

**To:** Lisa Noonan, Crespín Esquivel

**From:** Bev Ducey

**Date:** March 17, 2014

**RE:** Research Findings on Successful Small Schools

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**Assignment:** To examine successful small schools and identify several for further research into their keys to successful student learning outcomes. To find small public high schools (non-choice schools), which have successfully implemented the IB program.

**Approach:**

- Interview key stakeholders
- Compile data on the top 300 national ranking high schools based on the US News and World Report
- Research top small schools in neighboring Western states based on the US News and World Report rankings
- Leverage educational expertise, both through research findings and professional experience

**Findings:**

The common goal expressed by the key stakeholders was: To improve student learning through rigorous and challenging coursework at George Whittell High School and create a program and reputation that will attract and retain students.

**POV on how to do accomplish the goal:**

1. Adopt a rigorous program with objective measures to assess student learning. (Ray Sydney)
2. Adopt a rigorous program with a stellar reputation that can be used to attract and retain students and their families. (Kelly Krolicki)
3. Find a program that *all* students can access; one that meets students where they are and has a clear path for increasing students' capabilities through proven teaching/learning methods and frequent assessments to provide feedback and adjustments. Ensure the program/methodology has a professional development component for the teachers and an assessment and coaching methodology for the principal. Find a program that can be adopted school-wide (i.e. by/for all students and all teachers) (Lisa/Crespín)

**Program to Evaluate:** International Baccalaureate Program (IB)

## **Empirical Research**

### **Top 300 Schools Ranked by the US News and World Report**

I used the US News and World Report's (US News) top high school rankings for 2013 to investigate what type of programs are yielding the best results nationally. (Attached is the criterion US News uses to rank school performance) Within the top three hundred schools, ninety five percent use the Advanced Placement Program (AP) as their college prep coursework and five percent use the IB program. Although I did not formally evaluate the demographic composition of students within the top performing schools, many of the schools are in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, with very large populations of diversity and poverty. The key factor for success seems to be the desire of students (and/or their parents) to attend the school, as is pointed out in the next section.

Next I focused on schools with student populations under five hundred (U500). There were sixty one schools within this subset. As mentioned above, of these top sixty one high schools in the nation, eighty seven percent of them are schools of choice. This means that students must apply to the schools and are either chosen through a lottery system or through a

competitive evaluation process. As far as college prep programs used within the U500 schools, ten percent used the IB program, eight seven percent used the AP program and three percent offered both programs. Below is a listing of the U500 IB programs. Of these eight schools (which includes two schools that offered both AP and IB), all are "choice" programs. The most interesting of these schools is the North Coast Prep & Performing Arts in Arcata, CA. This school requires all students to enroll in the IB program and 80% of their students receive an IB diploma.

Also listed below are the five U500 "regular" high schools – all of which offer the AP program as their college prep option.

**Exhibit A**

<b>Summary of Top 300 Schools in the 2013 US News and World Report Rankings</b>		
<b>Top 300 Schools</b>		
<b># of AP</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>95%</b>
<b># of IB</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b># of Schools Under 500 Students</b>		
<b>U500 - IB</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>U500 - AP</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>U500 - Dual</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Type of Admissions</b>		
<b>Lottery</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Application</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>Regular High</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Uncertain</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Exhibit B**

<b>U500 IB High Schools (All IB High Schools are Choice Schools)</b>	
	* Biotechnology High School, Freehold, NJ - (Career Academy - application required)
	* Brooklyn Latin School, Brooklyn, NY (Admission Review Process)
	* Signature School, Evansville, ID (dual AP/IB programs - Charter/Lottery)
	* Sturgis Charter, Hyannis, MA (Charter/Lottery)
	* The Baccalaureate School for Global Education, Long Island, NY (7-12/Application)

	Steamboat Springs HS	Steamboat Springs	CO	626	AP	644	20	9%
	Tomales HS	Tomales	CA	178	AP	668	129	100%
	Pacific Grove HS	Pacific Grove	CA	384	AP	705	134	36%
	McCall-Donnelly HS	McCall	ID	268	AP	785	3	7%
	Le Grande HS	Le Grande	CA	492	AP	834	172	92%
	Firth HS	Firth	ID	214	AP	937	4	14%
*	Chester Jr/Sr HS (7 - 12)	Chester	CA	174	AP	946	196	13%
*	Calistoga Jr/Sr HS (6 - 12)	Calistoga	CA	365	AP	973	203	99%
	Hayfork HS	Hayfork	CA	117	AP	1061	224	24%
	Rio Vista HS	Rio Vista	CA	318	AP	1068	227	37%
*	Quincy Jr/Hs (4 - 12)	Quincy	CA	251	AP	1126	251	17%
	Sargent Senior HS	Monte Vista	CO	124	AP	1272	27	27%
	Panguitch HS	Panguitch	UT	120	AP	1459	6	5%
	Thomas Jefferson Charter	Caldwell	ID	401	AP	1634	6	15%
	Garden Valley HS	Garden Valley	ID	211	AP	1735	7	9%
	Texico HS	Texico	NM	179	AP	1945	9	38%
*	Bever HS (7 - 12)	Beaver	UT	480	AP	1959	11	14%
	Lordsburg HS	Lordsburg	NM	198	AP	2075	10	90%
	Fruitland HS	Fruitland	ID	494	AP	2180	8	24%
	Sugar-Salem HS	Sugar City	ID	429	AP	2208	9	9%
	Pecos HS	Pecos	NM	197	AP	2261	13	91%

### Important Factor for Consideration

Based on my experience with public education as a parent of two high school graduates within the Tahoe Truckee School District, several years on Site Council, as an officer overseeing the Measure A Property Tax allocations, five years as an active School Board Trustee and my extensive research on successful academic programs within California, which culminated in writing a successful \$750,000 grant to implement Professional Learning Communities within TTUSD, I believe one factor is extremely important for success:

For any new program to be successfully implemented, the staff must be committed to the new program. The best way to guarantee this is to be sure they are an integral part of the evaluation and selection process. It's not a question of "do we need to improve student learning" – that's the given – but how do we improve student learning.

	* North Coast Prep & Performing Arts, Arcata, CA (100% of students take IB; Charter)
	* North Hills Prep, Irving TX (dual AP/IB - Charter/Application)
	* Metro Academic and Classical High School, St. Louis, MO (Charter/Application)
<b>U500 Regular High Schools (All Regular High Schools are AP Schools)</b>	
	* Blind Brook High School, Rye Brook, NJ
	* Telluride High School, Telluride, CO *
	* Friday Harbor High School, Friday Harbor, WA *
	* Yarmouth High School, Yarmouth, ME
	* Rye Neck Senior High School, Mamaroneck, NY

### Top U500 "Regular" High Schools in the Western United States (CA, ID, UT, CO, WY)

Continuing to utilize the US News rankings, I compiled a list of U500 Regular High Schools in the Western United States. I only listed schools that scored Bronze or above on the US Report. A full listing is attached and the Gold and Silver winners are listed below (Exhibit C). According to the summary page on each school, all schools on this list use the AP program for their college prep courses. Several schools are middle/high combination schools, which I have denoted with an asterisk in Exhibit C. Also listed is the percentage of the student body that is designated as a minority. There are several schools (non-choice) with significant ethnic populations that have scored very well on the US News report. Telluride High School, in Colorado, is at the top of this list with only 177 students and 19% minority population. It is ranked 158<sup>th</sup> in the nation and is the fourth highest in the state. It is the highest ranking "non-choice" school in the state. There also several results in California that would be worth investigating further:

- Anderson Valley HS, Boonville, CA – 7 thru 12; 250 students; 77% minority; 608<sup>th</sup> in the nation
- Chester Jr/Sr HS, Chester, CA – 7 thru 12; 174 students; 13% minority; 946<sup>th</sup> in the nation
- Calistoga Jr/Sr HS, Calistoga, CA – 7 thru 12; 365 students; 99% minority; 973<sup>rd</sup> in the nation
- Quincy Jr/Sr HS, Quincy, CA – 4 thru 12; 251 students; 17% minority; 1126<sup>th</sup> in the nation

I do not think I can over-emphasize that these schools' rankings are inclusive of schools of choice, which have a selective population who have applied and been chosen to attend. For each state I researched, I have also included a rank listing of all "non-choice" high schools, so you can see where each state's schools stand within the "regular" high school cohort.

#### Exhibit C

MS/HS	High School Name	City	ST	# of Students	AP/IB	National Ranking	State Ranking	% Minority
	Telluride HS	Telluride	CO	177	AP	158	4	19%
	Lyons MS/HS (6 - 12)	Lyons	CO	441	AP	515	16	11%
	Crested Butte Community School	Crested Butte	CO	553	AP	598	19	7%
*	Anderson Valley Jr/Sr HS (7 - 12)	Boonville	CA	250	AP	608	116	77%

## Recommendation

Before deciding on any one program to implement, I suggest a more robust investigation and evaluation of successful programs/schools be conducted.

1. Form a team with the specific purpose of developing a strategy for increasing student learning at George Whittell High School. Ensure the representation on the team is heavily weighted with educators and students – the two primary constituents for the success of any program.
2. Agree upon the educational goal(s) for George Whittell High School and develop a set of objective criteria from which to evaluate potential programs. Establish how progress and success will be monitored on the student level, as well as class and school level.
3. Research successful programs/teaching methods/other successful schools and evaluate them against the established criteria. Plan on doing site visits to successful schools with programs that meet the criteria.
4. Consider leveraging experienced professionals and validated research in helping to accelerate the process. A couple of suggestions for consideration are:
  - a. Dr. Michael McDowell, Assistant Superintendent, Mount Tamalpais High School District, Marin County, CA. Contact info: (415) 945-3728; [mmcdowell@tamdistrict.org](mailto:mmcdowell@tamdistrict.org). – Dr. McDowell has spent the last three and half years engaging the educators within his high school district in a similar process of improving student learning. He has many battle scars as it is not always easy to convince parents, teachers, trustees, etc. that continuous improvement is needed in already successful schools. He was principal at North Tahoe High School for one year before accepting the Assistant Superintendent position and made positive, sweeping changes that have endured. He continues to work with NTHS leadership and staff on a consulting basis. His resume is attached for your reference.
  - b. Dr. John Hattie – Professor of Education and Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia, since March 2011. He was previously Professor of Education at the University of Auckland. His research includes performance indicators and evaluation in education, as well as creativity measurement and models of teaching and learning. He is a proponent of evidence based quantitative research methodologies on the influences on student achievement. His Ted Talk gives you great background on his research (<http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=rzwJXUieD0U>) and his book is called Visible Learning. If this resonates with Mr. Esquivel, his research and findings could be an interesting backdrop to what the most important ingredients for success are in improving student learning.
  - c. David LaPlante – I heard David speak at a small conference organized by Sarah Adler from the NV USDA. As stated in his LinkedIn profile (<http://www.linkedin.com/in/davidlaplante>), “translating human development science into marketing strategy and behavior change technology is a hobby-turned-passion”. He spoke about the success of Mr. Mandela and the nation of Singapore in terms of their ability to find common ground among widely diverse and strongly opposed interests, where success around a common goal was a rallying point for common solutions. He is local and might be an interesting speaker to kick-off an initial meeting of the “team”. He may or may not resonate with your key stakeholders but he has very alternative and progressive views on education based on where the world is headed. He has two young sons (elementary/middle school) one of which gave a Ted Talk: Cody LaPlant - (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXHQj2BMj44>).

## Questions for Consideration by an Evaluation Team

1. What is broken?
  - a. Who would be candidates for the IB program? How is this group performing on established performance measures?
  - b. Who would most likely not be candidates for the IB program? How is this group performing on established performance measures? What is the plan for improving these students' learning outcomes?
  - c. Are there established programs/teaching methods that would improve all student learning with verifiable accountability measures built-in?
2. IB is a college prep curriculum, as is AP.
  - a. How many students are currently taking AP Classes?
  - b. How many students are choosing to take the AP exams?
  - c. What percent of students are scoring 3 or higher on the exams?
3. College entrance exams:
  - a. What percent of students are taking SAT or ACT exams?
  - b. What percent of those taking a college entrance exam have taken one or more AP classes?
  - c. Has any correlation been done on students' scores versus college entrance exam performance?
4. What are other successful small schools doing?
5. Are there specific ground breaking new programs that meet the developed criteria?

## Conclusion

Everyone I've spoken to concerning George Whittell High School is very committed to its students' success and has proven this commitment through their passion, time and financial support. The International Baccalaureate Program is a strong college prep program. However, it is obvious from the US News rankings that the Advanced Placement Program, currently in place at George Whittell High School, is also an excellent choice for college preparedness. I believe further research needs to be conducted on how students are currently performing and specific expectations established for how all students should be performing. From this common understanding, many programs/approaches can be evaluated. To choose a program without engaging educators and students in the process of establishing student goals and measurements for success and giving them an opportunity to investigate the programs/methodologies that would work best at Whittell, could result in solving the wrong challenge and investing tremendous time and money in a program that is not meeting all student needs. There are many successful, small, "regular" high schools that are performing very well within the Western United States. Taking the time to investigate these schools may pay large dividends.