

# **Thinking About Illinois High Schools: Your Thoughts and Reflections**

## **Participant Responses**

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# Section I

## A Summary of Principal Responses (N=19)<sup>1</sup>

### Effective Practices

1. *What practices did you learn about that you can modify and replicate in your school?*

*For principals and associate principals, the major take-aways were practices related to looping teachers, using data-driven effectiveness evidence, freshman academies, and teaching reading across the curriculum.*

- Looping teachers (4)
- Using data-driven evidence of effectiveness (4)
- Freshman academies (2)
- Teaching reading across the curriculum (2)
- Block scheduling
- Team-teaching in different subject areas
- Interdisciplinary department chairs and special education
- Moving electives to freshman year
- Student advisories that build relationships
- Creating the environment to support “all” students
- Effective interventions for at-risk students
- Coteaching
- Educating the whole child
- Student-centered teaching
- SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) goals
- School within a school
- Rigor and relevance framework
- Using current staff excellence

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<sup>1</sup> The numbers in parentheses represent the number of respondents offering this comment.

2. *Why do you think the exhibited practices are successful? In your school or community, what are the essential features of a successful high school?*

*Generally speaking, successful high school practices are implemented on a schoolwide basis with consistency, as well as with a focus on personalizing instruction and support for educating the whole child.*

- Anything that meets the needs of today's student and that is properly and fully implemented [will be successful] (2)
- Focus on educating the whole child (social and emotional as well as academic)
- Shared vision and commitment, which affirms that failure is not an option
- Raise student achievement
- Staff adopts successful practices
- Widespread staff buy-in and engagement in planning to adopt best practice
- Teachers presenting at conference were collectively dedicated (2) and driven by data (3)
- Stakeholder support is critical to successful practices (2)
- Resources to support change were available
- Committed to improving behavior standards

3. *What needs to occur at your school to implement similar practices?*

*Implementing the exhibited schoolwide reform practices in local communities requires a buy-in from school and community stakeholders along with a significant shift in thinking about the role of high schools in the 21st century.*

- A significant culture shift acknowledging the new direction is imperative
- Paradigm shift in school and community (4)
- A meeting of the minds or buy-in (6) on what does and does not work driven by professional development (2)
- Implementing successful local pilot programs
- Initiating change by starting small or in one area
- Asking staff to self-assess their practices and move toward authentic learning
- Training and professional development (2)
- Staff commitment
- Local superintendents need to visit the model schools
- Staff time to analyze data and the curriculum (2)
- Serious school improvement team

4. *What obstacles need to be overcome for the implementation to occur?*

*Overcoming the obstacles of staff complacency and skepticism requires strong leadership, as well as professional development over time that is driven by a framework of teaching and learning that, in turn, is informed by compelling evidence of effectiveness.*

- Staff need proof that painful changes will be successful for teachers and students
- Strong negativity (2) addressed with transformational and democratic leadership
- Develop trust and stop excuses (2)
- A framework and timeline (3)
- Staff too complacent about good scores
- Money
- Low status of education in the community
- Educating staff on the importance of improvement (2)
- Need strong central office support—where is the Large Unit District Association and Illinois Association of School Boards?
- “Latest and greatest” changes don’t address the core relationship with kids
- Much more involvement by higher education faculty who are preparing future teachers and administrators
- Increase new teacher retention
- Older staff
- Staff changes
- Getting past the traditions

5. *In what ways can partnerships with institutions of higher education and other organizations help in implementing effective practices?*

*Partnerships with institutions of higher education can provide professional development focused on research-based best practice and sustained through ongoing relationships with faculty members, researchers, and student teachers.*

- Professional development (5)
- Monitoring and supporting best practice and innovation (3)
- Keeping practitioners informed on research-based practices (2)
- Using community resources and local stakeholders (tutors) (2)
- Creating parent information classes
- Supporting similar suggestions

- Providing impetus for change, as well as expertise and people (4)
- What does the world beyond us want? (2)
- Is higher education also meeting like this?

## **Data**

1. *What types of data do you currently use, and what decisions are made with them?*

*Demographic, student achievement, and school climate data are frequently used to guide school improvement innovations.*

- Demographic data
- Test data to revise curriculum and school improvement plan (4)
- School climate data to identify appropriate speakers for assemblies
- Attendance and discipline data (4) to set improvement goals and select interventions
- EPAS (ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System) for reading diagnostics (3)
- Teacher assessments for grades (3)
- EXPLORE (3), PLAN (4), and PSAE (Prairie State Achievement Examination) (5)
- School report card
- Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) (2)
- Graduate survey results
- ACT (college entrance test)
- None—we still think we know what is best

2. *Are other data available that you do not use? If so, why not?*

*Most principals and associate principals believe that ample data are available but finding staff time to analyze the data is a challenge.*

- ACT and PSAE data
- Data for use by teachers
- Ample data (4) but no time
- Good question
- Data on community involvement and parent support
- Adding additional testing next year
- Data on teacher strategies, student attitudes and engagement

- Need local assessments

3. *What is needed for you to fully capitalize on available data (e.g., professional development of teachers and school leaders, better communication)?*

*Optimal use of data depends on the availability of funding and released time for professional development on data analysis and interpretation.*

- Professional development on data use (5)
- Money (2)
- Time (2)
- Awareness of data analysis funding sources
- Support from central office, particularly data people, (superintendent), and board (2)
- Assimilate all data into comprehensive document
- Access to data with appropriate technology
- Willingness of teachers to work outside of contract days
- One central analysis
- Effective school improvement plan team
- Develop valid and reliable data with trustworthy interpretations

4. *How does your use of data improve student achievement and college and workforce readiness?*

*Student achievement and school outcomes can be improved with data analysis tools that target weaknesses needing improvement and frequently measure continuous progress.*

- Able to target strengths and weaknesses for improvement (2)
- Permits measurement of continuous progress
- Guidance needs to be more involved—focus on [the] child (2)
- Use data to assess needs of high-risk students and place them in appropriate programs (e.g., afterschool tutoring, education to careers)
- MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessment allows student assessment three times yearly
- Directs curriculum change
- Indicates what is and is not effective in curriculum
- Improves instruction

5. *Currently, how is program development and improvement at your school guided by data?*

*Programs are improved by school improvement teams using attendance and student performance data to address specific targeted goals.*

- School improvement plan teams are involved and responsible for specific goals (2)
- Test, attendance, and discipline data drive decision making (2)
- Minimally; in beginning stages
- Target at-risk [students] and provide remediation
- Our school is data-informed in multiple ways
- District needs intense staff development for administrators so we ‘own’ the challenge
- Guided by good but incomplete data.

6. *How can institutions of higher education (IHE) play a part in assisting with data analysis?*

*IHE staff and students can work with school improvement teams to support clear and deeper interpretations of data through professional development.*

- Assist in explaining data and getting a broader understanding of it (4)
- Professional development (3)
- Work groups to consult (2)
- Grad student time to assist in data compilation, analysis, and translating data into what it means for student success (2)
- Help to create surveys
- Commitment and visibility would come from a partnership between the [superintendents] and university presidents

## **Achievement Gaps**

1. *What can be done to better prepare preservice teachers to understand the achievement gaps and methods for closing these gaps?*

*The next generation of teachers must be able to analyze data effectively to select instructional strategies and resources that reduce the achievement gaps for all students.*

- Preservice teachers must be familiar with assessment data and how to use it to close the [achievement] gaps (3)
- Create time in school prior to student teaching with collaboration (2)
- Discuss at-risk factors candidly with students (2)
- Achievement gap mentors

- Focus courses and panel discussions on this issue
- Provide instruction in real-world applications
- Stop telling them that “teaching to standards” and “student learning” are different things

2. *In developing an effective school improvement plan to reduce the achievement gaps at your location, answer the following:*

a. *What has been done?*

*Schools are using a diverse array of processes to reduce the achievement gaps.*

- Weekly watch list and parent conferences
- Tutoring and mentoring assignment (2)
- School improvement plan steering committee analyzes data and sets goals
- Develop student focused goals
- Examine data as a staff and develop SMART goals
- Gaps [are] addressed with high expectations, parent involvement, student connection, and teacher awareness
- Followed through on school improvement plan expectations
- Formed Professional Development School partnership with a university
- Annual review of data and design new efforts
- Created career academies, advisories, and job shadowing
- A clear focus on what students are learning has emerged.

b. *What can still be done?*

*School leaders are interested in building their capacity to use data effectively to reach and teach all students.*

- Focus on using data to teach every child differently (2)
- A school improvement plan to analyze data and evaluate interventions (2)
- Develop meaningful goals supported by the data
- More in-service days
- Gaps for high-need students need to be continuously and better assessed
- Develop a better and clearer vision
- Differentiating—must know, nice to know, everything else

## Respondents—Principals

Male: 9

Female: 9

Years in Education:	1–5	1
	6–10	4
	11–15	3
	16–20	2
	21+	9

Principal 11

Assistant/Associate: 8

Number of High School Students in Attendance Center:

1500; 1465; 3400; 2800, 2100, 700, 160, 70, 2000, 150, 1000, 540, 232, 2600, 50, 730, 2178

Small (<500) 5

Midsized (501-1,000) 3

Large (1001-1500) 3

Quite Large (1600+) 6

## Section II

### Responses from Teachers (N=38)

#### Effective Practices

1. *What practices did you learn about that you can modify and replicate in your school?*

Many who responded cited insights into reading and math, with reading as a schoolwide initiative, as well as the need for making these subjects more relative to what is required “in business and life” with “real world issues.” The collection and analysis of data were cited by the greatest number as practices that were useful and could be implemented. Several cited the information by the main speakers as being particularly relevant and “realistic for all schools and all teachers.” Targeted assistance to at-risk students with interdisciplinary teams of teachers was also noted several times.

2. *Why do you think the exhibited practices are successful? In your school or community, what are the essential features of successful high school practices?*

The most common response included the recognition of the buy-in and support for best practices by all teachers and staff. The role of data-driven decision making was recognized by many, as well as the need for communication of goals and objectives that are monitored and enforced. A “climate of success,” as well as “common sense” practices that “made sense to students” were emphasized by a number of respondents. School culture where “learning is cool” and change is accepted were also cited a number of times.

3. *What needs to occur at your school to implement similar practices?*

Once again, the notion of the need for buy-in, partnerships, and cooperation of the entire staff was considered essential, with everyone working together to create a culture of change. Strong leadership and administrative support was also viewed as a need at the high school level, together with support in the form of time, funding, staff development, and better technology. Several noted that a commitment to change needed to be accompanied by a “shared vision and plan.”

4. *What obstacles need to be overcome for that implementation to occur?*

Resistance to change and a need for stronger leadership were most often cited as obstacles. Lack of funding to implement change and a need to overcome the “poverty barrier” were also noted. Lack of understanding of the goals of implemented changes and the complacency of “stagnant teachers and old-fashioned methods” were also noted as obstacles, as was the need to educate staff.

5. *In what ways can partnerships with institutions of higher education and other organizations help in implementing effective practices?*

The value of partnerships with IHEs was generally recognized and many were anxious to tap both information and advice, as well as research. Several wanted IHEs to come to their schools and give suggestions for improvement to the schools and teachers, as well as suggestions to students about needed skills. Providing tutors and dual-credit courses were also cited as ways in which IHEs could contribute. A limited number of respondents saw the opportunity to bring in business and corporate communities to guide and advise students and explain “workplace needs.”

## **Data**

1. *What types of data do you currently use, and what decisions are made with them?*

Many respondents noted that they use data from ACT and PSAT test scores, as well as Explore and Plan. Test scores, report cards, and grades seem to be the main data available to and used by the respondents. Several stated that either they use no data or that data is not directly available to them. A number of respondents expressed frustration at the lack of data made available to them. This question was often left blank.

2. *Are other data available that you do not use? If so, why not?*

This question was either left unanswered or answered with a question mark or “don’t know” more often than not (26 of 38 respondents). Several were not sure what was available and several again expressed the difficulty in obtaining data from district information offices and other sources. A very limited number cited a single data source.

*Note:* Reviewer wonders if the placement of the question at the bottom of the page could have contributed to the lack of responses to this question.

3. *What is needed for you to fully capitalize on available data (e.g., professional development of teachers and school leaders, better communication)?<sup>2</sup>*

The most frequent response was the need for staff and professional development, followed by the need for better communication. Some noted (again) the lack of data available to them, while several noted the need not only to collect data, but also to know what to do with it. Time to collect and analyze data was cited by a number of respondents, while several tied this need to the need for funding.

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<sup>2</sup> Reviewer’s note: From this point forward, a significant number of respondents left the second page and the rest of the questions blank. Three or four answered only one question briefly—and not the same question.

4. *How does your use of data improve student achievement and college and workforce readiness?*

A significant number of respondents did not answer this question. Some noted the use of data to guide students in an advisory capacity to what they need to work on and to better focus on needs. Use of data used to “identify gaps [and] weaknesses” in student achievement was also noted. Most respondents noted use related to individual student needs.

5. *Currently, how is program development and improvement at your school guided by data?*

A number of respondents noted that they are just beginning to use data for this purpose, while a number of others stated that it was not used in this way at all or that they were unsure of its use in this manner. Several noted that data was used for district purposes only. Remediation and test preparation were cited by a few. Again, a significant number did not answer the question at all.

6. *How can institutions of higher education play a part in assisting with data analysis?*

A number of respondents noted the possible role of the IHE in professional development that would teach school staff how to compile and use statistics and data, while others noted that the IHEs could compile and analyze data for the schools. Institutions of higher education are seen by some as having more expertise and funding for this purpose.

## **Achievement Gaps**

1. *What can be done to better prepare preservice teachers to understand the achievement gaps and methods for closing these gaps?*

More exposure to “real life” classroom experiences and information is noted by a number of respondents as necessary for preservice teachers, both in actual physical presence, as well as in lesson plans and in teacher preparation institutions. Using “newer strategies” for teaching and learning about poverty were also cited, as respondents noted a need for greater understanding of diverse learners and the issues that they bring to school. The need for preservice teachers to understand the existence and nature of the gaps was also noted. Several noted the need to better understand assessment.

2. *In developing an effective school improvement plan to reduce the achievement gaps at your location, answer the following:*

- a. *What has been done?*

Support for at-risk or potentially at-risk students has been provided through a number of avenues: tutoring, special classes, increased availability of teachers,

and other “extra pushes.” Data collection was noted by a number of respondents as one step that has been taken, as well as the development of leadership and teacher teams and committees. Some were unsure of what has been done.

*b. What can still be done?*

Focusing on getting all teachers to buy in and get “on track” to a school plan or initiative, as well as developing and implementing a timeline for carrying out the plan, were cited by a number of respondents. Updating and implementing existing plans were also regarded as needs. Staff development and training was again cited by several respondents, along with the need for additional staff, such as reading and writing “coaches.”

## Section III

### Responses from Other Administrators (N=19: Central office, 5; Department Heads, 4; Others, 10)<sup>3</sup>

#### Effective Practices

1. *What practices did you learn about that you can modify and replicate in your school?*

*For central office and building leaders, the important actionable ideas focused on: looping teachers, changing the school culture with school improvement team support, and stronger use of data analysis.*

- Looping teachers (2)
- Coteaching with special education
- Targeting study skills (2)
- Improving school culture (3)
- School improvement team buy-in
- Improving use of data (2)
- More assessment
- More attention to real world problems (2)

2. *Why do you think the exhibited practices are successful? In your school or community, what are the essential features of a successful high school?*

*In the featured schools, building and district leaders noted that a foundation and infrastructure for innovation featured strong community and parent support, extensive stakeholder buy-in, and student-centered learning supports.*

- Leadership and community (parent) support
- Vested interest in schools (4)
- School culture embraces change along with major buy-in and collective focus (4)
- Student centered—personalized, differentiated student affiliation and success (4)
- Unique schools with unique DNA
- Proven and research-based practices are employed

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<sup>3</sup> The numbers in parentheses represent the number of respondents offering this comment.

3. *What needs to occur at your school to implement similar practices?*

*Implementing the exhibited schoolwide reform practices in local communities requires stakeholder buy-in, leadership seeking to foster a culture of change and innovation, and focused professional development.*

- Stakeholder buy-in on a clear mission (4)
- Focus on a few goals (3)
- Trust development
- Leadership focused on creating a culture for change (4)
- Patience and persistence
- Professional development (4) and teacher led initiatives
- Building specific changes

4. *What obstacles need to be overcome for the implementation to occur?*

*Very little consensus exists on a long list of obstacles that need to be addressed, which suggests that a framework for addressing high school redesign is needed.*

- Effective communication
- Systematic planning
- Elimination of departments
- Limited threats of accountability
- Creating time and financial resources
- Staff buy-in
- Inconsistency in standards and growth measures
- Share data and scores widely
- Professional development for administrators
- Cross-curricular teaching
- Understanding data
- Acknowledge that change is inevitable
- Remove the wall between Career and Technical Education (CTE) and academic teachers
- Teacher support (2)
- Stable leadership
- Address culture change

5. *In what ways can partnerships with institutions of higher education and other organizations help in implementing effective practices?*

*Through partnerships with regional service providers (RESPROs) and schools, institutions of higher education can create (and have created) partnerships focused on improving educational practice and field experiences for new educators.*

- Professional development and conferences
- Models
- Professional development school
- Data
- Research
- Understanding best practice
- Must focus on educating the whole child to full proficiency and improving teacher education
- Use basic skills tests
- Looping with 12–13 teachers
- Talk with high school practitioners (2)
- Internships for university students
- Dual credit for high school students
- Develop RESPRO university connections to provide ideas, funds, resources, and leadership
- Instruction on best practices

## **Data**

5. *What types of data do you currently use, and what decisions are made with them?*

*A wide variety of commercially generated and statewide assessments are used to collect data on student achievement. Relatively few comments were provided on the uses of data.*

- Test data
- Curriculum maps
- EPAS Educational Planning and Assessment System (2)
- School report card data
- Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) (3)
- ACT (6)
- PLAN (5)

- EXPLORE (4)
- ISES
- IDES
- IRRC
- Advanced Placement (AP)
- Attendance
- Graduation rates
- Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)
- MAP
- Baseline and exit scores
- School climate surveys
- Common assessment
- Data are used in and for staff development and instruction
- Improve instruction, interventions, and deficiencies
- Monitoring grade distribution
- Concentrate resources where needed

6. *Are other data available that you do not use? If so, why not?*

*Most central office and building leaders suggested that the limited amount of unused data is attributable to a lack of professional development.*

- Grades
- Tetra data
- Lots of unused data due to lack of knowledge about uses
- The fall report
- E-plan
- No assessment of common practices

7. *What is needed for you to fully capitalize on available data (e.g., professional development of teachers and school leaders, better communication)?*

*Clearly, additional professional development is required for school administrators in particular. Optimal use of data depends on the availability of funding and effective communication among key stakeholders about purposes and outcomes.*

- Professional development on data use (7)
- Funding for professional development (2)
- Developing ease of use
- Having a plan and focus (2)
- Start with professional development for administrative leaders and leadership (3)
- New personnel to analyze data
- Better communication between school, district, and others (3)
- Involving students and parents in the process.

4. *How does your use of data improve student achievement and college and workforce readiness?*

*This set of respondents noted that their current data analysis efforts do not focus extensively on college and workforce readiness.*

- Not sure it does—and it is bothersome (4)
- Improve test scores and other deficiencies
- Modify schedules
- Pinpoint strengths and weaknesses
- Real world tie-ins show the necessary skills for success beyond high school
- Alternative students need work-readiness data—the emphasis on academic assessment creates a disadvantage for alternative students
- It doesn't [improve achievement and readiness] because current data is inaccurate
- CTE programs and regional centers are aimed at addressing both college and career readiness

5. *Currently, how is program development and improvement at your school guided by data?*

*In some high schools, program and curriculum improvements are driven by data analysis including results that generate curriculum maps. However, several respondents also note that programs are not driven by data.*

- Data drives the school improvement plan
- Curriculum maps direct text selection (2)
- Revise curriculum based on data analysis (2)
- Created new assessment and data analysis department
- Teachers suggest data analysis is administrative function
- Minimal data use currently

- Community priorities don't coincide with state standards, which creates problems in moving forward with changes
- Not driven by data (3)
- Plans for making AYP

6. *How can institutions of higher education play a part in assisting with data analysis?*

*Building and district leaders are interested in developing long-term relationships with IHEs to conduct professional development on data analysis and co-interpretation, and to provide data on high school student success in college.*

- Sustained relationships would help generate consistent data and use (3)
- Provide data to school districts on student college readiness and success in college (2)
- Not much
- Assist in developing a common useable model for data analysis
- Conduct alumni surveys
- Offer teacher workshops
- Add data analysis to teacher preparation programs
- Not sure
- Create more dual-credit opportunities
- Include work readiness assessments in career and technical education (CTE) teacher education programs
- Conduct studies that examine the impact of CTE on student success
- Offer assistance
- Regional Service Provider System of Support (RESPRO) schools can provide data assistance

## **Achievement Gaps**

1. *What can be done to better prepare preservice teachers to understand the achievement gaps and methods for closing these gaps?*

*The next generation of teachers must be able to analyze data effectively for the increasingly diverse student population.*

- Include statistics and use real data in teacher preparation programs (3)
- Invite school improvement plan teams into classes to demonstrate analysis and solutions
- Read Ruby Payne books
- Analyze data on reading and writing interventions

- Examine information on poverty and diversity
- Go beyond test score analysis of data

2. *In developing an effective school improvement plan to reduce the achievement gaps at your location, answer the following:*

a. *What has been done?*

*Most schools have been conducting professional development to learn about and conduct analysis of achievement gap data.*

- Data analysis and review (4)
- Curriculum mapping
- Professional development (4)
- Align curriculum (2)
- Developed local assessments
- Literacy and numeracy emphasis for all
- Implementation of EPAS
- Little has been done

b. *What can still be done?*

*District and school leaders note that much remains to be done with data analysis to reduce student performance gaps.*

- Improve use of Interactive Illinois Report Card (IIRC)
- More attention to relationships
- Ruby Payne training
- A lot (2)
- Monitor teachers
- Longer day with time for professional development
- Tighten things up
- Get buildings to function effectively
- Meaningful action plan development

## Respondents—Other Administrators

Male:	2
Female:	15
Not specified:	2

Years in Education:	1-5	1
	6-10	2
	11-15	2
	16-20	1
	21+	9

Central Office	5
Department Head	4
Other	8

No. of HS Students in Attendance Center:

Small schools (<500)	3
Mid size (501-1,000)	2
Large (1001-1500)	1
Quite Large (1600+)	5