



High School Deeper Learning Opportunities

Topic Area Introduction

High schools are uniquely positioned to create the society of next-generation citizens, employees, employers, entrepreneurs, developers, innovators, inventors, and leaders—among other stakeholders—that the country seeks. Twenty-first-century careers, the increasing importance of technology, and new learning models all provide an important opportunity for schools to consider new approaches that support all students that better meet their learning needs and interests, and provide authentic application of knowledge. The ability of educators, through policies, procedures, and practices, to create learning environments that promote deeper learning outcomes—know and master core academic content; think critically and solve complex problems; work collaboratively; communicate effectively; be self-directed and able to incorporate feedback; and develop the academic mindsets necessary for learning—can have a long-lasting positive impact on future opportunities for students.

Students' age, maturity, and interests allow high schools to plan and implement programs that are very different from those used in the earlier years of schooling. Various opportunities can be made available at the high school level to help students explore their interests, experience work, give back to their communities, and make individual decisions—specifically supporting preparation for careers, the workforce, college, and adult life.

How do these opportunities become available to all students? What do they look like in the school and the community? What roles do students, educators, communities, and businesses play? Where are the models for high school programming? These are some of the questions that policymakers and practitioners, with support from all stakeholders, will need to address when considering their student populations and the learning outcomes they hope to achieve.

When students participate in interesting, adult-supported activities, they likely will stay engaged in learning, build confidence as learners, and see a productive future in college, careers, and life. Having knowledge of and interest in deeper learning is the first step to making this a reality in high school education—and, indeed, in the entire K–12 system.

In order to actualize deeper learning for students, educators should plan and implement strategies that support deeper learning for all students, across classes and content, with any necessary supports and scaffolding. These must be designed to support both educator and student needs. Leaders can ensure that all students, including those students who struggle or have not had adequate access to higher-level classes, have that access and the supports necessary to be successful. Such supports might be academic—additional classes, tutoring, peer mentoring, and work-based learning opportunities—while other assistance might include support services such as counseling, structured out-of-school time, adult mentoring, service learning, and other activities that appeal to student interest, aspiration, and need.

Similarly, to support changes in educational approaches, leaders can identify policies, procedures, and practices that are key to supporting the infrastructure that allows them to develop, adopt, plan, and implement programs and approaches that lead to deeper learning. In addition, leaders should—through policies, procedures, and practices—provide opportunities for more collaborative and independent learning that leads to more student ownership of their own educational experience. This can be done, in part, by creating space, time, and supports for deeper learning.

Opportunities That Enhance Deeper Learning

One way educators can ensure that students are being adequately prepared to demonstrate what they are learning beyond high school is by offering rigorous academic programs such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual or concurrent college enrollment, early college high school, and career and technical academies for more students, including students who traditionally have not participated in these



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courses. Additionally, districts are incorporating other approaches—such as personalized learning and a combination of methods that are appropriate in particular contexts—that are geared toward deeper learning. These opportunities allow students to demonstrate a level of college or career readiness in given subject or skill areas. While not all of these programs inherently exemplify all competencies required for deeper learning, programs such as AP and IB offer students rigorous content and problem solving that can be augmented with other activities for deeper learning. School districts are increasing programmatic opportunities that interweave content for postsecondary learning and careers. Along with specific programs, schools offer work-based apprenticeships, project-based learning, service learning projects, and other real-world and career experiences that connect students' interests to postsecondary learning, work, and community.

Schools also are utilizing more digital learning with approaches such as connected or blended learning and digital learning. They are turning to education resources such as the Alliance's Future Ready Schools® dashboard hub (<http://futureready.org/>) for resources to guide effective implementation of technology-based teaching and learning approaches. While technology and digital learning programs cannot replace teacher instruction, they can enhance instruction in ways that allow students to delve deeper into content and support a more personalized and/or project-based learning approach. It is important for districts to ensure alignment of

all programmatic approaches, including digital learning, with standards and desired outcomes for students.

Through the intentional review, design, and implementation of opportunities for deeper learning, students not only study rigorous content and apply their learning, they also can establish their ability to work collaboratively and think critically. As districts look to extend opportunities in high schools for deeper learning, leaders will benefit from having sufficient knowledge about the competencies students need to achieve these outcomes.

State and District Leaders' Roles and Responsibilities

Creating various opportunities to support deeper learning at the secondary level can be challenging. Successful implementation requires state and district leaders to create coherent policies, procedures, and practices that ensure equitable access for all students. Consider the following examples.

- **Policies:** The state provides incentives for districts to partner with other professional and community organizations to learn about their work, plan and deliver lessons collaboratively, and find ways to bridge the world of work with learning.

Learn More About Programmatic Strategies

In its Next-Generation High School toolkits, the Alliance has created resources on the following strategies.

- **Personalized learning** is described as a student-centered approach designed to help all students—including those from low-income families and students of color, who traditionally have been underserved—develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will prepare them for college, a career, and life.
- **Early college/dual- or concurrent-enrollment** programs are defined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). **Early college** is a partnership between at least one local educational agency and at least one institution of higher education that allows participants simultaneously to complete requirements toward earning a regular high school diploma and to earn no fewer than twelve credits that are transferable to the institutions of higher education. It also must be part of an organized course of study toward a postsecondary degree or credential and provided at no cost to the participant or the participant's family. A **dual- or concurrent-enrollment program**, on the other hand, allows a student who has not graduated from high school to enroll in one or more postsecondary courses and earn postsecondary credits that are transferable to the institutions

of higher education in the partnership. Credits also apply toward completion of a degree or recognized educational credential.

- **Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB)** typically are thought of as college preparation programs. AP is a program in the United States and Canada, created by the College Board, that offers college-level curricula and examinations to high school students. More than thirty college-level courses are administered by the College Board, each culminating in a college-level exam. IB is a comprehensive education program that helps students understand and manage the complexities of the world and provides them with skills and attitudes for taking responsible action for the future. It has four main programs, starting with the Primary Years Programme, then the Middle Years Programme, the Diploma Programme for high school, and the Career-Related Programme, also offered in high school.

The Alliance toolkits (<http://all4ed.org/nghs/>) provide state, district, and school leaders with an opportunity to learn about strategies and best practices that can be used for planning and implementing these high school opportunities. Particularly, they ensure that traditionally underserved students are able to participate and are supported in learning rigorous content.

- **Procedures:** Districts develop strong partnerships with institutions of higher learning, businesses, and community organizations to support principals and teachers in the planning and implementation of programs and in creating opportunities for authentic experiences for students.
- **Practice:** High school students participate in a series of project-based learning or work-based apprenticeships and develop portfolios aligned to specific rubric measures for high school graduation.

Leaders have the responsibility to ensure that infrastructure is available to support these programmatic opportunities. Infrastructure can be defined as the building of structures, personnel, professional development opportunities, and other supports that are necessary to ensure the planning and implementation of selected programs or approaches. These programmatic opportunities, intertwined with deeper learning, will give students the chance to become self-directed lifelong learners and leaders for tomorrow.

About the Deeper Learning Infrastructure Support Toolkit

Education leaders at all levels have a major role to play in selecting and facilitating approaches that foster college- and career-ready outcomes. Deciding on the policies, procedures, and practices that are needed most at any particular time, making good decisions, and acting

purposefully to achieve the goals are all actions that can create opportunities and success.

There is one toolkit in this topical area.

- **Deeper Learning Infrastructure Support** provides a look at the infrastructure supports that enhance deeper learning at the high school level. The toolkit is intended to provide more information about the policies, procedures, and practices related to infrastructure for deeper learning in high school. It includes tools that state and district leaders can use to reflect on changes to space, technology, and time that may be made to enhance student outcomes.

Learn More About Deeper Learning at the High School Level

The Alliance has created a series of user-friendly PowerPoint slides that make the case for the economic and moral imperative of deeper learning, provide information to promote deeper learning for all students, and address policies, procedures, and practices that can lead to deeper learning in new-generation high schools. To learn more, see the resource Deeper Learning, at <http://all4ed.org/nghs/>

