



Dear Interested Big Picture Supporter,

Big Picture is eager to work with you in designing and implementing your Big Picture School(s). We applaud your decision to create meaningful alternatives to your traditional high schools program in order to better serve the needs of students who are not realizing success in the traditional system. We assume that you will commit district energy and resources to establishing the Big Picture School.

Based on our experiences to date in helping school districts, community colleges, and other organizations to establish Big Picture Schools, we have identified two major options available to you and offer corresponding agreements for your consideration, samples of which are attached. The agreements specify the expectations we have for you in the partnership.

Becoming a Big Picture School requires faithful implementation of Big Picture School "distinguishers" that reflect the essential components of the school design. A Big Picture School also agrees to share responsibility with Big Picture Learning regarding principal selection, implementation planning, and accountability. In the attached MOU, we delineate specific district responsibilities, several of which we have found to be absolutely essential to a successful adoption.

We would be happy to work with you in crafting a customized MOU. Contact Kari Thierer at 401-243-7523 if you would like to move forward.

Cordially,

Elliot Washor
Co-Director

Attachments

- Attachment A: Big Picture Philosophy & Design
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Attachment A

Big Picture School Philosophy and Design

A PHILOSOPHY OF PERSONALIZATION, A FAR-REACHING VISION, AND A UNIQUE DESIGN

Big Picture Schools are defined by their commitment to educate “One Student at a Time.” Our schools are built around the recognition that each child has unique interests, needs, and abilities that the educational program must take into account. We believe that the key to achievement lies in fostering students’ individual interests and encouraging their active participation in the learning process. Big Picture Schools focus on authentic learning in order to develop students’ ability to apply knowledge and skills to real life experience and challenges.

Each Big Picture School has a small student population but is connected to a greater whole, both locally and nationally. Each small school is expected to grow and branch into multiple schools in a given district or region in two to four years. All Big Picture Schools will be electronically networked and will participate annually in our national conference.

Because of our philosophical commitment to interest-generated, real-world, personalized learning, Big Picture Schools have a markedly different structure than other high schools. These differences may necessitate waiver language, particularly around curriculum requirements and personnel regulations. Some circumstances may require the pursuit of charter status.

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS AND ELEMENTS

Those who start Big Picture schools agree to follow the guiding philosophy of "One Student at a Time" by establishing a school with these essential components and elements:

1. Learning in the real world. The most important element of the education at a Big Picture School is that students learn in the real world. The main component of every student’s education is the LTI (Learning Through Internship). In this minimum 10-12 hour, two-day-a-week internship with a mentor, an expert in the field of the student’s interest, the students complete authentic projects (projects at internship sites that benefit the student and the mentor) with deep investigations. These projects are the main root to academic growth and investigation in the curriculum. These authentic projects are connected to the student’s interests and needs and are “real to” or meet the needs of the mentors. Students have an LTI each year they are in school, unless in 12th grade their senior thesis project (the large, culminating independent real world project) encompasses the LTI.
2. Personalization—One Student at a Time. Learning at a Big Picture School is not constrained by the school day or the school year. Students are encouraged to pursue their interests and grow academically, and given credit for activities outside of the school day and the school year. One student at a time expands beyond “academic” work and involves looking at a student holistically. Every student’s work is documented on an individual Learning Plan created and updated each quarter (or trimester) with the learning team (the student, parent, advisor, and whenever possible, mentor) in a Learning Plan meeting. The curriculum, learning environment, use of time during the school day, choice of workshops or college class, focus and depth of investigation in the Big Picture Learning Goals based on the student’s individual interests, talents, and needs. Students with IEP’s follow the same process, personalized to their needs. It involves “doing what’s best for kids”, pushing and pulling at the right time, not dictating or punishing, but problem solving and mediating. Overall, the advisor’s job is to know students well and provide the right measure of challenge and support for each student in each activity to promote growth. Students are responsible to follow their interests and passions in the real world and in their project work.

Five general learning goals provide a framework around which the student and advisor organize this customized plan. The learning goals are:

- Empirical reasoning – How do I prove it?
- Quantitative reasoning – How do I measure, compare or represent it?
- Social reasoning – What are other people's perspectives on this?
- Communication – How do I take in and express ideas?
- Personal qualities – What do I bring to this process?

3. **Authentic Assessment.** Learning at a Big Picture School is a process that is substantiated with quality products. There are high expectations for each student at Big Picture Schools. The criteria of assessment are individualized to the student and the real world standards of a project (as gauged by the mentor). Students engaged in this process at Big Picture Schools are not assessed by tests and are not given grades. The assessments at a Big Picture School include public exhibitions (one per quarter or trimester) that track growth, progress, and quality work in the learning plan and academic depth in the Learning Goals), weekly check-in meetings with advisors, weekly journals, yearly presentation portfolios, and transcripts (to translate the information in a way colleges can understand). Gateways for students' progress are between 10th and 11th grade and at graduation.
4. **School Organization.** Big Picture Schools use time, people, facilities/space, and other resources in unique ways. The organizing principle around Big Picture Schools is to educate one student at a time. In order to carry out our design each school serves no more than 130 students, with no more than 17 students (1:15 is strongly recommended) in an advisory. Students work in one-on-one and small group learning environments around their interests and needs both in and outside of school doing authentic work.

Big Picture Schools are organized around a culture of collaboration and communication that includes staff and school meetings, writing in the TGIF, scheduling school functions and events, and retreats. Each school is a small community of learning and is also part of a system of small schools in their locale and part of the network of Big Picture Schools. School facilities are small, personalized and are organized to facilitate the Big Picture programmatic design. This is reflected in the outside-in, inside-out design of the schools where real world learning occurs in the community and is also occurring in the schools. The design necessitates an interdependence between the school and the community

A Big Picture School cannot exist in a vacuum outside of the community. The core of the students' education is the LTI. As a result, the community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school.

5. **Advisory Structure.** The advisory structure is the core organizational and relational structure of a Big Picture School. It is the heart and soul of the school and is often described as the "home" and "second family" by students. All BP schools have a small number of students (goal of 15) with one advisor for a minimum of two years (preferably four).

The advisor's role is to manage the student's LTIs and individual, personalized Learning Plans. To do this, the advisor must get to know and build relationships with each student and his or her family (this includes home visits and one-on-one meetings with each student). Though certified in one area, the advisor does not "teach" his or her subject area; rather he or she draws on many disciplines to meet the needs of each student, their projects, and the advisory activities. Ultimately, the success of the student is the responsibility of the advisor.

The advisor also organizes the "advisory time" (the half-hour to hour-long meetings of the group) in the morning and the afternoon to meet the needs of the students. He or she facilitates the group activities that are designed to expose students to new ideas and concepts, provide academic learning

opportunities, create a group identity and group process, and build a sense of belonging and trust in school and the educational process.

6. **School Culture.** School culture is not a means to an end, but an end in itself. One of the things that is striking about Big Picture Schools is the ease with which students interact with adults. There is culture of trust, respect, and equality between students and adults, as well among themselves. Students are encouraged to take leadership roles in the school and student voice is valued in decision making processes.

For the adults in Big Picture Schools, team work is a defining aspect of the culture. Principals create regular opportunities for professional development and life-long learning. Staff members also reflect regularly and share ideas through a weekly publication called TGIF. Additionally, staff members meet regularly in a variety of configurations (whole staff, grade level, buddies, etc.).

7. **Leadership.** In Big Picture Schools, leadership is shared and spread between a strong, visionary principal and a dedicated, responsible team of advisors. The community functions as a democracy.

Principal Leadership:

All BP principals will be trained by Big Picture staff through immersion. They are trained around BP principal leadership criteria as delineated in our materials through mentor/intern relationships with other Big Picture principals and coaches including: human relations and communication, moral courage, vision, flexibility and efficiency, life-long love of learning and leading, and public support. The principals participate in on-going year-round professional development by BP and are supported in the start-up years of operation by Big Picture. They are part of, and actively participate in, the Big Picture network of schools nationally and in their locale. Principals are both the BP cultural/instructional leaders and the CEOs/entrepreneurs for their schools. They are the liaisons to districts, Big Picture, and staff. Overall, the success of the whole school and the advisors in particular is the responsibility of the principal.

Advisor Leadership:

All advisors are trained by Big Picture-trained principals and supported, through the principal, with BP materials and coaching. Advisors take great responsibility in the day-to-day organization of the school, the successful managing of the school, successful implementation of the curriculum, and generally the success of students in the school. In addition to formal professional development, advisors learn from each other on a daily basis; they serve as mentors and leaders to one another. Each year they talk about what they taught, passing down information from year to year. Much of the learning about how to be an advisor is done by interactions and the collegial relationship with other advisors, which results in a collaboration and a passing on of knowledge.

8. **Parent/Family Engagement and Adult Support.** Parents and families are an essential element of a Big Picture School from start up through everyday operation. They feel welcome and valued at a Big Picture school. Families are engaged around each one of their children by participating in Learning Plan meetings and exhibitions. Families are resources at these meetings for knowledge about their children as well as supporting the school community by suggesting mentoring possibilities and using their assets in ways that support the school. They play an active role in the school community that includes political issues, social gatherings, and supporting new parents and students. They get educated in playing a proactive role in the school life of their children through high school and out to college.
9. **School-College Partnership/College Preparation.** Big Picture Schools show deep faith in all students and work to make college an opportunity for all of their students in order to provide options for

them in life. They plan backwards to maximize these opportunities: challenging individual learning plans, visits to colleges, educating families about the process, and building relationships with local colleges.

All students must take college entrance exams and apply to college or post-secondary school programs. In addition, Big Picture schools continue to follow and support their students even when they become alumni. Big Picture schools require and help students to create post-high school plans.

10. Professional Development. Professional development for advisors is done at each and every school by principals, other staff at the school, and by BP staff and coaches at staff meetings and retreats. Professional development is on-going both at the school and within the Big Picture network. Advisors participate in all BP professional development activities including an annual Big Bang conference, our TV workshops, and other Big Picture events at their locale.

ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

Though each Big Picture School has a small student population, the vision extends far beyond the building. Big Picture Schools are literally and figuratively networked to promote the philosophy of “one student at a time” and share best practices. Schools agree to use and contribute to development of Big Picture’s school design materials, and staffs from all Big Picture Schools attend an annual retreat in the summer.

Principal. Each school is led by a principal whom local decision-makers select together with Big Picture Learning. It is highly desirable and intended that this principal comes on board full-time by August, one year prior to the school’s opening. During the year before opening, this individual participates in Big Picture’s leadership training, which includes consultation in Big Picture’s philosophy and design and start-up issues. As part of the training, each principal develops a thorough learning plan that identifies leadership development needs and timelines the organizational development of the school.

Each Big Picture Center must organize an active Advisory Board that meets four to six times a year, giving guidance and support to the principals in the center. This Advisory Board should be in addition to any district-based school board.

Site-Based Decision-Making. Each Big Picture School needs considerable autonomy to fully implement the school’s philosophy and design, as described in this document and in Big Picture’s extensive materials. The principal, with board approval, must be able to hire, evaluate, and terminate staff as necessary. The principal must control allocation of the school’s budget and have direct and easy access to funds.

Student Population. Big Picture Schools are designed to serve students of all abilities, interests, aspirations, and socio-economic backgrounds. Because of the individualized approach, Big Picture Schools can successfully meet the needs of all students, from the most severely at-risk to the highest achieving. Students must be recruited throughout the given district and selected by a lottery system to ensure that the school population reflects the demographics of the community as a whole.

Contract Language. Two basic tenets underlie staff contracts in Big Picture Schools: 1) trust, respect, and open communication characterize relations between the principal, teachers, and families; and 2) concern for the communal good guides all decisions. Staff members play an active role in site-based decision-making and must have ample opportunity for productive dialogue and problem-solving. Big Picture School staff are given full benefits, including retirement and health packages, and competitive salaries.

Advisors and other full-time staff at Big Picture Schools are considered salaried professionals whose responsibilities often extend beyond a traditional school day. Staff may be part of the local union, but contractual language waivers must be established to ensure that staff members have the flexibility necessary to implement the school’s design.



Attachment B
MOU: Statement of Agreement
Regarding the Establishment of Big Picture Schools

This statement sets forth the scope and substance of the agreement between _____ and Big Picture Learning to create one or more new, small high schools based on the Big Picture philosophy and design (Attachment A). The first school will open in the fall of _____.

The District will:

1. Appoint an administrator who will serve as a champion for the Big Picture School, facilitating its development and full implementation in a timely manner.
2. Plan and implement one or more schools incorporating the Big Picture school core components and elements.
3. Engage the faculty and staff in planning for the Big Picture School and the facility, where appropriate.
4. Engage the community in planning for the Big Picture School and the facility, where appropriate.
5. Provide funding for planning the new school(s).
6. Select, in collaboration with Big Picture Learning, and appoint a principal(s) for the new school(s). Pay the salary and benefits of the principal(s) during the planning year, pursuant to the district's pay scale.
7. Provide training and support to the principal(s) during the planning year and release principals to participate in Big Picture principal training.
8. Develop a detailed program design / implementation plan for the school(s).
9. Develop a comprehensive curriculum addressing Big Picture School learning goals and appropriate District academic standards.
10. Apply for waivers from traditional regulations that would impede the full implementation of the Big Picture school design.
11. Provide an appropriate facility for the school(s).
12. Invest the principal(s) with appropriate authority and responsibility for recruiting and hiring teachers and staff in accordance with district policy.
13. Employ a non-selective student recruitment and enrollment process.
14. Provide funding for the school(s) consistent with the District's school funding formula.
15. Provide student and school performance data to Big Picture Company.
16. Participate in the Big Picture annual peer performance review process.
17. Support the school's participation in the Big Picture Schools national network.

In working with the District to conduct these tasks, Big Picture reserves the right to:

1. Select, in collaboration with the District, a principal(s) for the new school(s).
2. Monitor the implementation of the core Big Picture Schools design components and elements.

To assist the District in carrying out these tasks, Big Picture will provide services as needed and requested by the district, including coaching and consulting, access to Big Picture Online, print materials, video conferencing, training and support, and conference/workshop attendance. Big Picture will develop and submit to the District a proposal and estimated budget for providing these and related services, and will enter into a contract with the District to provide such services.

Big Picture agrees that, during the term of this Agreement, the District shall have the right and license to call each school a "Big Picture School" and to otherwise use the name and trademark "Big Picture School" in such a manner as Big Picture shall approve in advance of any such use. All such use will be contingent on the district's faithful implementation of the core Big Picture design components and elements, as delineated in Attachment A.

This agreement will be reviewed annually and will be adjusted to reflect new needs and circumstances.

Limitation of Liability

Neither Big Picture or any of its directors, officers, agents or employees ("Big Picture Persons") shall be liable, responsible or accountable in damages to the District for or in connection with this Agreement, any of the materials and services provided hereunder by Big Picture Persons, or otherwise, except for acts or omissions constituting gross negligence or willful misconduct of such Big Picture Person.

Notices

Any notice required or permitted to be given under this Agreement shall be in writing and shall be sufficiently given and deemed effective when delivered personally, or transmitted by facsimile with transmission acknowledged, or deposited in the United States mail (certified) postage prepaid, addressed as follows:

If to Big Picture, addressed to: M.R. Pagano at Big Picture Company, 325 Public Street, Providence, RI 02905. Phone: 401-752-2604. Fax: 401-752-2602.

If to the District, addressed to:

Attention:

or to such other addresses as may be hereafter specified from time to time in a written notice given by such party. Both parties agree to acknowledge receipt of any notice delivered in person.

By signing this agreement, we understand and agree to the above-named actions.

Superintendent of Schools

Date

Elliot Washor
Co-Director, Big Picture Learning

Date

Dennis Littky
Co-Director, Big Picture Learning

Date