

New Century High Schools A Vision of Partnerships

To succeed today, many of our students need more than a traditional high school can provide. In the 21st century, all students need sophisticated literacy and critical thinking skills. But a great many students also need support in overcoming significant social and personal obstacles to their success in school. Recognizing this need, many schools have brought in outside partners to provide specific services to students, such as after-school programs or tutoring. While these services are clearly valuable, the traditional role of partner organizations has been limited. As a result, their work has had only a limited impact on teaching and student achievement.

If we really want to meet the needs of all high school students, we must re-envision not simply the roles partner organizations play but the nature of school-community partnerships themselves. Educators and other groups and organizations in the community must share responsibility for student success; positive student outcomes and student attendance; course and grade passage; graduation and preparation to enter college or work prep program; and work in close collaboration to remove barriers to learning. Partner organizations bring great assets to a school, including expertise that can support good teaching, deep ties to the local community, additional resources and a fresh perspective on how to work effectively with young people. If we integrate these assets with the assets of innovative teachers and leaders, we can build effective schools that give all students a genuine opportunity to succeed.

This vision of partnership is at the heart of the New Century High Schools Initiative, a groundbreaking effort to create new, small, effective high schools throughout New York City. These schools combine personalized learning environments with rigorous curricula, ongoing assessment and on-site professional development for all staff. A wide array of community partners – from museums and community-based organizations to libraries and universities – are collaborating with educators to design, develop and operate these schools.

The partnerships are guided by a number of key principles:

- Each member of the partnership has strengths and expertise that are essential to creating successful learning opportunities for students.
- Partnerships are built around a shared mission and each partner's strengths and capacities.
- All members of the partnership help to define the school's vision and to create a personalized school culture.
- The work of all partners is fully integrated into every aspect of the school's design, development and operation.
- The work of all partners has a direct impact on teaching and learning: they help students grow as learners, grow as individuals, and grow as community members. The work of the partnership helps students meet high standards and provides expanded and enhanced learning opportunities.
- Partnerships actively engage parents and community members in the life of the school.
- Partnerships work to change relationships between schools, the community and the school system as a whole.

As these new schools continue to grow, we expect their work to provide invaluable lessons about how partnerships can fundamentally transform the educational opportunities available to our high school students.