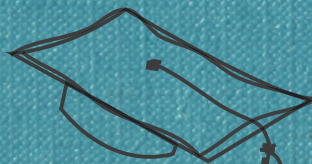


High School Transformation

→ A NASHVILLE STORY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MORE THAN 100 ACADEMY PARTNERS HAVE SIGNED ON
TO WORK WITH THE ACADEMIES.



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My FUTURE. My WAY.

Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) system serves almost 78,000 students, and includes all of Davidson County, an area of approximately 525 square miles. MNPS is among the 50 largest school districts in the nation with 140 schools, including 72 elementary schools, 34 middle schools, 21 high schools, three alternative learning centers, four special education schools and six charter schools. The district serves a diverse population of students, with 66% minority students, 13% English Language Learners and 12% students with special needs. More than 79% of all MNPS students are economically disadvantaged, a rate that has increased from 64.2% in 2004.

GRADUATION RATE:

2006 – 68.8%

2007 – 70%

2008 – 72.6%

2009 – 73.1%

2010 – 82.9%



High School Transformation: A Nashville Story

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Where We Started Mid-1990s

graduation rate
declining.

In the mid-1990's, there was a growing concern nationally and locally that public education as everyone knew it would not adequately prepare students for the 21st century. As a result, local stakeholders - the business community, higher education, and public school innovators - began to identify issues and seek solutions.

The graduation rate in Nashville high schools was below 70% and dropping. Locally, to address the issue, school district innovators were trying out new high school models called academies - personalized, smaller learning communities that offer rigorous, relevant curriculum to engage students around career or thematic interests - , and the Nashville Area Chamber was starting to link the community's future economic development to a strong public education system.

As a result of these efforts, several different streams of private and public investments were made in Nashville in the mid-1990's:

- Ford Motor Company Fund offered a new kind of curriculum in its Ford Academy of Manufacturing Science (Ford FAMS) at Glenclyff High School; the business community took notice and supported the effort via high school internships.
- The National Science Foundation (NSF) began a long series of investments in Nashville via the community college, aimed at building a pipeline of a new type of workforce with knowledge and skills for a new century.
- The U. S. Department of Education invested in a program in the high schools called Tech Prep across the country and in Nashville a competitive Tech Prep grant demonstrated an Information Technology Academy at the Middle College High School at Nashville State Community College in the early 2000's.

Common themes in all of these investments were 1) a focus on business and industry as partners and an attempt to define how these partners could become real stakeholders in education; 2) a developing understanding of silos in our education system and the need for learning to be interdisciplinary; and 3) research-based evidence that traditional teaching and learning methods were designed for the industrial era and should be transformed for the information age.

Digging Deeper

All of these investments paid off; they uncovered powerful lessons that were

critical in the design of the model career academies in Nashville, funded in the early 2000's by NSF and the U.S. Department of Education. By this time, the business community was starting to realize that a crisis was looming in public education, and a few companies began trying to help. An analysis of the lessons learned from these efforts may be found in the full “High School Transformation: A Nashville Story” case study.

Another investment, this time from the US Conference of Mayors, helped fund the planning that has now been implemented. In 2006, with more experience and growing community support, district leaders and innovators along with community partners developed a strategic plan for a radical high school re-design. This re-design was intended to transform all comprehensive high schools into smaller learning communities, using career academies as the basic structure.

All comprehensive high schools would become wall-to-wall career academies, meaning all students would be in an academy. Innovators believed that to really transform high schools, the entire school must be transformed to allow students to learn their academics contextually, through the lens of a career, and provide equal access to all students to ensure every student is provided the extra support and options that academies offer.

Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies (Ford PAS) played an important role in the design and development of these new academies by providing innovative curricula and teaching and learning strategies for professional development of educators. Problem Based Case Learning (PBCL) strategies, including substantive methods for engaging business partners, developed locally through National Science Foundation grants, were also critical factors in the strategic design of the academies.

A proposal for \$6.65 million was made to the U.S. Department of Education to transform eight high schools into wall-to wall Smaller Learning Communities. The grant was funded and implementation began in 2007 with freshman academies, designed to nurture ninth grade students through this critical transition from middle school to high school. The first cohort of students had significantly better attendance and two schools showed significant improvement in promotion rates.

Framing the reform

In June of 2010, Nashville was named a Leadership Level Ford Next Generation Learning Community (Ford NGLC) by the Ford Motor Company Fund. By definition, a Ford NGLC should implement reform within three synergistic

strands: Transforming Teaching and Learning, Redesigning High Schools, and Sustaining Change through Business and Civic Leadership. Indeed, in Nashville, high school reform did develop through these strands synergistically.

In 2007, the America's Promise Alliance named Nashville one of twelve featured cities. Along with the featured city designation, America's Promise sponsored two drop-out summits and has directed many resources to Nashville to help improve graduation rates.

Significant local support

Alignment Nashville (AN), founded by business leaders at the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, strategically coordinates community organizations in support of public education and children's health.

Alignment Nashville has convened community organizations around the reform effort and through its process, builds trust and transparency. The Chamber of Commerce has led the development of the Partnership Councils and a group of CEO Champions and has produced an annual community report card that targets areas of improvement and growth. The PENCIL Foundation facilitates school level partnerships and has helped with the development of the Partnership Councils.

Nashville is fortunate to have had three consecutive mayors who made education a high priority. The current mayor, Karl Dean has protected funding for public schools while also supporting schools through substantive leadership, programming, and serving on the CEO Champions. Mayor Dean has also raised private funds to support education. The previous two mayors, Bill Purcell, and Phil Bredesen (the current governor) also placed education as their highest priority.

Important Lessons Emerge

- Organized executive-level community leadership can protect reform efforts through periods of transition. Despite many struggles due to inconsistent school district leadership, progress was made, thanks to the strength of this community support.
- When the school district leadership's vision was aligned with the community vision and grassroots efforts, real traction toward progress began.
- Having an infrastructure, such as Alignment Nashville, to strategically and

systematically coordinate organizations in support of public education and to ensure on-going focused collaboration was a key factor to sustaining business and civic engagement.

- Co-professional development for educators, business partners, and community members was a key factor in making change happen.
- Because of a coordinated and aligned vision, sustainable transformation happened synergistically and not in silos.

graduation rate from 68%
to 82% in five years.

A trend becomes clear

In 2010, the Academies of Nashville are now underway with their own “brand” in all of Nashville’s zoned high schools. More than 100 business partners have signed on to work with the academies. On June 18th, more than 300 business partners, teachers, administrators, and community partners gathered to celebrate the new name and brand and to sign up new business partners. Six partnership councils made up of 300 volunteers have organized to support the new high schools.

A relatively new, yet seasoned school district leader has brought in a dynamic and professional staff. A national expert in career academies has taken charge and is shaping Nashville’s high schools into high schools of the future. Extensive development over the past 4 years has positioned Nashville’s high schools for success.

Today, much still remains to be accomplished, but with all leaders in Nashville on the same page, a high bar for success has been set. As of fall 2010, there are 46 academies in 12 zoned high schools, and a five-year trend of improving graduation rates has set the pace. A strategic plan for the next five years has been developed and approved, and it is clear that the transformation of Nashville’s high schools will continue, ensuring that all of its students are prepared for college and careers in the 21st century.

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