

EDVISIONS SCHOOLS
www.edvisionschools.org

EdVisions Schools

Helping Create & Sustain Great Small Schools

2009



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501 MAIN STREET ~ P.O. BOX 518 ~ HENDERSON, MN 56044
507.248.3738

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THE HISTORY OF EDVISIONS

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Seventeen years ago about 20 people got together from the Minnesota River Valley of South Central Minnesota and started to plan a new type of education. Many of the planners were educators, some were parents and some were interested community members. The group researched a number of educational philosophies and decided after much discussion that John Dewey's 1900 pragmatist theory of "learning by doing" was what they wanted to use to create a new type of learning. They searched to find essential elements compatible to that of Dewey's and found the Coalition of Essential schools common principles

The Coalition of Essentials Schools : Common Principles

1. Learning to Use One's Mind Well
2. Less is More, Depth Over Coverage
3. Goals Apply to All Students
4. Personalization
5. Student-as-Worker, Teacher-as-Coach
6. Demonstration of Mastery
7. A Tone of Decency and Trust
8. Commitment to the Entire School
9. Resources Dedicated to Teaching and Learning
10. Democracy and Equity



Very few people go to work in the morning and plan to do the mathematics portion of their job for the first hour, the communications part the second hour, the history part the third hour and the art portion the final hour. Rather everything is woven together, used together, and interdisciplinary.



which at the time consisted of nine of the current ten principles. They also focused on a number of lessons learned from innovative schools that opened in the 1960's and 1970's. With a year of research and planning in place, Minnesota New Country School was created in 1994 with a focus on student interest and performance assessment reflecting high standards and use of the latest technology.

As former educators in traditional programs, they looked at the things in traditional systems that prevented students from being productive. They decided to get rid of the rigid scheduling system and allow flexibility in the day. Minnesota New Country has no bells, but does have a schedule that focuses on student work time. They chose to have students plan projects and work the state mandated curriculum into the projects (backwards planning) rather than have the state curriculum define what, and when, a student would learn specific items (forward planning). They also felt it was essential to have learning reflect work and life. Very few people go to work in the morning and plan to do the mathematics portion of their job for the first hour, the communications part the second hour, the history part the third hour and the art portion the final hour. Rather everything is woven together, used together, and interdisciplinary. Personalized learning became a key to our plans. They knew that just because a student was a certain age did not mean that they were always ready or willing to learn a new concept. They would have learning move



at a pace that met the student's ability. They decided technology should be as easily available as it would be in an office or work setting. All students should have easy and ready access to technology as needed. They also designed personal work stations for students to give them ownership in the school setting.

THE FLAGSHIP: Minnesota New Country School

The Minnesota New Country School (MNCS) opened its doors in 1994 with 65 students. As a regional innovative school it attracted students from 10 other school districts in addition to the sponsoring district. It quickly grew to 90 students and in 1998 moved into a new facility in Henderson, MN built for 130 students. The building resembles a

small office building; there is a large open central area and ample space for each student to have a personal workstation with technology at their fingertips. There is a science and greenhouse area, shop and art room, media center, workout facility and meeting rooms. To add to its uniqueness, there is a Harvester silo built into the center of the building converted to usable room space and a presentation stage.

MNCS is currently starting its 15th year of operation with 125 students and 20 staff members. The students design projects in their interest areas and advisor/teachers coach them to include all areas of state mandated

standards. By working on projects that interest them, students are intrinsically motivated to complete projects. The role of teacher changes to that of an advisor who works closely with 15-18 students rather than a typical class load of 100-150 students. This size allows the teacher to know the student well and to assist the student in completing work and working up to their potential. Students at MNCS need to demonstrate their learning to the public two times a year at public presentation nights.

MNCS was named one of the nation's top eight charter schools in 2006 for its efforts in closing the achievement gap. Despite a third of the students currently qualify for free or reduced lunch and 40% special education rate, 100% of the students have passed the Minnesota Basic Skills Test. Ninety percent of the school's alumni have gone on to post-secondary education. MNCS is highly recognized as one of the most successful charter schools in existence.



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By giving the staff at the school the ability to make all of the decisions at the school, from financial to curriculum, they have a greater sense of pride and ownership

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THE BIRTH OF EDVISIONS

EdVisions Cooperative

When MNCS was being designed, Ted Kolderie from the Center for Policy Studies, (now Education Evolving) in St. Paul, MN suggested that they create a different type of employee arrangement within the new school. He suggested that if teachers became owners (similar to business owners) of the instructional program rather than employees, they would act differently. He was right. By giving the staff at the school the ability to make all of the decisions around the learning program at the school, from teaching methods to curriculum, they have a greater sense of pride and ownership.



EdVisions Cooperative was formed to function as the teacher professional practice group. They created staff development opportunities and other services, including payroll and benefits for its member schools. The Cooperative currently serves twelve schools in Minnesota and has over 200 individual members.

EdVisions Schools

In 2000, representatives from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation visited the school and decided they would like to see the school replicated. Some of the original founders wrote a grant and received \$4.3 million dollars from the Gates Foundation to start 15 schools that closely resembled MNCS in Minnesota and Wisconsin. In 2001, EdVisions was awarded a Federal Charter Schools Technical Assistance grant, which allowed the organization to host three annual Midwest Charter Starter institutes to identify and assist quality startup groups in a five-state area, including Minnesota and Wisconsin. In 2003, EdVisions was awarded a second Gates grant for \$4.5 million to take the replication effort nationwide, create a teacher/leader's center to help develop leaders for these new schools, and create a plan to assist/coach these new schools during their first 3 years. Twenty more schools were to be assisted over the next five years. In total EdVisions Schools has now helped create 40 schools across the nation.



INSIDE EDVISIONS SCHOOLS

Who We Are

EdVisions Schools, Inc. is a Minnesota non-profit educational development organization affiliated with EdVisions Cooperative, the first public school teacher cooperative in the nation. EdVisions Schools help create and sustain a network of small, innovative high schools across the U.S. using the EdVisions Model. Our organization has two divisions;

one focuses on school development, including ongoing school coaching, and two, the EdVisions leader center, supports school development through best practice dissemination, institutes, research, and a variety of technical assessment tools.

EdVisions fundamentally different approach to teaching and learning focuses on highly personalized learning in full-time advisories. Students have the opportunity to learn in different ways and achieve curriculum standards and earn graduation credits through

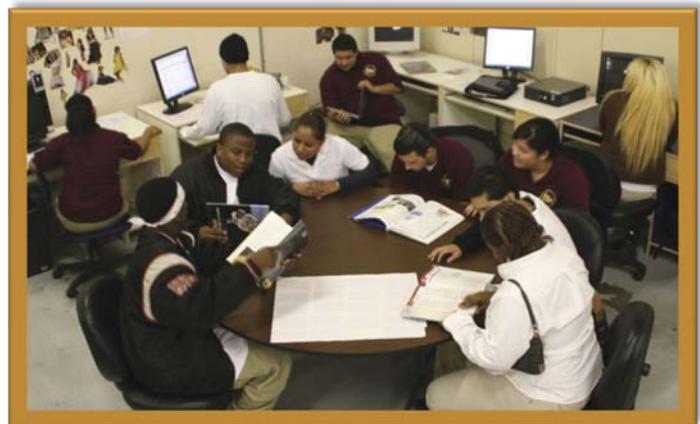


rigorous, engaging projects that are driven by student interest and connected to the real world. Educators experience a new level of professionalism, putting them on par with other professions. Results for school in operation for three years or more show conclusively that the EdVisions model can have a powerful impact on students' long-term success. For the past eight years we have promoted a set of 'Design Essentials,' the necessary practices and operating principles it takes to carry

out the EdVisions School model. The Design Essentials consist of four major components: self directed project based learning, small learning community, authentic assessment and teacher ownership. Through supportive training and assessment tools these design essentials become the means by which our beliefs are applied.

What We Do

As an educational development organization EdVisions Schools offers an array of services to assist planning groups and district reformers in creating and re-creating learning programs and schools. EdVisions is developing a national network of small, personalized schools designed to prepare all students for college, careers, global citizenship and raise their hopes for the future. We are currently working in a dozen states and soon-to-be opening a fortieth affiliated high school. In addition to the 40 new schools, EdVisions has helped several dozen other groups launch their innovative schools through consultations, start up direct technical assistance, and an extensive summer institute. EdVisions Schools offers assistance in navigating the chartering process and support to boards, administrators & teachers in planning changes. We also provide guided professional development, on-site coaching, immersion experiences and targeted assistance including understanding the model and preparing for the school opening. EdVisions has also



partnered with Hamline University in St. Paul and Minnesota State University-Mankato to offer advanced professional development opportunities and degree programs.

Why We Do It

Large comprehensive high schools do not meet the needs of every adolescent in our culture. EdVisions Schools has taken on the challenge to create great, small schools to accommodate those who have not been served well. The statistics on high school drop-outs for minority students and the large number of other disaffected students in today's



high schools is appalling. We believe this disaffection is due to the impersonal, curriculum-driven, and time-driven model that pays little attention to relationships and to relevant learning opportunities needed by adolescents. According to research done for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on why students drop out of high school, 69% said it was because of “no motivation or inspiration.” Other reasons for dropping out were that school was “not interesting” (47%) and that “absences were too difficult to make up” (65%). These statistics bear out the experience of the educators who began MNCS.

They knew that the education system was failing many students. What did these former students think would have kept them in school? More experiential and real-world learning (81%), better teachers (81%), smaller classes (74%), an engaging curriculum that is interesting (71%), more individualized instruction (70%), increased support from adults (62%), a climate of high expectations (62%), and a safe place (54%). Adolescents found that the methods employed by typical education institutions were not measuring up.

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EdVisions Schools have averaged higher than the national average on College Entrance exams for the past five years.



EdVisions Schools endeavors to help create schools that meet high state and federal standards, instill a continued love of learning, and equip students with life performance skills. Among those are: process skills, such as communication, collaboration, use of modern technologies, and carrying out complex tasks; Habits of Mind, such as analysis, synthesis, creating new knowledge, using scientific and social inquiry methods, and creating philosophical perspectives; and enhancing dispositions and traits, such as building hope, resiliency, persistence, and purpose. All of these are evidenced in the outcomes of our schools.

EdVisions also believes that giving students meaningful choices is possible through personalizing the curriculum, and small, teacher-led schools give the best chance for creating and sustaining positive school environments. Therefore, helping create and

sustain such schools is the most important work in the present education reform and accountability movement.

Results of EdVisions Schools

Proven Results

EdVisions Schools has achieved significant positive results from the mature sites in the network. We can show that schools are meeting the needs of students, parents, state departments, sponsors, and NCLB. Our schools are accountable for meeting academic content standards, thinking skills (such as creativity, problem-solving, finding information, etc), personal qualities (such as responsibility, self-directed learning, leadership), and in dispositional hope.



Other EdVisions Schools, despite having large numbers of students categorized as minorities (32.5%), low SES (46.5%) and Special Education (17.5%), none-the-less produces higher than average results on many measures. The overall ACT average for EdVisions Schools in 2007 was 21.9 (as opposed to 21.2 nationally), and an SAT average of 1713 (as

opposed to a national average of 1518). EdVisions Schools have averaged higher than the national average on College Entrance exams for the past five years. The EdVisions average NAEP proficiency rating in reading was 44.9%, as opposed to 29.7% nationwide.

In Addition, EdVisions has been carrying on a long-range study of school climate that has indicated that the model has a significant impact on positive attitudes that affect one's future. There have been issues and challenges surrounding academic achievement in schools which has been well documented; however, little attention has been paid to the ability of schools to encourage positive non-academic outcomes such as self efficacy, optimism and problem solving ability. These non-academic outcomes can not only impact traditional academic achievement but also

influence student success and quality of life outside of school and after graduation. These non-academic outcomes can be measured in schools via the Hope study.

The study showed that students who attend an EdVisions School for any length of time will increase engagement and growth in dispositional hope, therefore giving them a better chance for success beyond high school.



The Hope Survey, which measures dispositional hope in the form of the Hope Index, has shown that adolescent developmental needs such as autonomy,

belongingness (adult and peer support), mastery goal orientation (intrinsic motivation), academic press (press for understanding) and engagement are higher in an EdVisions school than in traditional schools. The study showed a significant correlation between higher autonomy, belongingness, mastery goal orientation and levels of engagement. Engagement showed a high correlation to dispositional hope as measured by the Hope Index.

Young people who have high levels of hope have been shown to be more successful in college and careers than those with lower levels of hope. The study showed that students



who attend an EdVisions School for any length of time will increase engagement and growth in dispositional hope, therefore giving them a better chance for success beyond high school.

The data from the Hope study appears to be corroborated by a recent

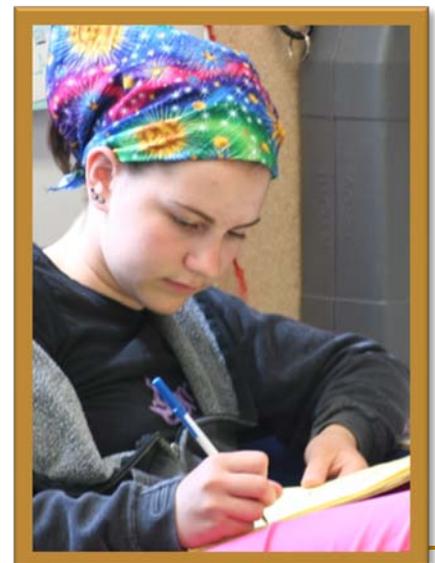
alumni survey completed by MSU, Mankato on MNCS graduates. Ninety-two percent of the alumni surveyed responded MNCS did a good or an excellent job of preparing them to reach their goals, 92% responded MNCS gave them advantage over college classmates and 83% responded MNCS gave them an advantage over their peers in a career. The MNCS alumni survey also found 95% percent of MNCS graduates have enrolled in a 2 or 4 year degree program, with 69% enrolled completing a degree and 22% currently enrolled.

The MNCS Alumni Survey data exhibits a high level of success on part of those who matriculated at the flagship school. We can make inference that graduates of other EdVisions Schools can eventually show similar data in years to come.

In addition, EdVisions Schools cater to the development of thinking skills and personal skills needed for success in college and work. Each site develops a rubric to score students on 21st Century Skills such as problem-solving, time management, decision-making, responsibility, leadership, and presentation skills. Although such skills are not aggregated across sites, the recently completed survey of MNCS alumni show that such skill development can be quite dramatic.

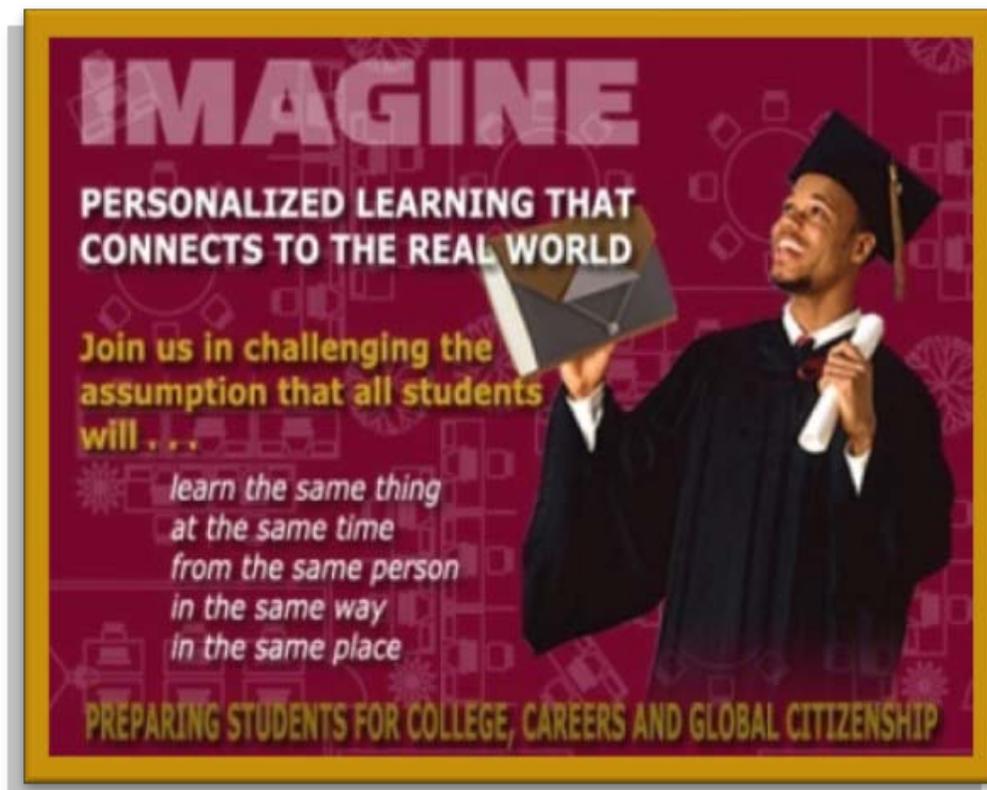
The Best Is Yet To Come

We are pleased to announce an ambitious and comprehensive effort to scale our professional development services to become one of the premier providers in the nation. The hallmark of EdVisions Schools is true innovation; the development of high



schools that fundamentally challenge and change nearly everything about teaching and learning. Beginning with our flagship school, the Minnesota New Country School in Henderson, Minnesota, we have historically been the only organization that has successfully implemented a self-directed project-based learning model and a teacher-leader governance system.

We have recently completed a new five-year business plan which calls for expansion of services and the growth of EdVisions Schools to over 100 affiliates. We will also assist with the development of specific schools, variations of the EdVisions model such as 'green' schools, recording arts schools, Native American, and online high schools.



Join Us

Our **vision** is to change the definition of school and schooling by establishing a system of schools that will provide meaningful options for parents, educators and students.

Our **mission** is to create schools that will enhance relationships and build relevant learning environments that empower students, parents and teachers to make choices. These learning environments utilize self-directed, project-based learning to build student autonomy through relevant learning opportunities; create student belongingness through full-time advisories; and empower teachers via teacher-managed, democratically collaborative schools.

If you agree with our vision and mission and feel compelled to put your passion into action

- Read more about EdVisions Cooperative, EdVisions Schools & the EdVisions Model
 - **"Teachers As Owners: A Key to Revitalizing Public Education"** Edited by Edward J. Dirkswager with a foreword by Ted Kolderie, available from the publisher, [Scarecrow Press](#) or from [Amazon.com](#)
 - **"The Coolest School in America: How Small Learning Communities Are changing everything."** Edited by Doug Thomas, Walter Enloe, and Ron Newell
 - **"Democratic Learning and Leading: Creating Collaborative School Governance"** By Ronald J. Newell and Irving H Buchen. Available from the publisher, [Rowman Education](#) or from [Amazon.com](#)
 - **"Passion for Learning: How a Project-Based System Meets the Needs of High School Students in the 21st Century"** By Ronald J. Newell. Available from the publisher, [Rowman Education](#) or from [Amazon.com](#)
 - **"The Language of Design"** by Randy Fielding & Prakash Nair
Defines a new graphic vocabulary that synthesizes learning research with best practice in school planning and design. But it is more than a book about ideas. It is also a practical tool and must-have resource for all school stakeholders involved in planning, designing, and constructing the educational adequacy of existing school facilities.
 - **"Assessing What Really Matters in Schools: Creating Hope for the Future"** by Ron J. Newell & Mark J. Van Ryzin. Since the 1960's, efforts to reform education--including various curricular changes, reading approaches, teacher preparation methods, funds for the disadvantaged, and instructional techniques--have failed to bring about true systemic change because the reforms do not deal with a different view of learning. The Hope Study was created to discover whether a radically nontraditional learning environment would achieve more positive results. In detailing the outcomes of the Hope Study, *Assessing What Really Matters in Schools* gives hope to innovative and progressive schools and to new and different accountability systems, while changing the conversation from an achievement discourse to a human development discourse.
- Visit websites
 - EdVisions Schools <http://www.edvisionschools.org>
 - The Minnesota New Country School <http://www.newcountryschool.com>
 - EdVisions Cooperative <http://www.edvisionscooperative.com>
 - Education Evolving <http://www.educationevolving.org>
 - Coalition of Essential Schools <http://www.essentialschools.org>
 - The Buck Institute <http://www.bie.org/index.php>
- Visit our Flagship School or an EdVisions School near you
 - Contact: Mary Murphy to coordinate your visit mary@edvisionschools.org
- Get involved
 - Contact an EdVisions School near you to volunteer to be a community expert
 - Inform yourself on the education issues in your area
- Donate to the Cause