

New Visions for Public Schools College Bound Proposal

Project Need:

Recent and ongoing changes in the global economy and U.S. demographics have intensified the demand for strategies that work for under-prepared adolescents. More than two-thirds of American jobs require some post-secondary education (*Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?* ACT, Inc., 2006). Clearly, our students need to be going to, and succeeding in, college. Numerous studies that have tracked the impact of a high school versus college diploma on lifetime earning potential show an increasingly stark disparity. But almost all of our students are the first in their families to even consider attending college. Myths and misperceptions about the cost of college, what it takes to get in, and the level of rigor a college education demands persist.

For the past nine years, the College Bound Program has been helping urban students overcome the obstacles that keep them from going to college by working with schools to establish supportive, college bound cultures. Through work with guidance counselors, college advisors and students, College Bound helps schools set the expectation from day one that college will be a viable option for their students – regardless of their family’s financial situation – and provide students with the knowledge and resources they need to make college a reality.

Target Population and Location: We will be working with guidance counselors, college advisors and 9th – 12th grade students at the 58 secondary schools in New Visions PSO network through the College Bound Program (five of New Visions’ 63 PSO schools contain only elementary grades). These schools, which include small and large high schools, 6-12 schools and transfer schools, are located in all five boroughs of New York City. The student population of these schools is 40% Hispanic, 38% black, 12% white, 8% Asian, 0.4% Native American, and 2% unidentified. Sixty-eight percent receive free or reduced lunch.

Numbers Served:

New Visions’ PSO network of secondary schools will serve 26,286 students in the first year. Nearly half of these students – 12,400 – are juniors and seniors about to embark on the college application process. While the number of schools that we will be working with under the new PSO structure is fewer than before, the number of juniors and seniors has actually increased. We hope to touch most of these students at some level through the *College Planning Guide*, *Scholarships for New York City Students*, and the College Fair.

Twenty guidance counselors and/or college advisors will participate in the program on an intense level through the two College Bound Networks. We expect as many as 50 additional counselors to participate in the workshops and/or College Fair.

Detailed project description and plan of action:

In our new role as a Partnership Support Organization (PSO), New Visions will lead school improvement in an environment in which we share accountability for student achievement and are encouraged to innovate to meet student and school needs. Our track record with using data to drive instruction, creating systems to spread knowledge systematically across practitioners, and disseminating our findings through publications and other vehicles ensures that our efforts can be applied to other New York City schools and nationally.

New Visions is now raising the bar for student achievement at our schools by shifting the performance standard from achieving at least 80% high school graduation to 80% college and career ready graduation. We believe that a high school diploma is not enough to ensure economic success over a student's lifetime, and that the diploma's requirements must incorporate the assets necessary to succeed in college. While more of our students are making it to their high school graduation ceremony, far too few are making it to their college commencement.

To help support this intensified focus on college readiness, New Visions recently received a four-year, \$10 million grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to help us ensure that all of the secondary schools in our PSO graduate at least 80% of their students on time and college ready. We have developed a preliminary metric to help predict students' success in college. For example, students need to achieve a minimum score of 75 on their math and science Regents exams to even have the chance at succeeding in these subjects at the college level. In fact, four-year CUNY schools, which many NYC students choose to attend, won't admit students who score less than a 75 on either exam; they must first complete two years of remediation (without credit) at a two-year CUNY school, and then they are able to transfer to a four-year school.

As always, the overarching goal for the College Bound Program in 2007-2008 will be to prepare students to get into and succeed in college. Program objectives for our work next year include:

- Integrating College Bound with other supports that New Visions provides to schools in our PSO network, and ensuring that college access and college readiness strategies and supports are aligned;
- Helping schools create systems, structures and tools that enable them to develop and sustain college bound work;
- Building skills and knowledge of school counselors;
- Strengthening relationships between New Visions' schools and colleges;
- Documenting and disseminating materials and best practices across New Visions' community of 58 secondary schools; and
- Increasing program reach and visibility, both within our community of schools and across New York City.

Networks

Our College Bound Networks, which involved 18 counselors/advisors from the Bronx and Brooklyn over the past year, proved to be an effective strategy for engaging college counselors and advisors in developing strategies to help students apply to and get into college. This year we propose to run two Networks, with 10 participants each, from New Visions' PSO schools. The whole group will come together six to eight times during the year, with more time spent on site at each school in between meetings (up to five visits to each school). These site visits allow us to better understand the culture of the school and better address the college advisors' specific needs. A portion of the Network sessions will be hosted by local college campuses, a practice that we began last year that proved to be very useful for participants.

The difference between the networks last year and what we propose for this year is that the College Bound Networks will be part of an integrated support system that New Visions provides to each school around college access and readiness rather than a stand alone opportunity. Each school in

our PSO network will be assigned a New Visions facilitator, at a ratio of one facilitator for every five to eight schools. They will also have access to an “expert bank” of experienced educators and school leaders. The facilitator will coordinate all of the supports New Visions provides to each school, and will work closely with the College Bound program officer to make sure his work with the school’s counselor/advisor is aligned with other college-focused strategies. Additionally, we will work with each school in the College Bound Network to assemble a College Access Team, to include the guidance counselor and/or college advisor, as well as school leadership, parents, partners, and teachers. With New Visions’ guidance, this team will be responsible for organizing the integration of college preparation into every aspect of the school (e.g., classes, advisory, workshops, after school programs). For example, the College Access Team might determine that English classes are the best place for students to complete personal statements and college application essays, or advisory classes will be used to complete college applications and financial aid forms. This will enable all stakeholders of the school to be involved in the college process.

Timeline: The network meetings will begin by late September and extend throughout the year, approximately every six weeks. The site visits to each school will be ongoing throughout the year. We hope to have each Network school’s College Access Team in place by November 1.

Counselor Workshops

Year after year, counselors continue to find our workshops focused on specific college access topics to be one of the greatest assets of the College Bound Program. This year, we offered workshops on traditional topics, including financial aid and writing college essays. We also surveyed our counselors and advisors and offered other workshops that were tailored to their specific needs, such as credit recovery strategies for students who had fallen behind. Workshop attendance averaged almost 30 people per session, with two of the workshops drawing more than 40 participants.

This year we will continue to offer a series of six workshops to counselors and college advisors from the 58 secondary schools in our PSO network. We plan to offer an early workshop on how to create and operate a College Access Team. Although our intense, school-based work with College Access Teams will only be with the 20 schools involved in the College Bound Networks, we hope additional schools will participate in this workshop and choose to create College Access Teams on their own. Beyond this first workshop, we will survey the counselors at multiple times during the year to assess their needs and interests and plan workshops accordingly. We will draw upon both external and internal experts to co-facilitate many of the sessions.

Timeline: Workshops will be held once every six to eight weeks, beginning in October.

College Fair

The College Fair serves multiple purposes. It provides students at New Visions schools, many of which are too small to host their own fairs, the opportunity to learn about 70-80 colleges in one setting. It also helps familiarize colleges with New Visions’ schools, many of which are not yet that well known in the college community. Finally, it is a networking opportunity for counselors and students from schools across New York City.

Next year, we will again host the College Fair in the fall and invite up to 18,000 students from our PSO schools as well as some of our New Century high schools that aren’t in the PSO. Because of

the growing number of students who attend the fair, we will continue to make logistical and programming changes that make the fair a productive use of everyone's time. First, only juniors and seniors will have the opportunity to meet with college representatives. While we want to encourage schools to focus on early awareness for younger grades, having younger students meet with college advisors before they are ready does not benefit either side. We will instead provide workshops on college access topics that all students in grades 9-12 can attend. This will also help control the flow of students trying to meet with college representatives and ensure they each get to spend quality time with the colleges that interest them the most. We plan to hold the fair over two days to guarantee that everyone who wishes to participate is able to.

Timeline: The College Fair and Reception will be held over two days in late October; exact dates to be determined.

College Bound Materials and Publications

- **School Profiles:** Over the past year, we developed a school profile template and worked with schools in the College Bound Networks to create profiles, but most are still a work in progress. Next year the College Bound program officer will work with College Access Teams at the 20 schools participating in the Networks to finalize their school profiles, which can then be distributed to colleges and shared through New Visions' KnowledgeBase platform. If schools are interested, we may also offer a workshop on creating school profiles.
- **College Planning Guide:** The *College Planning Guide* will be distributed on August 15, 2007 through the *New York Post* to their readership of approximately 700,000. We will obtain an additional 32,000 copies from the Post to be distributed to our schools, partners, and other organizations throughout the city and beyond. It will also be available on New Visions' web site.
- **Scholarships for New York City Students:** Traditionally we have printed the Scholarship Guide in the winter. This year we plan to move up production to October, so the Guides can be distributed to students at the College Fair. This will allow students to search and apply for scholarships much earlier in the year. We also plan to distribute additional guides to schools and community-based organizations throughout the year. It will also be available on New Visions' web site.

Timeline: The *College Planning Guide* will be published in the *New York Post* on August 15, and distributed on an ongoing basis throughout the year. The Scholarship Guide will be distributed in late October at the College Fair as well as on an ongoing basis throughout the year. Schools will work on School Profiles throughout the year, with completed products expected in the spring.

Anticipated Project Outcomes and Impact:

Over the past nine years, we have experienced considerable success with the College Bound Program. This past year, 81% of seniors at 31 New Century high schools applied to college, and 90% were accepted.

Next year, we will begin to raise the bar so that 80% of students not only graduate and get accepted to college, but that they are prepared to succeed once they get there. The College Bound Program is

an integral part of our strategy. To help schools achieve this ambitious goal, we have defined concrete benchmarks for the College Bound Program next year.

Student Benchmarks:

- College application rate of at least 80% and college acceptance rate of at least 90%
- 80% of students at Network schools complete their personal statements needed for college applications before the December holiday break
- 80% of students at Network schools will apply to college by the January 1 deadline
- At least 50% of students at Network schools will apply for scholarships by January 1
- At least 50% of students at Network schools will participate in a financial aid workshop

Counselor Benchmarks:

- Increased and regular communication between the guidance counselor and principal at each school participating in the Networks
- A group of 40 or more counselors who have attended at least one College Bound workshop
- A core group of 15-20 counselors beginning to share practice, tools and artifacts through New Visions' KnowledgeBase

School Benchmarks

- There will be a College Access Team in place at each College Bound Network school that includes the guidance counselor, school leadership, parent coordinator, teacher and possibly a student
- All schools in New Visions PSO will have school profiles, beginning with schools in College Bound Networks

Evaluation Method:

Evaluation Measures and Indicators of Success

The College Bound team collects data each year on graduation rates and college application and acceptance rates, as well as scholarship monies received. Next year, we will collect these data for our PSO network schools that have graduating classes. We will also continue to collect other quantifiable measures, such as numbers of guides distributed, number of students attending the College Fair, and number of counselors attending workshops.

New Visions' documentation team will be charged with monitoring the progress of New Visions' overall network strategy, including those in the College Bound Program. Additionally, the College Bound team will assess the progress toward the student, counselor and school benchmarks outlined above. For example, for the outcome regarding increased communication among guidance counselors and principals, a specific indicator might be regular meetings scheduled between the two, or participation of both individuals in the College Access Team.

Program Sustainability

Because we will be working with 58 secondary schools that serve more than 25,000 students, we cannot provide or sustain one-on-one support to every school. Therefore our strategies are designed both to help schools build their internal systems and structures that will sustain and deepen a college bound culture as well as foster cross-school connections and supports. These strategies include:

- Creation of College Access Teams at each school participating in the Networks to help schools develop effective communication systems among everyone who is responsible for students' college attainment – guidance counselors, college advisors, administrators, teachers, parents, partners and students – so schools can develop and implement a unified approach to college preparation.
- Collaboration of a team of New Visions staff responsible for each school in the PSO network, including the College Bound program officer, who will develop linkages between college access and college readiness at each school.
- Development of school profiles, through Networks, workshops and New Visions' KnowledgeBase, which will be used to inform colleges about the school, its students and its achievements. Profiles can also be re-purposed as recruitment tools for schools, for both students and staff.
- Relationship building among schools and colleges, through the College Fair and reception, school profiles, and use of college representatives as network and workshop co-facilitators.
- Concrete tools and resources, such as the *College Planning Guide* and *Scholarships for New York City Students*, which counselors can use to build their college offices.
- Opportunities for practitioners to share, refine and disseminate promising practices through KnowledgeBase.

Previous Project Outcomes and Impact: Through a combination of supports provided to guidance counselors and college advisors, students, families and schools, the program has had measurable results on student outcomes. In this past year alone, 81% of seniors at New Visions schools applied to college, and 90% percent of those that applied got accepted. Nearly 60% were accepted to at least one four-year institution, and more than half of the students that got accepted will be the first in their families to attend college. Colleges that students were accepted to include a full spectrum of CUNY and SUNY schools, as well as: Cornell University, Penn State, Temple University, Long Island University, Georgetown University, Syracuse University, Fordham University, Columbia University, Wesleyan University, Spelman College and West Point. These are tremendous accomplishments in a city where more than 40% of students do not even graduate from high school each year.