

# Santa Monica High School's Redesign

## Introduction

**Santa Monica High School (Samohi) is redesigning its large structure into six small high schools of 550 students in order to increase academic achievement for all students and to create a more personalized learning environment.**

Samohi has historically served a certain population of its students very well, but has struggled to meet the needs of some of its other students—primarily African-American and Latino students. In fact, Samohi's persistent achievement gap demonstrates that its white students experience greater academic success than do its African-American and Latino students. In addition to the achievement gap, Samohi's data shows that far more of its African-American and Latino students are suspended than white students.

Samohi's teachers recognize and acknowledge the importance of academic achievement for all students, the value of consistent classroom attendance, and the need for behavior that allows for student learning. For many years the Samohi faculty has worked diligently to improve academic achievement, attendance, and behavior in a variety of ways. The staff has participated in an Inquiry process, a Small Schools Planning process, and program to increase access to advanced courses for previously underrepresented students.

This year a group of stakeholders formed the Redesign Team and developed plans for Samohi's Redesign. This plan has been presented to its teachers, all of its parent groups, its students, and to the School Board and Superintendent.

## Rationale

The small schools movement is well established. As a result, there is now evidence to support what many have believed to be true—that small schools tend to produce significantly better results for students. More specifically, current research shows us that small schools tend to have:

- Better attendance rates
- Stronger academic achievement
- Lower drop out rates
- Higher grades
- Fewer failed courses
- Greater participation in activities
- Less vandalism and violence
- Fewer behavior incidents
- Especially strong academic results for low-income students and students of color<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Darling-Hammond, L. "Reinventing High School: Outcomes of the Coalition Campus Schools Project." *American Educational Research Journal*. Fall 2002, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 639-673.

The Chicago Small Research Team<sup>2</sup> conducted a comprehensive study of the small schools in Chicago, and established that both students and teacher fare better in small learning communities.

School-size research...usually finds that teachers in small learning environments feel in a better position to make real difference in students' learning and general quality of life than do teachers in large schools. They have closer relationships with students and other staff, experience fewer discipline problems, and are better able to adapt instruction to students' individual needs.

Clearly, students benefit from more personalized learning communities. But in addition to students, teachers also benefit from working in as professionals that focus around a specific group of students.

## **Problem**

Santa Monica High School is a large school with over 3,400 students. As a result, many students do not have a relationship with any adult on campus, and feel disconnected from the school. In addition to this lack of personalization, Santa Monica has an achievement gap between its White students and its African-American and Hispanic students. Santa Monica High School has analyzed its SAT-9 test results, its HiPlaces survey information, and its grade distribution data and has found that it is not meeting the needs of all its students.

### **A. Analysis of SAT-9 data**

The following statement summarize the performance of Santa Monica High School students in language arts and mathematics from 1999-2002 as measured by the SAT-9 test:

\*\*\*Samohi students performed as well or slightly better than high school students in the nation during the period 1999-2002.

\*\*\*On average, 9th, 10th and 11th grade students performed at about the 50th NCE score in reading, at the 60th NCE score in mathematics and at the 55th NCE score in language during this period.

\*\*\*On average, African-American and Hispanic students scored 10 NCE scale points lower than the school average, while Asian and White students scored 10 NCE points higher than the school average.

\*\*\*For many students, scores actually declined as they progressed through Samohi.

\*\*\*On average, African-American and Hispanic students in the classes of 2003 and 2004 had lower scores in reading, mathematics and language as they moved from 9th to 10th to 11th grade.

\*\*\*Approximately 70% of the class of 2002 had been at Samohi for four years.

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<sup>2</sup> Chicago Small Research Team. (2000) *Small Schools: Great Strides*. New York: Bank Street College of Education.

## **B. Analysis of Twelve Week Grades**

An analysis of the grades for the second six weeks of the school year indicate a large achievement gap between Hispanics and African-Americans, and White students.

- White students received 61% of the total A's given and 54% of the total B's.
- White students total 50% of the student body.
- Hispanic students received 45% of the total D's given and 52% of the total F's.
- Hispanic students total 31% of the student body.
- African-American students received 16% of the total D's and 17% of the total F's.
- African-American students total 11% of the student body.

## **C. Observations from High Performance Learning Community Assessment**

The High Performance Learning Community Assessment (Hi Places) surveys parents, students, teachers, and administrators and provides insight into many aspects of the Santa Monica High School experience. These findings have reinforced the need for a redesigned high school.

### **Teacher School Work Climate:**

- Teachers reported barriers to implementing reform as: (1) lack of adequate team planning time, (2) lack of time necessary for adequate planning and/or implementation, and (3) lack of adequate professional development time for staff.

### **Personalized Learning Community:**

- Teachers reported having team teaching opportunities to coordinate student assignments, assessments, and feedback never or once a year.
- 1/4 of Samohi students reported not using a guidance counselor.

### **Students' Perceived School Climate:**

- Students indicated that teachers provided support sometimes.

## **Solution**

In the fall, Santa Monica High School (Samohi) will reopen as six small schools. Each of these small schools will house students grades nine through twelve and will be lead by one administrator, two advisers, and one teacher-leader. The administrative team divided teachers into each small school and ensured that each is well balanced and can provide a complete high school curriculum to its students. Redesigning into small schools will improve what Samohi teachers care deeply about— academic success for all students. These small schools will facilitate interdisciplinary teaching, a team approach to struggling students, and will create much needed time for teachers to work together as professionals with common goals about teaching and learning.

Santa Monica High School's redesign plans reflect a desire to preserve what works well for students at Samohi, while also creating new systems and structures that will support teachers and insure that *all* of its students succeed now and in the future.

The Redesign Team has worked since September to develop small schools models that directly impact student achievement through increased graduation requirements, academic support programs, and a narrower academic focus. The Redesign Team believes by focusing on the "Small School Principles:" Personalization, Intellectual Mission, Community Partnership, and Professional Learning Community, teaching and learning at Samohi can only be strengthened.

Here's what the small schools have in common—

## THE BIG SIX

### A. Structure

Each school has approximately 550 students and 25 full time teaching positions. Each school also has a Leadership Team that includes all stakeholders.

### B. Instructional Program

The instructional program of each small school is aligned with UC/CSU standards (*see Appendix B for a summary of the UC/CSU standards*). As a result, the ninth grade program includes:

- English
- Math
- Biology
- Health/P.E.
- Language
- Visual and Performing Arts

Students have access to all advanced placement classes, even those taught by teachers in other small schools. All curricula are content and performance standards-based.

### C. Elective Program

All students in each small school have access to elective programs, even those taught by teachers in other small schools.

### D. Collaborative Time

Each small school's faculty meets at least twice a month to work collaboratively.

### E. Extra-curricular/Co-curricular

All students in each small school have access to all athletic programs and club activities.

### F. Academic Support

Each small school offers a structured academic support program and has a literacy coach. Each small school will also maintain an RSP and an SDC program.

## Appendix A

### Second Stage Implementation

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#### **Bell Schedule:**

The Redesign Team explored many different types of bell schedules, such as:

- Modified block (with two days of blocked classes)
- Modified block (with four days of blocked classes)
- Snaking schedule: The schedule rotates through, leaving off certain periods throughout the week

The Redesign Team believes that eventually Samohi will need to reexamine its bell schedule in order to accommodate different types of instruction. But in order to set attainable goals for next year, schedules are not included as a choice in these small school models.

#### **Advisory:**

The Redesign Team also believes that we will best serve our students if we develop an advisory program. In advisory program, students receive academic and personal support from a credentialed adult who they meet with for four years. The Redesign Team envisions many versions of an advisory program:

- 2-30 minutes sessions a week with program defined by student needs
- 1-60 minute session
- Small groups of students meet with a teacher/administrator twice a week for 25-30 minutes to discuss student issues, concerns, goals, etc.
- Adviser provides important information regarding colleges, school life (both academic and social), as well as supporting and advocating for each student.
- Student in advisory groups stay together through 4 years and hopefully provide a support network.

But, again, in order to set attainable goals for next year, advisories are not included as a choice in these small school models.

#### **Honors:**

The Redesign Team spent a great deal of time debating the role of honors classes, and analyzing the impact that these classes have academic programs. The Redesign Team supports rigorous academic challenges for all students as well as significant professional development focused on differentiated instruction. The Redesign Team developed two models for how honors could be reconfigured at Samohi:

- No separate honors options at the ninth and tenth grade, instead, honors options are articulated within each class.
  - Fewer honors options at the ninth great level (only in Math and Biology); in English the honors option is articulated within the class - - it is not separate.
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