

Model Providers: New Pathways to Innovation

The world is changing rapidly and schools are working hard to keep pace with what students need to be successful today and in the future. Many school leaders who want to reimagine education are embracing innovative school models. For some, that means designing new schools. For others, it means implementing successful design components into their existing schools. At NewSchools, we are seeing an increase in the demand for support in redesigning schools. While there are many ways to respond to this demand – and the diverse needs of school leaders – we see great potential in “model providers.”

What is a Model Provider?

It's an organization that partners with schools to provide a bundle of comprehensive, aligned and well-informed instructional resources, teacher supports and administrative tools. We believe this approach is promising and can offer a great deal to schools that have neither capacity, time nor resources to create new models on their own. Model providers can accelerate communities' efforts to reimagine their public schools, both district and charter.

Sometimes educators may not realize they have created a model that has potential for scale. Indeed, some do not yet see themselves as model providers. In this resource guide we will explore different examples of model providers, various ways to enter the field and stages of development.

Could This Be You?

Imagine you've developed an innovative school design that is proving to be effective. And then, what if other school leaders saw your results, loved your design and wanted to do something like that in their own schools? Instead of having to build their own concept, maybe they could take a shortcut and work with you to purchase a “bundled package” that gives them exactly what they need, at a fraction of the cost, and with much less time invested in design, testing and iteration.

This would make you a model provider, with the potential of reaching significant scale to meet the

needs of hundreds, if not thousands, of schools. Model providers vary in type and scale, and we have identified a consistent set of stages and entry points. But first, let's consider this example.

Following Their Inner Compass

It was in 2013 when twin brothers Todd Dickson and Daren Dickson developed a concept that would ultimately inspire a community to rethink the integration of academic and social-emotional learning. Todd, an engineer by training, and Daren, who was trained as an LMFT, dreamed of opening a school that integrated mindfulness and academic rigor in an environment that nurtured a child's spirit by giving them the mental health support they needed. By participating daily in social-emotional circles, students and teachers would be able to build trust with face-to-face dialogue that would help create an optimal environment for learning.

Built around the model of a compass, their new school would serve a racially and socio-economically diverse student population. The Compass model is a human development model grounded in the foundational elements of what it means to be human. “Working the Compass” means growing in body, heart, mind and spirit in pursuit of excellence in every dimension. Using the compass would ground students and allow them to have conversation that break down barriers, leading to greater academic and social-emotional development.

In 2014, the brothers' dream became a reality, and Valor Collegiate Academies was born in Nashville, Tennessee. The community immediately embraced the new school, and children were growing in ways the community hadn't imagined. Todd and Daren sought to increase their impact and opened a second middle school in 2015 and a high school in 2018. Their schools are now among the highest performing public schools in Nashville.

The brothers attracted the attention of many other school leaders who saw the results at Valor and wanted to implement the Compass model at their own schools. So, they developed a way to share their model in a way that makes it easier for these school leaders to apply Valor's practices in their own schools. Valor is just one example of what a model provider can be. While Todd and Daren did not create their schools with the intention of becoming model providers, the potential for greater impact is clear.

Why We're Betting On Model Providers

NewSchools Venture Fund saw the potential in Valor Collegiate Academies and has been supporting them over the past four years. While we initially supported Valor to launch a second middle school to increase the impact Valor had in its own community, we began to see a few years ago that Todd and Daren could reach many more schools and communities with their innovative model; they could be model providers.

We are committed to supporting innovators with the potential to scale their vision. Over the past few years, we have become more interested in model providers as a way to address the growing demand among educators for support in reimagining their schools to better meet student needs. We have written both about what constitutes a model and more recently, why we are optimistic about the potential of this concept to scale and serve more students.

Those familiar with the sector might know of more established models such as EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning) and newer examples such as the Summit Learning Program and New Classrooms' Teach to One: Math. While these models and others have shown promise, we believe there is burgeoning demand for more – and different types of – model providers. Our view is that having a greater variety of model providers across the PreK-12 spectrum would more fully address the diverse needs of educators

We use the term "model provider" to refer to an organization that does the following:

-  Partners with schools and systems to improve learning outcomes for a whole school or a meaningful portion, such as a full content area for a grade band (e.g., middle school math, K-8 social-emotional learning).
-  Offers a bundle of integrated resources, tools and supports designed to help schools reach those outcomes.
-  Provides schools with implementation and change management support, either as a direct service or through trusted third-party partners.
-  Sets ambitious goals for student outcomes and shares responsibility for results.
-  Establishes connections among its network of partner schools to share ideas with one another and continuously improve the model.

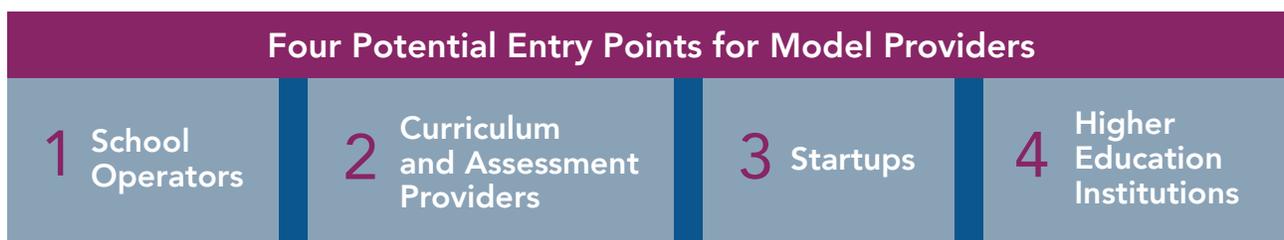
and their students. And new designs can take advantage of recent advances in learning science and new technologies.

Since 2018, NewSchools engaged in a number of activities to invest in 18 model providers. We also spoke with more than 130 schools, technology providers, curriculum and assessment providers and entrepreneurs about their interest in becoming model providers. In addition, we also considered lessons from other effort at scale, such as comprehensive school reform, ed tech, charter schools, and models outside the education sector.

These efforts led us to several insights about the most likely origins of these types of organizations as well as the stages they go through toward scale. Because this is still a relatively new area of focus for us, it's important to emphasize that these are emerging insights that may evolve as we learn more about what works and what doesn't. We still have a lot to learn, but we are committed to doing so and sharing with the field as we do.

Four Ways To Become A Model Provider

We identified four potential entry points for future model providers – as school operators, curriculum and assessment providers, startups and higher education institutions. While each type of model provider may operate differently, they share a common theme – bringing schools instructional resources, teacher supports and operational tools to accelerate communities’ efforts to reimagine their schools.



1. School Operators



Teton Science Schools (TSS) operates two independent schools in Wyoming and Idaho using a project-based model grounded in STEM. They are known for their emphasis on “place based education” – using the assets in the communities surrounding the school to support learning. Through its Place Network initiative, TSS has recently supported seven additional rural public schools in implementing this model, with plans to grow to at least fourteen in the 2019-20 school year.

Many schools across the country have built innovative models where students are thriving. They are reimagining the use of time, space, technology and the roles of students and adults. It’s no surprise these schools attract hundreds of visitors each year who are looking for the “secret sauce.” Leaders of these schools often want to serve even more students, but need help exploring ways to magnify their impact. They are experts who built their models based on core beliefs, experiences, and key supports. They designed each of the pieces and understand how they come together to create a coherent, integrated model. After implementing the model over many years with their own faculty and students, they have a strong sense of what supports are required to implement it with fidelity.

However, to successfully transition to a model provider, school operators must focus on two important areas:

Understand exactly what makes the model unique.

Providers must determine what is essential to their success and if it can be implemented by educators in other schools. In some cases, school operators may decide their entire model is essential. In others, they may identify a meaningful portion of it (e.g., middle school math). In any case, the important thing is that they have a clear sense of the scope of the approach and their non-negotiables.

Balancing running one school while becoming a model provider.

School operators must also find a way to continue running their own schools well while at the same time ramping up a new part of their organization focused on serving other schools. For smaller organizations, this transition can be particularly taxing without significant philanthropic or government support.

Model Providers can emerge from charter schools or networks, traditional districts and independent schools. Depending on the type of organization, teams will likely encounter different advantages and challenges.

Charter Networks

Charter networks tend to have an entrepreneurial spirit that will serve them well as they embark on a new type of approach, and they can generally expand without inherent geographical constraints. The biggest challenge that charter networks face is that they already operate their own schools on lean budgets with limited central staff, so they will struggle to pursue this path on their own. And because they operate outside of district management, they will need to learn how to operate successfully in a district context if they want to scale their models.

Charter School Spotlight: Summit Public Schools

After growing to an 11-school charter management organization in California and Washington, Summit Public Schools developed a model, Summit Learning Program, that other schools could use. Now in its fifth year, Summit Learning Program is being implemented in nearly 400 schools nationwide.

District Schools

There are 15,000 school districts across the country operating more than 90,000 schools. If more resources, supports, and tools were codified and shared broadly, more children would benefit. In addition, it has become increasingly common for districts to allocate resources toward innovation grants, innovation zones or even an innovation department. These investments are peaking up in certain places, which gives us hope that one day district schools may follow the model provider path, creating even more innovative schools that might consider the model provider path in the future. District schools face dual challenges of building the capacity to disseminate and having the will to share beyond their walls. Because they are primarily funded by a local tax base, districts are not designed to serve students beyond their immediate geography. As a result, successful models that originate with districts may need to spin out to serve students outside of their jurisdiction.

District School Spotlight: New Classrooms

New Classrooms, which began within New York City Department of Education, is a personalized math model. After running initial pilots in that district, the team realized national growth would only be possible if they launched an independent, nonprofit organization. They decided to pursue that path, but it wasn't without its challenges.

Independent Schools

There is potential for independent schools to become model providers. Because they operate outside the public accountability system, many independent schools are able to reimagine the student experience in creative ways. Also, they are often well-resourced and have connections to a donor base that may be willing to invest in new paths. However, the leaders of independent schools may have limited experience working directly with public schools. In addition, the student population they serve may not be the same as those that adopt their model in public schools. If that is the case, they will need to spend time ensuring their model can effectively serve students with different backgrounds.

2. Curriculum and Assessment Providers



ST Math historically only offered a supplemental digital math product that consisted of games designed to build conceptual understanding of math through a visual approach. However, their customers have been asking for a more comprehensive solution that could serve as a school's entire math model. After careful consideration, ST Math decided to explore the model provider path. As a first step, ST Math is piloting a more comprehensive offering that includes new lesson plans and instructional resources that are designed to complement their existing digital games.

Curriculum and assessment providers with compelling products that are not (yet) comprehensive offer a second potential entry point. Those that have already reached significant market share and demonstrated efficacy are the most attractive candidates. This might look like a supplemental math product building out its offerings to become a complete math solution for a grade span. Or perhaps a core/basal curriculum provider with analog content might enhance its offering (i.e., integrating into a technology platform, offering online formative assessment and/or adaptive learning tools).

These organizations have the advantages of capacity to realize the vision at scale. Because they have existing products in the market, they have likely built brand awareness and credibility with existing customers who may already be demanding more.

They have experience deploying the technical and human capacity to support many schools. Additionally, their internal product development and technical talent can be leveraged to support new product builds. Finally, their implementation and business development experience will help them as they scale a new type of model.

However, they will need to commit to this journey and devote significant resources to a "new line of business." Providers, especially for-profits, will need to make the case to their investors that this is a strategy worth pursuing. And going from providing a partial solution to a holistic solution will require a non-trivial shift in expertise and assets, particularly for organizations that historically have not directly supported teacher instructional practice.

3. Startups



3DE Schools was born as a model provider. Initially incubated within Junior Achievement Georgia, 3DE provided a highly relevant and engaging high school model, co-designed by industry partners, to existing schools within the Metro Atlanta area. After several successful implementations, 3DE recently spun out into a separate non-profit organization and is pursuing a scale strategy in multiple states.

Entrepreneurs may want to consider starting a new model provider organization. We often meet people with bold visions for what school should be, but are not yet sure how to make that vision a reality. Working within an existing operator may stifle their innovation, while launching their own school may not get to impact fast enough. If they knew there was another option, we believe some would consider launching a model provider.

The benefit of a startup is that it frees the team from going through the difficult and time-consuming process of launching and then operating a school before going down the model provider path. Instead, a team can devote itself from the outset to designing their new model. They can also build the model from the outset to be comprehensive, aligned, and well-informed.

However, this can take significant up-front time and resources. Startups must either build their models from scratch or curate and integrate external resources into a coherent whole. And given that they do not have an umbrella organization to subsidize their efforts, they will need to fundraise to support all their operating expenses until they begin generating earned

revenue, which could take years. Then, once the model is developed, they must find committed partners willing to pilot a new model. This may require that they start in lower-stakes settings like summer school or after school, then move into the core academic program once they demonstrate results. In any case, there is risk and expense associated with trying to prove something new.

While we have not yet encountered many entrepreneurs pursuing the model provider path, we believe this could become a more attractive option for visionary leaders in our sector. With greater awareness and access to startup capital, more entrepreneurs might consider this option over alternatives like starting a school or an ed tech company.

4. Higher Education Institutions



Arizona State University (ASU) recently launched ASU Prep Digital. By leveraging technology, business, and educational resources from the university, ASU Prep Digital is building a modular approach - from individual courses to more holistic instructional models - that districts in Arizona can leverage to better meet the needs of their students.

Some higher education institutions might be well positioned to support the development of new model providers. Typically, these institutions have considerable interdisciplinary resources, as well as philosophical alignment to prepare increasing numbers of students for career and life readiness. In the process, universities could help to erode the long-standing divide between secondary and postsecondary education and make postsecondary attainment more possible for underserved students. Previous efforts such as Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and the early college movement have helped blur the lines between two, but perhaps now is a time to consider fresh new approaches that build on their success.

The most straightforward example would be a university taking a successful model they use for their own students and applying it to the PreK-12 context. Similarly, universities may be able to assemble intellectual property that has been developed at the university and use it as the basis

for a PreK-12 model. Finally, we could imagine a faculty team investing in R&D to build a new model from scratch, perhaps in conjunction with a nearby school operator.

However, there are potential challenges for this pathway as well. First, this path will require visionary leadership within an institution. Further, because of the historical divide between secondary and postsecondary education, the policy, technology, and academic landscapes do not seamlessly connect. Bridging the two worlds will require cross-sector expertise and a long-term commitment. Finally, for most universities, this cannot be a net drain on their finances; they will need to find a way to generate earned revenue from this path or risk it being eliminated in a tough fiscal environment.

The Journey of Model Providers

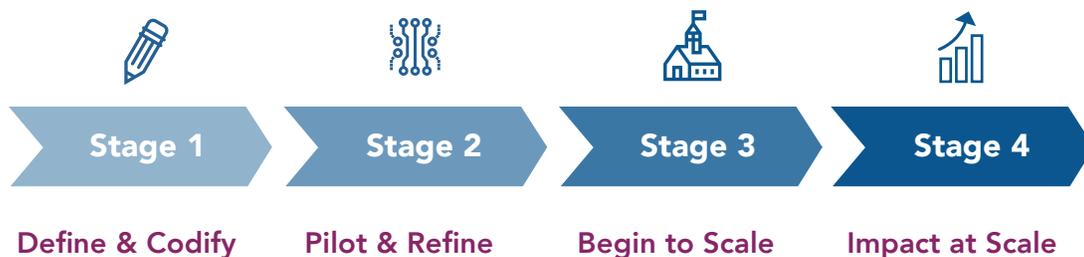
Regardless of industry, growing an organization from inception to enterprise scale involves multiple stages. Education is no exception. What might work in the early stages with a handful of close partners will likely not work as a model provider scales to serve hundreds or thousands of schools. Even as the core model remains intact, scaling it exponentially will require model providers to do qualitatively different tasks and to operate in qualitatively different ways.

Our early efforts to support model providers suggests that they typically go through four distinct phases in their pursuit of a fully-scaled model. Across these stages, teams will face different challenges and will engage in materially different activities. Below we map out the four stages of model providers, their essential questions, and the activities they might undertake within each stage.

First though, we offer a brief preface. Below is a set of viable stages, and not necessarily the set

of stages. We are still early in this work, and we know that stages might look different for different organizations, especially those from different on-ramps (which we describe in detail in the next section). We also recognize not all organizations will pass through the stages successfully; that is, some organizations may face insurmountable headwinds at various stages that push their strategy away from the model provider pathway.

Model Provider Stages



Stage 1: Define & Codify

“We think we might have something.”

Teams embarking upon stage one believe they have something. A combination of direct experience, research on learning and development, and intuition has convinced them that they can accelerate other communities’ efforts to redesign their schools. The next step is for them to decide what “model” they plan to offer to partner schools. At NewSchools, we define a “model” as a bundle of integrated resources, teacher supports, and operational tools that support educators in reimagining the student experience.

What Educators Need To Bring Their Vision To Life



Instructional resources — curriculum, materials, lessons assignments, projects, assessments.



Teacher supports — professional development, grading rubrics, classroom management tools.



Operational tools — implementation guides, role definitions and staffing plans, sample student schedules, tech platform.

Once teams have settled on the model they plan to implement, they will then need to secure partner sites and plan for these early pilot implementations, keeping in mind that the goal is to test their hypotheses about what educators will need to bring this vision to life in their context. As they plan their implementations, teams must consider the technical and human capacity needed from school partners.

Expectations of Model Providers in Stage 1

Objective 1: Define the Model

Teams first need to decide what model they want to offer partner schools. To help them achieve clarity, teams should:

- Craft a vision statement for the model that identifies the core beliefs about learning and development;
- Determine the scope (e.g., grades served, whole school, school within a school, specific subjects);
- Clarify what longer-term student-level outcomes (a.k.a. “graduate aims”) the model is intended to achieve;
- Outline the model’s major components (e.g., design principles, pedagogical approach, key experiences, etc.); and
- Decide what aspects of the model will be mandatory and what will be optional, as well as what partner schools must provide themselves.

Objective 2: Prepare Necessary Tools & Resources

Once the model has been defined, teams will need to prepare the relevant components – instructional tools, teacher supports and operational tools – so their partner schools will have what they need to successfully implement it. This requires that they:

- Assess the current state of the tools and resources they have already developed (if applicable);
- Identify critical gaps and develop a plan to address them before piloting (stage two);
- If necessary, begin codifying existing practices, creating new resources and/or leveraging external ones; and
- Package these resources into a comprehensive and aligned bundle suitable for educators in partner schools.

Objective 3: Develop an Implementation Approach

Teams should then decide how they intend to support implementations in partner schools. There are two goals associated with this objective – (1) ensure partner schools have what they need to implement the model successfully and (2) learn from these experiences to improve future implementations. Given that, they should consider how to:

- Introduce leaders and educators to the model;
- Develop guiding hypotheses on how the model should be implemented over time, considering the model’s complexity and the change management required;
- Sequence implementation supports to ensure that educators are equipped to implement the model successfully;
- Balance their desire to get the initial implementations “right” by offering intense support with the need to be efficient as they scale; and
- Use early implementations to test hypotheses and improve their approach over time.

Objective 4: Identify Initial Pilot Sites

Teams should carefully select their first set of partner schools (typically 2-5), ensuring that they:

- Develop criteria for the types of schools that would make strong partners, using the “5 C’s” as a guide: conviction, clarity of vision, coalition of stakeholders, capacity, and culture;
- Reach out to a broad range of potential partners that match that criteria to gauge interest;
- Select partners with whom they have established a trusting relationship, are enthusiastic about the model and have an “early adopter mindset” - that is, they are okay with a less-than-perfect rollout and are willing to co-learn and give feedback on how the implementation is going; and
- Prepare a detailed memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clarifies the relationship between the model prover and the partner.



Valor Collegiate, for example, initially built their Compass model for use in its own schools. Todd and Daren worked closely with their own faculty and staff to implement and refine the model. While they were intimately familiar with the process and content, much of their know-how was not written down; it was just in their heads. That worked at a small scale in their own schools, but as they considered offering the model to other schools, they realized that was no longer a viable option. Therefore, one of the first steps that Valor needed to undertake on the path to becoming a model provider was to clearly define the scope of their model and begin codifying the elements that schools would need to implement it.

Stage 2: Pilot & Refine

“We have defined our model and we are ready to pilot it.”

While the first stage is focused on building a vision, stage two is about turning the vision into reality. The primary goal of this stage is to pilot their model to test its viability for larger scale.

From our experience, model providers at this stage typically pilot core components of their models in two to five schools over one to two years before pursuing bolder scale plans. These pilots provide an early test of their implementation plan and give the team an opportunity to see their model in action. This stage is about testing hypotheses, understanding effectiveness in different contexts, and then using that information to improve the model and the implementation approach.

Expectations of Model Providers in Stage 2

Objective 1: Support Pilot Sites

Teams should ensure that they are effectively supporting each of their pilot sites. They should:

- Execute and track their responsibilities in the MOU;
- Communicate regularly and proactively with each partner site; and
- Adapt and adjust as needed (within reason)

Objective 2: Test Key Assumptions and Refine Approach Based on Findings

Teams should be collecting data and insights from their pilot sites to test key assumptions, and they should use that information to enhance their models and their implementation processes. Key areas include:

- Design tools and systems to track fidelity of implementation across all partner schools;
- Begin to capture and analyze relevant indicators of academic (e.g., academic growth, proficiency, persistence) and non-academic success (e.g., mindsets, habits, skills, culture/climate);
- Survey school partners to understand their experience;
- Schedule time to review and reflect upon this data regularly; and
- Use these insights to inform changes to the model and implementation approach

The logo for New Classrooms features the words "New Classrooms" in a bold, sans-serif font. Below the text is a horizontal bar composed of several colored segments: blue, red, purple, green, and yellow.

New Classrooms began in 2009 by piloting its middle school math model with 80 students over the summer. The team was deeply engaged in all aspects of the pilot, supporting the back-end operations to make the proof of concept model work and observing the implementation. Based on the insights they gleaned, they made significant updates to the model that they incorporated into their plans for more extensive pilots. Later that year, they expanded to serve after-school programs, and eventually, the model was used as a replacement for the traditional math block in three schools within the same district. Again, they used these pilots to gather information – both quantitative and qualitative - that they later used to continue refining their model and updating their implementation approach.

Objective 3: Determine Whether the Model is Ready for Broader Scale

As teams progress through this stage, they will face an important question: should they continue refining their model or has it proven itself ready for broader scale? This will require that they:

- Develop “green light” criteria to provide an objective means of assessing readiness for growth, incorporating all relevant data and insights captured during objective two; and
- Engage their board, funders and other key stakeholders in the decision.

Objective 4: Plan for Growth

Teams that decide they are ready to pursue a growth strategy will then need to develop a multi-year plan to support that ambition. This plan should include:

- Growth projections (# of schools, # of students) for at least the next three years;
- An assessment of the potential pipeline for new sites;
- An aligned budget with detailed revenue and cost projections;
- An assessment of the model’s sustainability and, if necessary, a plan to increase revenue and/or reduce costs.

Stage 3: Begin to Scale

“We definitely have something and we’re ready to go big.”

Having piloted their solution in multiple contexts, model providers that enter stage three should have a model that is ready to be implemented in more schools. By this point, there is likely early evidence that the model has been effective, and that the team has refined its implementation approach to allow for greater scale. In this stage, they will build internal capacity to begin scaling their model to serve more schools in different contexts.

Expectations of Model Providers in Stage 3

Objective 1: Generate Demand

Teams are building internal capacity to generate increasing demand for their models. Key areas include:

- Segment the market and develop a sense of the total addressable market their model serves;
- Build marketing and business development functions that can efficiently and predictably generate demand for the model;
- Build a robust pipeline of prospective school partners aligned with their vision; and
- Establish partnership criteria that is informed by previous implementations .

Objective 2: Begin Implementing a Scale Plan

Teams have developed a plan to scale their model and are ready to begin executing it. We expect teams at this stage to support at least 15 schools over the course of a two-year investment period, with ambitions to scale more significantly thereafter.

Key areas include:

- Select partner sites that meet established partnership criteria (see objective one above) and will commit to implementing the model; and
- Support implementation in these partner schools, while providing effective change; management, developing on-the-ground buy-in, and moving toward a more efficient approach in the process (see objective four below).

Objective 3: Continuously Improve

Teams have systems in place to capture relevant data, which they can use to monitor implementations and continuously improve their implementation processes and their models. Key areas include:

- Design tools and systems to track fidelity of implementation across all partner schools;
- Systematically capture and analyze relevant indicators of academic (e.g., academic growth, proficiency, persistence) and non-academic success (e.g., mindsets, habits, skills, culture/ climate) in all partner schools; and
- Use data from implementation sites to inform changes to the model and implementation supports.

Objective 4: Pursue Sustainability

By this point, teams should have a reasonable conception for the value and the costs of their model to schools. They should use this information to pursue viable business models that will allow them to achieve sustainability at moderate scale. This will require that they:

- Develop and test business models that are less reliant on philanthropy and generate more earned revenue from one-time and recurring fees;
- Reduce implementation costs by moving away from supporting “by any means necessary” to a more streamlined process that minimizes high-touch elements without sacrificing fidelity; and
- Leverage technology as a means of driving efficiency in the model.

Stage 4: Impact at Scale

“We’ve proven our model and want to expand our reach to hundreds of schools. We need to build a sustainable organization for the long term.”

As early-stage, catalytic investors, we work closely with organizations in stage four. Our hope is that major funders will mobilize to support teams past this phase, ensuring there is enough capital to fund ongoing R&D and cover short-term operational deficits so they can develop into mature, sustainable organizations that achieve impact at scale.

As model providers reach this stage, they must answer questions like:

1. How do we effectively manage an increasingly **large and complex organization**?
2. How does the **model evolve** as the education and technology landscape changes?
3. How do we achieve **financial sustainability**? Organizations must find a business model across recurring subscriptions, pro services, and philanthropy to continue their work.
4. How do we proactively **create conditions to support growth** (e.g., influencing policy)?

Conclusion

We would love to see more model providers to reach stage four with models that show significant, positive impact for hundreds of schools. Getting there will require a concerted effort in pipeline development, specifically targeting organizations that have capacity and clarity of vision to pursue this type of growth. We also believe that model providers will benefit from customized support (aligned to their stage of development), as well as being a part of a community of practice – to learn from others who are on this journey alongside them.

Over the next three years, we will continue building a diverse portfolio of model providers in stages one, two and three, with an emphasis on stages two and three. While we expect most will come from the first two on-ramps – school operators or curriculum and assessment providers – we welcome interest from anyone compelled by this vision. If you or someone you know fits this description, please share your contact information and provide a [summary of your model](#) on our website in the innovative schools section.

