

## DESIGNING NEW SCHOOLS FOR SUCCESS

(Same goes for schools-within-schools)

Experience suggests that the following features are important to the success of an innovative school. The more of them associated with a program, the better its prospects for remaining successful.

- ~ There is a fair amount of freedom from standard district operating procedures.
- ~ Staff choose to be there rather than being assigned.
- ~ Students choose to be there rather than being assigned.
- ~ Existing staff have a strong voice in selecting new staff.
- ~ The program permits a continuing educational experience for its students, not just a 'transitional year' or a 'beef-em-up-and-send-em-back operation.'
- ~ The program is designed by those who will operate it -- its staff -- and staff are free to modify it as they find conditions warrant.
- ~ The program begins small -- with perhaps fewer than 100 students -- and a doubled enrollment remains close to the limit.
- ~ A separate space and a substantial part of the school day spent together help build group coherence and identification.
- ~ The school (or school-within-a-school) exerts high levels of control over the various features of its program.
- ~ Teachers have both autonomy and interdependence.
- ~ The most secure programs cost no more per student than standard programs in the district, though they are likely to allocate their funds differently.
- ~ The program begins with a two- or three-year commitment, with an evaluation planned for near the end of that period.

## THE COMPONENTS OF SUCCESS

- 1) Small cohesive units
- 2) Affiliation by choice, for both staff and students
- 3) An organization tailored for personalization
- 4) Extended roles for all participants
- 5) Lean, flexible, flattened school organization
- 6) Teacher discretion, collegueship, collaboration, interdependence
- 7) Regular, sustained interaction time for teachers
- 8) Mission consciousness, consensus, deference
- 9) A distinctive, themed program
- 10) A concern with full student development: intellect, character, personality
- 11) School-devised or school-adapted curricula
- 12) Some kind and degree of curricular integration
- 13) Independent study and experiential learning opportunities
- 14) Cooperative and/or collaborative learning opportunities
- 15) A continuing commitment to making it better
- 16) District policy commitment
- 17) District flexibility and tolerance of departures

## HOW TO KILL THE NEW PROGRAM -- OR LEAVE IT VULNERABLE

Each of the following features reduces the likelihood of success. The more of them found in a program, the more remote its chances for yielding the benefits innovation can bring.

- + It is designed by administrators, not its staff.
- + It is 'imported' from somewhere else and set into operation pretty much intact as it worked elsewhere.
- + The program is a referral program to which students are assigned -- or a 'last chance' alternative to suspension or expulsion.
- + The program is punitive in orientation, or designed for students of particular ability or achievement levels.
- + The program is built around a single new element -- a new curriculum or a new set of activities -- and otherwise holds to a least-departure-necessary design principle.
- + The program is treated just as any other new unit -- as a new department within the school, or a new school within the district. It is expected to conform to existing regulations, operating procedures, and arrangements.
- + Staff are assigned by administrators outside the program -- or by automatic processes such as contract rights.
- + The program is intended for the 'toughest' cases.
- + No one in the district is told very much about the new program -- and guidance counselors are left to remain lukewarm to negative about it.