

## New Visions for Public Schools

### Creating Model 21<sup>st</sup>-Century School Libraries

June 2007

#### The Challenge

New York City's effort to transform its high schools is unprecedented in its intensity, scale and commitment to underserved students. Since 2001, nearly 200 small high schools have been created throughout the City. New Visions for Public Schools and its partners have led this effort with the creation of 83 small schools through the New Century High School Initiative. New Century High Schools, when at full capacity, will serve more than 38,000 students from some of the poorest and most diverse neighborhoods in the city. The majority of students—more than 70%—enter ninth grade performing below or at basic levels in literacy and math. Most importantly, these schools are changing student outcomes. Last year, the first 14 New Century High Schools graduated 78.5% of their students. This is striking progress when compared to a city-wide graduation rate of 58% and even more noteworthy when compared with the graduation rates of 30% or less of the large, failing high schools that these new, small schools replaced.

While emerging data on student attendance and achievement suggest that there are many strategies working in the New Century High Schools, both extensive research and day-to-day feedback from teachers, students and parents tell us that a crucial support for student learning has been largely absent: the high school library. Research has shown that access to a quality school library significantly boosts student achievement.<sup>1</sup> Access to top-notch school libraries is central to taking entering students from below or at basic literacy and math levels to on-time, college-ready graduation from high school.

Unfortunately, most New York City high school libraries have been neither structured nor supported in ways that positively impact student achievement:

- Collections remain old, outdated, and irrelevant to student interests;
- Computers and technology are strikingly absent;
- Student access to the library and books is limited;
- Spaces are often cramped, uninviting, and outdated; and
- Many teachers, librarians and school leaders, because of both the lack of resources and the lack of knowledge, are not maximizing the potential of the library to improve teaching and learning.

In the last five years, New York City's public and private sector have made significant investments in new models of secondary schools that are yielding demonstrable results: higher graduation and attendance rates and greater safety. Yet, in the newly transformed campuses of autonomous small high schools, the library is often the forgotten stepchild. High school libraries have suffered from years of neglect, with resources hardly sufficient to keep up with changes in media, technology and access to information. A complementary investment in the re-envisioning of campus libraries is a critical next step in strengthening the impact of New York City's reform efforts. The need for improved library facilities, and the creation of models for others across the city and country to emulate, is clear.

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<sup>1</sup> Library Research Services: School Library Impact Studies: <http://www.lrs.org/impact.asp>.

## **The Context**

New Visions is uniquely positioned to take on the work of creating model 21<sup>st</sup> century school libraries, thanks to its track record in New York City and close relationship with its schools and the NYC Department of Education. Between 1988 and 1999, New Visions launched a groundbreaking initiative called Library Power to reinvigorate elementary school libraries. By the time this program ended in 1999, it was national in scope, reaching over 700 schools in 19 communities. The final report documented the ways in which the Library Power program had improved school library collections, refurbished facilities, increased student usage, increased greater instructional collaboration between teachers and librarians and expanded the professional skills of librarians. While the Library Power program transformed elementary school libraries, high school libraries remained untouched.

Recognizing this issue, and using recommendations from a 2002 NVPS commissioned study,<sup>2</sup> New Visions launched the Literacy through Libraries (LTL) initiative in spring 2005. Since its inception, the LTL initiative has uncovered the issues, challenges, and opportunities for reforming campus-based libraries. The goal of this program was to help high school campus libraries transform themselves into centers of 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning, but perhaps most importantly, the initiative has allowed us to undertake school library reform within the context of the largest secondary reform initiative in the country. Through the LTL initiative, New Visions piloted a collaborative, participatory planning process that brought together representatives from each of the autonomous schools on a campus and from the various stakeholders in the school community to envision and design a shared instructional space that would be a hub for literacy and learning for the campus. This participatory process helped to catalyze the relationships and structures essential for sustainability as well as broad ownership across schools for a common, shared vision of the library.

## **Creating Library Media Centers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Using this base of experience and lessons learned, New Visions, in partnership with the New York City Department of Education, launched the LMC21 Initiative in 2006. LMC21 seeks to create truly innovative, model high school libraries for 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning. Capital funding from the City Council has been secured for library renovations on five secondary school campuses over the course of the next year (see Appendix A for a full description.) This \$2.6 million capital investment will afford 12,715 students across 25 schools access to 21<sup>st</sup>-century media centers. Working with newly established Library Advisory Councils on these campuses, New Visions has helped facilitate a collaborative visioning and redesign process for each of the five campuses.

The City Council is currently in the midst of its annual budget review process and we are well positioned to secure capital funding for an additional five to ten campus libraries in 2007. While this capital investment represents an extraordinary opportunity to revitalize library structures, we recognize from our past experience that capital funding alone is not enough to create truly innovative and functioning 21<sup>st</sup>-century libraries. The refurbishment and design must be supplemented with strong professional development to support higher levels of student achievement. Improved design features such as enhanced lighting, comfortable seating, and electrical wiring to support technology are an essential start to building state of the art libraries—but librarians, teachers, and school leaders must also know how to best use these upgraded facilities. Building on the lessons learned from our previous library initiatives, including recent work with five campuses through LMC21, we propose to expand our LMC21 program model by combining high concept design with programmatic support, enabling us to transform both the physical space and

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<sup>2</sup> Expanding the Role of High School Libraries: Tapping the Potential to Improve Instruction.

the strength of the campus library as an essential tool for teaching our students the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills they need to succeed—and share our experiences with others in the school reform field.

### **Our Approach**

New Visions will continue to use what we learned about effective library reform from our first cohort of five libraries, as captured by our documentation team. Harvesting key lessons learned, particularly around stakeholder engagement and ownership, we will build on the experiences of these five campuses to create the next phase of building model libraries with the potential to transform student achievement. Moving forward, to ensure sustainability, New Visions will continue to serve as an advocate for the original five campuses by hosting monthly meetings from September 2007 to January 2008, bringing together the library advisory councils and culling lessons learned from their implementation for the next phase of library transformation. We will also provide grants for each campus to build its collection, which school teams have identified as a key need. Each campus will work collaboratively to create an expanded collections list.

Working in partnership with the Department of Education, New Visions will select three new NYC public high school campuses over the next three years from those granted capital funding from the City Council and the Borough President's Office. Our work with these three campuses will go even deeper than the first cohort of five libraries—we will revitalize their campus libraries, provide professional development support to critical stakeholders, and maximize each library's capacity to improve teaching and learning. The program will kick off with a competitive RFP process to select the best campuses for inclusion. Among other factors, we will be looking for a long-term commitment from campuses to own a comprehensive process involving a broad range of stakeholders. Program components will include:

- Facilitation of a campus-based *Library Advisory Council* (LAC) comprised of all campus librarians, an administrator from each school, at least one teacher from each school, students, parents, and partner organizations. The LAC will meet regularly to map the current strengths and weaknesses of the campus library, develop a shared vision and goals for the program, and work with architects to design a space that reflects campus' articulated instructional vision and goals. This work is critical to ensuring that the new library is a collaborative space that brings all schools on a campus together in supporting student achievement. This body will also develop linkages between the library and key external partners in the community.
- Leverage through New York City capital funding for *design and construction*. The entire school community will be engaged in a participatory design process, ensuring that all voices are heard and needs are met. The design and construction work will be guided by the newly formed Library Advisory Council. Libraries will be fully redesigned, so that rather than one large room with books, the library has an identity, and carefully created nodes to maximize its usage for multiple purposes, from instruction to presentation to research to relaxation. All of this will manifest itself in a design transformation, including improved lighting, shelving, seating and a technological overhaul with electrical wiring necessary to support new technologies.
- Creation of a *technology infrastructure* within each library. Each library's main room will have enough computer terminals to host a full class with high-speed Internet access. Software will be installed that support literacy and learning (such as tutoring programs, educational games, and Microsoft Office) as well as college preparation (including college search databases,

Regents, SAT and ACT prep materials, FAFSA access, and scholarship information.) Each library will be given a budget for the purchase of, and training in, its choice of state-of-the-art hardware technologies. These technologies could include smart boards, interactive white boards, LCD projectors, and video conferencing. To ensure that students have access to all of the library's holdings, each library's catalog will be moved online and updated.

- *Professional development* for all relevant stakeholders. Librarians and teachers will be trained in using new library technology and resources to maximize student achievement. Each campus librarian will participate in a series of monthly professional development seminars. These sessions will address the ongoing challenges and opportunities of campus libraries; explore strategies for improving communication and collaboration; and develop a new understanding around library-based best practices. In addition, each Library Advisory Council will convene a network, comprised of teachers and librarians, to focus on library information literacy skills. This network will seek to develop and lead new ways of using library resources to drive student achievement, with an explicit focus on literacy, information/inquiry and the use of technology.
- *Full student participation* throughout the process. Student engagement is an integral part of the work, and the LAC will be responsible for facilitating youth literacy components such as book and technology clubs. Students will also be given a full, hands-on orientation on using all of the library's resources, and a select group will be trained by MOUSE, a nonprofit focused on school technology, to provide high-quality technical support for the computers.
- Support in *ensuring the sustainability* of these libraries going forward. New Visions will work with each campus to identify corporate sponsors who can help support the long-term sustainability of the campus library. Corporate partner contributions could include financial or in-kind support of continuing technology and collection enhancements. In addition, employee volunteers could help with ongoing upgrades to the facilities and support activities that help integrate the new model library into the broader community. The New York City Department of Education will make naming rights available for each model library.

We will also explore partnerships with nearby colleges and universities for academic breadth. Academic partners offer tremendous resources including: professional development around information literacy skills needed for college readiness, access to much more significant collections for student research, and professional development opportunities for campus librarians.

- *Documentation and dissemination* of our learning and best practices. New Visions' documentation team will ensure that the design and construction processes, and best practices as elicited from librarians, students, and faculty members, are captured and ready to disseminate to the larger school reform community. We will capture the impact through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with different stakeholder groups, culminating in a publication of what we have learned.

The timeline for implementation of the initiative is outlined below:

Pre-campus selection	Year One September 2007- June 2008	Year Two September 2008-June 2009	Year Three September 2009-June 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of RFP</li> <li>• Campus selection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation and facilitation of Library Advisory Council (LAC):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Instructional visioning</li> <li>✓ School-wide collaboration</li> <li>✓ Integration of library resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Facilitation of front-end participatory design process:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Campus principals</li> <li>✓ Students</li> <li>✓ Practitioners</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Professional development for campus librarians</li> <li>• Identification of business/university partner prospects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library construction</li> <li>• Continued facilitation of Library Advisory Council in:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Building campus culture of literacy</li> <li>✓ Managing outside relationships to enhance the library</li> <li>✓ Facilitation of campus information literacy skills network</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Continued professional development for campus librarians</li> <li>• Formation of business/university partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentation of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Design and construction process</li> <li>✓ Librarian promising practices</li> <li>✓ Practitioner promising practices</li> <li>✓ Student promising practices</li> <li>✓ Preliminary impact study measuring student and teacher usage</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Continued professional development for campus librarians</li> </ul>

**Sustaining the Campus Library**

New Visions recognizes that providing one-time significant grants to campuses does not ensure that the libraries remain state of the art for the long-term. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the library will require a long-term commitment from the campuses as well as dramatic change in culture that shifts ownership of the library to its stakeholders. New Visions will work with campuses to ensure that they are fully leveraging all available support.

In addition, we will establish the following accountability checkpoints to ensure that campuses are committing to the program as outlined in the RFP:

Activity	Deadline
Selection of Library Advisory Council	1 month after selection
Development of instructional vision	3 months
Completion of library design	6 months
Development of student and partner involvement plan	9 months
Development of library financial plan, including alignment with state standards	9 months
Formation of teacher literacy/inquiry networks	12 months
Development of a technology and collections resource plan and budget for use of grant funds	15 months

**Conclusion**

We believe that state-of-the-art, appealing school libraries are vital to student achievement. An investment from The Heckscher Foundation for Children would leverage major public funding at a critical juncture in time, resulting in three model campus libraries equipped to successfully boost learning and ready for replication elsewhere. Thank you for your support of literacy and your consideration of our request.