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Executive Summary

# BREAKING RANKS II™:

## Strategies for Leading High School Reform



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
of SECONDARY SCHOOL  
**PRINCIPALS**

THE  
EDUCATION  
ALLIANCE  
FOR AMERICA

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION  
DATE: 4/4 EXHIBIT D PAGE 1 OF 14  
SUBMITTED BY: Bob Gerve



First published in 1996, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* presented a vision of a dramatically different high school of the 21st century. Its more than 80 recommendations provided direction for high school principals across the country in making schools more student-centered by personalized programs, support services, and intellectual rigor for all students.

*Breaking Ranks II* outlines the need for current high schools to engage in the process of change that will ensure success for every high school student. Its first set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of a professional learning community, wherein leadership throughout the institution refocuses its work on what will

successfully support every student in their high school experience. The second set of recommendations and tools focuses on the need to provide every student with meaningful adult relationships that can best support every student. And the third set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of personalized learning, where students see their learning as meaningful and relevant, as well as rigorous and challenging, ensuring their success both within and beyond high school. Together, these recommendations and activities ultimately lead to the success of every student, not only those typically served well by the traditional comprehensive high school.

*Breaking Ranks II* is intended to assist principals by:

- Providing strategies for implementing the recommendations
- Illustrating possible entry points or areas in which to begin reform
- Profiling the successes, challenges, and results of schools implementing the recommendations.

### **How Well Does Your School Serve Each Student?**

In the opening chapter of *Breaking Ranks II* school leaders are confronted with questions about their schools. Some of these questions are:

- How many of the students who enter your school in ninth grade graduate in four years?
- What percentage of your graduates must take remedial courses in college or a community college? What percentage of those finish college?
- Does your leadership team successfully interact with “hard-to-reach” parents with activities such as home visits, Saturday meetings, and meetings outside of regular business hours?
- How many low-income and/or minority students are enrolled in advanced courses?
- How many teachers from different disciplines work together on a regular basis?
- Are the aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses of each student known by at least one faculty member or other member of your staff? How do you ensure the staff member uses that information appropriately to help the student become successful in all classes and activities?
- What percentage of the classes per week at your school is primarily lecture-driven?

If, after answering the questions, principals see room for improvement, setting a vision for that improvement is their next step.

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## Seven Cornerstone Strategies to Improve Student Performance

Seven cornerstone strategies have been gleaned from the experiences of *Breaking Ranks* schools and will help those who wonder how to start. These seven cornerstone strategies cut across all three core areas and most of the 31 recommendations. Together, these seven cornerstone strategies, if implemented effectively, will form the foundation for improving the performance of each student in your school.

1. **Core Knowledge:** Establish the essential learnings a student is required to learn in order to graduate, and adjust the curriculum and teaching strategies to realize that goal
2. **Connections with Students:** Increase the quantity and improve the quality of interactions between students, teachers, and other school personnel by reducing the number of students for which any adult or group of adults is responsible
3. **Personalized Planning:** Implement a comprehensive advisory program that ensures each student has frequent and meaningful opportunities to plan and assess his or her academic and social progress with a faculty member
4. **Adapting to Differences:** Ensure teachers use a variety of instructional strategies and assessments to accommodate individual learning styles
5. **Flexible Use of Time:** Implement schedules flexible enough to accommodate teaching strategies consistent with the ways students learn most effectively and that allow for effective teacher teaming and lesson planning
6. **Distributed Leadership:** Institute structural leadership changes that allow for meaningful involvement in decision making by students, teachers, family members, and the community and that support effective communication with these groups
7. **Continuous Professional Development:** Align comprehensive, ongoing professional development program and individual Personal Learning Plans of staff members with the content knowledge and instructional strategies required to prepare students for graduation.

*Breaking Ranks II* illustrates how school principals and their leadership teams hold the key to initiating essential conversations about relationships among people and relationships between students and ideas.



### Seven Cornerstone Strategies



## Core Area 1

### **Sowing the Seeds for Change: Collaborative Leadership, Professional Learning Communities, and the Strategic Use of Data**

The idea for comprehensive change may not begin in the principal's office, but it most assuredly can end there either through incomplete planning, failure to involve others, neglect, or failure to create conditions that allow a new order of things to emerge in the high school. Creating those conditions is often the first challenge—and sometimes it must start within the principal's own thinking and interactions with people.

#### ***Recommendations:***

1. The principal will provide leadership in the high school community by building and maintaining a **vision, direction, and focus for student learning**
2. Each high school will establish a **site council** and accord other meaningful roles in decision making to students, parents, and members of the staff to promote student learning and an atmosphere of participation, responsibility, and ownership
3. A high school will regard itself as a **community** in which members of the staff collaborate to develop and implement the school's learning goals
4. **Teachers will provide the leadership** essential to the success of reform, collaborating with others in the educational community to redefine the role of the teacher and to identify sources of support for that redefined role
5. Every school will be a learning community for the entire community. As such, the school will promote the use of **Personal Learning Plans for each educator** and provide the resources to ensure that the principal, teachers, and other staff members can address their own learning and professional development needs as they relate to improved student learning
6. The school community will promote policies and practices that **recognize diversity** in accord with the core values of a democratic and civil society and will offer substantive ongoing professional development to help educators appreciate issues of diversity and expose students to a rich array of viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences
7. High schools will build **partnerships with institutions of higher education** to provide teachers and administrators at both levels with ideas and opportunities to enhance the education, performance, and evaluation of educators
8. High schools will develop political and financial **relationships with individuals, organizations, and businesses** to support and supplement educational programs and policies
9. At least once every five years, each high school will convene a broadly based external panel to offer a **Public Description of the school**, a requirement that could be met in conjunction with the evaluations of state, regional, and other accrediting groups.

## Core Area 2

### Personalizing the School Environment

If high achievement for all students is the goal of reform, then personalization is the key. Although some students might be able to make it through four years of high school despite the lack of any personal connections, all students require a supportive environment—some more than others. Creating that environment is essential to bringing learning to fruition. In keeping with the sentiment implicit in the word, *personalization* can mean different things to different people. However, most definitions converge on a few common principles associated with providing students with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to the school, a sense of ownership over the direction of one's learning, and the ability to recognize one's choices and to make choices based on one's own experience and understanding of the choices. The following provides a working definition linked to the *Breaking Ranks* call for a more student-centered, personalized experience in high school.



#### ***Recommendations:***

10. High schools will create **small units** in which anonymity is banished
11. Each high school teacher involved in the instructional program on a full-time basis will be responsible for **contact time with no more than 90 students** during a given term so that the teacher can give greater attention to the needs of every student
12. Each student will have a **Personal Plan for Progress** that will be reviewed often to ensure that the high school takes individual needs into consideration and to allow students, within reasonable parameters, to design their own methods for learning in an effort to meet high standards
13. Every high school student will have a **Personal Adult Advocate** to help him or her personalize the educational experience
14. Teachers will convey a **sense of caring** to their students so that students feel that their teachers share a stake in their learning
15. High schools will develop **flexible scheduling** and student grouping patterns that allow better use of time in order to meet the individual needs of students to ensure academic success
16. The high school will engage students' **families as partners** in the students' education
17. The high school community, which cannot be values-neutral, will advocate and model a set of core **values essential in a democratic and civil society**
18. High schools, in conjunction with agencies in the community, will help coordinate the delivery of **physical and mental health and social services for youth.**



## Core Area 3

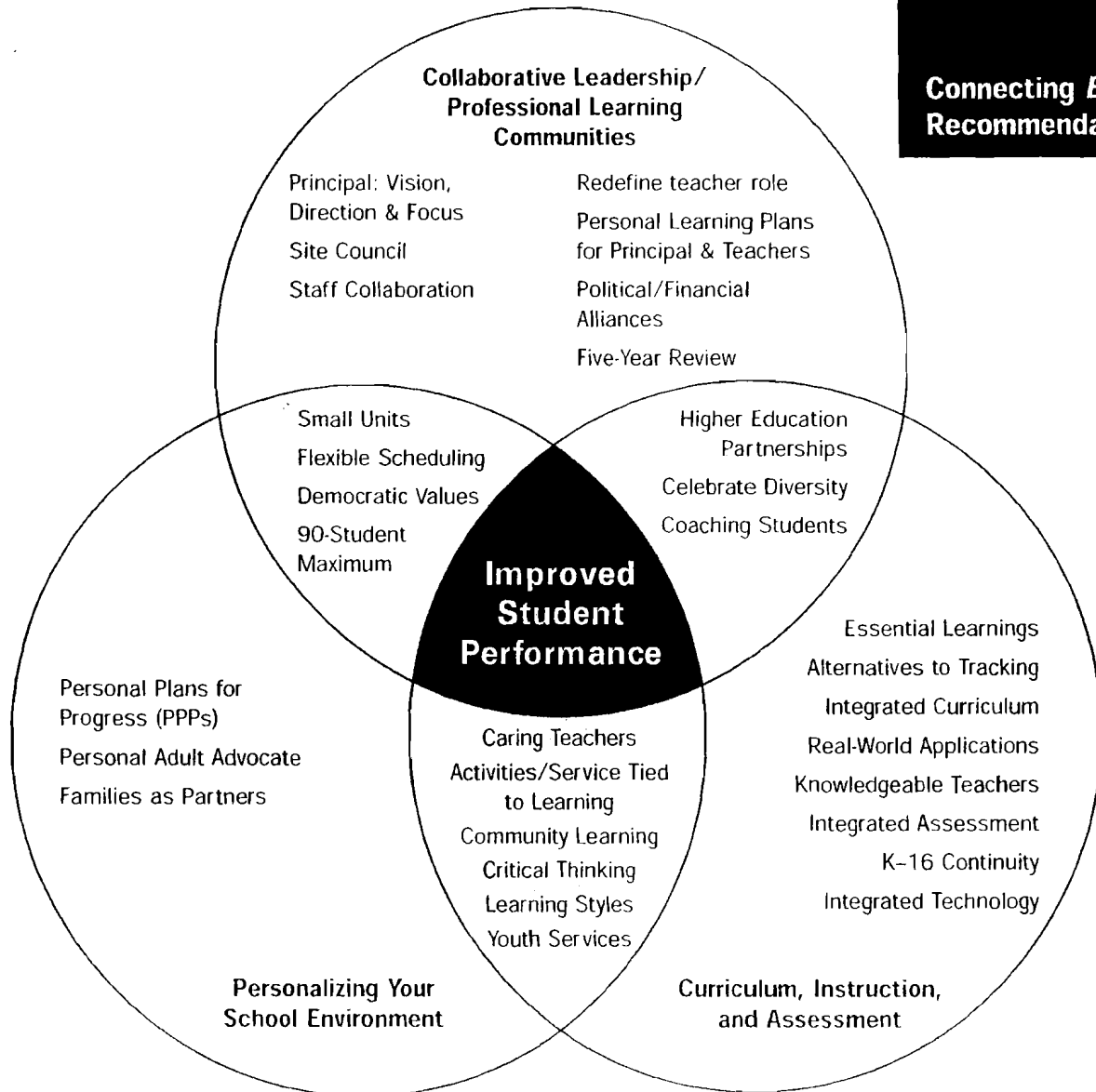
### Making Learning Personal: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

In this chapter we discuss the importance of **building relationships between students and ideas**—how the student interacts and directs his or her own learning with the oversight, coaching, and motivational strategies associated with student-centered curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Teacher-to-student and student-to-student relationships cannot be left outside that door, however. In fact, they become a tool within the classroom to generate excitement about ideas and learning.

#### *Recommendations:*

19. Each high school will identify a set of **essential learnings**—in literature and language, writing, mathematics, social studies, science, and the arts—in which students must demonstrate achievement in order to graduate
20. Each high school will present **alternatives to tracking** and to ability grouping
21. The high school will reorganize the traditional department structure in order to **integrate the school's curriculum** to the extent possible and emphasize depth over breadth of coverage
22. The content of the curriculum, where practical, should connect to **real-life applications** of knowledge and skills to help students link their education to the future
23. The high school will promote **service programs** and student activities as integral to an education, providing opportunities for all students that support and extend academic learning
24. The academic program will extend **beyond the high school campus** to take advantage of learning opportunities outside the four walls of the building
25. Teachers will design high-quality work and teach in ways that **engage students**, cause them to persist, and, when the work is successfully completed, result in their satisfaction and their acquisition of knowledge, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and other abilities valued by society
26. Teachers will know and be able to use a variety of strategies and settings that identify and accommodate **individual learning styles** and engage students
27. Each high school teacher will have a broad base of **academic knowledge** with depth in at least one subject area
28. Teachers will be adept at acting as coaches and facilitators to promote **more active involvement of students** in their own learning
29. Teachers will **integrate assessment into instruction** so that assessment is accomplished using a variety of methods and does not merely measure students, but becomes part of the learning process
30. Recognizing that education is a continuum, high schools will reach out to elementary and middle level schools as well as institutions of higher education to better serve the **articulation of student learning** and to ensure each stage of the continuum understands what will be required of students at the succeeding stage
31. Schools will develop a strategic plan to make **technology** integral to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, accommodating different learning styles and helping teachers to individualize and improve the learning process.

# Connecting *Breaking Ranks II* Recommendations in High School Renewal



*Diagram by John Clarke, Steering Group, Vermont's "High Schools on the Move"*

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# Breaking Ranks II™

**Breaking Ranks II** is the most powerful and practical resource available anywhere. It is a must-read handbook for all those working on high school reform. It is superb!

Michael Fullan  
Dean, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education  
University of Toronto

**Breaking Ranks II** is a powerful tool for all secondary school principals. The book offers valuable strategies, recommendations, and resources for effecting comprehensive school reform, while underscoring the importance of preparing individual adolescents for membership in a democratic society.

James P. Comer  
Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry  
Yale Child Study Center  
Associate Dean, Yale School of Medicine

The templates for action in **Breaking Ranks II** are clear and compelling. The case studies are powerful and convincing. The report is as well organized and helpful to the reader as any I've seen.

Ron Wolk  
Founding Editor  
*Education Week* and *Teacher Magazine*

NASSP demonstrates its ongoing commitment to meaningful reform of the American high school with the release of **Breaking Ranks II**, the much-needed next step in outlining strategies that will produce effective change in our high schools. We applaud the NASSP effort in this period of challenge and change in education.

George Kersey, Jr.  
Executive Director  
Phi Delta Kappa International

Every person connected to a high school should read this book—the school board member, the superintendent, the principal, faculty, staff, students, and parent leaders—because it lays out a journey which, if they are willing to undertake it, would dramatically improve the learning experience for every high school student. Bravo to NASSP for undertaking this important work.

Anne L. Bryant  
Executive Director  
National School Boards Association

**Breaking Ranks II** is thoughtful and doable. The vignettes of school practice are incredibly valuable. This document will prove to be the most important work on improving the high school this decade.

Tom Sergiovanni  
Lillian Radford Distinguished Professor of Education  
Trinity University

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*Breaking Ranks II*

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## MY PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS ROBERT A. GERYE

I was the founder of the Las Vegas Academy of International Studies, Performing and Visual Arts which opened in 1993. When appointed to the position in October of 1992, I embarked upon a search of the best performing and visual arts and international studies programs in the country, traveling to many of them to gather information that would be helpful in structuring a new magnet school that was different from the "status quo" high school model in the Clark County School District.

The Las Vegas Academy program was the first program in the Clark County School District to use block scheduling based upon an eight (8) unit school day. In addition, it was the only school to use a college concept for the scheduling of classes and student enrollment whereby students choose a major area of study from the seven programs offered at the Academy. Academic classes are held three days a week for 86 minutes, while the major class is held for 86 minutes every day of the weeks. The Academy also pioneered a longer school day where students attend classes for an average of 55 minutes longer than those in comprehensive high schools. To further make the school unique, a total of 25 site specific courses were developed for students, which are only offered at the Academy site. For example, Modern Music Technology and Lighting Design are two of the courses whereby students can receive more in-depth instruction than they would at regular high schools, using the most up-to-date technology from the industry that is possible. An active sister school program has also been designed with student cultural exchanges between schools in Korea, China the Ukraine, Russia, Mexico, Germany, France and Quebec. During these exchanges, students travel to these countries to visit the school via a home stay for two or three weeks, with the students from that country traveling to Las Vegas to pursue learning with Academy students.

Also, unique to the Academy has been the extensive use of professionals from the performing arts who serve as role models and mentors for students. Involvement with these people has brought many special opportunities for students. When the school opened in 1993, an active partnership with the Las Vegas Hilton and Starlight Express was fostered, whereby students had workshops from professionals starring in the musical, as well as internship opportunities at the Hilton. This program was further augmented in 1998 with the development of a partnership with New York New York and Kenneth Feld Productions. Students were mentored by cast members from Feld's Madhattan!. Following the six week mentoring period, the Academy students presented their version of Madhattan! as a fund raiser for the school. During 1996 and 1997, students had the opportunity to work with Academy Award winner Stephen Schwartz to produce the premiere of his musical Children of Eden. Not only was the a premiere for the nation, but it was also the first time that Clark County School District students had the opportunity to work with an Academy Award winner such as Schwartz to produce a world premier of his work. In addition, in the fall of 1997, Schwartz returned to the Academy to premiere his newly released album, Reluctant Pilgrim. Academy students furnished the backup vocal and instrumentals for this album debut and, in a tribute to his work, provided a review of his works. In addition, students have had the opportunity to hold "talk back" sessions with people such as Robert Wagner, Stephanie Powers, Hal Holbrook, Trisha Yearwood and Leann Rimes. It is these unique opportunities that would be considered innovative uses of education to motivate students to learn.

Academically, the Academy has maintained a top academic status in the community, state and country. While the Clark County School District's TerraNova scores hover around the 50th percentile and the other comprehensive high schools can only muster the lower 60th percentiles, the Academy has consistently scored in the mid to upper 70th percentiles on the total battery of the tests. Ironically, students come from average stanines. Academy students attend college at a 68% rate, and are accepted to the top schools in the United States. For the past four years, Academy students have been selected to represent the Clark County School District at the International Science and Engineering Expo (International Science Fair). Students are actively involved in the development of technological portfolios to showcase their achievements during four years of high school. To this end, we have developed a state of the art portfolio center where students can do a full multi-media portfolio for job or educational usage. In November of 2000, the U.S. Department of Education honored the Academy as a "New American High School," one of the top 27 high schools in the United States. In October of 2002, the Academy was honored by the U.S. Department of Education as a "Blue Ribbon School." The State of Nevada honored the Academy in March of 2003 with the Governor's Arts Awards in Education, and the International network of Performing and Visual Arts Schools has designated the Academy as a STAR School and has bestowed an achievement award upon the program. The Nevada State Department of Education has twice honored the school with a designation as a "High Achieving School," a designation given to only two other schools in the State.

Sadly, my tenure as principal of the Academy ended on December 31, 2003, when I was "tapped" by the Clark County School District to plan and implement the first Smaller Learning Communities/Career Academy comprehensive high school in the District. Although the Academy had been designed on this model, it was a magnet school that had admission requirements. Spring Valley High School is the first comprehensive, large high school to be fully converted to this model in the District. Grade levels are housed in wings with administrators assigned to each of the "houses," which have been named after the top four universities in the U.S. I serve as the Executive Administrator of the entire program, while the grade level administrators are in charge of their students until graduation day for that grade level. This attempt to break the large high school into smaller communities has met with resounding accolades from the community, as they realize that this will allow students to have personal contact with several adults during their school career. An active mentor program has been established that will group students into 15 student mentor groups for the purpose of providing adult supervision of grades, attendance and social progress in the school. Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, seven career academy programs will open which will give students the opportunity for increased class time in an area which has been identified as either one of interest or one of aptitude.

I was honored by the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce in 1998 with the Community Achievement Award in Education for the development of the Academy program. Professionally, I have been involved in the International Network of Performing and Visual Arts Schools. In October of 1998, I was elected Vice-President of the Network, in charge of planning and implementing yearly conferences through the year 2004. I am currently the Chair of the Membership Committee of the organization and have been nominated for the Jeffrey Lawrence Lifetime Achievement Award in the Arts. In 2000, the Clark County School District recognized me as an Excellence in Education "Hall of Fame" winner for the district. In May of 2004, I was selected as the National Association of Secondary Schools Principals Nevada High School Principal of the Year. The International Network of Performing and Visual Arts Schools (now the International Network for the Advancement of the Arts) honored me in October with the Jeffrey Lawrence Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts. At the end of October 2004, Washburn University honored me by my selection as a University Fellow for Lifetime Achievement in Education. I am truly humbled to have been chosen as a role model by all of these organizations for my educational accomplishments.

By the time I spend 60-70 hours a week involved with school and activities, there isn't much time for community work. However, I was involved with the Community College of Southern Nevada in developing their teacher preparation program and with developing their cohort program to introduce support staff in the Clark County School District to education as a career. I also have taught English and Education classes for the College. Additionally, I have been a professor of graduate education in the teacher preparation and administration divisions of the University of Phoenix in Las Vegas. I firmly believe that staying current on research and philosophy is crucial to my effectiveness as an administrator. Sierra Nevada College has also had me present several classes in their post-graduate licensure program.

In the community, I have been actively involved in the Las Vegas Arabian Horse Association, serving as a volunteer for horse shows held in Las Vegas. I have also been involved with the Las Vegas Arabian Horse Association Youth Club, working with their fund raisers, on the Youth Classic Show as a volunteer for community resources. I also have served as a leadership consultant for the International Arabian Horse Association in Denver and have been associated with developing feasibility for youth leadership programs during the International Arabian Youth Nationals Show held in Oklahoma City every July. In addition, I have served as volunteer for the Youth National's Show.

I have served on the Board of Directors for the Las Vegas Sister Cities Association. I remain active in Sister Cities International as a speaker on youth exchanges. This is a result of the Academy's participation in the Sister Cities/Sister Schools program. My work on this board is to develop and foster educational and cultural exchanges with schools in our sister cities. This has dovetailed with the school exchanges that the Academy developed over the years.

Overall, I have been very fortunate to have had many experiences that have broadened my perspective on what makes education work for all students. It is my hope that I can continue to have these experiences in order to help students see the world beyond their neighborhoods.



**UNIQUE SMALLER LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROGRAMS  
SPRING VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL  
2004-2005 SCHOOL YEAR**

The school was planned and developed around the following closely held beliefs:

- 1) STUDENTS ARE HOUSED IN WINGS BY GRADE LEVELS:**
  - a. Each grade level is assigned a university name, based upon the top 25 universities in the U.S.
  - b. Administrators are housed in the grade level wing and will move offices in subsequent years to stay with their classes.
  - c. Grade levels embody teams for math, English and social studies.
  - d. Grade levels provide for smaller groupings of students for enriched adult contact.
  
- 2) A FRESHMAN "ACADEMY"(TRANSITION) COURSE IS IN PLACE VIA THE LIFE STRATEGIES PROGRAM**
  - a. Written and developed by SpVHS staff
  - b. Nine weeks of reading improvement
  - c. Nine weeks of career academy identification/college investigation
  - d. Nine weeks of study skills
  - e. Nine weeks of financial strategies
  
- 3) A FULL MENTOR PROGRAM IS IN PLACE TO PROVIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS OF 20 STUDENTS MENTORED BY ONE ADULT**
  - a. All teaching and administrative staff and most support staff have a mentor group
  - b. Curriculum was written by SpVhs staff and focuses upon character education(attached)
  - c. Meets every two weeks
  - d. Mentor checks attendance and grades: contacts parents if there is a problem
  - e. Mentor will(future) conference with parents and student to develop a five year plan and monitor progress
  
- 4) CAREER ACADEMY PROGRAM DEBUTS IN 2005-2006**
  - a. All students will choose one academy for expanded course offerings
  - b. Students will also have an academy for an SLC as well as a grade level.
  - c. SpVHS staff have developed strands and courses for academies
  - d. Academies follow career pathways
  - e. Students will increase attendance rates and grades through academy interest
  - f. Dual credit courses will be offered in academic areas in cooperation with CCSN
  - g. Tech Prep. Credit will also be offered for tech classes

**5) ACADEMIC FOCUS AND ENHANCED EXPECTATIONS ARE IN PLACE**

- a. Mission statement requires post secondary education for all
- b. AVID will increase AP and Honors enrollment, as well as four year college attendance for underserved populations
- c. CCSN dual credit courses
- d. Increasing enrollment in AP and Honors courses
- e. Blocking of remedial math and reading courses to increase proficiency

**6) FIVE YEAR PLAN AND SENIOR PROJECT IN PLANNING STAGES**

- a. Every student and parent will be required to meet with mentor to develop a five year plan for high school courses and college attendance
- b. Senior project will begin in freshman year in career academy and culminate in senior year.