

# High School Transformation

→ *A NASHVILLE STORY*

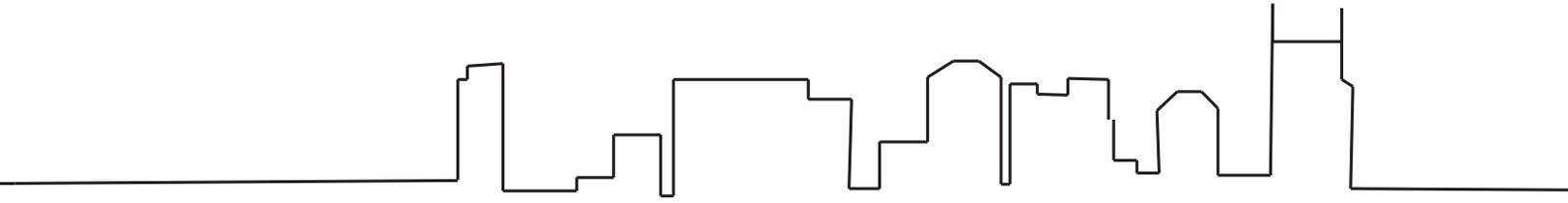


*My FUTURE. My WAY.*



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The NEXT Chapter.  
2011 ADDENDUM  
HIGH SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION



In the current 2011-2012 school year, all MNPS high schools are now wall-to-wall academies, there are more than 150 Academy Partners, significant shifts in the cultural landscape of the high schools are evident through positive momentum in teacher and staff attitude and student discipline, and improvements in academic outcomes are beginning to surface.

Those who have been on the ground doing the work daily have made some important observations about what is working and why. Those observations are shared here.

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## Jay Steele

Jay Steele is the Associate Superintendent of High Schools for Metro Nashville Public Schools. Jay was brought to Nashville from Florida because of his national reputation and expertise in developing academies. Since his arrival, the Academies of Nashville have had a laser focus as the district's strategy for high school transformation and his leadership has moved the initiative forward dramatically.



Steele believes that having a clear vision with a solid and thorough five-year plan outlining measurable goals for each year has had the biggest impact on the Academies. Nashville's five-year plan was developed jointly with the community and with support and leadership from the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and the Ford Motor Company Fund. The plan provides a roadmap for action steps and accountability for all.

Steele attributes the substantial forward progress in Nashville to the scale of community support here. "This is a very different story here because all are working together toward the same goals," he said.

Another contributing success factor, according to Steele, is the teacher externship experience. He says that transforming what happens in the classroom is where the real change occurs, and the externship experience for teachers gives them what they need to move their teaching to an inquiry-based environment for students.

"To really seal the transformation, barriers need to be removed so that business partners can help create, deliver, and enhance the curriculum as partners with the teachers," Steele said. "This has happened in Nashville, and now our kids are seeing all of the possibilities whereas before, they could only see tradition. The new structure of our high schools – interdisciplinary teaching teams, block scheduling, assistant principals as part of the teaching teams, etc. – structurally replaces the old barriers that stood in the way of effective business engagement."

He hopes that every student in our high schools is in an inquiry-based environment 100% of the time, and that all students are able to earn as much college credit as possible while in high school.



## Melissa Jagers

Melissa Jagers is the Associate Executive Director at Alignment Nashville and she staffs the joint MNPS Transformational Leadership Group (TLG) and Alignment Nashville High School committee. Melissa developed the concept for a pilot IT Academy at Nashville State Community College’s Middle College High School and won a U.S. Department of Education grant to implement the academy. Later, in 2006, working through the Alignment Nashville High School committee, she authored the U.S. Department of Education grant to MNPS for the wall-to-wall Smaller Learning Communities (now called the Academies of Nashville).

Jagers sees the value of the community involvement from the beginning, a fact that she says has ensured stability through turbulent times. She believes that having a community organization coordinating structure, like Alignment Nashville, outside the school district is critical for long-term sustainability.

She is proud that in Nashville, “we decided to go at this full-scale because we knew this was needed for all kids.”

Her hopes and dreams for the Academies are that MNPS becomes the first choice for people inside and outside of Nashville – that people want to be here because of the schools. She also hopes that MNPS becomes known for its graduates being ready for life.

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## Starr Herrman

Starr Herrman has been with the Nashville public schools for decades. She was instrumental in development of the very first academy at Glencliff High School in the 1980s and subsequently helped to lead the development of several pilot academies across the state as part of a National Science Foundation Center at Nashville State Community College. This experience prepared her to lead the entire transformation effort through the U.S. Department of Education grant that funded the transition to the academies beginning in 2006. Herrman has directed all of these efforts, from late 2006 to the present.

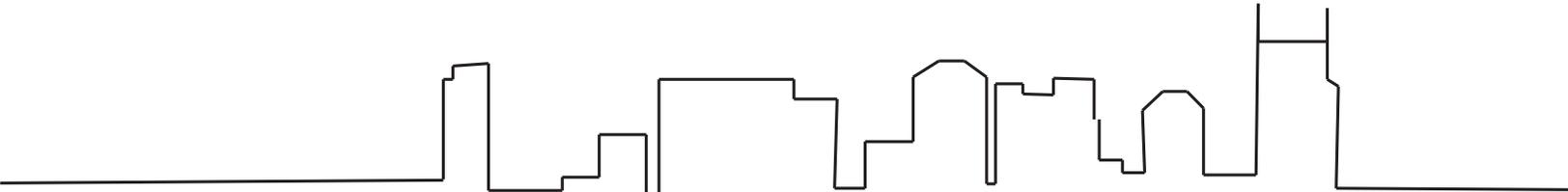


According to Herrman, the most important factor in Nashville’s progress is that we addressed all three of the Ford Next Generation Learning (NGL) strands (Transforming Teaching and Learning, Redesigning High Schools, and Sustaining Support through Business and Civic Engagement) simultaneously. She believes that doing all of these together is critically important.

“You have to have people dedicated to working on this change as well,” she explained. “We have a dedicated staff at the district level and a dedicated person – the academy coach – at each high school, and dedicated leadership at the highest level in the district. Then, each principal has to have the vision for what we are trying to do.

“When you have partners who can tell the story of what you are doing, as well as district people who can tell it, you know you have an open and collaborative atmosphere,” she pointed out. “To achieve this requires that people at the school district and the schools themselves are open and collaborative.”

Consistent evaluation is also critical to implementation. “The way we know we are on the right track is that we have had the same evaluator all the way through the process,” Herrmann said. “We get constant feedback from her and we make adjustments as we go along. We have a yardstick to measure our success and that is the National Standards of Practice. We are very intentional about our implementation. We develop manuals, timelines, and de-brief after every task and event. This allows us to go deeper year after year and improve constantly. We are very focused on implementation with fidelity.



“Our first five-year plan, developed in early 2006 by the Alignment Nashville High School committee, set the vision and set the course. When we had achieved that, we developed our current, much more comprehensive plan. When we have completed this one, we will do another.”

Herrman remembers that, a few years back, someone asked her to explain why we had to go “wall-to-wall” with the academies (wall-to-wall means all students in all schools are in an academy). She told them, “We have a moral imperative and an economic imperative to do this. If you really think this is the best approach we can develop, then which child would you leave out? Which one would not be given the advantages that academies can offer? The economic imperative is that if we do this well, more of our students will be productive workers and the economy of the whole community will improve.

“Now that we have real stories of real student success, suddenly it seems like we have made a great leap in progress here,” she said. “There are now so many good stories, it is impossible for us to capture them all.”

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## Alison McArthur

Alison McArthur is the Academy Coach at Glencliff High School, where she taught for thirteen years before becoming part of the “academies team” in 2007 when the US DOE grant funded positions at each high school called “change coaches.” She taught in the very first academy at Glencliff High School in the 1990s.

For McArthur, one of the biggest lessons learned in the school is that training and development around academies and all that involves – highly effective teaming, advisory, team leaders, interdisciplinary curriculum, working with business partners – needs to be a continued effort indefinitely into the future. She explains that turnover of teachers and staff requires a constant focus on continuous training. In Nashville, there was not enough training for support staff and assistant principals in the beginning.

Especially important, she explains, is that “...training for bringing real-world experiences into the classroom requires marrying the two cultures of business and education and sometimes we forget to explain the basics to the partners, like – what is a Smaller Learning Community?”

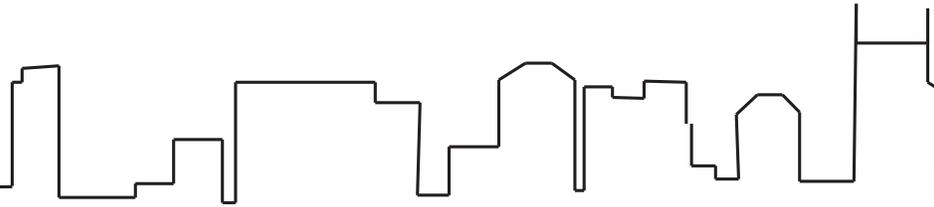
“We have had some real barriers to overcome lately,” McArthur says. “Due to budget cuts, we lost teachers in many areas affecting the purity of academy classes. In several cases, we no longer have classes with students from a single academy. For example, an English class may have students from the Hospitality Academy & the Medical Science Academy making it difficult to complete interdisciplinary projects.

“Another barrier that is very real is transportation. Students have to get to clinical jobs, job shadowing, to the career fair and to field trips. Sometimes the lack of transportation means students don’t get to the experience or get a less-than-desired experience,” McArthur adds.

She points out that there have been really significant opportunities for students. “Because of the new structure and the academies, students get to meet with interesting professionals, they have a curriculum that is relevant, there are more dual credit options, opportunities for internships, leadership opportunities, and job shadowing experiences. We have also seen the quality of our problem-based classroom experience improve with the intensive training that was done this last year.”

McArthur hopes that all MNPS students who have the opportunity to be in an academy will meet or exceed all benchmarks on testing, and go on to post-secondary learning. She is especially proud of her school, Glencliff High School, for having 40 paid student internships this year.





## Marc Hill

Marc Hill is the Chief Education Officer at the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and was the education staff person for Nashville's previous mayor, Bill Purcell. During that time, the Mayor's office helped identify resources to develop the first 5-year plan that was developed by the Alignment Nashville High School committee. Later, at the Chamber, Marc led the effort to develop the current 5-year master plan. The Chamber has been a critically important supporter of the development of the Academies of Nashville.

"Involving key organizational partners – Alignment Nashville, Chamber, PENCIL, and Mayor's Office, from the beginning has created a lot of ownership to help sustain and grow the effort," Hill explained. "The fact that the schools have a whole network to rely on, and not just a single organization has been an important factor in the progress to date. And, the fact that the school district really agreed to share ownership of the effort from the beginning has proven to be the best course for sustaining through several changes in leadership. People on the ground at the district office trusted me and others to do this right. Sharing ownership and control brings broad participation and encourages organizations to become significant partners."

According to Hill, "Many cities are initiating academies as a response to workforce development needs. We are just now really getting to that piece. In Nashville, academies were started as a school turnaround and transformation strategy."

Hill hopes that all students graduate with at least a 21 ACT score, prepared for college and career. The Chamber has put extensive resources behind making this work. They have led the development of the current 5-year master plan, created and supported the six industry cluster Partnership Councils, created a CEO Champions group, helped develop the annual Career Exploration Fair, sponsored and supported the teacher externship program, developed the "Academies of Nashville Awards" and the "Academy VIP Tours" designed to share the academy model with community leadership.

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## Connie Williams

Connie Williams is the Executive Director of the PENCIL Foundation. PENCIL connects business partners to public schools all across the district and plays a key role in recruiting and managing the business partnerships that really make the Academies shine. Since 1982, PENCIL has played a significant role in developing business relationships with schools. In the early academy models at Glencliff High School, the business partners were PENCIL Partners. Williams worked with the Chamber of Commerce to lead the design of the Partnership Councils for the Academies.



According to Williams, timing is everything. It was important, she says, to begin the journey of engaging business with schools with the development of the Partnership Councils, and the members of the councils were carefully chosen because they had demonstrated a commitment to public schools. Later, the Councils took on more activities, such as the Career Exploration Fair and when the time was right, PENCIL, the Chamber, and the school district identified and recruited academy partners.

“School-business relationships are the key to developing ongoing successful academy partnerships,” Williams explained. “Prior to the implementation of the academies, PENCIL’s annual recommitment rate for PENCIL Partners in the district was 90%, but for high schools it was less than 50%. Each year we would have about 75 high school partners and lose 40-45 at the end of each school year. Top reasons why this happened are 1) lack of communication; no follow-up, 2) only asking for money; sense of entitlement about partner financial donations and 3) didn’t feel needed; weren’t working in areas or projects that made a difference for students.”

Importantly, Williams says, “Partners need to be engaged quickly in meaningful contributions to the school and they need clear expectations. As an academy partner, businesses agree to work together for at least one school year, identify a partnership coordinator who will be the chief contact with the school, support the goals of the school in at least one activity, and report the time spent on the partnership through [www.schoolvolunteers.org](http://www.schoolvolunteers.org).”

Williams hopes that all Nashville teens will graduate from high school with the academic and life skills needed for further education and for career.



### Matt Seaton

Matt Seaton is the PENCIL Partner's Program Director for the Academies. For more than a year, Matt has been providing district-wide partner recruitment and retention support to all 12 high schools.

Seaton sees a real need to be sure that teachers have a good understanding of how to engage business partners. He says, "Even though teachers have had district-wide training on project and inquiry-based instruction, finding ways to incorporate partners into that instruction is still being worked out on an academy-by-academy basis. And, we still need to do some work on making the advisory boards more effective. Some advisory boards have found their niche and that niche may not necessarily be in the classroom. It is important to use the strengths of the various business partners well."

Seaton hopes to see some cross-academy work. For instance, an academy from Whites Creek working on a project with an academy from Antioch would be really interesting. To accomplish this, we will need to work out some of the issues with transportation. He is especially pleased about the 95% partnership retention rate for the 2010-2011 school year. This demonstrates real and substantial engagement with the schools.

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