



Newark- Alternative High School Initiative Partnership December 2008

Newark-Alternative High School Initiative Partnership: The Newark-Alternative High School Initiative Partnership (Newark-AHSI Partnership) is a three-year concentrated effort to develop new student-centered secondary schools in Newark, New Jersey. The Newark-AHSI Partnership aims to expand opportunities for all students, particularly at-risk students and out-of-school youth, to engage in rigorous educational experiences culminating in the opportunity to receive a high school diploma, attend college, and prepare for careers. Membership in the Newark-AHSI Partnership consists of the City of Newark; Newark Public Schools (NPS); The Nicholson Foundation; Essex County College; Rutgers University; Newark Alliance; National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families; Big Picture Learning; Commonwealth Corporation/Diploma Plus; Gateway to College National Network; and Communities in Schools. All parties signed a Letter of Agreement establishing a formal partnership in November, 2008. In joining the Newark-AHSI Partnership, all parties have agreed to collaborate to:

- Engage with a local network of partners to expand existing education, workforce, and youth development opportunities for at-risk students and out-of-school youth;
- Launch high-quality secondary school alternatives in Newark targeting at-risk and out-of-school youth by initiating AHSI model programs that complement and build upon the existing school and community infrastructure;
- Design, establish, and document innovative frameworks, habits, and culture that enhance learning among students and partnering organizations;
- Collectively identify and address relevant laws, policies, and regulations to ensure that high quality alternatives for high school are able to achieve meaningful scale locally and to be sustained over time; and,
- Stand mutually accountable for success by synthesizing information and findings that will enable management by results as well as measurement and evaluation of progress.

Alternative High School Initiative: The Alternative High School Initiative (AHSI) is a network of youth development organizations with more than 250 sites nationwide committed to creating educational opportunities for young people for whom traditional school settings have not been successful. AHSI began in 2003 with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in response to low high school graduation rates. Composed of twelve intermediaries with innovative program models and two conveners, AHSI launches and sustains safe, top quality high schools for vulnerable youth.

AHSI Place-Based Partnerships: AHSI Place-based Partnerships will create a continuum of high quality alternative high schools to move significantly toward reaching the scale needed to make these options available to all young people in a locality, including struggling students, those at-risk of dropping out, and those who may already be out-of-school. Partnerships include city governments, school districts, community organizations, postsecondary institution(s), and high quality alternative high school programs, including models belonging to the Alternative High School Initiative. Partnerships engage a network of partners, launch schools and programs that complement current offerings, and increase the number of young people who continue in high school and earn a diploma college- and career-ready. AHSI Place-Based Partnerships also seek to influence broader high school reform and policy efforts by improving the ability of local school systems, local government agencies, and community organizations to meet the needs of all young people for achieving academic and personal success. Newark, along with the cities of Nashville, Tenn. and Indianapolis, Indiana, is a pilot site.

Roles of Newark-AHSI Partnership Members

National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families provides technical assistance, support, and facilitation for the lead partner team in Newark, and overall leadership for the effort to pilot AHSI Place-Based Partnerships in Newark as well as in Nashville and Indianapolis. NLC oversaw the national process that selected Newark as a pilot site, and helps identify and address state and local policy barriers and opportunities that affect launching and sustaining high-quality alternative high schools.

The Nicholson Foundation, as local coordinating intermediary organization, ensures an infrastructure for the Newark-AHSI Partnership, including supporting a leadership position and staff members who will work with partnering organizations to implement this effort. Nicholson will also: 1) Pursue and secure commitments from NPS and other entities that will refer at-risk students and out-of-school youth for potential enrollment in AHSI model programs; 2) Identify which AHSI model programs will launch based upon an agreed to timeline; and 3) Secure necessary resources for the planning and start-up of AHSI model programs, as well as ongoing operational costs tied to established AHSI model programs.

City of Newark provides Mayoral leadership for the Partnership, and devotes the time of a member of the Mayor's office staff to coordinate involvement of city agencies and leaders in supporting students and families in AHSI schools and programs.

Newark Public Schools provides the leadership of the Superintendent of Schools for the Partnership, and through the Office of Alternative Education provides coordinating staffing and will host and staff many of the AHSI schools and programs. NPS will also help identify and manage referrals of potential students and dropouts for participation in AHSI schools and programs.

Essex County College houses the Gateway to College program and will also make available college exploration and dual enrollment opportunities for students in AHSI schools and programs.

Rutgers University coordinates with NPS-Office of Alternative Education and AHSI through its management of the Youth Education and Employment Success Center, and will also analyze student data to promote better understanding of dropout and graduation dynamics and foster better matches between students and programs.

Newark Alliance brings business, civic, and higher education leadership into the Partnership.

Big Picture Learning (www.bigpicture.org) will develop three schools that use a rigorous, highly personalized curriculum which combines demanding academic work with real-world experiential and inquiry-driven learning.

Communities in Schools (www.cisnet.org) will develop four Performance Learning Centers, which offer self-paced, student driven courses that encourage project and community based learning with practical applications through work experiences.

Commonwealth Corporation / Diploma Plus (www.commcorp.org/diplomaplus) will develop at least two schools that combine a competency-based approach (in which students progress at their own pace), a small, personalized learning environment, and numerous opportunities to make connections between what is learned in school and the world outside.

Gateway to College National Network (www.gatewaytocollege.org) is scaling up and adding additional supports to an existing Essex County College program in which students complete a high school diploma while simultaneously earning college credits, progressing toward an associate's degree or certificate.

What Distinguishes AHSI Schools & Programs from Other High Schools?

Alternatives for high school are new alternative secondary school initiatives that prepare young people through programs characterized by rigor, relevance, and relationships, to graduate from high school and achieve college success. Evidence of progress in quality alternatives for high school appears based on indicators such as increases in high school graduation rates among students participating in these programs, decreases in dropout rates, higher rates of college entry, and preliminary indications that young people will succeed in and complete postsecondary education. Together AHSI organizations present families, districts, and policy stakeholders with a portfolio of small, alternative high school options. A set of universal distinguishers is evident in the design of all AHSI schools: authentic learning, teaching, and performance assessment; personalized school culture; shared leadership and responsibility; supportive partnerships; and future focus for students.

AHSI Policy Perspective: The AHSI network has charted key policy conditions that merit attention if alternatives for high school are to reach large-scale, nationwide success. AHSI's Place-Based Partnership pilot sites use the collectively-developed policy framework to implement a set of policy strategies together in three places. A centerpiece of the AHSI policy perspective is a framework consisting of seven key themes and conditions which the network has identified as essential for alternatives for high school to achieve large scale success. These seven policy themes include five conditions proposed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as necessary for large scale K-12 education reform and two additional conditions which are particularly relevant for alternatives for high school. These seven key policy conditions are defined in Figure 1.

<i>Figure 1.</i> Executive Summary of Policy Themes & Issues Affecting Alternatives for High School	
7 Policy Conditions for Large Scale Success	What They Mean
1. Increased College Access	AHSI program models enable students to complete high school by earning a regular diploma or an equivalent credential, and they prepare young people to pursue postsecondary education.
2. Need-based, Adequacy Approach to Funding	Adequate funding at levels <u>above</u> per pupil funding allotments for traditional high school programs is essential if alternatives for high school are to reach sustainable nationwide scale.
3. Rigorous, Reasonable Academic Standards and Assessments	Alternatives for high school are committed to ensuring that students meet or exceed academic standards and competencies for high school completion and readiness for entry into postsecondary education. AHSI models seek to measure student learning along a continuum that includes state tests and requirements as well as authentic assessments of performance through tasks, projects, and portfolios.
4. Strong Accountability	Alternatives for high school are dedicated to being held accountable for students' academic achievement. Students who have not fulfilled their academic potential in traditional K-12 settings often require additional supports. An alternative model's accountability must be aligned with access to the necessary resources and flexibility for innovation in programming that will enable students to succeed.
5. Expanded Options for Parents and Students	Parents and students would benefit from a wider range of alternatives for high school, preferably with the ability to choose a learning environment likely to be effective at enabling a young person to achieve success.
6. Open Sector, Readiness to Open Alternative High Schools	Launching and expanding alternatives for high school requires a healthy "open sector" in education that is receptive to education programs that expand, enhance, and recalibrate the premises and structure of the existing public school system.
7. Coordination with City and Other Public Agencies and Community Organizations	Alternatives for high school recognize the need to offer students supports and services that are beyond the purview of the school system to provide. To do this, many alternatives for high school coordinate with other public agencies and with community organizations to create options for students to tap into a range of appropriate resources.