

Preface

The purpose of this guide is to provide educators and community members with a practical overview of all the facets of creating small schools in a district. As staff members of a lead organization in the small schools movement, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), we looked for resources to guide schools and districts through the complex process of small school development, and found there were few. We decided we could add to the resource base by developing this guide ourselves, drawing on our own experience and the research and experience of the wider educational community.

Creating Small Schools provides an introduction to and overview of the small schools movement, answering the question, *Why small schools?* It provides lessons and case studies from the field, as well as practical tools and advice for getting small schools started in a district. In the guide, we address different approaches to small school development—from starting new schools in new facilities to converting large schools into clusters of small ones. A centerpiece of the guide is a close look at building partnerships, particularly the importance of district-union collaboration in the creation of small schools.

We highlight the work of the Boston Pilot Schools and the pilot school model as an example of an effective small schools strategy. In particular, the pilot school model demonstrates the importance of giving small schools autonomy over their budget, staffing, schedule, governance, and curriculum and assessment. It is through such autonomy that small schools are able to transform teaching and learning and enable their students to succeed.

The guide also provides a framework and tools for making each small school a place of learning and achievement. Chapters on teaching and learning, school structures, a culture of adult learning, and the practice of collaboration are full of lessons and tools to help small school faculties and leaders build an excellent school. Each chapter contains vignettes that illustrate aspects of the work of small schools development. At the end of each chapter are tools to help schools implement the strategies discussed in that chapter.

While the guide can play an important role in this process, it should be used as part of a larger planning and professional development process for small school design that includes technical assistance and coaching, network meetings, summer institutes, and other support.

Conditions, Principles, and Autonomies for Successful Small Schools

FOUR CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS

1. **Smallness**—Schools are small and personalized.
2. **Unifying Vision**—Schools have a unifying vision, framed around principles of effective teaching and learning.
3. **Autonomy**—Schools have the autonomy to use their resources to best meet students' needs.
4. **Accountability**—Schools are held accountable for the quality of the education they provide to students.

*Small Schools Principles**

Equity and Access—Raise learning and achievement of all students.

Habits of Mind—Teach children to use their minds well.

Personalization—Teachers and students know each other well. There are lower student-teacher ratios so faculty works with fewer students.

Less Is More—Students master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.

Student-as-Worker, Teacher-as-Coach—Learning is purposeful, meaningful, and related to the real world.

Assessment by Exhibition—Students demonstrate mastery of competencies in multiple ways.

High Expectations, Trust, Respect, and Caring for All—The school culture is built on these values.

Professional Collaboration—The principal and teachers serve multiple obligations and collaborate for the achievement of all community members.

Flexibility, Autonomy, and Shared

Governance—Schools have control over their resources.

Five Areas of Autonomy

Staffing—Schools have freedom to hire and excess their staff.

Budget—Schools have discretion in spending a lump-sum per-pupil budget.

Curriculum and Assessment—Schools have freedom to structure curriculum and assessment to best meet students' needs.

Governance and Policies—Schools create their own governance structure and set their own policies.

School Calendar—Schools have freedom to set the schedule for school days and calendar years for both faculty and students.