and relationships are based on mutual respect.

TIME TO COLLABORATE: Staff has time to collaborate and develop skills and plans to meet the needs of all students. Parents are recognized as partners in education. Partnerships are developed with businesses to create work-based opportunities and with institutions of higher education to improve teacher preparation and induction.

PERFORMANCE BASED: Students are promoted to the next instructional level only when they have achieved competency. Students receive additional time and assistance when needed to achieve this competency.

TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL: Teachers design engaging and imaginative curriculum linked to learning standards, analyze results, and have easy access to best practices and learning opportunities. Schools publish their progress to parents and engage the community in dialog about continuous improvement.

ATTRIBUTES OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT SCHOOL DISTRICTS

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP: The school board, administration and employee representatives share a goal of helping all students achieve. They focus on literacy, encourage continuous improvement of teaching and learning, focus on student learning, and engage parents and community members in helping all students achieve at high levels.

PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY: The district establishes clear expectations and accountability: grade level standards and standards-based assessments in core academic areas guide teaching and learning; policies that guide promotion and school funding provide the time and assistance students need to meet performance expectations; staff members are evaluated on skill and performance; low performing schools receive assistance and when necessary the district takes responsibility to create better options for students.

EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE: Schools make hiring, budget and program decisions. Parents and students can choose schools and have access to alternative delivery systems.

SHARED VALUES: The school board, district administration and employee representatives articulate and model shared values. District leaders seek regular feedback from students, staff and parents.

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS: Parents are recognized as the first teachers and are involved in instructional decisions. Business partnerships provide work-based learning opportunities. Community supports the improvement agenda.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT: Districts invest at least 5% of their resources in adult learning and leadership development. Learning opportunities for staff members include professional development and time for the instructional staff to analyze data, target efforts and solve problems. Partnerships with schools of education improve teacher preparation and induction.

TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE: Every staff member and student has access to technology and support.