

(A) Vision for Reform

(A)(1) Articulating a comprehensive and coherent reform vision

“We are putting good things into place in New Haven with our School Reform Effort. School flexibility and turnaround, meaningful coaching and evaluation, New Haven Promise, that’s all great stuff. But if we are going to really succeed, if we are really going to change the paradigm of learning for our students, we have to embrace the Secretary’s challenge to transform our system – we have to find real ways to concretely live up to our vision of engaging each New Haven student in coherent and meaningful learning experiences that connect within each classroom, between classrooms, and to the rest of each student’s life.” Teacher, New Haven School Reform Committee, September 2009 following a conference call with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan upon signing of the 2009 NHFT contract, in which he challenged the team to “transform the system.”

INTRODUCTION

Since 2009, New Haven has received national recognition for its clear, credible, and steadfast pursuit of education reform, and has even been referred to as “ground zero for school reform in America” by the New York Times.¹ New Haven Public Schools serves 22,000 students: 79% are low income and 80% are traditionally underserved minorities. As a mid-sized urban district, New Haven is small enough to drive high-impact and personalized, student-centered reform efforts throughout the district with realistic and measurable outcomes, but large enough to prove that urban systems *can* be reformed to better serve all students. Since 2009, the New Haven *School Change Initiative* has pursued a bold and innovative reform strategy. To measure progress on the *School Change Initiative*, we articulated a set of high-reaching goals, and are proud of the substantial progress made on each in three short years:

Five-year goal (as of 2009)	Progress to date (as of 2012)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Closing the achievement gap with the state of Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Across all subjects, improved outcomes at twice the rate of the state: gains of 10% vs. 4% in 3rd-8th grade and 2% vs. -1% (decline) in 10th grade• Greatest progress on reading and writing: closed the gap by 20-25% across all grades

¹Nicholas D. Kristof. *The New Haven Experiment*, [The New York Times](#), February 15, 2012.

Five-year goal (as of 2009)	Progress to date (as of 2012)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cutting the drop-out rate in half, from 27% to 13.5% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 percentage point improvement over the last two years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving a 75.5% graduation rate, up from <60% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 percentage point increase to 64%, on track to meet goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that every graduating student has the academic ability and the financial resources to attend and succeed in college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening college readiness indicators to be better predictors of success • Implemented New Haven Promise, providing qualifying students with full scholarships to public, in-state colleges and subsidies for private, in-state colleges

In 2009, to frame the pursuit of these goals, the District and its stakeholders developed a **vision** and supporting **strategy** for comprehensive, collaborative, and persistent reform. Three statements defined our **vision**:

1. **Students** learning through meaningful and coherent learning experiences that support their intellectual, emotional and physical development. These experiences will be created in individual classrooms, within the school as a whole, and beyond the school in students' lives.
2. **Schools** as the focal point for learning in the City, where teams of adults take collective and empowered responsibility for students, working separately and together to move students from wherever they start to their highest performance levels.
3. The **district**, at all levels and in all things, encouraging both collaboration without fault and continuous improvement through growth, adaptation, and innovation.

Three **strategic priorities** have supported this vision (see Appendix A-1-1):

1. A **Portfolio of Schools** initiative, including strengthening individual school planning, support, and accountability, engaging in extensive school turnaround, and expanding the data and information available to schools for self-improvement;
2. A **Talent** initiative, with a nationally recognized educator evaluation and development system, as well as a strong pipeline program of leadership development; and
3. A **Community and Parents** initiative, including efforts at parental engagement, community involvement in schools through the *Boost!* partnership with United Way of Greater

New Haven, and a Promise scholarship and college trajectory program sponsored by Yale University to strengthen the college trajectory of NHPS students.

A foundation of strong instructional building blocks (standards, curriculum, and assessments) and data infrastructure and systems cuts across all three initiatives.

The NHPS School Change vision and strategies have, to date, provided a foundation for progress in the district. At the same time, we recognize that our current strategies alone are insufficient – as the opening quote and our vision indicate, from the beginning of our reform efforts we have wrestled with the importance of engaging and personalizing learning experiences for students, to deepen and accelerate student learning and increase equity of access and results. System-level reform will have limited impact on learning if the nature of learning experiences shared by students, teachers, and other adults does not fundamentally change. **Race to the Top provides NHPS with an ideal platform to pursue our established vision of meaningful and coherent learning experiences, building on existing successes in collaborative reform and our preliminary explorations of personalized learning. The goal of our “Engage New Haven” RTT-D program is to accelerate the transformation of learning by developing the culture and equipping all stakeholders with the capacity (systems, tools, and skills) to deepen instructional practices and enable coherent, meaningful AND personalized learning experiences for each individual student, based on his/her interests and needs.**

PROGRESS ON FOUR CORE USDOE ASSURANCE AREAS

The New Haven *School Change Initiative* strategic priorities are tightly aligned to the four core educational assurances in Race to the Top. We have made substantial progress in all four areas, laying a strong foundation to successfully make the shifts expected by RTT-D.

Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy (directly aligned to the NHPS **instruction** cross-cutting initiative): NHPS currently implements a rigorous curriculum aligned to the Connecticut state standards in all subject areas and college readiness benchmarks, and has a periodic district assessment system in place across all schools to measure student progress toward annual learning goals, highlight gaps in standards mastery, and make adjustments in curriculum and instruction. NHPS has adopted the Common Core state standards (see Appendix A-1-2), is part of the governing coalition in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and

has already begun to transition to Common Core standards and aligned curriculum through a grade-staggered implementation across content areas. NHPS is also taking a lead in developing Connecticut's transition to the Next Generation Science Standards. We have a curriculum architecture that focuses on significant performance tasks in all disciplines, and have begun work on interdisciplinary units and courses such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). As part of our *School Change Initiative*, we have introduced 21st Century Competencies and portfolios, and established Student Success Planning for all students in grades 6-12 to ensure focus on college and career planning and readiness (see Appendix A-1-3).

Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals with data about how they can improve instruction; and empower students and their parents and guardians with a clearly-defined perspective of student performance: NHPS has made significant investments in our data infrastructure and has powerful data systems in place, including a Learning Management System that has been in place for several years (SchoolNet), a talent management system adopted last year (TalentEd), and a new robust Student Information System with parent-facing interfaces (PowerSchools). These systems provide an initial warehouse of holistic student information, student growth data, and teacher evaluation measurements, complemented by advanced data mining capabilities. At the same time, we recognize that having data and technology, in and of itself, is not enough – teachers, school leaders and administrators must be able to make meaning out of the data. We coach educators on using data to personalize instruction through regular “data days”, and we are building the capacity of teachers to dig into interim and formative assessment data and to plan re-teaching strategies to address gaps in understanding.

Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective educators, including teachers, principals and assistant principals, and other administrators, especially where they are needed most (directly aligned to the NHPS **Talent** initiative): NHPS has received national recognition for its leading work in this area. With the support of our teacher and administrator unions, we have implemented teacher, principal and assistant principal, and central office evaluation systems that consider multiple measures of student growth in determining the effectiveness of all educators, define clear instructional and leadership competencies, and keep professional growth at their core by identifying areas of need and individualized development. In its first two years of implementation, the system has resulted in the meaningful improvement

of our educators, as well as our separation from a material number of educators (see Appendix A-1-4). Our success in this core assurance area was recently endorsed through the award of a Teacher Incentive Fund grant, which will support implementation of the Professional Educator Program, building off the evaluation system to provide personalized training, differentiated compensation, and better career advancement opportunities for our educators. The district has also established a leadership development trajectory of programs, in partnership with innovative and high-quality outside professional development providers.

Turning around lowest-achieving schools (directly aligned to the NHPS **Portfolio of Schools** initiative): New Haven’s ambitious *School Change Initiative* established a School Tiering framework and School Improvement Planning process to differentiate accountability and support for every school. Our relationship with the New Haven Federation of Teachers provides a unique and strong foundation for school turnaround work. Through a contractual turnaround process, and a vision-driven commitment to adults working together in a no-fault environment, we can rebuild school-level collaboration and instructional focus by rehiring teachers in turnaround schools through a mutual consent process, and provide work rule flexibility and extra compensation for teachers in turnaround schools. NHPS has seen success in this turnaround activity (see section B(1)), with our earliest turnaround school posting gains double digit test score gains, and our more recent turnarounds showing early signs of success. Notably, several of our turnaround schools have embraced school-based initiatives – Expeditionary Learning, mastery-based learning, and wraparound family services (see below) – that emphasize personalized learning at the core of student growth. The results, and the financial and talent investments that underlie them, are a testament to the district’s commitment to taking research-based risks to provide equity and bolster innovation and achievement.

A core element of our approach to supporting low-achieving schools and students is our focus on addressing the issues that affect students’ readiness to learn. Today, the *Boost! Initiative*, a three-way partnership between the New Haven Public Schools, United Way of Greater New Haven, and the City of New Haven, is designed to ensure that educators and students have access to the right comprehensive supports to student learning through community connections. The *Boost! Initiative* is fully implemented in ten schools as of this year, with plans to phase into all schools while simultaneously building system capacity. *Boost!* complements School Improvement Plans and Student Success Plans by “wrapping around” the school day with

district- and community-based programs and services that have been shown to contribute to academic success, enhance students' ability to focus and learn inside the classroom, and directly support student learning outside the classroom.

APPROACH TO ACCELERATE COHERENT, MEANINGFUL AND PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Through our "Engage New Haven" program, NHPS will build upon our learning standards, data systems, talent initiatives, and Portfolio of Schools model to turbocharge progress toward our vision of personalized learning experiences for every student in the district. We operate from the core belief that, to set every student on a path to success in college, career, and life, we must engage her both in defining her long-term goals and in her learning process to achieve them. We further believe that a critical pre-condition to student engagement is ensuring that learning experiences are coherent and meaningful for the student. The "Engage New Haven" program, then, seeks to provide this relevance and comprehensive approach to education by confronting fundamental culture and capacity flaws in the traditional industrial learning systems that fail so many of our students.

To extend our educational reform efforts, "Engage New Haven" seeks to redefine our learning systems so that high standards and scaled learning tools don't translate into standardized and static learning experiences for students, and so that we instead afford students and teachers the time, resources, flexibility, and responsibility to delve deeply and individually into the pursuit of mastery standards. Similarly, "Engage New Haven" acknowledges that academic learning can only happen when other student needs are satisfied, and that teachers, schools, school systems, and communities must work together to ensure that students are ready to learn when they arrive in the classroom. A child who is hungry, reacting to violence in his community, or simply ill-equipped to manage the emotional turbulence of adolescence must receive additional and coordinated support, whether from the school or the community, to be able to see his learning as meaningful. Finally, the "Engage New Haven" program recognizes that our students are increasingly digitally native, and that our mediums and communications will be more meaningful to the extent that we let students communicate with and learn from the same tools both inside and outside the classroom. We do not underestimate the magnitude of

this work, but are encouraged that our reform efforts draw on areas of existing strength, and we believe our program creates the culture, the capacity, and the systems to support these shifts.

To deliver on our vision of coherent and meaningful learning experiences for all students across the district, the district and its partners will launch the “Engage New Haven” program with four key initiatives, oriented to fundamentally shifting learning experiences to make them more purposeful, supportive, and meaningful for each student – the three foundational characteristics of exemplary teaching and learning in New Haven (see Appendix A-1-5). We will:

1. Engage students in coherent, meaningful, and personalized curriculum, instruction, and assessment through a **mastery-based learning system**, including transformation of culture, standards, instructional practices, and assessments to better prepare students for college and career. Implementation will include:

- Building from our existing 21st Century Competencies rubric as a foundation to integrate content and performance skills into interdisciplinary district-wide learning goals that intersect with our college and career readiness curriculum standards.
- Transforming district assessments to allow for flexible and personalized delivery points, without sacrificing the ability to norm and track individual progress to high expectations for all students.
- Expanding capstone portfolios to gateway defined levels at all schools; portfolios will be student-owned, standards-aligned, interdisciplinary, technology-driven, and growth-oriented to provide authentic challenge-based learning and allow students to pursue their interests, tying into their individual Student Success Plans.
- Identifying technology needs to support engaged learning (e.g., adaptive assessment software) and implementing the requisite investments.
- Building the capacity to assess learning real-time to inform the grouping of students and to ensure the allocation of time required for mastery.
- Deepening and refining the fundamental rubrics of our teacher and principal evaluation systems, currently built to the framework of purposeful, supportive, and meaningful instruction (see Appendix A-1-6), to further highlight the connections to personalized

instruction, and build the embedded coaching and career development for teachers in alignment with this vision of instruction .

2. Engage our students, families, educators, and community partners in the coherent and meaningful tracking of students and their needs through a multi-dimensional **Student Success Profile** for every child. These profiles will provide a coherent and cross-cutting view of each student's real-time needs and include comprehensive academic, social-emotional, and wraparound inputs, drawn from NHPS and community partners' systems. These profiles will be deeply informed by the mastery-based learning standards described above, including the capstone projects, and will tie to each student's individual needs and goals through his/her personalized Student Success Plan. Educators will be able to use the profiles to drive personalization and *engaged learning* in the classroom, and work towards the interdisciplinary learning goals. At the same time, the profiles will anchor ongoing dialogue between teachers, students, families, and community organizations about student needs and preferences.

Implementation will include:

- Building upon and extending our existing data capabilities, including the introduction this year of Student Success Plans for all students 6th grade and up, to enable student-centered, real-time data capture, seamless systems integration, and enhanced data analytics and reporting.
- Creating user-friendly data dashboards that will help teachers understand how individual students are progressing toward both college and career standards and personal interests and goals, and better personalize instructional practices and capstone portfolios.
- Expanding data accessibility for students to monitor their own learning and for parents and community partners to provide tailored support.
- Building the capacity of educators to both collect data effectively (understanding critical inputs into the profiles) and then use that data to personalize instruction.

3. Engage our students, families, educators, and community partners in coherent and meaningful support for student's readiness to learn by building capacity and accountability for **systematic wraparound services** in every school. We will draw on district and community resources to ensure that every student is ready to *engage in learning*, and to ensure that the

district provides a backbone to support community- driven support of our students.

Implementation will include:

- Expanding *Boost!* services, support, and resources to all of our schools, so each student will have access to support that is relevant to his/her specific needs and interests.
- Strategically evaluating partner organizations and optimize partnerships across individual schools and the district, including extended time learning opportunities.
- Capturing social-emotional and health and wellness student data and/or collect data from community partners, for integration into the data profiles outlined in initiative Two .
- Building the capacity of educators to deepen their social-emotional awareness and develop best practices in identifying struggling students early and providing support, through the student support team and on-site coaches and *Boost!* Coordinators.

4. Engage our schools in a **cycle of technology-forward innovation**, simultaneously building the foundation for all schools to meet students on the digital learning landscape and pushing leading edge educator teams and schools to develop examples of *engaged learning* using technology. The initiative will fund two cycles. The first award will ensure equity of access to technology as a predicate to innovation, and will focus on our most underserved schools and students that do not have adequate technology infrastructure in place today. The second award will set educators up to develop models of personalized instruction, with a small number of grants going to teachers and principals with the strongest ideas to rapidly test new ways to personalize learning using technology; funding will be inversely related to discretionary resources available to schools. NHPS will study these innovations and capture and share best practices that others can adapt or adopt. Implementation will include:

- Assessing the district’s technology infrastructure and invest in providing every school a technology foundation adequate to our digital native students.
- Defining and then facilitating a systematic process through which teachers and principals will develop plans for ways to use technology to drive greater personalization
- Systematizing the dissemination of demonstrated best practices across the district, using technology and other systems to facilitate practice exchange .
- Maintaining and extending a culture of continuous improvement and “no fault” problem solving, recognizing that worthy innovation will not always be successful, so long as we learn from the experiments.

It is important to note that, while we do not call out professional development systems as a standalone initiative, we have embedded teacher and administrator training, coaching, and support in each of the initiatives above. We will be developing an enhanced resource “portal” for our educators, an on-demand bank of professional development modules, rubrics, tools, videos and examples of effective teaching practices, and collaboration space. We believe capacity building is fundamental to the success of our reform agenda, and are channeling significant investment towards promoting effective adult learning through embedded learning.

SUMMARY

New Haven recognizes that each student is unique and learns in different ways and in different time frames. We also realize students come to our schools with life experiences that impact how they approach learning, and therefore how we foster their learning. We understand students are partners and volunteers in their educational experience. Our vision is to deliver coherent, meaningful, and personalized learning experiences to each student, engaging them in the challenges and rewards of preparation for college, career, and their future. NHPS’s “Engage New Haven” program extends the district’s landmark reform efforts to more deeply embrace this vision of personalized and coherent instruction for students. Through the strengthening of existing initiatives (e.g., *Boost!* wraparound support, Student Success Plans, school turnaround models), the advancement of innovative new practices (e.g., capturing real-time student data, anytime-anywhere learning, gateway capstone portfolios), and the focus on equity that enables innovation (e.g., providing all our schools with a base level of technology), we will build toward our vision of coherent, meaningful, and personalized learning in every school in the district.