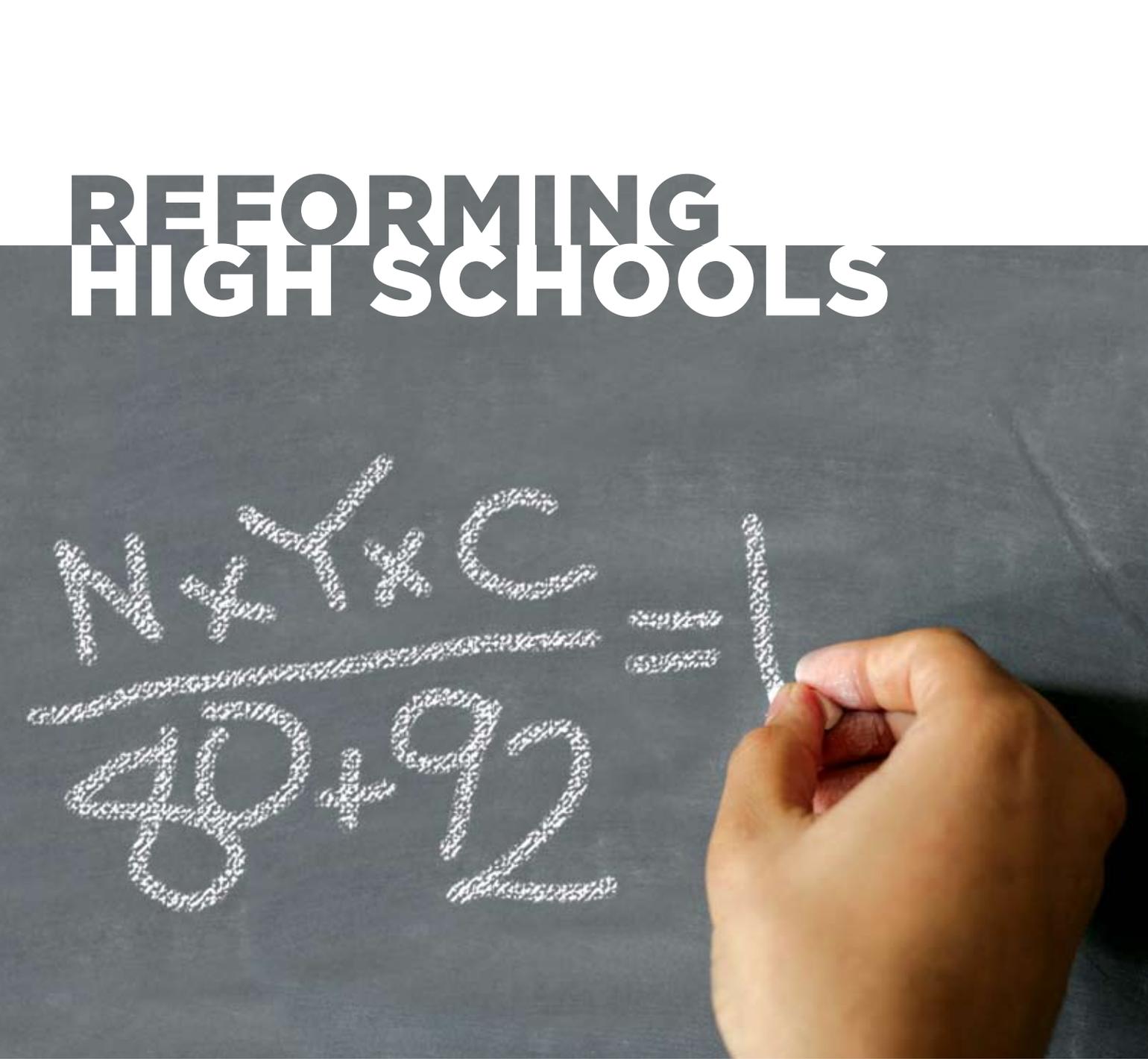


REFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a piece of white chalk, writing on a dark grey chalkboard. The chalkboard contains a handwritten mathematical equation:
$$\frac{1/4 + 1/4 + 1/4}{48 + 92} = 1$$
 The numbers and symbols are written in a slightly messy, hand-drawn style. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with the thumb and index finger holding the chalk. The background is a dark, textured surface, likely the chalkboard.

**Lessons from the
New Century High Schools Initiative
2001-2006**

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This report examines the preliminary performance data emerging from the New Century High Schools Initiative that has created 83 new small, public high schools in New York City since 2001. The report summarizes outcomes, strategies, and lessons learned and places these within the context of New York City's secondary reform efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

New Visions for Public Schools is the largest education reform organization dedicated to improving the quality of education children receive in New York City's public schools. For 16 years, New Visions has worked with the public and private sectors to develop programs and policies that energize teaching and learning and increase student achievement. In 2001, in partnership with the New York City Department of Education (DOE), the United Federation of Teachers, and the Council of Supervisors and Administrators, New Visions launched the New Century High Schools Initiative (NCHSI) to transform secondary education in New York City. Through the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Open Society Institute, the initiative sought to establish high quality small schools as the DOE closed large, failing high schools. The goal is a new "proof point" in education: demonstrating that a large number of high schools serving poor and minority students can achieve, sustain, and eventually exceed 80 percent graduation and 92 percent attendance rates. This goal is significant compared to the current average graduation rates of 58 percent citywide and 70 percent nationwide¹.

This paper first provides an overview of the New Century schools, students, and emerging results. Next, we place the initiative in the context of overall systemic secondary reform by:

- Addressing high school reform from 2001 to the present.
- Describing the original New Century High Schools Initiative's Theory of Action for secondary school reform.
- Outlining the initiative's work with data and reviewing preliminary performance data.
- Summarizing the outcomes, strategies, and emerging conclusions from the following three areas of work, which are based on third-party evaluations and studies, as well as internal reports:
 1. Creating a significant number of small high schools;
 2. Supporting the New Century schools in implementing effective strategies through the Ten Principles of Effective Schools; and
 3. Developing ownership and sustainability of secondary level reform.
 4. Finally, this paper ends with a look ahead for the New Century High Schools Initiative. We briefly discuss some of the overarching challenges to high school transformation and propose ways to address those challenges at the practitioner and policy levels.

New Century Schools

At the midpoint of the ten-year New Century High Schools Initiative, New York City has shuttered or is in the process of phasing out some of its lowest-performing large high schools and has opened 83 new, small New Century high schools in their place. Unlike other high school reform models, New Century schools do not follow specific programs or curricula. Instead, the NCHSI model fosters “disciplined innovation” to meet student needs, a shared commitment by schools, partners, and New Visions to:

1. A common, core performance measure of 80 percent graduation and 92 percent attendance rates.
2. Ten Principles of Effective Schools: Clear Focus and High Expectations; Rigorous Instruction; Personalized Learning Environment; Instructional Leadership; School-based Professional Development; Meaningful Assessment; Partnerships; Parent/Caregiver Engagement; Student Voice and Participation; and Integration of Technology.
3. Continual improvement through ongoing, timely collection, analysis and use of data.
4. Peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing that facilitates inquiry, self-assessment and accountability among NCHSI leaders, faculty, and community partners.

Each New Century school must explicitly map out its strategies for meeting these commitments. New Visions requires that schools implement a four-year course of study and proven strategies for inquiry-based learning, literacy, and numeracy; ensure effective supports for English Language Learners and special education students; and provide high quality professional development. Each site must also have a lead partner—a community organization, capacity building organization, university, or cultural/arts institution—involved in governance, curriculum, professional development, and/or services to students. Currently, 225 organizations are involved with New Century schools.

The New Century schools reach a diverse group of students who come from New York City’s poorest neighborhoods, speak various languages, and represent a multitude of racial and ethnic backgrounds. At full capacity, the schools will serve 38,155 students, approximately 14 percent of New York City high school students and, as a national comparison, a figure roughly equal to the number of students served by many midsize urban districts. Moreover, “relative to public high school students citywide, students in [New Century] schools [are] more likely to be female, African American, or Hispanic and poor.”² They also are more likely to be learners below grade level [levels 1 and 2 on eighth grade exit exams] than the average New York City public

high school student. However, currently, “they [are] less likely to be English Language Learners, new immigrants, or special education students.”^{3,4}

Early Results

New Century schools are showing preliminary encouraging results. In the first 14 schools, opened in 2002, 78 percent of the 2006 student cohort graduated on time. Although slightly below our goal of 80 percent graduation rates, this is striking progress when compared to the city’s 2005 graduation rate of 58 percent⁵ and the graduation rates, ranging from 31 percent to 51 percent, of the large, failing high schools that these schools replaced. Overall, “available data show that students educated in [New Century] schools in 2004–05 were better prepared for graduation than comparable students in traditional schools. All precursors—attendance rates, credit accumulation, promotion rates, and the number of Regents exams passed—pointed in the right direction.”⁶

As the largest high school improvement effort of its kind in New York City, the New Century High Schools Initiative has also led to a systemic commitment to secondary reform. Thirteen additional intermediaries are now involved in leading school creation in New York City. The city has added 184 small schools within the past five years, with New Century schools as the largest subset. The sheer number of new small high schools established within a short time span has required changes in policy and procedure to better support high school improvement. Additionally, New York City has pledged to add another 100 or more small schools and to close additional large, failing high schools by 2009. Strategies from NCHSI are also being adopted as improvement efforts for mid-size high schools and as multiple pathways toward graduation and post-secondary opportunities for overage, under-credited youth.

CONTEXT FOR REFORM

National Context

Since the 1980s, the national push to improve struggling public schools focused almost exclusively on pre-kindergarten and elementary and, to a much lesser extent, middle school. In many ways, this strategy made sense: ensure that students have a strong foundation so they are prepared for upper levels of learning. As a result of this work, there are pockets of improved teaching and learning in elementary schools across the nation.

This focus, however, neglected the numerous issues at the secondary level—low expectations, few learning supports, student alienation, and lack of relevance to post-secondary opportunities—that affected both students who entering ninth grade below grade level and students entering at grade-level. For the most part, the hands-off approach toward these challenges was based on two assumptions: first, that they would evaporate as soon as the majority of students entered secondary school with better preparation; and second, that the problems were simply intractable. In either case, fundamental high school reform was considered to be too difficult to tackle by most policy makers and practitioners.

Against this backdrop, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, along with the Carnegie Corporation and the Open Society Institute, took a courageous step in supporting organizations and districts committed to dramatically changing failing high schools. In 2001, the New Century High Schools Initiative became one of their first, and largest, partnerships in this groundbreaking national work.

Local Context

At that time, many large, comprehensive high schools in New York City were struggling with abysmal rates of student achievement, attendance, dropout, and graduation. Most students in these schools were disconnected and lacked the opportunities necessary to achieve high academic standards. For the students who did persevere and who earned a diploma, many lacked the skills and knowledge necessary for post-secondary education and employment.⁷ Staff were also alienated. Teachers struggled within a huge bureaucratic structure that fostered low expectations and prevented personalized relationships. School size and structure, large teaching loads, and lack of intentional supports all contributed to poor student performance. Moreover, New York City's large zoned high schools were schools of last resort. They served extremely poor and/or low performing students and had no resources to address their needs. Education advocates believed that the failure of these schools enabled other schools to admit better-prepared students and achieve success based on those students' abilities and social capital. In many ways, the large, failing high schools enabled systemwide inequities and reinforced failure and social reproduction.⁸

New York City's Secondary School Reform Efforts

To address the widespread failure of the city's many large high schools, New Visions drew upon its previous experience in creating 34 small elementary, middle, and high schools during the 1990s. This work, funded by the Annenberg Foundation, created a blueprint for New York City's more ambitious effort to transform secondary education through the launch of the New Century High Schools Initiative and, a year later, the DOE's Children First Reform Agenda. As the NCHSI opened its first 14 new small high schools in 2002, newly elected Mayor Michael Bloomberg laid the foundation for systemwide change through clear authority, accountability, and stable leadership. First, the mayor advocated for state legislation to place the New York City school system under mayoral control. The resulting law dismantled the 32 community school boards and established a citywide Panel of Education Policy with 13 members appointed by the mayor. Second, he appointed Joel Klein, a former CEO and U.S. assistant attorney general, as school chancellor. In this position for more than four years, Chancellor Klein has provided consistent top-level leadership and is among the longest-serving chancellors.

At the end of 2002, Chancellor Klein announced the DOE's multi-year Children First reform effort. Setting the goal of providing an effective school for every child, Children First established the environment for small high schools to take root. It positioned high school transformation as a priority and regarded the NCHSI as a flagship school improvement strategy, with the initiative's partners emerging as leaders.

Children First also launched a full-scale reorganization of the Department of Education to improve its efficiency and supports to schools. Over the past five years, the DOE subunits, which are the structures that oversee city public schools, have evolved in organization, supervisory responsibilities, and supports. The first shift occurred in 2003, when the mayor dissolved the city's 32 local school districts—by which the schools had been organized since 1968—and created ten instructional regions and six operational centers. Then, in 2005, the DOE piloted an “autonomy zone” to provide more authority to schools that promised, in return, strong leadership, evidence of progress, and a accountability for academic outcomes. Most recently, elements of the autonomy zone have become institutionalized with the DOE's move to Empowerment Schools, in which certain schools gain greater autonomy and self-select to participate in a learning network. Informed by the work of New Visions and the New Century High Schools Initiative partners, the Empowerment School structure incorporates the NCHSI tenets of accountability through performance measures, continual improvement, and peer-to-peer learning. Currently, 61 New Century schools are Empowerment Schools.

THEORY OF ACTION

The NCHSI Theory of Action⁹ has guided the initiative’s work during the past five years and provided strategic clarity during times of extreme change. From the beginning, the NCHSI partners conceptualized New York City’s move to small high schools as a way to: 1) transform all aspects of a school community; 2) foster partnerships among educators, community organizations, parents, and students; and 3) catalyze systemic change to provide a supportive context—policies, procedures, structures, and behaviors—for school reform. The Theory of Action hinges on both experience and research showing that if schools effectively implement the Ten Principles of Effective Schools, student achievement and systemic improvement ensue.

NEW VISIONS FRAMEWORK: Intermediate Outcomes

Action Steps	Short-Term Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<p>Establish a grant-making planning, and development process</p> <p>Provide direct support in developing effective new schools</p> <p>Involve community partners in planning and operating new schools</p> <p>Cultivate systemic support within DOE subsidiary organizational units and professional associates</p>	<p>Establish Critical New Century High Schools Which Provide-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous instructional program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized relationships between adults and students • A clear focus and expectations for students • Partnerships with community organizations • Instructional leadership focused on student achievement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based professional development and collaboration • Meaningful assessment of student learning • Parent engagement and involvement • Opportunities for youth development • Effective use of technology 	<p>Large numbers of students apply for admission to the New Century schools</p> <p>Schools attract representative cross-section of the student population in communities they serve</p> <p>Enrolled students outperform students in local comprehensive high schools</p> <p>Students are positively engaged with their school and community and prepared for postsecondary experiences.</p>	<p>Systemic adoption of New Century elements across New York City High schools</p> <p>Improved quality of learning experiences for youth, especially those from most disadvantaged communities</p>
PHASE I			PHASE II

EVIDENCE OF PERFORMANCE

During the first two years of the initiative, the partners confronted two key questions: How well is the Theory of Action, particularly the Ten Principles of Effective Schools, being implemented? and What is the impact that the first New Century schools are having on student performance? To address these questions, New Visions and its partners established a clear performance metric for each NSCHI school: a minimum of 80 percent graduation and 92 percent attendance rates. The metric established clear expectations and set an organizational focus for the initiative's work. Its simplicity communicates precisely where the initiative and the schools stand. From there, New Visions established a set of data points to measure progress in implementation and performance.

Data Challenges

As in most school districts, data collection and analysis have been challenging. At the beginning of the initiative, New Visions found that many schools were not using the shared DOE database. Instead, each school created its own system for tracking data from scratch and did not share its data with the DOE. Additionally, as an external partner, New Visions' access to data was constrained due to confidentiality regulations prohibiting the disclosure of individual student data to non-school personnel. The need for data on individual students was urgent, however, not only to track student and school progress, but to identify challenges and strategies on an ongoing basis. During the first few years, in order to obtain the necessary school information, New Visions staff members collected and analyzed data manually at each school site.

Improving Data Collection, Analysis, and Use

Through intense efforts, New Century schools now have access to two levels of data and information about their work:

1. Third-party evaluations conducted by the Policy Studies Associates (PSA).¹⁰ The PSA evaluations have been critical in providing comprehensive quantitative and qualitative information on the work and results of the New Century schools. These studies measure both the schools' implementation of the Ten Principles and student performance as measured by credit accumulation, promotion rates, holdover rates,¹¹ attendance, passage of the Regents Exams, suspension rates, and more.
2. Automated, updated student-level data sets three times each school year.¹² The student-level data sets have been valuable both for day-to-day and for strategic planning in New Century schools. Some of New Visions' related achievements include:
 - A new data tool. New Visions formed a close partnership with the DOE's Region 2 staff, who had developed a user-friendly

electronic database. This database allows schools to track the academic progress of each student, including credit accumulation and passing of the New York State Regents Exam.¹³ Using this tool, schools are able to implement and adjust strategies for individual students, as well as create systemwide supports for areas in which numerous students are struggling.

- Professional development on data and data conversations with schools. Using a school-level reporting guide that examines student performance data in the context of a school's implementation of the Ten Principles, New Visions staff and New Century school leadership teams identified evidence of significant growth, compelling challenges, and promising practices in order to meet the "80/92" performance metric.
- A "disciplined innovation" approach to develop and test strategies for struggling students. New Visions is working closely with schools to disaggregate student data in ways that allows them to identify patterns related to performance. School teams are examining critical questions: Who are the overage, under-credited students? What courses/exams are they missing? Which content areas are students struggling with the most? This process is helping schools to design intervention strategies, as well as improve the first-wave of curriculum, instruction, and student services.

A Look at Emerging Data

Data from the 2005–06 school year, along with the PSA evaluation on past school years, offers a comprehensive look at the results of the New Century High School Initiative to date. There are areas of tremendous progress, but there are also ongoing challenges to be addressed.

- Improved graduation rates: 78.5 percent of the 2006 NCHSI student cohort graduated on time.¹⁴ The overall graduation rate for the first New Century schools cohort of students approaches the goal of 80 percent.¹⁵ This first cohort graduation data corroborates the most recent PSA evaluation in which the overall findings suggest that New Century schools promote academic success.¹⁶ As the report reads, "Students in the NCHSI research sample on average accumulated credits at a rate consistent with on-time graduation, and they out-performed comparison group students."¹⁷
- Improved attendance: NCHSI schools achieved an average attendance rate of 85 percent during the 2005–06 school year. At 85 percent, the New Century schools attendance rate for 2005–06 is slightly higher than the 2004–05 citywide average of 82 percent.¹⁸ Although this rate has improved, it falls short of the goal attendance rate of 92 percent and is a slight decrease from the previous year's rate.

- Low holdover rates: New Century schools' holdover rates were significantly lower than the comparison group documented by the PSA. The New Century ninth-grade holdover rate for 2004-05 was 16 percent, much lower than the citywide rate of 28 percent and the 45 percent rate of sites chosen for comparison because of their demographic similarity.¹⁹
- Not yet acceptable suspension rates: New Century schools' suspension rates have increased and are now comparable to the citywide average. According to data from the 2004-05 school year, the most recent year for which data is publicly available, suspension rates in New Century schools rose to 6 percent from 4 percent in 2003-04 and 2 percent in 2002-03. This rate is "roughly comparable to the citywide suspension rate of 6 percent in 2003-04."²⁰ According to PSA, factors contributing to increased suspension rates include increasing enrollments, shared facilities with host schools that sometimes resulted in tensions, and "over the counter admissions," in which students who did not participate in the high school admissions process, or who requested a transfer, were assigned to schools arbitrarily, wherever places were available for them.

NCHSI data on student cohort progress toward graduation also plays an important diagnostic role. Drawing on the work of the Chicago Research Consortium, New Visions has developed its own metric to judge whether students are "on-track," "almost on-track," or "off-track" toward high school graduation, looking at course credits and the passing of New York State Regents Exams. The most recent data shows that 75 percent of the 2007 cohort is on- or almost on-track to graduate, leaving 760 students out of a total of 3,004 who are not on-track to graduate.

OFF-TRACK STUDENT ANALYSIS—Cohort 2007

Total Students	Off-Track	Almost On-Track	On-Track			
3004	760	407	1837			

BREAKDOWN OF 760 OFF-TRACK STUDENTS	REGENTS PASSED					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
No credit problem	34	65	0	0	0	0
Credits < 28; not behind in any subject	10	31	26	29	24	14
Behind in 1 subject	31	50	41	45	28	22
Behind in 2 subjects	34	33	27	9	5	4
Behind in 3 subjects	43	22	10	6	2	0
Behind in 4 subjects	90	19	5	0	0	1

Of those 760 students, approximately 380 (the total number of students in the top right section) have accumulated a sufficient number of course credits and/or passed a sufficient number of Regents exams to graduate by summer 2007 with targeted, intensive interventions. Of those, 100 (the total number of students in the last two columns) have exhibited academic achievement by passing four or five Regents exams and are lagging only in course credits. Conversely, about 213 students (the total number of students in the lower left section) are unlikely to graduate due to low credit accumulation. New Visions is working with their schools to devise immediate intervention strategies to help those students succeed.

While the New Century High Schools Initiative is making strong progress toward improving secondary education, much work remains to be done to ensure that all New Century schools are successful and sustainable. The data points to a particular challenge: incoming classes appear to be having greater difficulty with credit accumulation as the initiative expands to serve more students. In order to maintain significantly higher graduation rates, the New Century High Schools Initiative must work to ensure student credit accumulation during the ninth and tenth grades.

OUTCOMES, STRATEGIES, AND EMERGING CONCLUSIONS

New Visions plays a multitude of roles in the New Century High Schools Initiative: convener, negotiator, mediator, broker, school-based coach, technical provider, facilitator, critical friend, provocateur, and advocate. Moreover, New Visions has used multiple points of entry—communities, the DOE, campuses, and schools—to strategically engage constituents in meeting the needs of students. Although always evolving, the NCHSI transformation efforts fall into three main areas:

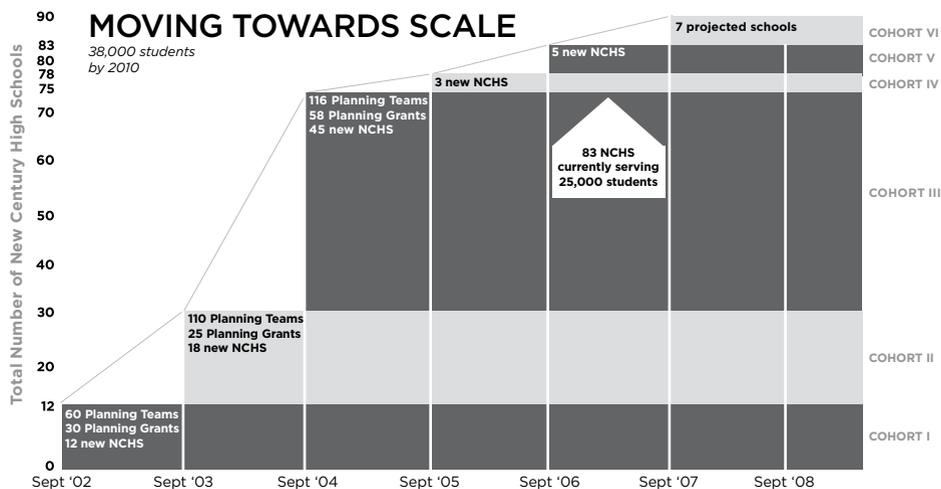
- Creating a significant number of small high schools;
- Supporting the full implementation of the Ten Principles of Effective Schools; and
- Developing ownership and the capacity to sustain secondary-level reform.

Each of these areas comprises some successful strategies, some unsuccessful ones, and many mid-course corrections, adjustments, and refinements. At times, New Visions and the NCHSI partners were adroit and agile in shifting priorities, focus, and approach as circumstances required. At other times, the work of school improvement was less methodical.

Creating Small High Schools

OUTCOMES TO DATE

Establishing 83 small high schools within the course of five years has been a massive undertaking that involved hundreds of organizations and thousands of people. Many can claim credit for the rapid growth of small high schools, as illustrated in the following graphic.



By 2010, New Century schools will educate more than 38,000 New York City students each year, or 14 percent of New York City’s high school students.

The New Century High Schools Initiative’s strategies for establishing new small schools share a common characteristic: the engagement of multiple constituents. This can be seen at the leadership level with the creation of the NCHSI Core team. Bringing together top managers from New Visions, the participating foundations, and key New York City public education organizations (the DOE and the teachers’ and principals’ unions), the Core team facilitated alignment with and commitment to the initiative and new school creation. The team was established with the recognition that each of the members holds important expertise and represents stakeholders whose engagement is crucial for sustained high school improvement. The team was the forum for continuing negotiation, problem solving, and, at times, “horse trading.” The effort to engage multiple constituents is threaded across the main components of new school development: the school creation process; the “saturation” strategy of school reform; and the process of closing large, failing high schools.

The School Creation Process

All members of the Core team designed the school creation process and approved each new school. The process embodies key attributes for guiding school teams in the successful planning and opening of small high schools at scale within only a few years:

Explicit, yet iterative, requirements for school creation based on the needs of the system: From the beginning, the Core team set explicit expectations and requirements in its RFP for interested small schools teams. New Century schools must outline their commitment to and strategies for “disciplined innovation.” As the RFP has evolved over the past five years, it now requires that potential school teams articulate their specific plans and strategies for high quality teaching and learning in every classroom, including a four-year course of study and pedagogical strategies for inquiry-based learning, literacy, and numeracy.

Multiple levels of approval: The NCHSI school creation process is multi-tiered, requiring school teams to develop initial concept papers for approval, then design, present, and defend full implementation plans. This strategy has fostered competition, served as quality control, and eliminated those who were not committed to intensive work and/or willing or able to produce a detailed, viable, high quality plan.

Supports for school creation teams: New Visions’ supports for school creation includes intensive coaching for school teams throughout the planning process. These supports help school teams develop skills and experience in navigating obstacles and contribute to the schools’ peer-to-peer collaboration and disciplined innovation.

The “Saturation” Strategy

From the outset, the NCHSI partners sought immediately to impact large pockets of underperforming students by “saturating” two underserved geographic areas with new small high schools: first the Bronx, in 2001, and then Brooklyn, in 2002. Two distinct results occurred. Early on, the Bronx emerged as a model for how district leadership can drive small school creation and the “phasing out” of large, failing high schools. The Bronx leadership established a context that fostered the success of new school start-ups: an office dedicated to the work, a steering committee comprising the major stakeholders, and a network of school leaders to foster collaboration. One year later, New Visions sought to replicate the Bronx experience in Brooklyn, but found the work to be more challenging there due to changes in Brooklyn district leadership and lack of clear communication and constituent engagement strategies. In response, New Visions took a hands-on approach to leading the work and engaging important community leaders.

Large High School Closures

Shortly into the initiative, emerging evidence indicated that reform models for existing large, failing New York City high schools did not produce rapid change in adult behavior or practices. Since that time, the DOE has committed to completely closing large, failing high schools. School closures were timed to coincide with school start-up as a “phase-in/phase-out process” within four years. In general, for every large high school that was phased out, five new small schools were phased in so that the total number of seats remained consistent. The new small schools added one student cohort each year, so that they reached full capacity within four years. At the same time, no new students were accepted to the large, failing high school, which phased-out as students graduated or exited. This phase-in/phase-out strategy was effective in fostering multiple school start-ups, reducing abrupt disruptions for students and staff in the large high schools, and providing continuity for students as they entered the new schools.

A difficulty that developed on a few high school campuses, however, was a stakeholder perception that the student body was divided into “haves” and “have-nots.” Some community members, parents, and teachers were concerned that the students remaining in large high schools were not benefiting from the changes. The response strategy was twofold: 1) New Visions worked closely with phasing-out communities to increase their understanding of the initiative; and 2) the DOE provided additional resources and customized learning experiences for the last cohort of students at the large high schools.

Supporting the Implementation of the Ten Principles of Effective Schools

OUTCOMES TO DATE

In evaluating the New Century schools' performance data, in conjunction with information on the schools' implementation of the Ten Principles, PSA has found that the initiative's overall approach to school improvement seems to be working. "The central finding was that student achievement was enhanced by attendance in [New Century] schools."²¹ PSA explains:

The strongest supporting evidence [for possible program effects of the New Century High Schools Initiative] is that achievement outcomes were anticipated by and consistent with implementation data. Achievement outcomes improved for entrants to NCHSI schools after 2002-03, at which time, implementation data indicate, instruction became more rigorous. Further, achievement outcomes peaked for entrants to NCHSI schools in 2003-04, at which time the measured quality of the schools' instructional climates also peaked.

Further, and importantly, observations and interviews with parents, students and teachers confirmed what implementation and outcome data suggested. [New Century] schools, were in most cases, instructionally focused, rigorous . . . and academically and personally supportive. There were differences among [New Century] schools with regard to thematic integration, the quality of partnerships and the implementation of advisories, but the basic ingredients of success were generally in place.²²

STRATEGIES AND EMERGING CONCLUSIONS FOR SUPPORTING SCHOOLS

Within five years, the New Century High Schools Initiative has shifted focus from expediting the creation of small high schools at scale to ensuring that the new schools meet or exceed the "80/92" performance metric. During this phase of the initiative, New Visions has particularly emphasized four of the Ten Principles of Effective Schools: Leadership; Community Partnership; Teaching and Learning; and Personalized Learning Environments and Youth Development.

Leadership Development

There is a national need for school leaders who are able to effectively lead school change and continual improvement. According to former Teachers College president Arthur Levine, too few university programs are adequately preparing aspiring school leaders for this work.²³ Additionally, too few school systems provide adequate professional learning opportunities and supports for their current and new principals. Historically, New York City public schools exemplify these challenges. For New Century schools, the PSA reports indicate that many principals stepped into

their jobs without previous experience, and, under the administrative demands of the job, struggle to develop as instructional leaders.²⁴

To ensure that New Century schools have the necessary leadership, New Visions conducts principal mentoring, principal-to-principal learning, and school-based leadership development. Although different in approach, each program embraces the principles of distributed leadership and school improvement. New Visions' Principal Mentoring Program, for example, provides first- and second-year mentoring to new NCHSI principals as they start up their schools and implement the Ten Principles of Effective Schools. Its leadership collaboratives foster the use of research-based strategies to solve problems and identify and test promising practices at their schools.

For school-based leadership development, New Visions is partnering with Baruch College to implement the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM). SAM is a unique leadership program that prepares new candidates for principalship and builds leadership capacity across many roles through the work of school improvement. This program grounds leadership training in the day-to-day work of schools as school teams work together to make improvements. As a result, teachers are certified for building-level administration and prepared to lead school improvement.

Community Partnership

One of the New Century High Schools Initiative's founding assumptions is that community partners bring extensive resources, skills, and knowledge to schools in ways that increase student engagement and achievement. School and community partnerships range from the Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment/Brooklyn Botanic Garden to South Brooklyn Community High School/Good Shepherd Services to Facing History School/Facing History and Ourselves. Data suggests that the overall depth and quality of the partnerships has improved since the inception of the initiative, although it continues to vary from school to school. According to PSA, "About one third of the schools . . . had strong partnerships. About one third had partnerships that were successful in specific areas of school life. And about one third had ineffective partnerships."²⁵ Strong partnerships were characterized by schools and partners sharing a common vision and having a partner staff member on site and regularly involved in most areas of the school. In the second category the community partner played a discrete role, such as facilitating after-school programs. In the third category, partner involvement was negligible.

In an effort to further document and share practices, New Visions has hosted several studies about the role of partnerships.²⁶ For example, Dr. Janice Hirota's study of six New Century school partnerships, "Practicing Partnership: Lever for Reform in Public Schools,"²⁷ concludes that small schools and school/community partnerships offer the opportunity to

create dramatically different high school experiences than those provided to students during the last thirty years. This means looking at how school/community partnerships can facilitate non-traditional coursework for students that is embedded in experiences outside of the classroom. It also means creating opportunities for students outside of the school and in the community that foster the development of academic, social, and emotional skills, as well as giving credit toward high school graduation.

Improving Teaching and Learning

Across the nation, one of the biggest challenges facing high schools is creating and maintaining rigorous curricula and instruction. In many cases, they vary widely not only from school to school, but also from classroom to classroom. Often there is a lack of shared understanding of what constitutes high-quality teaching and learning. This was also the case at the beginning of the New Century High Schools Initiative. Although both teachers and students in the first New Century schools reported that they believed their courses were academically challenging, classroom observations of English courses indicated that most instruction was traditional. “The most common performance goal in these classrooms was learning facts, definitions, and content. Teachers’ question strategies indicated that they continued to focus on memorization and recall of facts in their interactions with students.”²⁸

In response, New Visions began teacher development in 2002 through workshops and summer trainings. As the initiative grew, so did the need for more intense and coherent professional learning. Due to the size of the small schools and the lack of subject-area “departments” during start-up, many staff members lacked access to subject-area colleagues and professional learning. Relying on research that suggests cross-school networks among colleagues can stimulate deeper inquiry about practice and foster improved instruction, New Visions reoriented its teacher training to develop content knowledge and instructional expertise through teacher networks. New Visions now leads networks on teacher leadership, humanities, ELL and special education, and literacy.

As noted above, PSA observations, along with other documentation of classroom practices, suggest that classroom practices are improving throughout New Century schools. Overall, NCHSI schools are becoming more rigorous and instructionally focused.

Personalized Learning Environments and Youth Development

New Visions defines personalization as the depth of student-adult relationships and the adult knowledge of individual students’ needs that lets schools make effective decisions about their educational experiences so that they graduate and are prepared for college and/or

the workforce. According to PSA, New Century schools exhibit many signs of personalized learning environments. Parents, students, and teachers believe that the small size of New Century schools is a “huge advantage.”²⁹ PSA also found that “youth development activities were widespread in [New Century] schools. Fifteen of the 20 NCHSI schools we visited twice had a range of well-used extracurricular activities that kept students involved and connected with learning and their local communities.”³⁰

New Visions has sought to deepen the notion of personalization as the initiative has matured. Using data and other information on students, staff members in New Century schools are “personalizing learning” by implementing strategies that are finely tuned toward student needs. Emerging strategies include:

- Looping to increase teaching and learning alignment and to deepen student/teacher relationships from grade to grade.
- Teaming that allows teachers to work together to identify and address the needs of students whom they share and to create alignment in curriculum and instructional strategies.
- Grouping in which students are continually grouped and regrouped based on their learning strengths, needs, and progress.

New Visions is also rethinking personalization as a way to move beyond 80 percent graduation rates to student success in college and/or the workplace. Through the College Bound program, New Visions is working with schools to focus on college readiness, becoming explicit about the skills, in addition to academic preparation, that students need in order to succeed in college. Personalization also means supporting schools in putting the structures, systems, and partnerships in place that guide parents and students through the application process.

Developing Ownership and Capacity to Sustain Secondary Level Reform

OUTCOMES TO DATE

Since 2001, there has been an enormous shift in New York City’s capacity for and commitment to sustaining new small schools and high school transformation. This affirmation of small schools and their impact is taking many forms:

- Financial investments from difficult-to-access public sources, such as the New York City Council, are emerging.
- More than 225 community organizations are partners with NCHSI schools.
- Community boards, elected officials, religious leaders, and

community organizations now join middle school faculty in spreading the word about small school opportunities.

- There is an intensified demand for student placements at small high schools. Within three years of the initiative, student applications surged to 30,000 for 7,000 seats.

STRATEGIES AND EMERGING CONCLUSIONS FOR DEVELOPING OWNERSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

School reform does not happen in a vacuum. Multiple external factors—central office policies and practices on hiring, a resistant regional superintendent, a neighborhood that identifies strongly with its large, albeit failing, high school—can undermine improvement. From the beginning, the NCHSI Theory of Action sought to create systemic conditions that support small schools and high school transformation. New Visions works in two areas: pursuing broad civic involvement and ensuring that policies and procedures are in place to support reform efforts.

Pursuing Broad Civic Involvement and Understanding

New Visions' public education campaign is multifaceted. It includes: disseminating information to community boards; hosting school visits and forums for city and community leaders; and pursuing aggressive communications through select media outlets such as high circulation union newsletters, newspaper inserts, and partnerships with faith-based and community organizations. Strategic alliances with community organizations have been particularly important to the sustainability of this work. At the start of the initiative, some community leaders expressed concern over the speed and spread of new school creation and its impact on students and families. New Visions has engaged them in continual dialogue and visits to schools, and many are now significant allies in the push for school reform and higher student achievement. Their involvement has been critical in insulating the initiative from local politics, particularly during election time.

The partnering organizations have also been critical in leveraging additional resources for New Century schools. New Visions' *Partnership Sustainability Study* established that lead organizational partners bring substantial resources to schools. On average, community-based organizations dedicate \$303,000 per year toward their school partnership; capacity-building organizations contribute \$186,000 per year; arts and cultural organizations contribute \$141,000 per year; and institutions of higher education contribute \$94,000 per year. This study has informed the advocacy work of NCHSI partner organizations and school leadership, resulting in the allocation of \$500,000 from the New York City Council toward sustaining the 16 schools/ community partnerships that came off the initial NCHSI grant in June 2006.

***Ensuring That Policies and Procedures Support
Small Schools and High School Reform***

The rapid pace of school creation required significant changes in the operational supports that affect schools' success or failure. New Visions frequently works with the DOE to adjust policy and procedures in areas such as facilities, student admissions, and budgeting. For example, student admissions became one of the key challenges faced by NCHSI schools. New Visions and the DOE worked to improve the effectiveness of the admissions process and limit inappropriate over-the-counter placements. Similarly, as New Century schools grew, redesigning the physical plant so that it would serve the instructional needs of small schools on a campus became an urgent priority. Working with the School Construction Authority³¹ and the DOE, New Visions developed a facilities master planning process and visual branding program for 18 campuses. The facilities work continues as New Visions partners with the DOE and the School Construction Authority to develop new school construction strategies in which community-based organizations co-locate with schools and strengthen school/community partnerships.

MOVING FORWARD

Systems to Ensure Sustainability

During the next five years of the New Century High Schools Initiative, New Visions will focus on a comprehensive approach for ensuring that New Century schools consistently improve and are sustained. Building upon the first five years of the initiative, New Visions is offering support to a portfolio of 117 affiliated schools, including the 83 New Century schools, through two networks—whole school and practitioner—that are committed to the use of data to improve practices. Whole school networks engage school teams in a continuous process of analyzing student data, developing interventions focused on a specific target population, and assessing the impact of their strategies on the progress toward specific goals, notably meeting or exceeding the 80 percent graduation and 92 percent attendance rates. Practitioner networks are organized to strengthen teaching and learning in specific content areas and areas of practice, such as adolescent literacy or differential instruction.

Additionally, New Visions is building an online open source system, KnowledgeBase, to enable educators to refine and share their work more rigorously and efficiently. The system will make the work of innovative educators more readily available to colleagues and increase New Visions' ability to support the development of strong schools and effective instructional practices. When fully operational, KnowledgeBase will serve as a virtual work space for practitioners at the leading edge of urban school reform, including educators at New Century and other schools, New Visions staff, members of the wider school reform community, and researchers, policymakers, and funders.

Practice and Policy Priorities

The New Century High Schools Initiative and the New York City secondary school system as a whole have made tremendous progress over the last five years. The community and city are actively engaged in and committed to public education. Many new small schools are exhibiting strong educational practices. Innovative approaches to such systemic issues as leadership and teacher development are achieving encouraging results. The DOE has adjusted policy and procedures systemwide to support schools more effectively. Most importantly, more New York City students are graduating from high school on time.

Challenges remain, of course. Most of these are not unique to New York City and, in fact, point to national concerns.

- Moving beyond student graduation to post-secondary success. The NCHSI minimum performance measures of 80 percent graduation and 92 percent attendance rates are just the beginning. High school performance measures need to move beyond graduation toward college readiness as a goal, and high school practices must be readjusted and realigned in accordance. While there is burgeoning work nationally and in some states on college readiness,

the in-depth high school/college connection must occur at the local level. Intermediaries, local districts, schools, and universities must have access to the resources and technical assistance necessary for this intensive work. And businesses must be encouraged to become actively involved in aligning high school and college to meaningful employment opportunities

At New Visions, we will be working with our partner universities to identify and clarify post-secondary expectations for student skills, knowledge, and Regents achievement rates and then integrate these expectations into New Century schools' curricula and student performance measures. This work includes identifying and adding meaningful measures of student performance; examples might include comparing student scores on the SAT/ACT, studying retention rates of New Century schools graduates in post-secondary institutions, and expanding opportunities for students to attain industry-related certifications in conjunction with their high school diplomas.

- *Continuing to improve data collection, analysis, and use.* In order to improve schools at scale, the collection, analysis, and use of data is critical. Yet this research is extremely difficult for most local systems—it is complicated, expensive and requires extensive human resources in helping schools become savvy in using the data. Thanks to generous funders and internal capacity within our own organization and the DOE, the New Century High Schools Initiative has been able to implement a system that provides timely school data, along with a professional development process that makes it usable for school teams.

These effects are just the beginning. Local systems and intermediaries need financial supports and technical assistance to make important information consistently available and usable for educators beyond that currently mandated by *No Child Left Behind*.

- *Providing overage, under-credited youth with a variety of high-quality learning experiences that lead to meaningful opportunities after graduation.* New York City is not alone in its struggle to better serve overage, under-credited students. Many of these students will become the “1.2 million students nationally who will fail to graduate this year.”³² In New York, New Visions is working closely with the New Century schools and other school partners to use data to identify who these students are, why they are behind, and how we guide them toward graduation and beyond. For many of these students, this effort includes redesigning high school to provide multiple pathways toward meaningful post-secondary experiences. It also means creating deeper connections with community partners in order to provide new settings for learning. As a nation, we need to immediately start identifying and developing models for these approaches, assessing their results, and disseminating best practices.
- *Induction and retention of leaders and teachers.* Despite the number of people receiving teacher and administrator certification each year, urban schools continue to need more leaders and teachers than there

are certified personnel willing and/or able to fill those roles. And, as much of the research indicates, too many are leaving the profession.

In partnership with the New York City DOE, New Century schools, and partnering universities, New Visions has learned a great deal about successful school leadership development and the importance of integrating such programs into the day-to-day work of individual schools. In looking to the future, New Visions will concentrate on how to translate these practices into teacher induction and retention programs. While there are examples of innovative and effective ways to certify and recruit teachers, the nation as a whole, and urban schools in particular, needs to move toward models that make induction meaningful and intensive over a period of years, so that teachers' growth is fully supported and their commitment to the profession is sustained.

NOTES

1. EPE Research Center, 2006.
2. *Evaluation of the New Century High Schools Initiative: Report on the Third Year* (Policy Studies Associates, March 31, 2006), iii.
3. New Visions is working with the DOE and the NCHS schools to increase the number of ELL and special education students who attend NCHS schools and to ensure that their learning needs are met.
4. PSA 2006, iii.
5. This is the official city figure, which includes high school equivalency diplomas. The state figure, which does not include such diplomas, is 43 percent. See David Andreatta, "Panel: City Curves Its HS Grads," *New York Post*, November 18, 2006.
6. PSA 2006, 61.
7. The 1999 report *An Institution Adrift* stated that "many of CUNY's [the City University of New York] problems are directly attributable to the failure of [the New York City public school system] and its students to achieve minimal standards of literacy and mathematical understanding before they leave high school." Furthermore, the report indicated that more than 80 percent of New York City public school graduates who entered CUNY at that time required remedial help in basic areas such as reading and mathematics. During the late 1990s, business leaders were also concluding that a significant majority of high school graduates did not have the skills necessary for employment. A 1998 Public Agenda survey reported that 86 percent of the 450 business leaders surveyed said that "a [New York City] High School Diploma is no guarantee that the typical student has learned the basics." In fact, 73 percent stated these students "lack" the skills "needed to succeed in the work world." Benno Schmidt, et. al., *The City University of New York: An Institution Adrift*, Report of the Mayor's Advisory Task Force on the City University of New York, June 15, 1999. Jean Johnson, et. al., *Some Gains, But No Guarantees: How New York City's Employers Rate the Public Schools* (New York: Public Agenda, 1998).
8. *Public High Schools: Private Admissions*, A Report on New York City Practices (New York: Advocates for Children, 1985). *Report on the New York Hearing on the Crisis in Public Education* (New York: Advocates for Children, 1985).
9. *Evaluation of the New Century High School Initiative: Report on Program Implementation in the First Year*, Policy Studies Associates, December 15, 2003, 4.
10. PSA evaluations tend to be one year behind because external parties must wait until the DOE confirms the data and makes it available for analysis. This typically occurs during the fall after the last school year. Thus the *PSA Report on the Third Year*, which was released in March 2006, covers the school year 2004-05.
11. Percentage of students being held back in all grades. This data is significant because it reveals the acute challenge that stems from holdovers in the early years of high school: ninth-grade holdovers are more likely to drop out of school than are promoted students.
12. Students' privacy is protected through a coding system that allows non-school personnel to see individual student data without having access to individual student identities.
13. New York State requires students to accumulate 44 course credits and pass five state Regents exams with a 55 or higher (soon to be 65 or higher) in order to graduate from high school.
14. The 2006 student cohort is the first cohort of students to attend NCHSI schools. They entered ninth grade in 2002.
15. Most recent data available.

16. PSA 2006, i.
17. Ibid, 4. PSA employed a “quasi-experimental design with a constructed comparison group as the counterfactual” (7). For a further description of the comparison schools and students, please see the Research Methods section in PSA 2006.
18. Most recent data available.
19. PSA, 4.
20. Ibid, 38.
21. Ibid, 4.
22. Ibid, 62.
23. Arthur Levine, *Educating School Leaders* (Washington, D.C.: Education Schools Project, March 2005), http://www.edschools.org/reports_leaders.htm.
24. Ibid, 38, 57.
25. Ibid, 55.
26. A third study, *The Partnership Sustainability Project*, analyzes the financial and in-kind commitments from school lead community partners. This study is discussed in detail in this report’s Ownership/Sustainability Section below.
27. Janice M. Hirota, “Practicing Partnership: Lever for Reform in Public Schools,” in *Reframing Education: The Partnership Strategy and Public Schools. A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York* (New York: Youth Development Inst., Fund for the City of NY, New Visions, Sept. 2005) 43-80.
28. *Evaluation of the New Century High Schools Initiative: Evaluation Findings from the Second Year*, Policy Studies Associates, March 16, 2005, Executive Summary ii-v.
29. PSA 2006, 50.
30. Ibid, 53.
31. The School Construction Authority (SCA) was established by the New York State legislature in December 1988 to build new public schools and manage the design, construction, and renovation of capital projects in New York City’s public schools.
32. EPE Research Center, 2006.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

New Visions for Public Schools would like to acknowledge the following contributors to Reforming High Schools:

Stacy Galiatsos, *Writer*

NEW VISIONS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Robert Hughes, *President*

Lili Brown, *Vice President of Development and External Affairs*

Samira Ahmed, *Director of External Affairs*

Theresa McKenna, *Director of Development*

Jason Mazza, *Publications Officer*

Elena Melendy, *Publications Officer*

Tracey Marie Allen, *Communications Associate*

New Visions wishes to thank the principals, partners, staff, parents, and students of the 83 schools in the New Century High Schools Initiative whose hard work and dedication are changing the face of education in New York City.



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