Making Schools Work
Key Practices for High Schools

SREB's **Making Schools Work school improvement process** is grounded in the belief that increasing student achievement begins with increasing student effort. Our school improvement framework for high schools — **High Schools That Work** — brings teachers, counselors, school leaders and industry partners together to focus on *engaging instruction, aligned curriculum, career pathways, systems of support* and *leadership for continuous improvement*.

SREB has identified 10 key school and classroom practices that positively impact student effort and achievement. When implemented with fidelity, these practices provide high school students with the purpose, direction and accelerated learning opportunities they need to graduate on time and thrive in postsecondary studies, careers and the global marketplace.

High schools use the 10 Key Practices to guide improvement. The process often begins with SREB's Curriculum and Instruction Review, in which an external team of teachers, leaders and local partners assess promising practices and problems of practice in the school and recommend actions to eliminate those problems. Later, SREB's Site Development Workshop engages faculty focus teams in analyzing CIR findings, conducting research, setting bold goals for student achievement and developing plans for improvement. SREB offers school improvement coaching and professional learning to support these plans.

By combining this process with the **10 Key Practices** below, high schools build their capacity to continuously address problems and meet clear targets for student success.

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1. **High Expectations —** Help teachers embrace school and classroom practices that elevate learning, promote a growth mindset and ensure each student has access to intellectually demanding course work and resources. (*Leadership for Continuous Improvement*)

   Indicators

   A. School leaders build teachers' capacity to implement school and classroom practices that promote a growth mindset and encourage students to achieve.

   B. Teachers establish classroom policies and procedures and standards-aligned instructional practices, assignments and assessments that promote high expectations.

   C. Teachers clearly communicate expectations to help students recognize when they are not progressing and proactively seek feedback to advance their learning.

   D. Teachers create rigorous assignments and assessments and use effective feedback and questioning strategies that help students meet high expectations.

   E. Teachers, leaders and the whole school community regularly celebrate students' achievements.

2. **Programs of Study —** Ensure each student can develop and complete a high-quality program of study — a progressively intensive, nonduplicative sequence of secondary and postsecondary general and/or career and technical education courses, co-curricular learning experiences and accelerated learning options — that culminates in the attainment of recognized industry and/or postsecondary credentials. (*Career Pathways*)

   Indicators

   A. Each student develops and annually reviews and revises a personalized education plan that includes rigorous academic core courses and/or challenging career pathway courses and aligns with their interests and aptitudes.

   B. The school offers programs of study in career pathway areas that reflect local and regional workforce needs, as determined by analyses of workforce data.

   C. Each student has opportunities to earn industry-recognized credentials and early postsecondary credits in their chosen program and career pathway.

   D. Programs of study expand learning beyond the school walls by connecting students with local career and technology centers, two- and four-year postsecondary institutions, co-curricular and work-based learning options, online learning and engagement with business, industry and community partners.

   E. The school maintains active advisory committees comprised of business, industry, postsecondary and community partners who help design and deliver programs of study and career pathways leading to high-demand jobs.

3. **Integrated Curriculum —** Help students master the essential concepts of the state's college- and career-preparatory curriculum by teaching academic content through the lens of real-world problems and projects. (*Aligned Curriculum*)

   Indicators

   A. School leaders create a data-driven environment by providing teachers with the tools, resources and support they need to use qualitative and quantitative student data to identify and address curricular gaps.

   B. Teachers unpack and align state standards with relevant, engaging instruction, assignments and assessments.

   C. Teacher teams use established processes to review, analyze and select student-centered instructional tools that align with standards.

   D. Teachers collaborate across disciplines to integrate literacy in all courses.

   E. Each student learns content and academic, technical and workplace skills by completing real-world problems and projects.

4. **Access and Equity —** Ensure each student, including underrepresented and nontraditional students, has equitable access to intellectually challenging academic and technical studies that emphasize the mastery of skills needed in the workplace and further education. (*Aligned Curriculum*)

   Indicators

   A. School leaders, counselors and teachers ensure each student can access advanced courses and encourage students to complete challenging programs of study.

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B. School leaders, counselors and teachers ensure that all academic and CTE programs are inclusive and accessible.

C. Teachers prepare lessons that reflect the lived experiences of diverse populations and acknowledge that perceptions of events are affected by race, ethnicity, culture, religion, education, gender, sexual orientation, disability and personal experience.

D. Teachers help students consider past and current events in historical, geographical, social and economic contexts.

E. School leaders and teachers use student and school data to identify potential barriers to success and develop plans to eliminate those barriers.

5. **Student Engagement —** Use research-based instructional strategies and innovative technology practices to actively engage each student. (***Engaging Instruction***)

Indicators

A. Teachers use powerful instructional practices for literacy, mathematics, science and other curricular areas to engage students in authentic learning.

B. Teachers plan instruction after reviewing student assessment data and student work.

C. Teachers design structured opportunities for students to collaborate, engage in peer discussion and feedback, and solve real-world problems in varied instructional settings.

D. Teachers use effective classroom questioning strategies to engage students in learning.

E. Teachers use authentic project- and problem-based learning strategies to engage students in solving real-world problems.

6. **Teacher Collaboration —** Provide teacher teams with the training, time and support they need to improve instruction, align lessons with standards, create interdisciplinary assignments and develop innovative instructional practices. (***Engaging Instruction***)

Indicators

A. School leaders provide time for collaborative professional learning and planning, collect data during instructional rounds and observations, review student assignments and assessments, and celebrate teachers' and students' successes.

B. School leaders collaborate with teachers to create and improve curricular tools like syllabi, assessments and lesson plans that meet or exceed grade-level standards.

C. School leaders provide opportunities for teacher teams to integrate lessons and assignments across disciplines and grade levels.

D. Teachers collaborate with student support personnel and other staff to improve and adjust instructional supports and accelerated learning opportunities for students with Individualized Education Plans, 504 plans and other special needs.

7. **Work-Based Learning —** Encourage each student to participate in developmentally appropriate, structured work-based learning experiences that connect the classroom and the workplace and align with students' personal interests and goals. (***Career Pathways***)

Indicators

A. Students participate in a broad and progressively intensive array of work-based learning experiences that allow them to explore career options, such as field trips, guest speakers, career fairs, job shadows, school-based enterprises, simulated workplaces, paid or unpaid internships, and apprenticeships.

B. School leaders and teachers engage business, industry, postsecondary and community partners in contributing to the school's curriculum, offering work-based learning, participating in classroom activities and mentoring students.

C. The school uses written agreements to define the roles and responsibilities of business, industry, postsecondary and community partners who offer work-based learning and make other contributions to the curriculum.

8. **Guidance and Advisement —** Involve the whole school community in creating and offering personalized career guidance, advisement and social-emotional supports that empower students to pursue a full range of career and college options. (***Systems of Support***)

Indicators

A. The school designs and implements programs that provide students and parents with social-emotional supports.

B. The school offers career interest and aptitude inventories, surveys and other tools that allow students to explore their talents, consider their options and plan for the future.

C. Each student is partnered with a caring adult, such as a counselor or teacher-adviser, who regularly meets with them and serves as a contact between school and family.

D. Each student designs a personalized plan of study and collaborates with their parents, counselor and teacher-adviser to choose courses that align with that plan.

E. The school embraces trauma-informed practices that nurture and support students who have experienced or are currently experiencing trauma.

9. **Interventions and Enrichments —** Design tiered systems of extra help and accelerated learning opportunities that help each student become an independent learner and complete a challenging academic and technical program of study. (***Systems of Support***)

   Indicators

   A. The school employs a system of tiered interventions for students who need academic, social-emotional or behavioral supports.

   B. School leaders, counselors and teachers use early warning systems and other structures to identify and monitor students who fall behind their peers, target struggling students with timely and effective interventions, and monitor student progress.

   C. Teachers use innovative technology tools and strategies to support learning.

   D. Schools regularly share information on available interventions and student progress with students and families.

   E. Schools provide enrichment opportunities for students who are performing on or above grade level.

10. **Culture of Continuous Improvement —** Engage the whole school community in continuously analyzing data to identify problems of practice, devise action plans for solving those problems and monitoring student learning outcomes. (***Leadership for Continuous Improvement***)

    Indicators

    A. School leaders engage the whole school community in developing and communicating the school's vision and mission.

    B. School leaders employ a distributed leadership approach to engage teams of teachers, counselors and other staff in using SREB's problem-solving process — based on Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act approach — to strategically plan for school improvement.

    C. School leaders use school, classroom and process data to make effective decisions and monitor progress toward meeting bold goals for student achievement and school improvement.

    D. School leaders align ongoing professional learning opportunities with school improvement priorities and teacher evaluation data.

    E. School leaders develop a plan to effectively support new teachers that includes mentorships, specialized professional learning and time to collaborate with other new teachers.