

## Appendix A

### Project Description: Rethinking the Cost of Small High Schools

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported Education Resource Strategies in a three-year effort aimed at building understanding and tools that would support districts in creating cost-effective systems of high-performing urban high schools. The following is a description of the components of this project. More information can be found on our Web site at [www.educationresourcestrategies.org](http://www.educationresourcestrategies.org).

**“The Cost of Small High Schools: A Literature Review”** considers the limited research on small high school costs, resource use, and constraints to understand the key questions surrounding the topic and identify further areas for investigation. Specifically, it reviews the available research to examine the following questions:

1. How much do districts and charter schools spend to operate small urban high schools?
2. How do high-impact small urban high schools organize their resources?
3. How do school *systems* need to change to support a portfolio of high schools, including small schools, in organizing for high performance?

**“Strategic Designs: Lessons from Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools”** summarizes findings from detailed case studies of nine high-impact “Leading Edge” small high schools. The report describes the common trends and models for organizing resources that distinguish these Leading Edge Schools from typical large urban high schools. It reveals that leaders of Leading Edge Schools create strategic designs through which they deliberately organize people, time, and money to advance their respective schools’ specific instructional model. Although these schools spend varying amounts per pupil and organize resources in unique ways, they share common strategies for taking advantage of their smallness to improve student performance.

**“Case Studies of Leading Edge Small Urban High Schools”** is a companion to the “Strategic Designs” report. It contains the complete case studies for each of the nine schools analyzed in “Strategic Designs,” including bell schedules and staffing lists.

**“District Spending in Small and Large High Schools: Lessons from Boston, Baltimore, and Chicago”** examines how these three urban districts created a large number of small high schools. The report looks at how much money each district spent on their respective small schools and how the schools used the additional resources they received. Patterns found in these districts’ small schools are contrasted with those seen in the Leading Edge Schools presented in the “Strategic Designs” report. The paper also examines the differences in spending across the districts and between small and large high schools. It discusses several ways to spend less on small schools, the perils of doing so, and the importance of considering how many small schools to create and where to place them. The conclusion: Only through careful planning can districts develop small high schools in an equitable and sustainable way.

**Going to Scale Tool.** When districts implement new small high schools using “large high school rules” — the staffing and budget allocation policies used for large high schools — they typically spend more per pupil both as the small high schools ramp up and once they reach full enrollment. The Going to Scale Tool is a planning and teaching tool to help district leaders and those who support them understand, quantify, and more strategically deploy the typical sources of additional small high school spending in their own district contexts. Accompanying this tool is a brief that quantifies and describes the typical sources of additional spending for small high schools and explores when and how the extra investment might contribute to higher student performance.

**Small Secondary School Design Tool** is a Web-based tool that assists school leaders in using available people, time, and money to implement high-performing school organizations that support student achievement. The School Design Tool allows leaders to engage in the school design process using frameworks and concrete models for organizing resources, as well as allowing them to test the budgetary and strategic effects of different design choices. The tool is designed for a broad spectrum of users, from those who are in the initial stages of design and have limited information on staff, schedules, and budgets, to those with established school designs who may be engaged in continuous improvement efforts.

**District Assessment Tool.** This tool is intended to provide a foundation for determining district resource planning and setting strategic direction. The District Assessment Tool allows district leaders to assess their resources against essential district roles using both quantitative and qualitative diagnostic indicators to understand their strengths and challenges.