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Strategic Communications Plan

November, 2009

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OUR MISSION

We are dedicated to ensuring that all New York City public school students, regardless of race or economic class, can fully participate as citizens and economic actors nationally and internationally. Further, we are committed to sharing innovative tools, strategies and lessons learned in New Visions schools with others in New York and throughout the country to prove that meaningful change is achievable at scale and success is possible for every child.

OUR VALUES

Throughout our 20-year history, we have worked intensively with a core group of schools while fashioning strategies to improve student achievement across the board. Today, with 76 schools serving more than 34,000 students, we support a network similar in size to some of the nation's largest school districts. We are committed to proving what no urban district has yet to realize: that large numbers of urban students can graduate on time and be successful in college and in the workplace.

These core values define our work as an organization and with our schools:

Focus on instruction: Everything — from curriculum to scheduling to facilities — is about supporting teaching and learning.

Data driven decisions: Data define our strategies and allow us to personalize and customize supports to schools and students.

Practice must be public: We learn, grow and improve by making our practices transparent and collaborating with others.

Continual improvement: Our work embodies a continuous process for improvement — analyzing data, developing and implementing actions, assessing impact, and refining strategies to re-imagine the systems that foster innovation and transformative change.

Stakeholder engagement: Multiple stakeholders who bring assets and expertise to solving challenges must be mobilized to ensure widespread support and ownership of student success.

OVERVIEW

Since it first opened its doors in 1989, New Visions for Public Schools has acted with the belief that educational improvement requires everyone involved — the public school system, government, businesses, community groups, parents and students — to work harder and do better together with a focus on improving student achievement. While some questioned the possibility of success in a school system as vast and complex as ours, others knew that improvement was not an option; it was a necessity. The link between a quality education and quality of life cannot be disputed. Educational quality not only defines the options that enable children to lead healthy and productive lives, it determines the economic and cultural success of our city.

New Visions for Public Schools has worked with every district in New York City in nearly 800 schools with hundreds of thousands of students, parents, teachers and community members. For 20 years, New Visions has improved the educational opportunities of students through multiple strategies, including:

1. **Creating New Schools**

New Visions:

- Created 139 small schools throughout New York City
- Secured additional funds from the New York City Council for building improvements to schools

2. **Working with Communities to Support Schools**

New Visions:

- Mobilized 225 community groups, institutions and businesses to support New Visions' schools
- Engaged parents through bilingual workshops and parent-centered publications focused on getting students ready for college

3. **Developing Innovative Solutions to Improve Schools**

New Visions:

- Initiated a highly successful school improvement model that links leadership certification to increasing student performance, certifying 180 school leaders by 2012
- Launched the Urban Teacher Residency, a teacher recruitment, preparation and retention initiative based on the medical residency model
- Pioneered a principal mentoring program and mentored more than 600 principals in their first year of service
- Created new data tools for students, parents and teachers to measure progress toward graduation

These strategies have proven results:

1. Increasing Student Achievement

- The first graduating classes from New Visions' new schools surpassed the citywide graduation rate by 20 percentage points
- Black and Latino students in New Visions' schools graduated at rates 20 percentage points higher than the citywide average for similar cohorts

Taking Education Reform To Scale

- The New York City Department of Education adopted New Visions' school creation model, resulting in the opening of more than 200 new schools
- Boston and Oakland, Calif., launched leadership certification programs based on New Visions' model
- The New York City Leadership Academy and Palm Beach County, Fla., adopted New Visions' principal mentoring strategy
- The New York City Department of Education instituted a school improvement strategy (called "inquiry teams") based on New Visions' model

New Visions schools reach a diverse group of students from some of the city's poorest neighborhoods, yet they graduate a significantly greater proportion of students than the city at large. In 2009 NVPS posted the following results:

- **73%** percent graduated on time, compared with a citywide average of **63%**
- **57%** of ELL students graduated compared to **44%** citywide
- **44%** of special education students graduated compared to **27%** citywide

Findings from past evaluations conclusively demonstrate that New Visions' key strategies have resulted in schools with higher attendance, credit accumulation and graduation rates, particularly for low income, special education and ELL students (PSA 2005, 2006 and 2007). New Visions has built on the lessons learned to create tools for teachers and parents, transform certification programs and disseminate strategies locally and nationally.

Today, as a Partnership Support Organization (PSO) — one of about a dozen in New York City — supporting 76 schools serving more than 34,000 students, New Visions continues to raise the bar. In a goal to increase the graduation rate by 2013, New Visions and its partner schools have made a bold commitment to ensuring that at least eight out of 10 students graduate from high school with the skills they need to succeed in college and compete in the global economy.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

– Purpose and Goals

Purpose: Why a Communications Plan?

“The words ‘information’ and ‘communication’ are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is *giving out*; while communication is *getting through*.”¹

The *Communications Department* must take responsibility for directing, energizing and synchronizing internal and external communications processes in ways that effectively **maximize the goals of New Visions**, its **impact on student achievement**, its **brand recognition as a change leader** and its vision to build an enduring, high quality school reform standard for New York City Public Schools.

The proactive and aggressive implementation of this plan will both inform and get through to a host of partners, stakeholders and constituents of ***New Visions for Public Schools***.

Goals:

- **Increase awareness** about the positive impact of New Visions as the most effective *Partnership Support Organization (PSO)* in New York City
- **Enhance exposure of the New Visions brand** so it becomes recognized as a “household” name and “authority” on education reform strategies that work in New York City – with the data and track record to prove it
- **Aggressively enhance the exposure of the New Visions goal: “80% by 2013”** – percentage of students graduating from high school with the skills necessary for success in college and careers
- **Improve internal communications and collaboration** related to messaging, publications and consistency
- **Boost school site allegiance and sustainability** via stronger relationships with schools
- **Generate consistent information flow** for employees through non-news media efforts

²Sydney J. Harris (1917–1986) , *American journalist for the Chicago Daily News*

TARGET AUDIENCES

Communication is a two-way process and thrives on a continual exchange of feedback. A clear categorization and understanding of audience allows the communications team to more appropriately tailor messages

1. Internal Audience:

- New Visions Staff
- New Visions Board of Directors
- New Visions Principals
- New Visions Teachers

2. External Audiences:

- Principals
- Teachers
- Students
- Parents
- Corporate Partners
- Funding Organizations
- Legislators
- NYDOE
- News Media
- Education Associations
- Colleges and Universities
- Volunteers

STRATEGY

Five Key Strategies:

1. LEVERAGE the New Visions Brand

- Increase external visibility of the New Visions name, logo and mission by ensuring use in all ads, publications, marketing materials and social media
- Increase internal use of the New Visions brand – name, logo, mission – by all directors, program managers and staff in publications, presentations and correspondence as well as at events and in programs

2. IMPROVE delivery of information to schools, staff and communities

- Counter myths and misconceptions about New Visions schools with timely, accurate information, personal testimonials and *evidence of progress*
- Using accurate data, launch a proactive public relations campaign with consistent messaging about achievements and improvements in New Vision schools
- Complete and promote the rollout of the newly designed NV website

3. BUILD capacity among school leaders and New Visions directors, team leaders and staff to improve communication

- Develop clear communications policies and procedures
- Provide training to school leaders and New Visions Directors in marketing, public and media relations, customer service and other communications skills.

4. POSITION New Visions as a positive force in the news media

- Improve media relations through generation of more news about New Visions schools
- Update and expand media database
- Research and follow education trends in key media outlets (*i.e. NY Post, Times, ABC News, community newspapers, etc.*)

5. STRENGTHEN internal communications

- Conduct internal communications audit
- Assess current communications practices and to establish a defined protocol
- Shift the current NV culture of independence to one of cohesiveness and collaboration towards common goals

TACTICS

1. Leverage the New Visions Brand

“Brands are not simply products or services. Brands are the sum total of all the images that people have in their heads about a particular company.”

- *Scott Bedbury, CEO of Brandstream, a Seattle-based marketing consultancy, and the marketing brain behind Nike’s “Just Do It” campaign and the Starbucks phenomenon as one of the fastest spreading brands in history*

- **Enhance NV brand on all marketing collateral:** i.e., publications, case studies, white papers. Materials that build and define the NV brand and provide an important look at our positioning and messages. i.e.
 - Annual Report
 - College Planning Guide
 - Parent Guides
 - Program Brochures
 - Annual Fund Brochure
 - Scholarship Guide
- **Place the name “*New Visions*” in the news** via op-eds, news articles, editorials and press releases
- **Establish a New Visions information/ad campaign** to publicize New Visions via media pitching and paid advertising specific NV programs and initiatives
- **Leverage high visibility of the *Good to Go (G2G) Campaign*** to boost NV brand to external audiences
- **Leverage the success of the *Urban Teacher Residency (UTR) program*** to showcase NV as major player in effective teacher recruitment and preparation
- **Position Bob as national speaker** and authority on:
 - Education reform issues
 - Innovative learning strategies and designs
 - National education issues such as achievement gap, college and career readiness, graduation and dropout rates, charter schools, alternative education improvement, etc.
- **Create new and improved exhibit board** for enhanced visibility at conferences and media appearances
- **Design an effective advertising campaign** and seek supportive sponsors/partners to help fund NV work – specifically around college readiness via G2G campaign

2. Improve delivery of information to schools, staff and communities.

- **Key communicators** – Develop a network of key communicators – principals, teachers, parents, students and partners who may be called upon for interviews, speaking engagements and other opportunities to describe their experiences with NV programs or in NV schools
- **Leverage newly designed NV website** as useful tool and resource for both local and national education audiences via:
 - Profiling of innovative teaching and learning strategies that work
 - Illustration of data-driven best practice models

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- **Social networking** – Go beyond meetings and newsletters – establish NV presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and offer student and staff incentives for use
- 3. Build capacity among school leaders and New Visions directors, managers and staff to improve communication**
- **Offer communications training** at quarterly principals meetings and NV leadership and staff retreats to ensure consistency of messages and goals
 - **Support directors and managers in alignment** of individual department work with overall NV mission, goals and messaging
 - **Disseminate newly created “Guidelines for News Media”** to support school leaders in media response protocol (APPENDIX A).
 - **Establish network of partners** in every community with a NV school:
 - Parents
 - Students
 - Legislators
 - Businesses
 - Colleges/Universities
 - Foundations
 - Media
 - Communities of Faith
 - Community Organizations
 - Student Groups/Student Councils
- 4. Position New Visions as a positive force in the news media**
- **Establish NV as the “go-to” PSO** for updates education innovation and trends
 - **Monitor national and local education and political news daily**
 - **Create a community-specific media list/database** for every community with a NV school
 - **Create national media list/database** of education reporters and key media outlets
 - **Develop protocol for sharing good news** at both the school and corporate levels via ongoing news releases highlighting extraordinary students, teachers, principals and school partners
 - **Develop a commitment to keeping the record straight** via a rigorous, systematic strategy for responding to false or misleading news stories with informed responses from key spokespeople
 - **Respond to education articles** that address innovation, graduation and dropout rates, achievement gap, charter schools, alternative education strategies, etc.
 - **Promote key successes** and tell the New Visions story by:
 - Promoting academic and climate improvement results
 - Spreading individual school success stories
 - Developing a system to find and track NV alumni in order to build an ongoing alumni database of success stories and information on areas to improve

5. Strengthen Internal Communications

While most organizations – public or private – understand the importance of strategic communication with customers and stakeholders, few address internal communication in the same way. Determining what should be communicated to staff, when it should be communicated, and how it should be communicated is often warranted by circumstances, timing and what individuals need to know when – in short, without protocol. Our plan is to establish protocols that transform staff into passionate ambassadors, while making effective internal communication a part of everyday NV culture by:

- **Assessing current practices.**
 - Work with Bob to facilitate ways to ensure his passion for the NV mission is shared and common among all staff
 - Work with directors and managers to establish a defined protocol that tightens internal communications between departments
 - Work with chief of staff on message alignment via coordination of presentations and work sessions at quarterly all-staff meetings
 - Assist in the streamlining of information shared by working with directors and managers on protocols for newsletters, emails and CRM
- **Shifting the culture.** Establish an organizational culture that is held in common by all NV staff. The intent of such a culture is not to micro-manage or control staff, but to offer a set of common goals that they can infuse into their daily work. This builds a framework for consistency and creates coherence and alignment that helps eliminate ambiguity
- When the staff goes beyond simply knowing the basic mission, goals and values, and instead understands and develops passion for the work, we give them the opportunity to make more informed decisions that fall within those parameters. This means, for example, that more decisions at any level. To create such a culture, we must harness all of our communication resources:
 - NV Intranet
 - CRM weekly newsletters
 - All-staff meetings
 - All-staff emails from Bob
 - NV Web site
 - Internal publications
- **The advantage and benefit** of having a coherent and shared NV culture:
 - **Permits staff to make more informed decisions** because they have the tools, knowledge and understanding necessary
 - **Encourages a sense of identification on the part of all staff.** When the staff shares a passion for the mission, goals and procedures of NV, individuals and teams develop a sense of pride in "making a difference." This has a direct impact on effort, efficiency and morale.
 - **Reduces day-to-day conflict.** Conflict generated by contradictory ideas on what is important to the organization is often an indicator that staff lack a common vision or understanding
 - **Helps staff feel more a part of the organization**

ACTIONS and TIMELINE

AUG – OCT 2009	NOV 2009 – JAN 2010	FEB – APRIL 2010	MAY – JULY 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conducted Communications Survey and Audit ▪ Began one-on-one communications meetings with directors ▪ Final edits of newly designed NV website ▪ Completed first draft of NV Strategic Communications Plan for review by Bob ▪ Developed news media databases ▪ Designed/launched <i>Good to Go (G2G)</i> College Readiness Campaign ▪ Edited and released college planning guide ▪ Began school site visits ▪ Launched and publicized new website ▪ Organized Media Training Workshop for NV leadership retreat ▪ Created and disseminated “Guidelines for News Media” for all NV staff and school leaders ▪ Conducted communications training for staff retreat ▪ Created PowerPoint templates for all directors to ensure consistency at team update meetings ▪ Conduct media outreach for key events, i.e. release of annual College Scholarship Guide ▪ Continuous media monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Finalize and share NV Strategic Communications Plan ▪ Review and revise Communications Department Budget ▪ Launch G2G Writing and Arts Competition ▪ Design FAFSA marketing campaign ▪ Create internal communication network ▪ Gather success stories for annual report ▪ Develop social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube ▪ Participate in ABC TV’s “Education Nation” series ▪ Complete first draft of annual report ▪ Secure “celebrity judges” for G2G Writing and Arts Competition ▪ Conduct media outreach release of graduation data and other key events, i.e. announcement of the G2G Writing and Arts Competition ▪ Continue ongoing meetings with directors ▪ Continue school site visits ▪ Continuous media monitoring ▪ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Launch FAFSA marketing campaign ▪ Monitor student participation in G2G Writing and Arts Competition ▪ Begin District-wide Media Release policy for students ▪ Conduct communications training for staff retreat ▪ Conduct media outreach for key events, i.e. G2G Writing and Arts competition, college fair, FAFSA events, etc. ▪ Conduct media training at principal’s retreat ▪ Continuous media monitoring ▪ Continue school site visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Track progress and impact of G2G Campaign via college visits, Regents, graduation rates, etc. ▪ Begin building NV alumni database plan ▪ Conduct media outreach for graduation events ▪ Continuous media monitoring ▪ Continue school site visits

EVALUATION: How we'll know we're succeeding...

STRATEGY	MEASUREMENT(S)
<p>Leverage the New Visions brand</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of new or revised internal publications with consistent NV name, logo and mission ▪ Visibility of NV name and logo by partner organizations ▪ Use of NV boilerplate in news releases and on school publications ▪ Number of external ad and logo placements
<p>Improve delivery of information to schools, staff and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of new or revised publications with consistent New Visions name, logo and mission ▪ Number of friends/participation on Facebook, Twitter and MySpace ▪ Number of responses to all-staff/school emails ▪ Positive feedback from NV staff and schools ▪ Reached ALL 76 schools via site visit or personal calls
<p>Build capacity among school leaders and new visions directors, team leaders and staff to improve communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of school leaders engaging in and promoting NV mission, agendas and activities ▪ Increased in CRM entries by school leaders ▪ Track number of calls from school leaders for communications/media support
<p>Position New Visions as a positive force in the news media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Track number/source of media inquiries ▪ Track articles and/or mentions of NV in media ▪ Track number of hits on News Releases page of new website ▪ Track media support calls from schools ▪ Monitor effectiveness of media response by school leaders – who's being quoted? ▪ Well-established rapport with key media/reporters ▪ Working partnership with DOE Press office
<p>Strengthen internal communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved message alignment across departments ▪ Positive feedback on communication processes ▪ Use of CRM by directors and managers ▪ Reduction in miscommunication complaints

APPENDIX A



Office of Communications

Guidelines for News Media

The communications office for New Visions for Public Schools (NV) is committed to helping schools cultivate and maintain open and productive relationships with local and national news media. The media not only provide a public service but are a powerful resource for distributing timely information that serves to increase the visibility of our schools and our work. NV believes the benefit of proactive media outreach far outweighs any inevitable negative press. By maintaining an open, trustworthy and cooperative relationship with the media, we increase our opportunity to release information that is timely, accurate and in line with our messages, beliefs, goals and passion.

Media Inquiries

We clearly understand that schools' top priority is to educate and ensure the safety and privacy of all students, staff and families. To balance schools' responsibilities and the need to provide information to the media, press inquiries about any NV school, student, staff member, program or initiative are to be directed to the New York City Department of Education (DOE) press office. However, we ask that the communications department at NV is made aware of press inquiries via the Leadership Development Facilitator (LDF) or a direct call to the NV communications department.

A member of the communications team will work with the LDF and principal to gather appropriate information about the story, the media outlet and the deadline and coordinate with the DOE on the response. In the unlikely instance that no one in the communications office is available the call may be handled by asking the reporter for the following initial information:

1. Name _____
2. Media outlet (*i.e. NY Post, Times, ABC News, community newspaper, etc.*) _____
3. Contact information (*phone, fax, e-mail, etc.*) _____
4. Subject of story (*school, individual, program, etc.*) _____
5. Deadline (*down to the hour*) _____
6. To whom has he/she has spoken to already _____
7. Has contact been made with NYCDOE? _____

The reporter should then be assured that someone will get back to him or her as soon as possible – whether it's someone in the NV communications office or at the school.

Media Visits to Schools

Any NV school that is contacted directly by a member of the news media is obligated by NYCDOE policy to alert the DOE press office first. We ask that schools notify the NV communications office as well.

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Like any school visitor, all media representatives must report to the school's main office for identification and authorization before going to any part of the building or contacting any individual. Reporters must also have an official school escort before wandering into hallways or classrooms. Whenever possible, a member of the NV communications team will be present for media visits to NV schools.

The only person authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the school is the school's official spokesperson, which in most cases is the principal. However, depending upon the story, NV staff may speak on behalf of NV when appropriate and with guidance from the NV communications team. Also when appropriate, the communications team will work with the principal to identify appropriate staff members, parents or students to be interviewed or photographed if interested – students only with parental permission.

Please note that it is DOE policy that all students and parents sign the DOE media consent forms located on the DOE Web site under *Communications and Media Relations*, where a “Media Consent forms” link is located.

A student or staff member should be informed that he or she has the right to deny an interview or photograph. Students whose parents or guardians have not signed and returned a media consent form may not be recorded, filmed, photographed or interviewed. The form is provided to all students and must be submitted annually.

Media Outreach

All NV schools are potential sources for positive news and feature stories. The NV communications team stands ready to help in developing and distributing information for release in coordination with the DOE press office. News releases and notification to the media of potential stories or photo opportunities should be coordinated through the communications office.

If an individual school site or department initiates a media contact, appropriate notification should be given to the NV communications department as well as the DOE. A NV staff member should secure authorization from the principal or administrator before contacting the media on behalf of the school.

Confidentiality

Release of information about individual students is governed by federal and state statute and DOE policy and procedures. While NV school leaders and staff must cooperate with the news media to the extent required and appropriate by law, it is critically important to protect the privacy of students, staff and families according to the requirements of the law. The NV communications team is committed to working closely with the DOE press team and legal counsel to determine what information is a matter of public record and what must remain confidential.

Confidential information about students or other staff may be released only as permitted by federal and state statute and DOE policy and procedures. In most cases, the NV communications team will stay clear of issues related to confidential information and legal matters. In the case of accidents or emergencies involving students or staff members, the communications team will work with the DOE press office to provide accurate and timely information.

Contact the NV Communications Office

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