



2015–2016 Annual Report

# BUILD



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMEN

Dear Friend,

Nearly a generation ago, we built New Visions for Public Schools to be a force for good within New York City. Motivated by the belief that the education of our city's youth is a collective responsibility, we sought to engage civic, philanthropic, community and corporate partners in our efforts to pioneer new approaches to help all students reach their full potential.

Today, we have a record of success that is built to last. Our achievements—small schools that have been proven to raise graduation rates, next-generation teacher and leader preparation programs and a

growing network of charter high schools that serves some of our city's highest-need students—have had a durable impact on the district and its 1.1 million schoolchildren.

But the work of transforming our city's schools is far from done. Too few New York City students graduate with a credential that prepares them to persist in college or to land a career that moves them up the rungs of opportunity. To enact enduring change, we must redefine the problems confronting schools today. Our public schools largely have not benefited from the advances in technology and infrastructure that other fields now take



for granted. By building schools' capacity through 21st-century technology, effective teaching and learning, and high-quality curriculum, we are forging a new approach.

What makes New Visions different? Rooted in the real needs of schools, our approach provides educators with not only critical data but also tools and strategies for acting with intention and impact. We help schools keep their students on track to reach the critical milestones on their way to high school graduation and beyond.

This past school year, we experienced a milestone of our own, as our longtime president, Bob Hughes, accepted an appointment to lead K-12 strategy at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. His 16-year tenure at New Visions was marked by his exceptional intellect and creativity, an unwavering commitment to serving those students furthest behind, and a compelling vision for bringing our efforts to scale within the wider district.

We were pleased to announce this past May that, following a national search, the board unanimously appointed Mark Dunetz to the role of president of New Visions. As a former public schoolteacher, founding principal of a successful small high school and a public school parent, Mark brings an invaluable perspective on public education.

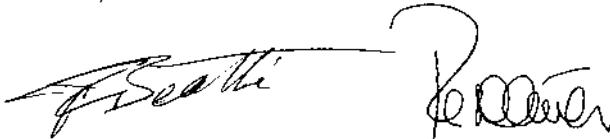
Mark, whose relationship with New Visions as a leadership coach and principal has spanned more than a decade, joined the management team of New Visions in 2013, overseeing our support of district schools with the goal of helping schools improve outcomes like graduation and college readiness rates. In 2016, the average graduation rate of our district schools reached 81.6 percent, our highest ever.

We couldn't be more excited to build on our success with Mark's leadership. There is much more work to be done for students, their teachers and their schools. With the help of generous supporters like you, we will keep delivering on our promise of a better education every day for every student.

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Our approach provides educators with not only critical data but also tools and strategies for acting with intention and impact.

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The image shows two handwritten signatures. The signature on the left is "Richard I. Beattie" and the signature on the right is "Roger C. Altman".

Richard I. Beattie  
Founder & Chairman

Roger C. Altman  
Co-Chairman

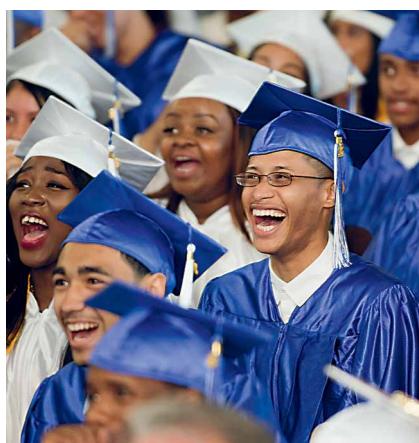
## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friend,

Over the 18 years I've worked as an educator, my beliefs about the transformative power of public education have been reinforced by getting to know hundreds of students and their families. Witnessing a parent's joy seeing her daughter walk across a graduation stage, or sharing in a student's success upon passing a course in which she struggled, makes an indelible imprint on your spirit.

As a young teacher, long before I heard of New Visions, my own professional opportunities were shaped by the work of my predecessors, Beth Lief and Bob Hughes. Following a year spent teaching at a large school where factors conspired against even the best-intentioned teachers, I took a job in a small high school, where my eyes were opened to new possibilities. I found a school designed to ensure that students were known, where teachers and administrators collaborated and where collective responsibility permeated the culture.

The school was one of the dozens of small schools opened in the 1990s as part of a movement that New Visions helped nurture. Out of these early, innovative efforts came educators who went on to open hundreds of small schools that would represent the single most impactful intervention on the graduation and college-going rates for low-income students of color in the modern history of large, urban school districts.



What makes New Visions unique is the recognition that there is no one solution to the complex challenges of public education. While New Visions played a critical role in supporting small schools, we have also long partnered with the full range of New York City's secondary schools, including some of the largest. Our work with educators on core challenges makes

us a laboratory for realizing ambitious goals in public education. The result is impact at scale in the country's largest school system and beyond.

In order to be effective, educators need access to the latest technology. That's why we built software applications—among the most sophisticated available—currently being used by over 200 public schools in NYC and over 100,000 educators around the country. We have created open-source curricula currently used by a community of tens of thousands of teachers. And we have tapped the enormous potential of knowledge-sharing among educators in charter and district schools by building an organization that facilitates collaborative work across this divide.

Our approach enables parents, students, teachers, community members, nonprofits, civic organizations and businesses to form lasting partnerships and to create schools that are worthy of the incredible young people who attend them. When New Visions began in 1989, the four-year graduation rate in New York City was around 45 percent. In August of 2016, more than 80 percent of the students in New Visions' non-transfer high schools graduated in four years.

Behind these numbers are countless stories of lives—like those profiled in this Annual Report—transformed through the dedication of adults inside and outside of schools. On behalf of our organization and our board of directors, I want to thank you for supporting our efforts to build towards a better future.



Mark Dunetz  
President

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What makes New Visions unique is the recognition that there is no one solution to the complex challenges of public education.

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## NEW VISIONS IN ACTION

Since its beginning in 1989, New Visions for Public Schools has been a laboratory of innovation dedicated to improving the quality of public education in New York City.

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What sets New Visions apart is our deep knowledge of schools—developed through years of ongoing collaboration with principals, teachers, students and parents—together with our commitment to continuous improvement. Uniting all of New Visions programs is the profound belief that, if schools are organized in ways that maximize opportunities for students to learn and for teachers to develop as professionals, all students can achieve their highest potential.

Our approach, which cuts across our district and charter schools, focuses on preparing high-quality teachers and leaders through direct classroom experience, co-developing challenging curricula with educators that result in deeper student learning, and providing robust data systems that assess student learning and give educators a road map for keeping students on track. And because we work across a range of New York City schools—both small and large—what we learn is transferable to other schools and districts across the country.

### SUPPORTING OUR SCHOOLS

Today, the breadth of New Visions' support extends to more schools (243) serving more students (120,000) than ever before. Working in collaboration with the New York City Department

of Education, we drive improvements among a core network of 69 district schools and seven charter high schools, while supporting the data needs of 149 additional schools participating in the Chancellor's Community and Renewal Schools program, a signature initiative that is a national model for integrating social services within public schools.

While we look to scale our efforts, we recognize that school improvement happens one student at a time. In order to support the needs of each individual student, schools require responsive systems to monitor progress and to facilitate rapid intervention when students fall off track. We've developed customized tools and protocols that extend the professional capacity of educators, reduce paperwork burdens, increase personalization, and allow educators to share knowledge more efficiently with their peers.

Schools need access to both real-time data and proven strategies for making decisions based on those data. So we developed planning protocols—Strategic Data Check-ins (SDCs)—that empower school leaders and administrators to regularly review student progress at critical points during the academic year, with the goal of helping students stay on track to achieve the

best graduation outcome possible. Coupled with New Visions expertise in continuous improvement coaching, this strategy has become a powerful accelerator of school improvement.

Pam Randazzo, principal at Brooklyn School for Music and Theatre (BSMT), uses New Visions data tools to monitor and address individual students' needs as well as identify and respond to school-wide trends. "The data tool allows us to say, 'Look at this. We need to have a conversation around this,'" she says. "Then we can get to work problem-solving. Without the data tool, it would just be me sitting here looking through pages and pages of documentation trying to figure it out." By making decisions based on evidence, and by "bringing everyone into the conversation," BSMT witnessed an 11-point gain in graduation rate from 2015 to 89.5 percent in 2016.

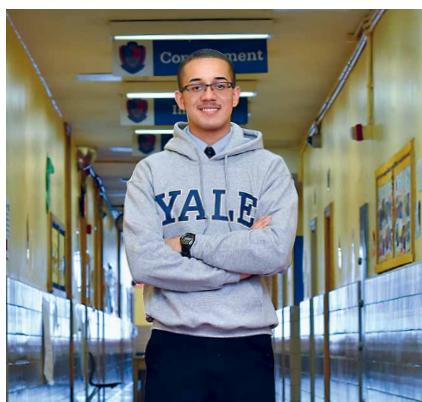
Across the New Visions network, we achieved a milestone in 2016: an 81.6 percent four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2016 among our non-transfer district schools.

We continue to raise the bar. Our next milestone is for every school in our network to achieve at least an 80 percent graduation rate, a goal that aligns with the Mayor's own 10-year plan for the city's high schools. We aim to lead the way in demonstrating how all schools can achieve better graduation outcomes for all students.

## **PREPARING TEACHERS AND TEACHER LEADERS**

Nothing is more important to education than effective teachers, and we are delighted to have been selected as a "Demonstration Site" by the National Center for Teacher Residencies. We will be hosting a national delegation of educators in New York City to learn best practices from our successful immersive teacher preparation program that places aspiring teachers in the classroom with veteran mentors for a yearlong residency.

Teacher residencies are indeed gaining traction as a rigorous, evidence-based



## **Brandon Tejada**

**Class of 2016, Advanced Math and Science II Charter**

A New Visions scholarship winner, Brandon Tejada credits his teachers for fueling his interests in biology and chemistry, which he looks forward to exploring as an undergraduate at Yale University.

approach towards teacher preparation. "Just as we recognize that aspiring doctors need training before they can diagnose and prescribe, we must acknowledge that teaching candidates require an up-front investment," read a recent *New York Times* Opinion piece, citing, in particular, New Visions' residency program in partnership with Hunter College. "Aspiring teachers need well-designed and well-supported preparation."

## **CHARTER SCHOOLS**

Recognizing that school improvement can take multiple forms, New Visions also operates seven charter high schools, all committed to serving high-need students—including students from low-income families, English language learners and students with disabilities—in proportions equal to or greater than neighborhood district schools. Providing a longer school day and year, a challenge-based approach to student learning and a commitment to engaging the community as a resource for students, our charter schools are demonstrating the sustained, positive effects educators can

have on outcomes for students who enter 9th grade far behind standards. The average four-year graduation rate across these schools was 90.9 percent in 2016.

## CURRICULUM

To help teachers make the instructional shifts demanded of them by new, higher-benchmarked learning standards, we have co-developed with teachers a comprehensive array of curricula across multiple subject areas, including mathematics, science, social studies and English language arts. Our high school curricula offer rigorous lesson plans and student activities, high-quality resources and differentiated supports for students with disabilities—all provided to schools and teachers free of charge. By addressing the lack of coherent high school curricula available to many urban teachers, we are providing resources that save teachers time and effort, allowing them to focus on their strengths as classroom educators in meeting the needs of diverse learners.

Our efforts co-designing curricula with teachers increasingly integrate technology. In 2015, New Visions was awarded an “Investing in Innovation” grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The project aims to improve literacy instruction in New Visions schools by providing teachers with curriculum resources and online tools to help organize, manage and facilitate student writing using Google Apps for Education, a powerful online platform that is transforming how our schools and classrooms organize themselves. The five-year project will reach 3,000 students across 10 schools in New York City by supporting teachers as they deliver instruction aligned to the Common Core standards.

## ADVANCING INNOVATION

Today, New Visions’ engine of innovation is supported by the Richard I. Beattie Fund, overseen by our founder and board chairman and seeding investment in emerging projects that address critical needs across our network. Among these needs is the shortage of teachers certified in special education in New York City. To address this issue, the Fund has

invested in supporting a cohort of New Visions teachers certified in a single subject area as they work towards an additional New York State certification in teaching students with disabilities.

Improving daily student attendance is another critical need at our schools, as research has highlighted the link between boosting attendance and on-time graduation. The Fund is supporting a study, carried out in partnership with policy research firm MDRC, to examine the effect of a new intervention at New Visions schools: same-day text message notifications to parents whenever students are absent. The first of its kind to evaluate real-time notifications to parents, the study demonstrates the rigorous, evidence-based approach New Visions takes towards identifying promising practices for school improvement.



**Amanda Wilson**  
Class of 2017, The Young Women’s Leadership School of Queens

Known to be shy, Amanda Wilson discovered her natural leadership skills through the support and encouragement of teachers and students. “This school honestly changed my life,” she says. “I feel like after here, I’m going to do bigger and better things.”

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2015–2016

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**Ralph L. Schlosstein**

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**Katherine J. Trager**

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**Randi Weingarten**

American Federation  
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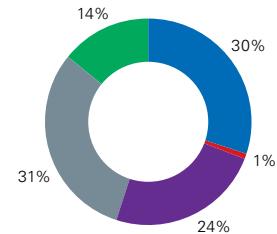
Fiscal Year 2016

## New Visions for Public Schools Statement of Activities\*

Year ended June 30, 2016

### REVENUE

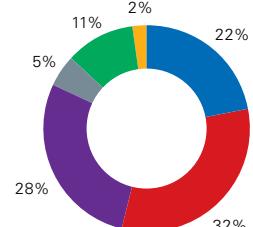
■ Government	\$ 11,070,846
■ Corporations	256,782
■ Foundations	8,934,132
■ Individuals	11,631,429
■ Other (including investment returns)	5,135,879
Total Revenue	\$ 37,029,068



### EXPENSES

#### Program Services

■ School Creation	\$ 5,786,023
■ School Support	8,419,709
■ Teacher & Leadership Development	7,382,911
■ Policy Research & Innovation	1,301,835
Subtotal	\$ 22,890,477



#### Supporting Services

■ Management and General	\$ 2,858,248
■ Fundraising	620,794
Subtotal	\$ 3,479,042
Total Expenses	\$ 26,369,519

### NET ASSETS

Beginning of Year	\$ 37,542,829
Change in Net Assets	10,659,551
End of Year	\$ 48,202,380

In accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, New Visions records contributions as revenue in the year in which they are committed even if the funds are not received. Expenses are recorded in the year in which they are incurred.

\*Financial information is unaudited as of publication. Audited for FY16 will be posted to [www.newvisions.org/financials](http://www.newvisions.org/financials) upon completion.

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2015–2016

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New York City Department of Education  
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United States Department of Education

## Partners \$100,000–999,999

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# OUR SCHOOLS

2015–2016

## Bronx

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- 2 Astor Collegiate Academy
- 3 Belmont Preparatory High School
- 4 Bronx Academy of Health Careers
- 5 Bronx Arena High School
- 6 Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics
- 7 Bronx Community High School
- 8 Bronx Engineering and Technology Academy
- 9 Bronx Haven High School
- 10 Bronx High School for Law and Community Service
- 11 Bronx Latin
- 12 Bronx Leadership Academy II High School
- 13 Bronx School of Law & Finance
- 14 Bronx Theatre High School
- 15 East Bronx Academy for the Future
- 16 High School for Contemporary Arts
- 17 Knowledge & Power Preparatory Academy International High School
- 18 Marble Hill School for International Studies
- 19 Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies
- 20 Mott Hall Bronx High School
- 21 New Visions Charter High School for Advanced Math & Science
- 22 New Visions Charter High School for Advanced Math & Science II
- 23 New Visions Charter High School for the Humanities
- 24 New Visions Charter High School for the Humanities II
- 25 West Bronx Academy for the Future
- 26 World View High School
- 27 Young Women's Leadership School of the Bronx

## Manhattan

- 1 Academy for Software Engineering
- 2 Bread and Roses Integrated Arts High School
- 3 Business of Sports School
- 4 Central Park East High School
- 5 Community Health Academy of the Heights
- 6 Frank McCourt High School
- 7 Frederick Douglass Academy II Secondary School
- 8 The Heritage School
- 9 Innovation Diploma Plus
- 10 Manhattan Bridges High School
- 11 Millennium High School
- 12 New Design High School
- 13 Quest to Learn
- 14 Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change
- 15 Young Women's Leadership School, Harlem

## Queens

- 1 Academy for Careers in Television and Film
- 2 Bayside High School
- 3 Cambria Heights Academy
- 4 Civic Leadership Academy
- 5 East-West School of International Studies
- 6 High School for Community Leadership
- 7 Hillcrest High School
- 8 New Visions Charter High School for Advanced Math and Science IV
- 9 North Queens Community High School
- 10 Queens High School for Information, Research and Technology
- 11 Robert F. Wagner, Jr. Secondary School for Arts and Technology
- 12 Voyages Preparatory
- 13 Young Women's Leadership School of Queens

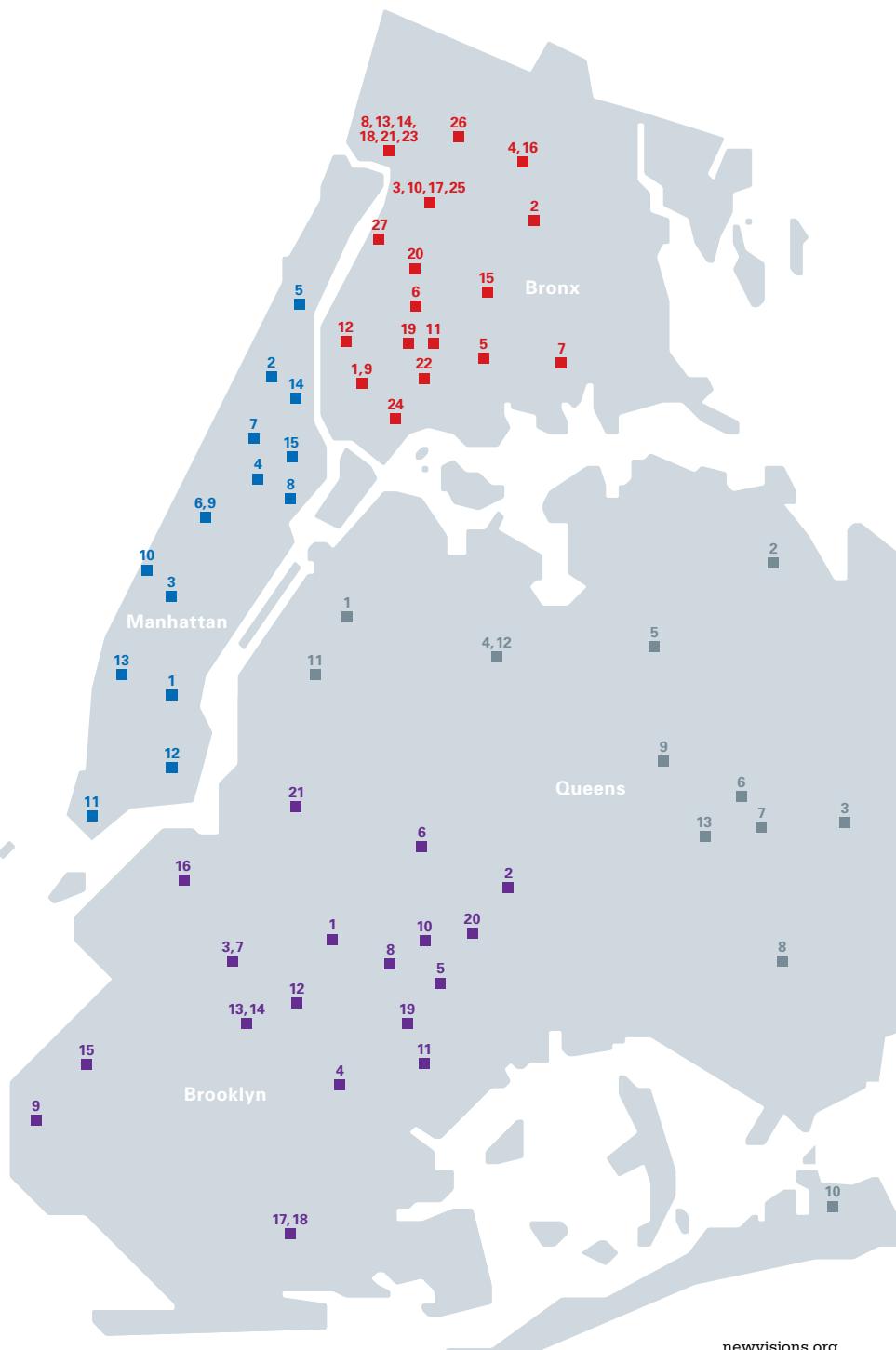
## Brooklyn

- 1 Academy for Health Careers
- 2 Academy of Innovative Technology
- 3 Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment
- 4 Brooklyn Bridge Academy
- 5 Brooklyn Democracy Academy
- 6 The Brooklyn School for Math and Research
- 7 Brooklyn School for Music and Theatre
- 8 East Brooklyn Community High School
- 9 Fort Hamilton High School
- 10 Frederick Douglass Academy VII High School
- 11 High School for Innovation in Advertising and Media
- 12 High School for Public Service: Heroes of Tomorrow
- 13 High School for Service & Learning at Erasmus
- 14 High School for Youth and Community Development
- 15 High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology
- 16 Khalil Gibran International Academy
- 17 New Visions Charter High School for Advanced Math & Science III
- 18 New Visions Charter High School for the Humanities III
- 19 Olympus Academy
- 20 World Academy for Total Community Health High School
- 21 Young Women's Leadership School of Brooklyn

## Staten Island

- 1 New Dorp High School

Staten Island



Photography: Philip Greenberg / www.philipgreenbergphoto.com  
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2015–2016 Annual Report

# BUILDING ON



New Visions  
for Public Schools

On the Cover:

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## Israel Ashiagbor

Class of 2016, Bronx Academy  
of Health Careers

"Find something that inspires you and build on it," says Israel Ashiagbor. Israel, who received a New Visions scholarship, is pursuing his interests in biomedicine and cardiology at Colorado College and aspires to a career in cardiothoracic surgery.

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**What happens when New York City public schools connect to community, support passionate and well-trained teachers and leaders, embrace a rigorous and relevant curriculum, pioneer responsive data tools to personalize education, and disseminate expertise and innovation across the network and citywide?**

As we see every day, and you'll read on these pages, students in New Visions schools create and seize opportunity as they chart their own paths to success. Students like Felton, Luna, Tahiya, Zack, Ajifanta and Shaharan inspire their peers, uphold legacies, shatter expectations, expand horizons and begin to live their dreams.

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# BUILDING ON A SECOND CHANCE



SY 2016-17 AT NEW VISIONS TRANSFER SCHOOLS\*

1,853

STUDENTS IN 10 TRANSFER SCHOOLS





## Felton Caviness

Class of 2017  
Voyages Preparatory  
Queens

## Food for Thought

**W**hen Felton Caviness was growing up in public housing in Long Island City, cooking—starting with farina and grits—was his way to help out in a family with 15 kids. “We all had to chip in, so it was a matter of learn what you can do, then do it,” he recalls.

In the years since, Felton has been in foster care, dropped out of 11th grade, returned to another high school, Voyages Preparatory—and changed people’s perceptions of himself along the way. “I like to prove that I’m capable of doing anything that I put my mind to,” says Felton, who, at 18, has just aged out of the foster system. “That’s exactly why I enrolled in Voyages. A lot of people told me, ‘You dropped out, you won’t graduate.’ But I thought, just watch how fast I can get back on track, get academic credits, pass all my Regents Exams.”

Voyages Prep is one of New Visions’ 10 transfer schools, which provide close academic and emotional support to students significantly behind on credits. The adult oversight and encouragement gave Felton the accountability he needed to work hard and succeed. “We’re adults getting a second chance at high school,” he says. “I was being paid attention to, people letting me know, ‘Make sure you’re here in the morning,’ and maybe getting a phone call in the morning from the school. I didn’t feel like I was doing it all on my own.”

With only three gym credits left to go, Felton has big plans for the future: going to culinary school, becoming a private chef, and creating a culinary arts program for public schools like one he began to develop at Voyages, called Food for Thought. Finally, his life feels like it’s falling into place, complete with a powerful ticket to the future that recently arrived in the mail—his passport. “I don’t want to be a statistic,” he says. “There’s something else out there, a whole world. That’s why I got my passport, to start the journey of going away, of building.”

# BUILDING ON INNOV



## The Next Einstein

**D**riven by innate curiosity since she was a little girl, Luna Ruiz always wanted to know more about how things worked. “I just had this insatiable thirst for knowledge,” she says.

That thirst for knowledge attracted her to Academy for Software Engineering (AFSE). She was hooked at a school fair the instant she spotted a 3-D printer and a logo that suggested a forward-looking vision. “This is it,” she recalls thinking. A small Career and Technical Education school, AFSE partners with CSNY (Computer Science NYC) to help students develop the skills to build software systems and succeed in the profession. She thrived in her four years there, developing a deep expertise in computer programming and a passion for other STEM subjects, inside the classroom and out.

“I learned how to make my own opportunities at this school,” says Luna. “Not only has the school given me resources to do things, they also helped me figure out how

to find my own resources.” She spoke at the United Nations on International Women’s Day about her experience as a female in computer science, joined the likes of the CEO of Code.org on a panel at an Apple SoHo event, and created an internship at the software start-up Codesters by approaching the company’s CEO at a party and suggesting, “Maybe you need an intern?”

The middle of five children, Luna is the first child in her family to go to college. Today, she attends Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), with the help of a New Visions scholarship. With plans to major in computer science and electrical engineering, Luna seeks to change lives through the STEM fields, as her mother changes lives as a social worker. She need look only as far as the RPI community, whose graduates, she points out, built the Brooklyn Bridge and invented the Ferris Wheel. “I want to be in that kind of culture,” says Luna. “Actually, I want to be the next Einstein.”

# Luna Ruiz

Class of 2016  
Academy for Software  
Engineering  
Manhattan



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



# BUILDING --- PAS

**Tahiya Islam**

Class of 2017  
The Young Women's  
Leadership School  
Queens

# ON SION

## If You Build It, They Will Come

In a year filled with terror attacks across the globe, Tahiya Islam wanted to foster a deeper understanding of her culture. Because she attends a close-knit, supportive school that encourages women to find their voices and act on their passions, she and a fellow student started the Muslim Students Association at the Young Women's Leadership School (TYWLS) in Queens.

"If you have a passion, you can implement it here," says Tahiya, class of 2017. "I love Islam and I love being Muslim. We shouldn't be considered people who are aggressive and mean. People might be curious, and they may not be able to ask. The MSA isn't just for Muslim people—it's for everyone."

The Muslim Student Association, powerful in its own right, is also an example of the kinds of opportunities students are encouraged to pursue at TYWLS. "Ms. Panday always says that if we have an idea for a club or team, to approach her," Tahiya says, referring to TYWLS principal Mala Panday. "That openness really helps us connect to our inner creativity and be proactive with our

passions. Let's do something for this school. Let's make it bigger."

Educating girls from 6th to 12th grade, TYWLS emphasizes leadership, STEM education, health and wellness, and college and career readiness to help young women build healthy, successful lives in school and beyond. "It's been a sisterhood," says Tahiya. She believes that her teachers and principal know her deeply and help her discover a wealth of possibilities.

This includes connecting her with a program at the American Museum of Natural History that exposes girls to the world of computer science and, says Tahiya, enables them to "meet the people who are behind the experiments I have read about in newspapers." A lover of science, Tahiya has been turned on to computer science and knows it will definitely be part of her future. "Back in the day, it was all about chemicals and hands-on things, but now they need computer science and coding, because what we are learning about the world is much more complicated and in-depth," she says. "I'm going into unknown fields and unknown waters."

# BUILDING ON COMING

## To Infinity...and Beyond

**V**arsity football wide receiver. Homecoming King. Ninety-six grade point average. Glee club. Leadership award winner. Staten Island PTA essay scholarship winner.

By all measures, Zack Benasillo was a success at New Dorp High School, an inspiration to his fellow students and teachers. But this success did not come easily for Zack, who has been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome and works extremely hard for all he earns. Throughout, he has been surrounded by a passionate (and often vocal) community of support, starting with his parents, who are vigorous advocates, and extending to teachers and counselors, classmates and teammates, and the community-based GRACE Foundation, where he sings in the glee club and which supports individuals with autism spectrum disorder and their families. His school counselor and speech therapist even took their support to a new level, forming Team Zack to successfully campaign for his election as Homecoming King.

New Dorp Principal Deirdre DeAngelis recalls seeing that inspiration in action during the last football game of the season. "The team started to chant 'Zack, Zack, Zack,' and then the stands started

chanting," she says. "The kids got the ball to him, and it was 'sob city.' It was a moment that really showed the character of the kids here and what he meant to them. It was like nothing else I've ever experienced."

The support bolsters his confidence and helps him rise to his rallying cry, from the movie *Toy Story*: "To infinity and beyond." "Even though I have a disability, I can show people that I surpass all expectations and that autism can't stop me," says Zack, who now attends Adelphi University. "It's not the disability that you have—it's how you feel about yourself. Don't judge a book by its cover. Judge a book by its story."

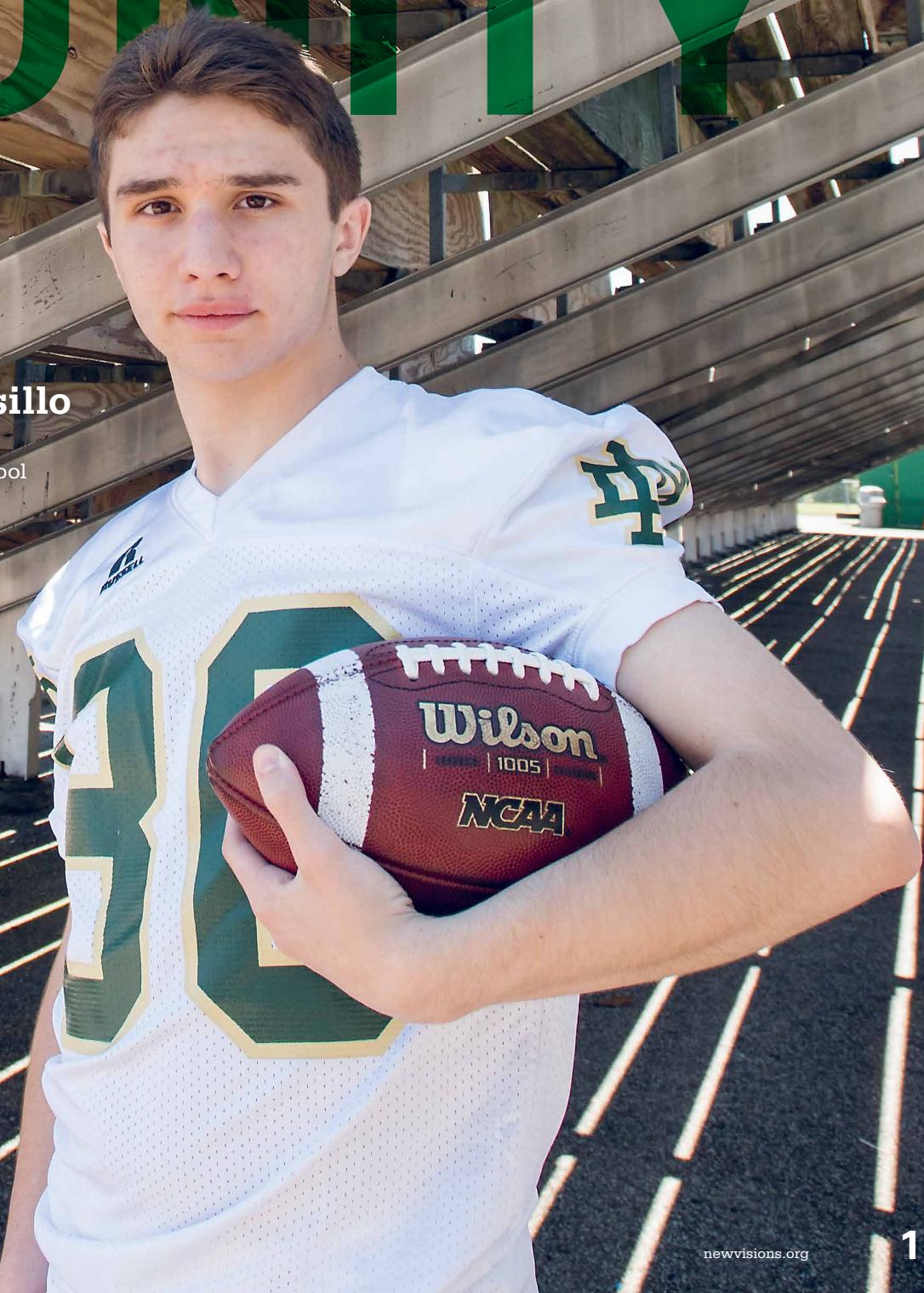
**NEW VISIONS GRADUATION RATE (NON-TRANSFER SCHOOLS)**



# UNITY

**Zack Benasillo**

Class of 2016  
New Dorp High School  
Staten Island



**A**

NEW VISIONS CHARTER HIGH SCHOOLS

**90.9%**

2016 GRADUATION RATE

**Ajifanta Marenah**

Class of 2016  
New Visions Charter  
High School for Advanced  
Math and Science  
Bronx

# BUILDING ON LEGACY

## Good Things for People

**F**rom the tragedy of her childhood, Ajifanta Marenah is emerging triumphant.

When she was eight years old in her native Gambia, her father, the head of the country's intelligence agency, was taken away in a political kidnapping. She never saw him again. Her mother moved with Ajifanta and her younger sister to New York, where life was hard. They lived in public housing, and her mother worked long hours, then got injured on the job.

But throughout, with her mother's support and guidance, Aji, as she is known, has strived to live up to her heritage. "You have to keep the legacy of your father," her mother tells her. "He was a righteous man and he did the right things. He wanted good things for people, so you have to keep that going."

Ajifanta has done just that at New Visions Charter High School for Advanced Math and Science (AMS) in the Bronx. An honors student who began taking AP courses in tenth

grade, Aji thrived in AMS's supportive and rigorous environment, graduating with more course credits than she needed, captaining her track team, interning at her school's recruitment office as well as holding a yearlong internship at New York Presbyterian Hospital. "Everybody here cares about you," she says of her close-knit school. "There always is a teacher there to help me. My principal knows me personally. AMS really helped me with everything, kept me on track."

She recently won a prestigious New York Times scholarship, \$15,000 per year towards her education at St. John's University. She plans to study political science and work for human rights. "With my background and my story, I have a passion for this," she says, adding that she's already been researching potential career paths at agencies like Amnesty International and the United Nations. "I want to fight for people who are going through what I've been through."

# BUILDING ON OPPORTUNITY

## Making His Mark

**W**hen Shaharan Chowdhury arrived in Jamaica, Queens, as a 17-year-old from Bangladesh, the first thing he did was walk into every shop along Jamaica Avenue and inquire about work. A high school junior, he was also his family's main breadwinner, as neither parent spoke much English and his father's illness made it difficult for him to work.

Eventually, Shaharan found a job at Dunkin' Donuts, where he would work every day 4:30 p.m. to midnight after his day at Hillcrest High School. "It was stressful, I must say, but you have to do what you have to do," he says. "It really helped me to develop the work ethic that is important for college."

Even though he shouldered a heavier burden than most American teenagers, Shaharan speaks instead of the great opportunities he was able to seize, especially compared to life in his native country. "In Bangladesh, you have to know a government official to do anything," he explains. "In

America, if you want to do something, you can do it." He was delighted to be able to choose his classes (including his first love, physics) as a high school student and take advantage of extracurriculars such as the Red Cross club, "because I really like helping out people like that."

He plans to continue seizing opportunities at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where a New Visions scholarship will help ease the financial burden on him and his family and the proximity to Queens will allow him to check in on his parents while at school. But, as always, Sharahan is looking beyond his and his family's everyday needs to see how he can change the world. "Focusing on yourself and your family—you have to do that, that's part of survival," says the teenager, who knows a lot about survival. "But what makes you unique are the things you do that impact others. If you're trying to expand into the world and make a mark in the hearts of other people, that's what I really think is important."





## Shaharan Chowdhury

Class of 2016  
Hillcrest High School  
Queens

NEW VISIONS SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS SINCE 2009

68

TOP RECEIVING COLLEGES

[City College of New York](#)

[Dartmouth College](#)

[New York University](#)



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