

# **Nashville Steering Committee**

## **Overview Brief for Grad Nation Action Forum**

### **September 2009**

#### **Collaborative Overview**

The Nashville Steering Committee, convened by Alignment Nashville, is organizing the Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit, to be held in October 2009. The purpose of Alignment Nashville is to create a system to bring community organizations and resources into alignment so their aligned support to Nashville's youth has a positive impact on public school success and the success of the community as a whole. Many of the organizations that form the Summit Steering Committee have been involved with the overall activities and efforts of Alignment Nashville. In addition, the Alignment Nashville Board of Directors has invited a representative of the America's Promise Nashville Steering Committee to represent the group on the Alignment Nashville Board to ensure that all efforts are aligned.

The Steering Committee, made up of 25 cross-sector representatives, meets monthly to lead the Summit planning efforts. Alignment Nashville is made up of several other committees structured around either grade levels or issue areas. The members of the committees bring diverse perspectives — small non-profit, public school, city government, public health, higher education, large non-profit, and the business community — to create the most aligned, strategic tactical plans to achieve very ambitious goals. All committees meet at least monthly. Community members and organizations are encouraged to get involved with an Alignment Nashville collaborative initiative by reviewing current Invitations to Participate (ITPs), which provide a description of each collaborative initiative as well as examples of how organizations can participate.

#### **About Our Work**

##### ***Focus Areas for the Summit and Work Beyond the Summit:***

The 2009 Nashville Summit will focus on two of the five promises: Safe Places and Caring Adults. Specific areas to be addressed include:

- What happens to students outside of school and the impact of that on school performance and thus the dropout rate;
- A proactive prevention track to education reform;
- Creating a long-term solution rather than the most expedient route;
- Eliminating the pipeline that leads to dropouts; and
- Looking at the impact of early intervention.

The group is conducting smaller neighborhood focus groups before the summit to gain a better understanding of the issues and diverse perspectives and obtain buy-in for participation and support for the summit. This is also a critical step in building allies and partners to drive the post-summit action and implementation efforts.

##### ***Key Initiatives and Programs:***

- Parent University is the task force created by Alignment Nashville and Metro Nashville Public Schools to develop a comprehensive parent education program in collaboration with Nashville's non-profit community. Parent University hosted a one-day training event in July and educated

200 parents and caregivers on how best to prepare their children for successful learning at the elementary, middle and high school levels. In addition, Parent University has created a network of community organizations that have established relationships with hard-to-reach parents across the city. In spring 2009, Parent University partnered with the school district to make sure all parents understood the new school option plan. As a result, over 45,000 parents and community members learned about their options, helping the district reach its goal of 100% of parents completing their school option form.

- The Youth Opportunity Center (the first ever APA-designated “Promise Place”) houses 10 different youth organizations—all under one roof— that offer programs collectively reaching youth in 82 different schools, as well as the hundreds of youth living on the streets of Nashville. Notable features include: Nashville's only long-term Transitional Living Center for homeless youth (ages 17-21); Nashville's only dedicated Youth Clinic; a Youth Job Center operated by the Nashville Career Advancement Center; a College Access center offering full support to youth interested in post-secondary education; computers with internet access; “Teenedge Tees”— a youth run screen-printing business benefiting street outreach services for homeless youth; and much more.
- Developing Community Leaders is a school-based leadership development program that equips and empowers non-traditional student leaders to effect positive change in their own schools and communities. The program offers college-level leadership development curriculum along with service-learning; community organizations provide mentoring and support for teachers and students as they implement the curriculum and the service-learning. Since 2006, more than 600 students have participated in the program, and 26 community organizations have been engaged through the Alignment Nashville ITP process.
- The Alignment Nashville Children’s Health Initiative is the result of a city-wide planning process that included the Mayor's Office of Children and Youth, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, Metro Department of Public Health, and several other community and business partners. This group identified six goals for children’s health, and Alignment Nashville created committees to create community collaborations around each of the six goals.
- Oasis Center, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA, and others collaborate through the Alignment Nashville Middle School Committee to “Create a Culture of Kindness” in Nashville’s middle schools. These organizations and others are providing interventions designed to improve the school climate and reduce bullying and other violence in the schools; through a grant from the CDC, Alignment Nashville has full-time coordinators placed in four middle schools. Initial results are promising, and are showing that the *coordinated* interventions are improving the school climate as well as academic achievements, whereas the same interventions, when uncoordinated, do not show significant improvement.
- Many community organizations and businesses are supporting the school district’s high school redesign initiative through the Alignment Nashville Small Learning Communities Committee. Through the committee, the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and the PENCIL Foundation have organized six Partnership Councils to recruit and engage businesses in the district’s efforts

to create smaller, more personalized learning environments that are relevant, rigorous, and prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

## Resources Needed to Bring Our Work to Scale

- Staff: One or two additional staff to work with committees would strengthen our work. For instance, we are adding committees focused on services for immigrant populations and need more staff support.
- Volunteers: Through Alignment Nashville, we have a strategic partnership with Healthways, Inc. that provides volunteers for our collaborative initiatives. Healthways has identified employees to serve as liaisons with each of our committees; the primary role of the liaison is to identify volunteer opportunities and recruit their colleagues to participate. New partnerships with area companies could use this model to strategically place volunteers in school- and community-based programs across the city.
- Informational Resources: A communications expert, or access to one, would help us gain support and therefore strengthen the work.
- Other Resources: Evaluation resources would help us sustain and scale these community collaborations. With additional staff, time and expertise, we would be able to measure the impact of these collaborations on the community. Currently, we primarily focus on process outcomes, but with additional resources we would be able to measure their effectiveness as well.

## Questions & Challenges for Consideration

1. We would like to know how other communities have created and sustained research partnerships with area colleges and universities that are mutually beneficial.
2. We would like to engage the smaller, grassroots-type organizations that provide much-needed services in our community but don't have the capacity to be committee or planning team members. How have other communities successfully engaged these organizations and ensured that their voice is heard and their participation is meaningful?
3. We need examples of assessment strategies that measure the effectiveness of collaborative work. Does anyone have some examples?



## Appendix A: Nashville Steering Committee Member List

**Convener:** Sydney Rogers, Alignment Nashville

### Member Organizations

AmeriChoice  
Belmont University  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Middle Tennessee  
Boys and Girls Clubs  
Catholic Charities  
Community Nashville  
Equal Education Opportunity Group, Inc  
Homework Hotline  
Mayor's Afterschool Initiatives  
Mayor's Office of Children and Youth  
Mayor's Office of Economic Development  
Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods  
Metro Nashville Public Schools  
Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce  
Nashville Black Chamber of Commerce  
Oasis Center  
PENCIL Foundation  
Rocketown  
State Farm  
TNAAP  
United Way  
Urban League of Middle Tennessee  
YMCA of Middle Tennessee  
YWCA

## Appendix B: Demographics & Statistics, Metro Nashville Public Schools

- 137 schools, more than 75,000 students<sup>i</sup>
- Ethnic distribution: 47% African American, 36% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic
- 72.8% of students are economically disadvantaged
- 9.2% are English Language Learners
- Graduation Rate: 45.2% in 2004-05<sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Metro Nashville Public Schools website, [www.mnps.org](http://www.mnps.org)

<sup>ii</sup> Swanson, Christopher B., *Cities in Crisis 2009: Closing the Graduation Gap* (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center)