

## INTRODUCTION

NewSchools Venture Fund is pleased to share this first installment in our new *Practices from the Portfolio* series of publications. As a venture philanthropy firm that invests in education entrepreneurs and supports them as they grow to scale with quality, one of NewSchools' greatest assets is its ability to connect education entrepreneurs with each other and with other leaders, and to enable them to share ideas and knowledge in order to accelerate the pace of systems change for underserved students in public schools. In our engagements with the entrepreneurial education organizations we support, we have found that these entrepreneurs have much to share with—and much to learn from—one another.

For this volume of *Practices from the Portfolio*, we asked FSG Social Impact Advisors to help us capture, synthesize and share this powerful knowledge residing within the NewSchools portfolio. We identified some of the most effective practices in use by the organizations in our portfolio, many of whom are working to create new systems of public charter schools. With FSG's help, we documented the details of how these practices were developed and implemented, and collected tools and templates used by these organizations along the way. The result is a set of case studies that we believe will inform practitioners who are looking to improve practice within their own organizations across three areas: human capital, organizational growth, and educational curriculum and quality.

Entrepreneurial education organizations consistently find that one of their biggest challenges is to recruit, train, and support the teachers and leaders they need to achieve at high levels. In **Section 1, “Human Capital: Recruiting, Training and Supporting Teachers and Leaders,”** we examine practices that are designed to meet this need, including both internally developed solutions and examples of high-leverage partnerships with external providers. This section includes the following case studies:

1. ***Achievement First: The Design and Implementation of a Highly Effective Teacher Recruitment System.*** Charter management organizations (CMOs) and schools are constantly working to find and recruit the best and the brightest teachers within a relatively limited talent pool. Achievement First developed a systematic approach to hire and retain great teachers resulting in a high number of quality applicants, a high acceptance rate for offers, and a high retention rate.
2. ***New Schools for New Orleans: Partnership with New Leaders for New Schools and The New Teacher Project.*** Recruiting excellent teachers and principals to urban schools is one of the biggest hurdles impeding CMOs from growing to scale. New Schools for New Orleans contracted with The New Teacher Project and New Leaders for New Schools to recruit and train effective teachers and principals. This case explores how CMOs or groups of charter schools in a region can partner with intermediaries to meet human capital needs.
3. ***High Tech High: Implementation of a Teacher Credentialing Program.*** In response to concerns that traditional university-based programs do not produce enough high-quality teachers prepared to teach in innovative schools, High Tech High developed its own state-approved teacher credentialing program.
4. ***DC Prep: Implementation of the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP).*** Many charter schools and CMOs do not have the expertise, time, or resources to develop an in-house professional development program from scratch. DC Prep implemented The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), a third-party program that provides teachers with ongoing professional growth, evaluation, a career path in teaching, and performance-based compensation.

5. ***Green Dot Public Schools: Working in a Union Environment.*** Recognizing the key role a union could play in facilitating open dialogue around important issues and increasing teacher satisfaction, a group of teachers at Green Dot, along with Green Dot’s founder, formed their own teachers union as an affiliate of the California Teachers Association.

Managing growth while maintaining quality requires organizations to execute successfully a range of centrally-run practices. In **Section 2, “Home Office: Strategies for Managing Scaling Organizations,”** we examine these varied practices – including external relations, new school openings, and governance – and identify the resources needed to support these practices. This section includes the following case studies:

6. ***Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools: Board Engagement in Fundraising.*** Generating enough funding to sustain growth and manage day-to-day operations is a universal challenge for CMOs. Alliance for College-Ready Public Schools has developed a highly successful board-driven approach to fundraising.
7. ***Partnerships to Uplift Communities: Community Outreach.*** While most CMOs and charter schools recognize the importance of strong community ties, they don’t always know how best to go about the process of building them. Partnerships to Uplift Communities invests heavily in community outreach and has built a wide range of community partnerships to support the start-up and operations of its schools.
8. ***Aspire Public Schools: An Approach to Opening New Schools.*** For CMOs, opening new schools is a complex and challenging endeavor requiring an intense amount of work and the ability to manage a vast array of tasks over a relatively short period of time. Aspire has developed a detailed, systematic approach to opening new schools, which reduces the complexity and challenging nature of the new site development process.
9. ***Lighthouse Academies: Annual School Opening Survey.*** The opening days of school can be a chaotic, stressful time for school staff. Lighthouse developed and implemented an annual survey to continuously refine the process of school openings, and to ensure that the school year begins smoothly.
10. ***Aspire Public Schools: Board Management.*** A highly qualified board that is managed and engaged appropriately can be a significant contributor to organizational success. Aspire puts considerable effort into developing and managing its board, and has created structures and systems to ensure that the work of the board is informed, relevant, and impactful.

At the heart of the work of the organizations in NewSchools’ portfolio is providing every child with a high-quality education. In **Section 3, “Education Program: Curriculum and Quality,”** we examine several practices that organizations are using to advance the performance of schools, including curricular choices such as character education programs, partnerships with colleges, and mechanisms to review and ensure quality. This section includes the following case studies:

11. ***Mastery Charter Schools: The Design and Implementation of an Effective Social and Emotional Learning Program.*** Schools that would like to make social and emotional learning (SEL) a priority likely will need guidance to develop an effective program. Mastery created and implemented an SEL program that is integrated into its school curriculum and culture and is designed to develop the interpersonal skills students need to thrive in today’s global economy.

12. ***Perspectives Charter School: Character Education.*** Character education can be critical for success in today's world, but culling through the hundreds of available approaches to determine the best program is daunting. Perspectives developed its own character education curriculum, *A Disciplined Life™*, which has become a fundamental component of its schools.
13. ***Partnerships to Uplift Communities: College Partnerships.*** By increasing exposure and access to college from an early age, Early College High Schools are increasing the number of underserved youth who graduate from high school and go on to pursue post-secondary education. Partnerships to Uplift Communities partnered with local colleges to promote college readiness and enable students to take college-level courses for credit while still in high school.
14. ***New Schools for New Orleans: School Review Process.*** The Knowledge is Power Program and the New York Center for Charter School Excellence have implemented a school review process to assess school performance on instruction, operations and governance and to develop improvement plans. New Schools for New Orleans recently implemented a school review process based on these models.

When taken as a whole, these case studies exhibit the depth of knowledge and experience embedded in the NewSchools portfolio and highlight the value of sharing effective practices across these organizations as they work to transform public education for underserved students. We would also like to thank all of the organizations whose practices are profiled here for their willingness to share openly with others and for the time they spent working with us to produce these case studies.

We are confident that this compilation will be a powerful resource for your organization, and we look forward to sharing the next installment of *Practices from the Portfolio* later this year.