What is Continuation High School for, anyway?
I didn’t go to Continuation High School.
You didn’t go to Continuation High School, either.
You didn’t go to Continuation High School, either.

It is hard to make choices and set priorities because we lack context and knowledge.
Today

Context and Knowledge

Life in the Margins

Features of Continuation Schools

Purposes of Continuation Schools

Thinking Tools for Your School
Today

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Life in the Margins

No guidance + No oversight + Mixed messages = Enormous Freedom!
With Great Freedom...

...comes the great responsibility
to figure out
what and who
our schools should serve.
Who lives in the Margins?

“Sometimes I feel like we are a dumping ground for kids the mainstream high school can’t handle: disruptive behavior problems. They are sent here because they’re behind in credits, and they’re behind in credits because they haven’t been doing their work, or they’ve been cutting class, or they’ve been getting into fights, or they’ve been doing drugs, or they get caught in an illegal activity.”

-Continuation high school teacher
Who goes to your school?

Continuation high school students are credit deficient.

Why?
Who goes to your school?

Credit deficiency tells us who will be placed at our sites. It doesn’t tell us how they got behind, or what will help them now.
Who goes to your school?

Our kids have issues.
Who goes to your school?

Our kids have issues.

- Truancy
- Jail
- Pregnancy
- Foster Care
- Gang Involvement
- Expulsion
- Academic Gaps
- Fighting
- Family Crisis
- Financial Obligations
- Death and Dying
Who goes to your school?

Our kids have diverse goals.
Our kids need different things.

We need to figure out what to do.
Monica

17 year old Latina
Quiet, Understated
Basic Academic Skills: Proficient
Study Habits: Good

Lives with mom and 2 much younger siblings
Older brother was recently incarcerated
Works at Target 30 hours/wk to help family income
Misses a lot of school to babysit. Never misses work.
Monica’s Goals

Graduate from High School
Go to college to become an RN
Take care of her younger siblings
Keep her family together
Monica’s Needs

Classes that flex around her work schedule
To work at home while she baby-sits
Academic skills for community college
Talik

15 year old African-American boy
Baby-faced, hulking, lethargic
Basic Academic Skills: Very Low
Study Habits: None

Lives with grandparents, cuts school to visit mom
0 credits and multiple suspensions at other high school
Brings headphones, but never pencil, books, or paper
Tested for learning disabilities, but does not qualify
Talik’s Goals

Control his own time
Not feel stupid
Graduate, without working too hard
Talik’s Needs

Individual instruction
Frequent supports to keep him on task
Materials provided, and his lack of them seen as a challenge to be overcome, not a discipline problem to be punished
Trina

16 year old Filipina
Glamorous, vivacious
Basic Academic Skills: Uneven
Study Habits: Poor

Lives with grandma, older brother, and sometimes dad
Mom died several years ago, while incarcerated
Risky drug and sexual habits
Truant from previous high school
Trina’s Goals

Connect with people
Be recognized and valued
Feel no pain
Trina’s Needs

Develop her self-esteem and leadership
Work with her family
Help to moderate her extremely high risk drug and sexual behaviors
Dumping Ground?

How did these three wind up in the *same class* at the *same school* when they needed *different and incompatible* things?
Dumping Ground?

Dumped = Misplaced

What? = Well Placed
Well Placed?

Maybe ‘Well Placed’

= Credit deficient, for reasons we can address.
Dumped?

Maybe ‘Dumped’

= 

Credit deficient, 
for reasons we can’t address.
It’s not an accident

No one starts at continuation high school.

Every student is placed with us by a person, for a reason.

Those reasons have changed over time.
Who goes to your school?

Choose a student you believe is well-served by your school.

Identify their characteristics, goals, & needs.

Persona Activity
Today

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It’s like the Tax Code

Continuation high schools weren’t designed.

They morphed again and again, offering to fix kids these days.
Legacy Code

Mandates go in, but they never come out.

We have a lot of stuff
We use it for unintended purposes
We don’t always know what feature will work
Legacy Code

- Remedial instruction
- Shorter day
- Work with families
- Work with probation officers
- Smaller classes
- Work experience credit
- Fifth year
- Smaller classes
- Early graduation
- Service learning credit
- Direct instruction
- Make up credits
- Social Services
- Self-paced instruction
- Day care
- Work with social workers
- Respect for family care
- Counseling
Which features of our schools are commonalities and which are quirks?
Feature: Short day

Origins:
Accommodate working teens

Institutions:
ADA for 3 hours
AM/PM Session
Feature: Short Day

Synchronicities:
Truancy reduction
Easier for disaffected students
Accommodates family needs
Pregnant/Parenting
and…?
Feature: Small Class Size

Origin:
Individualized programs

Institutional:
Ed Code
Teacher’s Contract
Feature: Small Class Size

Synchronicities:
Remediation
Closer teacher-student relationships
Feature: Small Schools

Origin:
Negative admission filters

Institutions:
Physical Plant
Cost
Feature: Small Schools

Synchronicities:
Reduced student conflict
Big fish in a small pond
No cracks to fall through
and...?
Feature: Flexible Credit

Origins:
- Non-diploma program
- Alternative Education

Institutions:
- Productive Hours Credit
- Product Credit
- Competency Assessment
Feature: Flexible Credit

Synchronicities:
- Drop Out Prevention
- Remediation
- Acceleration
Feature: ILPs

Origins:
Individual Program
2nd Attempt: batting cleanup

Institutions:
16-18 Year Olds
Flexible Credits
Feature: ILPs

Synchronicities:
Individual Instruction
Acceleration
Remediation
Feature: Supervision

Origins:
Delinquency Prevention

Institutions:
Low Teacher:Student Ratio
Counseling and Social Services
Feature: Supervision

Synchronicities:
Work with Social Services, Foster Parents, Probation.
Truancy Intervention
Substance Intervention
Feature: Placed by Policy

Origins:
“Last Chance” High School

Institutions:
Not College Prep
Bad Reputation
Scare Tactics
Feature: Placed by Policy

**Synchronicities:**
- Little Oversight
- Freedom to innovate
- No “Harvard Guilt”
- Can filter population
It’s *not* like the Tax Code

Schools with narrower missions try to do some of these things, all of the time.
It’s like a Restaurant

Continuation high schools try to do all of these things, some of the time.
It’s like a Restaurant

Continuation high school offers flexibility and personalization.

There is no one thing that continuation schools do with increased flexibility or personalization.
What’s on the Menu

Does your school do everything well?

Or, are academics sometimes just xeroxed packets?

Is Voc Ed sometimes just credit for low-wage, low skills jobs?
Oral history of the school as told through the people who have come to work there: why and how they came and what they care about once they get there.
Today

Context and Knowledge

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Purposes of Continuation Schools

Thinking Tools for Your School
The Continuation Chameleon

Continuation high schools were created to do something entirely different from what they do today.
Continuation high school is a reform that has “changed so much over time that it bears little resemblance to the initial reform.”
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It began as “a part-time institution for employed youth which became a school of last resort for students unsuccessful or disruptive in regular high schools.”
Continuation high schools have always dealt with the problem kids, but the problems change.
The Continuation Chameleon

Two consistent priorities:
The Continuation Chameleon

Two consistent priorities:

Deal with troubled youth

  Delinquency
  Mechanical Job Training
  Dropouts
  Pushouts
  Informational Job Training
The Continuation Chameleon

Two consistent priorities:

Deal with troubled youth

- Delinquency
- Mechanical Job Training
- Dropouts
- Pushouts
- Informational Job Training

Keep ourselves in business
Current Mandate

Our current mandate is to graduate students by fixing their credit deficiency, by any means necessary.
Cross Purposes

Continuation high schools act as a safety net, ensuring that individual students receive an education.
Cross Purposes

Continuation high schools also act as a safety valve, by removing from mainstream schools disruptive, slow, or difficult students.
Cross Purposes

The safety net and the safety valve are antagonistic.
Cross Purposes

The safety net and the safety valve are antagonistic.

Continuation high school staff are caught in the middle.
Continuation high school was created in 1917 to develop the “civic and vocational intelligence” of young laborers and see to the “organization and direction of the pupil’s interests outside of school.”

(Smith Hughes Act 1917)
(CSDE Handbook 1933)
Citizenship Education

1920s: 17% of teens graduate High School

Continuation high school is 4 hours a week of compulsory, independent instruction.
Vocational Education

Continuation high school has never really been for Voc Ed, but for working students.
Vocational Education

1930s: Continuation enrollment down
Compulsory attendance laws pull kids from workforce

1940s: Continuation enrollment drops further
Comprehensive high schools add Voc Ed
Near Extinction

1950s & 60s: many continuations close

Comprehensives offer better Voc Ed & diplomas aren’t necessary to work
Dropout Prevention

As high school diplomas become more common, not having one creates problems for individuals and society.
Dropout Prevention

1960s: continuation high schools resurrect themselves as alternative educational centers

Continuations begin to offer Diplomas & are tasked with dropout prevention
Alternative Education

Continuation schools are the major Alt Ed option for students who don’t fit in the so-called comprehensive high school.

Dropouts & Pushouts
No diploma - whose fault, whose problem
Alternative Education

1970s: Marginal groups demand access

Continuation high schools continue serving these groups

55% male: 45% female
Mostly urban and rural youth
Racial data unavailable
Working class overrepresented
Children of Immigrants overrepresented
Alternative Education

1980-90s: Almost 80% of Americans graduate from high school, including alternative programs.

Focus is on attitudes, social skills, work habits.
Remediation

As diplomas become common, concerns surface about ‘giving them away’, to students without mastery of specific skills or knowledge.

Enter high stakes testing.
Remediation

2000s: Continuation schools focus on filling academic gaps

CaHSEE prep and standards-based courses drive trend toward longer days

mismatch between staff and new mandate
Transition Time

We are in the midst of a painful transition.
"Efforts to improve the quality of education for all California students and reduce the high school drop out rate make such options as continuation education an even more important program alternative today."

-Continuation Handbook, 1998
“Efforts to improve the quality of education for all California students and reduce the high school drop out rate make such options as continuation education an even more important program alternative today”  

-Continuation Handbook, 1998

(Never mind that these may be antithetical.)
Prioritizing Everything

...is the same as prioritizing nothing
Two Simple Questions

Who is well served at your school?

What is well taught?
Today

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Thank you

Any Questions?