

## **New Visions for Public Schools Transfer School Creation Report**

*August, 2007*

### **Overview**

In 2006, New Visions began work with the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and community partners to create six transfer schools. The need for these schools was clear: 138,000 youth between the ages of 16 and 21 were overage and undercredited. Half of these, representing 20% of New York City's public high school population, were students still enrolled but barely engaged in traditional high schools; the other half had already dropped out of the system.

Traditional high schools were simply unequipped to serve the needs of this population, most of whom struggled with significant academic deficiencies and a variety of challenging personal circumstances. Building on the work of Good Shepherd Services at South Brooklyn Community High School, a New Century high school, and research conducted for the DOE by the Parthenon Group identifying transfer schools as a key component of a comprehensive multiple-pathways strategy, the New Visions transfer school model incorporates:

- Rigorous instruction, aligned with standards, that prepares students for post-secondary success;
- Comprehensive student supports and opportunities that meet the needs of the overage and undercredited population effectively; and
- Youth development principles integrated into both rigorous instruction and student supports and opportunities.

In collaboration with the DOE and key community partners, we have begun work that will expand New York City's capacity to serve its overage, undercredited students. That work has not gone unnoticed: on August 21, *The New York Times* identified New York City as *the* school district on the "forefront of a movement" to provide educational alternatives to the most disconnected students. We have made much progress in the last year, including the:

- Creation of a transfer school development team to oversee the planning and creation phases of the school openings;
- Completion of a thorough search and review process resulting in the selection of seven new transfer school planning teams, two of which, Jill Chaifetz Transfer High School and Brooklyn Bridge Academy, have been approved and will open their doors this fall; and
- Development of a comprehensive professional development and support structure for participating schools.

Of several early indicators validating the importance of this work, perhaps the most telling has been the overwhelming demand expressed by students and families: in total, the two new transfer schools received approximately two applications for every available seat, and one instituted a waiting list mid-summer. Clearly, this initiative has identified a deep need among NYC's public school students. New Visions is on the leading edge of addressing that need.

## **New Visions Transfer Schools Unit**

The New Visions Transfer School Unit was created to oversee the planning, creation, and implementation phases of all New Visions-supported transfer schools. The unit currently provides support to a total of seven schools. In addition, the Transfer School team supports two pre-existing New Century transfer schools (South Brooklyn Community High School and Bushwick Community High School) and three pre-existing transfer schools operating within the New Visions PSO (West Brooklyn Community High School, North Queens Community High School, and Bronx Community High School). The work of the Transfer Schools team provides integrated support for school personnel and access to New Visions resources and professional development networks. In addition, New Visions acts as the primary liaison with the DOE during the proposal phase and after.

In order to provide the array of supports necessary to ensure the viability of the new schools, New Visions has assembled an experienced and dedicated team, including:

- Shane Santo Mulhern, Senior Executive of the Transfer Schools Unit, has played multiple roles at the DOE, most recently serving as the Executive Director of the Office of Youth Development and School-Community Services and Chief of Staff to Michele Cahill. Mr. Mulhern brings a wealth of expertise to New Visions in the area of overage and undercredited youth, as well as established relationships inside and outside the NYC DOE that allow him to work seamlessly with key stakeholders.
- Jessica Furer, Program Officer, played a major role in the reorganization of the DOE's Office of Youth Development. Ms. Furer also brings a valuable knowledge base from her previous work, which included serving as a program reviewer at the New York Community Trust, a school development counselor at Urban Assembly, and a middle school and high school teacher.
- Jean Thomases, Senior Consultant, has served as an advisor to the President at New Visions for over five years. Her prior experience included fifteen years with Good Shepherd Services, where she was involved in the creation of the program that would ultimately become South Brooklyn Community High School, the school on which New Visions' transfer model was based.

In addition to creating this team, New Visions has forged a strategic partnership with Good Shepherd Services, a social services and youth development agency with extensive experience in transfer school development. Good Shepherd serves as both a community-based partner and an intermediary to a portfolio of transfer schools, a number of which are also served by New Visions. In addition, the New Visions transfer model is based largely on the work of Good Shepherd at South Brooklyn Community High School. The two organizations will work together to ensure high quality by developing both instructional and partner capacities within the schools they serve.

The Transfer School Unit also works closely with Michael Rothman, a facilitator on the New Visions Leadership Development team, who provides training to principals in the area of instructional leadership. Michael worked previously with the DOE as an achievement coach, where he assisted principals in using departmental data, planned and delivered professional development, and co-developed a knowledge management system for sharing best practices. Before that, Michael was co-founder and Executive Director of the Project for School Innovation in Boston, where he led over 500 principals and teachers in creating effective systems and practices to improve education

for over 10,000 students. In addition, Michael is the author and editor of numerous books, articles and films on education.

### **School Selection Process**

The Transfer School Unit engaged in a thorough vetting and matching process for prospective community-based organizations and principal candidates, to ensure that each party entered the relationship with the requisite skills, knowledge and commitment to serve the complex needs of the overage and undercredited student population.

The selection process for community-based organizations was based on a set of core criteria. Each organization had to demonstrate financial health, knowledge of and experience with the target population, a commitment to do the necessary fundraising, and the ability to make a multi-year commitment and make the shift from fee-for-service provider to a shared governance model. In some cases, Transfer School staff identified and approached organizations who met these criteria; in others, interested community-based organizations reached out to the Transfer School Unit. In both cases, the Transfer School Unit engaged in two to four interviews with senior staff at potential community-based organizations, including the executive director and directors of relevant programs. Following these conversations, the Transfer School Unit made a determination about whether organizations had the commitment and capacity to engage in the work of transfer school creation.

Principal candidates were selected through a similarly extensive outreach and vetting process. Criteria for this critical leadership role were identified as: ability to act as an instructional leader—particularly in the areas of differentiation and literacy across the curriculum—commitment to and experience with overage and undercredited youth, and commitment to working in partnership with a community-based organization under a shared governance model. The Transfer Schools team reached out to potential candidates through open houses, DOE sponsored events, and postings on a number of web sites. Outreach efforts prompted the submission of dozens of applications, from which the Transfer School team selected the strongest candidates for interviews. A second round of interviews included reference checks and deeper conversation around the identified criteria. Finally, New Visions facilitated a series of meetings between successful principal candidates and community-based organizations in order to ensure that the respective parties were well matched for joint leadership of a transfer school.

Seven planning teams emerged from the selection process. Given the demand for transfer schools and the commitment among key stakeholders, the transfer school team decided to accelerate the pace of school openings. Under the revised plan, two schools will open this fall and an additional five are currently involved in a structured planning process, with plans to interview before the DOE in December and, pending approval, open in fall of 2008. The expedited calendar creates an additional benefit, as well. By engaging in this process simultaneously with multiple teams, New Visions will create a community of practitioners who can learn with and from each other as they navigate the challenging early years of transfer school creation.

The following schools will open this fall:

- Jill Chaifetz Transfer School is located at a temporary site in Southwest Bronx. The school will serve 125 students in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), a Bronx-based organization providing economic and social support to families and communities most in

need since 1972. In addition to strong ties within the Bronx community, CAB has extensive experience serving high-school aged youth, including career development, dropout prevention, and college-preparatory programming. Jill Chaifetz's principal, Anne Fennelly, is the former assistant principal, as well as a founding staff member, of the Community School for Social Justice, a New Century high school.

- Brooklyn Bridge Academy, located in the Canarsie neighborhood of Brooklyn and serving 150 students, will operate in partnership with FECS Health and Human Services System (FECS). Established in 1934, FECS is the nation's largest health and human services-related non-profit organization. Of particular relevance to this project is FECS' experience running programs related to dropout prevention and college/career planning, as well as participation in several initiatives within New York City's Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation and extensive counseling and mental health programming. Adele Fabrikant is the incoming principal of Brooklyn Bridge Academy. Prior to joining the Brooklyn Bridge Academy, Ms. Fabrikant oversaw the implementation of Kaplan K12 Learning Service high school curricula for the city of St. Louis. Before that, her experience in education included four years each of classroom teaching and non-profit management, curriculum development, and the start-up of FECS's first Young Adult Borough Center.

The following schools are currently engaged in the planning process, with plans to open in 2008:

- VOYAGES Preparatory will open in partnership with Queens Community House, a settlement house with over 30 years of experience providing programs that assist, strengthen, and help improve the quality of life for the Queens community.
- Staten Island Community High School will open in partnership with the New York Center for Interpersonal Development (NYCID). NYCID has been bringing people and communities together since 1970 through quality programs and services that teach violence prevention, constructive problem solving, and conflict resolution.
- Bronx Academy for Self-Empowerment (BASE) will open in partnership with Graham-Windham, American's oldest, non-sectarian, nonprofit child welfare agency, an organization that established its own school in order to do the work of caring for their children academically as well as socially/emotionally.
- Bronx Haven High School will open in partnership with East Side House, Inc. (aka East Side House Settlement), a community resource that provides after-school and evening programs to nearly 1,700 children, ages 2-17, in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx.
- A planning team has assembled for a fifth transfer school that has yet to be named. The CBO partner will be Brooklyn Bureau of Community Services, a social services organization operating in Brooklyn since 1866.

### **Professional Development and Support Structure**

The professionals working in these new schools face a unique set of challenges. New Visions is working with the DOE and Good Shepherd Services to provide the resources that will help them address those challenges. To that end, we have offered, and will continue to offer, an array of professional supports before and after the school openings this fall:

- *Better Futures Conference (April 2007)*. Run by the Youth Development Institute with support from New Visions and two other intermediary organizations, the conference was designed to build capacity among participating community-based partners prior to the opening of the

transfer schools. The conference focused on orienting community-based partners to the Multiple Pathways strategy employed by New York City, the role their organizations can play in supporting overage and undercredited students, and the use of data in supporting that work. In addition to helping with planning, New Visions Transfer School team members participated in several of the conference's panel discussions.

- *Summer Professional Development.* New Visions facilitated a three week summer professional development institute. The purpose of the first week was twofold: to familiarize staff from Jill Chaifetz and Brooklyn Bridge Academy with the New Visions transfer school model, and to build cohesive communities around the shared mission and goals of the schools. Weeks two and three, conducted in partnership with Good Shepherd Services, included faculty and staff from all four New Visions transfer schools. Together, this larger community of practitioners focused on developing a common language and common instructional frameworks for their work with young people, creating strategies to build critical thinking skills and re-engage students in learning, and build lesson and unit plans while receiving detailed peer feedback. Throughout the upcoming school year, New Visions will facilitate the provision of twenty sessions to deepen the lessons educators took from these summer sessions.

New Visions will continue to provide supports to each new school following its opening this fall. A key component of this support will be the coaching provided by Michael Rothman to school principals. With Michael's guidance, and using the methodology of New Visions' Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM), principals will lead teams of staff members through in-depth analysis of student data, which will inform the development of interventions to support struggling students. The SAM methodology is particularly suited for application in transfer schools, where staff will be required to tailor their instruction to address diverse skill levels and learning styles. Early SAM data indicates its deep, targeted use of data helps teachers craft truly differentiated lessons, resulting in improvements for even the most difficult to educate students.

## **Challenges**

As the new schools prepare to open, New Visions is addressing two challenges confronting its transfer schools: facilities and integrated data systems.

Currently the two new schools are located on shared campuses rather than stand-alone sites. New Visions remains engaged in conversations geared toward alleviating the challenges of multiple schools sharing a single building.

Transfer school personnel also face challenges related to their highly specific data needs and the highly individualized nature of programming for overage, undercredited students. Currently, principals and teachers generate quantitative data on student performance, and the program director and advocates record qualitative data on the personal development of students. No data system exists that allows integration of the two sets of data. In addition, the school staff currently determines scheduling and programming for the students manually. This represents a major logistical challenge that is unique to transfer schools, as the schools are ungraded and serve students with specific and highly varying academic needs.

New Visions has begun researching technological solutions to these informational challenges. The transfer school team is in conversation with a number of vendors to explore the availability of data systems that are adaptable to the needs of transfer school personnel. Development of a data system specific to the needs of transfer schools would represent a novel contribution to the field of serving overage and undercredited youth.

### **Looking Ahead**

New Visions and its partners aim not only to open transfer schools to serve New York City's overage and undercredited population, but also to sustain and grow that work over time. Moving forward, then, we see a need to think strategically about the following questions:

- How can New Visions and our partners in this work “plug in” to the national network of alternative high schools? We believe that the work we are doing has relevance beyond New York City, and vice versa. Thus, we are exploring opportunities to engage with the larger national community of professionals interested in creating multiple pathways to a high school diploma.
- How can New Visions continue to expand the scope of alternative high school programming, so that *all* students who want a high school diploma can achieve one? Our transfer schools have committed to working with students entering at or above a fifth-grade reading level. Many overage and undercredited students, however, cannot meet that threshold and would need to spend at least one year improving their literacy skills in order to begin earning high school credits. For these students, there would not be enough time to earn the credits and pass the tests necessary before “aging out” of the school system at 21. Others, having already dropped out of high school, haven't engaged in the application process for admission to a transfer school. Looking ahead, a key task will be to explore the population not currently served via any of the city's multiple pathways to graduation, and to identify the policy and structural work necessary to continue sealing the cracks through which too many students are allowed to fall.