Intermediate Report Card

New Century High Schools and the Small Schools Movement in New York City

New Visions for Public Schools
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Dear New Yorkers,

For too long New York City’s high schools have not prepared even a majority of students for graduation. There is no single solution to the problems confronting our schools, but we need to do better—and we can.

Over the past several years, New York City has undertaken a far-reaching process of education reform. This report describes one of the most exciting aspects of this reform, the creation of innovative, new small high schools as part of the New Century High Schools Initiative. We have worked closely with New Visions for Public Schools to involve thousands of New Yorkers who deeply care about our children’s education. This initiative represents the best of what New York City can be.

Four years into a decade-long process, the New Century High Schools Initiative has created a portfolio of 75 new small high schools, with 15 more opening in 2005 and 2006, using a selective process that incorporates everything we know about what works in education—rigorous and relevant curricula, strong parent and community involvement and greater personal attention for every child. These new schools are preparing New York City students to meet the challenges of higher education, work and citizenship in the 21st century. They are moving our City forward.

Like earlier generations’ efforts to build our parks, bridges, monuments and museums, our civic commitment to reform our high schools will shape our economic and social destiny for decades to come. Now is a time for action: With the lives of thousands of young people and our City’s future tied to these efforts, we must all work together to succeed.

Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor

Joel I. Klein
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education

Randi Weingarten
President
The United Federation of Teachers

Jill Levy
President
Council of School Supervisors and Administrators
New York City has a number of public high schools that are known for excellence, yet system-wide results are poor. Across New York City, only 51% of high school students graduate in four years, and in historically low-performing schools the graduation rate averages just 31%. Only one-third of the city’s graduates earn Regents diplomas, signifying preparation for college-level work. Students who do graduate often require remediation before they can perform college-level work and frequently lack the skills to be economically viable.

The New Century High Schools Initiative is a decade-long effort to change these results. The initiative is part of the New York City Department of Education’s broader efforts to create meaningful educational choices for New York City high school students. The initiative, which has been supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Open Society Institute, seeks to transform learning at our lowest-performing campuses and introduce innovation into all schools. Research shows that small schools are the environments where meaningful changes have the best chance of being realized.

The initiative represents the work of a huge coalition of concerned New Yorkers—educators, parents, students, administrators, educational experts and 225 community organizations. From its inception, the New Century High Schools Initiative has been a unique partnership among diverse institutions, including the Department of Education, the United Federation of Teachers, the Council of Supervisors and Administrators and others. We have drawn on lessons from past efforts in New York City and nationally to guide us.

Left: In the Bronx, sophomores analyze fluid samples to chart the incidence of endemic diseases in New York City.
Rethinking an outmoded system

New York City’s high schools work for some students but not all. One of the reasons our school system does not educate the majority of the student population well is because it was designed specifically not to do so. As the *New York Times* recently explained:

> Developed a century ago, the standard factory-style high school was conceived as a combination holding area and sorting device that would send roughly one-fifth of its students on to college while moving the rest directly into low-skill jobs. It has no tools to rescue the students who arrive unable to read at grade level but are in need of the academic grounding that will qualify them for 21st-century employment.

The world has changed. The blue-collar jobs that once sustained young adults no longer exist and individuals with limited education have few options in the new, knowledge-based economy. Yet the way we educate young people has remained virtually the same. In most New York City high schools, students have hundreds if not thousands of classmates—more than 5,000 in some schools. They shift from class to class in 40 or 42-minute periods. They are isolated from adults, feel disconnected from their studies, and become accustomed to low expectations. When they lag behind, they have little prospect of catching up.

New York City’s human, physical and financial resources have been locked into an outmoded system. We need to retool our educational system to meet the reality of the 21st century.

The research on how students learn best

Can the system do better in preparing young people for higher education, work and citizenship in the 21st century? Research based on successful schools around the country says yes. In 2000, the Department of Education, New Visions for Public Schools, the United Federation of Teachers and the Council of Supervisors and Administrators took a hard look at the experience of school reform across the country as well as in New York City: We wanted to know: Where do students learn best? What helps lagging students catch up and excel? How do failing systems become successful ones?

As it turns out, there is little debate about what makes a school effective. Academic rigor, relevant curriculum and strong educational relationships help stimulate high levels of academic achievement and help bring lagging students up to standards. Research shows that small schools—around 100 students—are the environments where these characteristics are most likely to be realized. In a small school, everyone knows one another. Education is personal. Both talents and deficiencies are visible and can be addressed.

We know from experience, including New Visions’ experience starting 40 new schools in New York City between 1993 and 1998, that one size does not fit all. A viable school system must offer a diverse set of environments if it is to engage all students in education.

Challenge New Century High Schools are designed to be relevant and accessible to families and neighborhoods. However, families in poor neighborhoods have traditionally had the worst options in public education. Parents need to be aware that new small school options exist in their neighborhoods so that they can make informed choices.

Response Each year New Visions, the Department of Education and partners have held multiple school fairs throughout the city to provide information on new small schools. We have also met with faith leaders, local community organizations and elected officials to garner support. In partnership with the *New York Post* and *El Diario* we have distributed 800,000 copies of our Small Schools Guide in Spanish and English across the city.

Our outreach continues to ensure that all students and families can take full advantage of the range of new high school options.
Spurring innovation by creating new schools
Creating new schools can be a tremendous opportunity to spur innovation and detach from past behaviors and patterns. Starting from scratch allows educators and community members to think about what should be rather than what is.

In 2001, New Visions and its partners launched a series of community-based competitions to generate plans for new schools. Teams of educators, community groups, parents and students worked for many months under the supervision and coaching of educational experts to develop new school proposals. Over three years of school creation, more than 250 planning teams have crafted concept papers and school proposals. Through a highly selective process, 75 of these school proposals were selected by New Visions, the Department of Education, funders and unions to develop into New Century High Schools.

Partnerships to strengthen schools and support students
Schools can be made stronger and more effective by inviting the ongoing support of nonprofit community organizations. Students learn better when more adults are involved in their education. Community organizations that partner with schools add experience with youth, expertise, internships, training, social services, facilities, financial resources and adults who care.

Ten Characteristics of Effective High Schools

At root, excellent schools have the same set of characteristics. We identified these fundamental characteristics and made them the scaffolding for creating new schools. We continue to work with schools to help them fully realize a shared vision of excellence in education.

1. A Rigorous Instructional Program
2. Personalized Relationships
3. Clear Focus and Expectations
4. Instructional Leadership
5. School-based Professional Development and Collaboration
6. Continuous Assessment of Student Learning
7. Partnerships with Community Organizations
8. Family/Caregiver Engagement and Involvement
9. Student Participation and Youth Development
10. Effective Uses of Technology and Information Resources

Challenge: Most New Century High Schools are replacing large, low-performing schools slated to be closed because of chronic failure. The new schools are being introduced as old schools are being phased out. In some instances, tensions have arisen in response to the challenge of sharing limited campus resources.

Response: We are working closely with the Department of Education and individual schools to make the transition process more transparent. At Evander Childs High School, New Visions has developed a visual representation of the transition plan that shows exactly how space will be reconfigured and shared as enrollments change. We have also established campus governance councils: forums for schools housed on the same campuses to exchange information, share resources and work out conflicts before they occur. More broadly, we are working with schools to reframe the campus as a resource that can benefit all. The goal is for ailing campuses to develop into vibrant community institutions.
Partners enrich education by finding ways to engage the whole student. Partner organizations help students develop critical thinking skills. They provide meaningful opportunities for self-expression. They give voice to the needs, talents and aspirations of students.

There are now 225 partner organizations working with New Century High Schools, ranging from One Hundred Black Men Inc., to Lincoln Center Institute, to East Side House Settlement. Partner organizations include: museums, arts and cultural organizations; universities, conservatories and research institutes; educational organizations; family, youth and social services organizations; healthcare providers; professional organizations; and advocacy groups.

Moving quickly to scale
Real reform requires changing at scale. At the most preliminary level, scale involves starting and supporting a significant number of new schools. The Department of Education and New Visions started in the Bronx, focusing in particular on six traditional Bronx high schools that required radical reform. Today these campuses house 26 New Century High Schools. The initiative has since expanded to eight of the Department of Education’s ten regions. New Century High Schools are now located in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan.

But creating innovative new schools is just the first step. It is critical to focus on what happens in the school and deepen the implementation of the New Century design principles to improve student outcomes. It will take many years for these schools to attain their goals of transforming the learning and achievement of New York City’s young people. Still, we are making great progress thanks to the leadership of Chancellor Klein and the Department of Education and the strong support of thousands of educators, parents and members of the community.

The timeline on the following pages provides additional details about the research, planning and execution of the process of creating New Century High Schools.
**NEW CENTURY HIGH SCHOOLS INITIATIVE:**

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<tbody>
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**WORK TO DATE**

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<tr>
<th>SCHOOLS</th>
<th>CAMPUSES</th>
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<tr>
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<td>71</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13,800</td>
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### Supporting New Century Visions mounts extensive community engagement campaign in Brooklyn to build support for small schools

- March 2002: 14,000 students apply to 14 large Bronx high schools and retrofits 60
- In partnership with the Leadership Academy, New Visions provides year-long, on-site mentoring to 19 New Century principals
- DOE holds scores of workshops for educators on school design, budgeting, hiring and building partnerships with community-based organizations

### New Visions Launches Faith Leaders Campaign in Brooklyn to Ensure That Students and Parents Have Information to Make Informed Choices about Small Schools

- Summer 2002: New Visions distributes 800,000 copies of Small Schools Guide in English and Spanish

### Additional New Century Schools

- Jan 2003: New Visions helps secure $26.2 million from the Bronx delegation to the City Council to improve facilities at 14 large Bronx high schools and retrofit 8 New Century High School campuses
- July 2003: New Visions conducts utilization surveys on 12 campuses, identifying existing capacity for several hundred additional seats
- 5,000 parents attend Bronx admissions fair for small schools, generating 30,000 applications for 7,000 seats
- Jan 2003: DOE consolidates 40 school districts into 10 regions
- Sept 2003: Mayor announces plan to create up to 200 small high schools

### New Visions Supports DOE’s Efforts to Establish Building Councils on the Large High School Campuses Undergoing Transition

- May 2004: Bronx Coalition for Small Schools, representing students, parents, educators and community organizations, draws 800 people to rally in support of new schools
- DOE submits new 5-year capital plan for $13.1 billion including $4.0 billion to expand school capacity
- DOE undertakes massive analysis of existing student population and creates multiple pathways strategy for overage and undercredited students

### Planning

- Jan 2002: “No Child Left Behind” act signed into law in Washington
- Jan-Aug 2002: New Visions holds series of workshops for educators on school design, budgeting, hiring and building partnerships with community-based organizations
- 110 Planning Teams
- 48 Planning Grants

### Capital Planning

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### Funding

- Carnegie Corporation of New York, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Open Society Institute provide $31 million to stimulate school reform and creation of small schools in NYC
- United Federation of Teachers, Council of Supervisors and Administrators, New Visions for Public Schools, Board of Education and Funders establish core team to manage New Century High Schools Initiative
- New Visions broadly disseminates Request for Proposals on new school creation to educators and community organizations

### Timeline

- 1983: Publication of “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform,” an historic study documenting gross failures in U.S. educational system
- 1993-98: New Visions helps create 40 new small schools
- 1999: Election of Michael Bloomberg as Mayor of New York City
- 2000: Bronx superintendency targets 6 large low-performing high schools for transformation into campuses of small schools
- 2001: Brooklyn superintendency joins New Century High Schools Initiative and targets 3 large low-performing high schools for small school reform
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- 2003: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grants additional $158 million to New Visions and 8 other intermediaries to create and support small schools in NYC
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**NEW CENTURY HIGH SCHOOLS INITIATIVE: FLOOR PLAN**

- **Chancellor Klein:** Oct 2002
- **Chancellor of Schools:**
- **EVENTS AFFECTING SCHOOL REFORM**
- **Aug 2002:** Joel Klein becomes Chancellor of Schools
- **Jan 2002:** “No Child Left Behind” act signed into law in Washington
- **Sept 2003:** Mayor announces plan for 1,700 spots in Bronx small schools
- **March 2002:** 14,000 students apply to 14 large Bronx high schools
- **Jan 2003:** DOE consolidates 40 school districts into 10 regions
- **Feb–Oct 2002:** New Visions underwrites $26.2 million from the Bronx delegation to the City Council to improve facilities at 14 large Bronx high schools
- **Jun 2003:** New Visions helps secure $4.0 billion to expand school capacity
- **Nov 2002:** New Visions supports DOE’s efforts to establish building councils on the large high school campuses undergoing transition
- **May 2004:** Bronx Coalition for Small Schools, representing students, parents, educators and community organizations, draws 800 people to rally in support of new schools
- **450,000 copies of Small Schools Guide distributed in English and Spanish**

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How do we measure progress in educational reform? We review objective data in the context of long-term goals.

We expect New Century High Schools ultimately to reach graduation rates of 80% and attendance rates of 92%. Every New Century High School student must pass five Regents exams to graduate. It is too early to measure graduation rates but early indicators suggest that we are making progress toward these ambitious goals.

Promotion. From 2002–2004, ninety-three percent of New Century High School students were promoted from 9th grade, compared with 68% of the city as a whole.

Attendance. New Century High Schools had attendance rates of 90%, compared with 75% at host schools.

Regents exams. By the end of their sophomore year, 88% of students at the 28 New Century High Schools opened by 2003 had passed the Living Environment Regents exam and 64% had passed the Math Regents exam. Students still had six exam periods remaining to pass these exams as well as those offered later in high school.

Overall performance. On the basis of data collected for the 2002–03 and 2003–04 school years, Policy Studies Associates concluded, “On all the quantitative measures currently available to the evaluation, the New Century High Schools are producing positive changes for the students whom they enroll.”

It will take many years for these innovative schools to reach their potential and transform student achievement. Still, after four years, it is clear that New Century High Schools are building momentum for change. New Century High Schools constitute a vibrant, new portfolio of choice for New York City’s students and families. They employ a variety of cultural, civic and community assets to engage students in learning. These schools are already providing new educational options to thousands of New York City’s neediest students.

1Data collected from New Century High Schools by New Visions for Public Schools.
NEW CENTURY HIGH SCHOOLS: A NEW PORTFOLIO OF CHOICE FOR STUDENTS

MATH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (9 SCHOOLS)
In these New Century High Schools, students study math, science, technology, environmental science and related fields as a means of becoming scientifically literate, engaged citizens who are critical thinkers, active learners and effective problem solvers. Students develop intellectually and personally through interdisciplinary projects that are both academically rigorous and personally meaningful.

ARTS, HUMANITIES AND LITERACY (17 SCHOOLS)
Students in these New Century High Schools integrate the study of the arts, the humanities and the written word with the academic curriculum. Writing, literature, music, visual arts, theater, video and film are used as catalysts for learning and personal excellence. Students engage in internships, volunteer work, interdisciplinary projects and performance to further their academic and personal development.

CAREER (20 SCHOOLS)
The professions are vehicles for stimulating curiosity, academic achievement and personal development in these diverse New Century High Schools, which combine coursework with real-world experience in particular careers. With the support of their schools’ community partner organizations, students engage in career discovery and interdisciplinary learning projects through internships, volunteer activities, job shadowing, field trips and mentoring.

LEADERSHIP, SERVICE AND JUSTICE (23 SCHOOLS)
Many New Century High Schools are supported by longstanding community-based organizations with experience in social services and youth development. These schools have created safe, family-like environments that focus on supporting students in their academic and personal growth, while challenging them to exert leadership in their schools and neighborhoods. In connection with community partners, these schools provide college advisors, after-school tutoring, part-time employment for financially eligible students, and additional support services.

UNIQUE STUDENT POPULATIONS (6 SCHOOLS)
Many students in New York City are in a state of personal transition or have special academic or personal needs. Several New Century High Schools focus on unique student populations. These include schools serving immigrant students who enter high school with low levels of English-language ability; students who are over-age or who have previously dropped out of school; students who have been previously incarcerated; and students who due to personal or family circumstance need an especially strong level of support services.

Challenge
Many high schools are dilapidated and overcrowded following decades of inadequate capital investment by New York State and New York City combined with substantial increases in the city’s school-age population. These problems are most acute in New York City’s poorest neighborhoods, where most New Century High Schools are located.

Response
New Visions and its partners have supported efforts to create thousands of additional classroom seats. Working collaboratively with the Department of Education, we have used statistical analysis to find underutilized space in existing buildings; persuaded the City Council to reallocate millions in discretionary funds towards facilities improvement; advocated for purchase of non-DOE buildings for use in secondary education; worked with community housing developers to build new space for schools; and helped the School Construction Authority streamline its building process.
CONCLUSION: 
COMMITTING TO BETTER RESULTS

The New Century High Schools Initiative is about nothing less than remaking secondary education in New York City. We are building a new system dedicated to higher student performance where adults inside and outside of school—educators, parents and members of the community—take responsibility for the long-term achievement of students. We have set strict targets to measure our progress. New Century High Schools are committed to attendance rates of 92% or higher and graduation rates of 80% or higher. And students at New Century High Schools must pass five Regents exams to graduate.

We have articulated these goals knowing that we may not reach them in the first instance. Yet we know that only by setting goals, measuring our progress and constantly improving our practice can we ensure that our young people will be fully prepared for the challenges of the 21st century.

New York City’s young people need your support. They need you to advocate for quality, access and equity in education. They need you to demand high standards, both of them and of the school system. And they need you to stay with this struggle. Real change takes time and our work has just begun.

We know what works. What we need now is the will to make it happen. Please join us.
New Visions for Public Schools, founded in 1989, is the largest education reform organization dedicated to improving the quality of education children receive in New York City's public schools. Working with the public and private sectors, New Visions develops programs and policies to energize teaching and learning and to raise the level of student achievement. Our goal is to ensure that all students have access to effective schools that enable them to realize their full potential and become productive citizens.

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