newschools
v e n t u r e   f u n d

At NewSchools Venture Fund, our investment strategy is based on a simple idea: Most of today's schools were designed for a different time and purpose, for the society and economy of the early 20th century. They matched up well enough with how we lived and worked then— preparing an elite few for higher education and the rest for the jobs available in their towns or regions. The world has changed dramatically since then, and our schools have struggled to keep up. **It's time to update our schools so they work better for today's students.**

The good news is that teams of educators all over the country are tackling this challenge in district and charter schools. We have learned a great deal by supporting many of them.

After three years of investments in the launch of innovative new schools and the redesign of existing ones, we are launching a new portfolio based on what we have learned. We are currently building a pipeline of early-stage organizations called "model providers," with intentions to invest in several promising teams over the next few years.

In the sections that follow, we highlight some of the lessons that led to this new portfolio, an initial set of attributes that help describe model providers, and some ideas about how they might create impact. Because we are eager to build a strong pipeline of opportunities, we hope you will connect with us if you think your organization or your idea are a match with what we are looking for.

LESSONS FROM OUR INNOVATIVE SCHOOLS INVESTMENTS
We are inspired by the teams of educators all over the country who are updating their visions for what students need to be successful now and in the future. In addition to our investments in 80 teams

creating new schools over the last three years, we worked with 20 districts and charter networks that are building a new vision for their existing schools. Our experiences with them deepened our understanding of how educators engage in this exciting but challenging work. We gained insights into the kinds of outcomes they prioritize, the design choices they are making, and the types of tools and resources they are searching for as they bring their plans to life.

The teams we supported have embraced an expanded definition of student success: They remain committed to ensuring students build a strong academic foundation, but they also are helping students develop other important mindsets, habits, and skills that correlate with success in young adulthood. And they are redesigning their schools in ways that support the shifts needed to achieve those outcomes. We see teams taking different paths to redesign. Some teams start with certain subjects or grade levels, while others work to shift their whole school to a new model within a year or two.

Whether teams frame their work as school redesign, school improvement, or reimagining learning, they require aligned tools and resources to support the shifts they desire to make. A few teams aspire to design and build everything from

scratch, but most look for effective approaches that have already been developed and proven to work in other schools with similar visions and goals. Based on what we've seen, we group these tools and resources into three categories:

- **Instructional resources:** curriculum, instructional materials, assignments, projects, assessments
- **Teacher supports:** professional development, grading rubrics, classroom management tools
- **Administrative tools:** implementation guides, sample student schedules, tech platform

Finding and assembling the right mix of tools and resources into a coherent solution can be a significant undertaking. Educators must ensure each resource they adopt is aligned with their desired outcomes and instructional approach, but it's also essential that all the components work well together. And when teams cannot find what they need, they are left to fill in gaps by either adapting existing resources or building new ones. Too often this hard work of search, discovery, creation and integration of this extensive collection of "stuff" falls to individual teachers, whose time and attention is already stretched to the limit.

However, we are beginning to see more schools and systems work with a partner that can provide a bundle of integrated instructional resources, teacher supports, and administrative tools. When aligned with a school's vision and goals, these bundles can provide a solid foundation for educators to build on as they implement their improvement or redesign plans. This reduces the time and cost of their efforts and can be an effective way to bring promising approaches to more students.

These partner organizations that provide integrated tools and resources along with implementation support are frequently called "model providers." While there remains a lot to figure out about this approach, including what to call it, we see tremendous promise. At this point, we are unclear whether this way of supporting

schools will be limited to a few players or if we are in the early stage of development of a vibrant segment with many organizations. As an early-stage investor, we are committed to backing several high potential teams who are interested in this path and learning alongside them about how the segment might develop in the next few years.

EARLY ATTRIBUTES OF MODEL PROVIDERS

Based on our observations and early work in this area, we have identified a few attributes that together describe a model provider. Because the segment is nascent, this list is certainly incomplete and will undoubtedly evolve over time. But for now, it is a useful guide for our pipeline building work. In our view, model providers:

- **Partner 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)
- **Offer a bundle of integrated tools and resources** designed to help schools reach those outcomes
- **Provide schools with implementation support,** either as a direct service or through trusted third-party partners
- **Set ambitious goals for student outcomes,** share responsibility for results and establish feedback loops to continuously improve the model

The pioneers in this space help illustrate how model providers might originate and the ways they might partner with schools. (It is important to note that not all these examples embrace the model provider label at this time. We are completely open to a better name for this type of organization.)

Summit Learning is arguably the leading example in this space, currently partnering with 320 district and charter schools that are implementing Summit's approach. The program evolved from Summit Public Schools, an 11-school charter

network that redesigned its model to expand and improve its results for students. They developed a mix of curated and original tools and resources that support commencement-level outcomes for academics and habits of mind, with a focus on helping students develop ownership of their learning. After years of hosting tours for teams of educators from around the country, they bundled the tools and resources they had developed for use in their own schools and now make them available to other schools and systems. They also provide implementation support and facilitate a community of practice among their school partners.

New Classrooms began as a program inside New York City public schools and later spun out as an independent nonprofit. Their approach bundles instructional software, lessons, and projects for middle school math from multiple sources and integrates them through a web-based platform. They offer schools a suite of instructional resources, teacher supports and administrative tools for a full middle school math program that helps personalize learning for students. New Classrooms provides substantial implementation support and measures its success by the learning growth of students in its partner schools.

Wildflower Schools started as a network of independent Montessori micro-schools, but recently evolved into a nonprofit that enables teachers to start shopfront schools based on Wildflower's principles. The organization provides a bundle of tools and resources that make it easier to get started and ongoing implementation and operational support to their decentralized ecosystem of schools.

These examples are not exhaustive, but they help illuminate the early attributes of model providers and some potential paths for entrepreneurs. We expect that many of the organizations in our pipeline will emerge from innovative charter and independent school networks or effective programs in districts.

We also imagine a path for organizations that currently offer comprehensive curriculum and instructional materials. By extending their services to include administrative tools and teacher supports and sharing responsibility for student outcomes, some of these players could conceivably evolve into model providers. Similarly, a platform provider that currently provides an administrative backbone to manage personalized or competency-based learning could assemble the additional instructional resources and teacher supports needed to provide a more comprehensive solution to schools.

And, as has been true throughout our 20 years as an investor in education entrepreneurs, we are certain we will meet high-potential teams with the vision and skills to create these types of organizations from scratch, building on what early innovators have learned and plowing new ground.

WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

We want to partner with early-stage organizations that embody or aspire to develop the attributes of model providers. We are eager to work with teams that want to have a positive impact on as many PreK-12 students as possible by working with schools who are reimagining the learning experience. Our specific focus is on model providers with two key features in addition to the attributes we described earlier.

First, we are interested in model providers that are committed to helping schools implement coherent, integrated approaches that consistently achieve great results for every student. They should be committed to equity, holding high expectations for all students and ensuring learning outcomes are not predictable by race, ethnicity, income or gender. Many aspects of the traditional approach to schooling can create barriers to students achieving ambitious goals, which is why we are interested in supporting innovative models that reimagine the learning experience so that it is more personalized, supportive and engaging for

students. We are open to approaches that are designed to be implemented across an entire school or a meaningful portion of a school, as described earlier.

Second, we want to support model providers with ambitions to support meaningful, lasting change in hundreds, perhaps thousands of schools. Educators across the country are working to redesign, reimagine, and improve their schools and they are looking for effective tools, resources and support. Model providers have the potential to be one effective way to address this growing demand, but we need more of them that aspire to grow rapidly to meet it. This requires a business model that can support scale and a pricing model that schools can afford. And based on what we have learned so far, while technology is not a replacement for good teachers, it is a key asset for model providers who want to partner with many schools and serve them effectively.

COULD THIS BE YOU?

Our work over the last few years leads us to think model providers could have real potential to support school improvement and redesign, as well as new school creation. We are interested in helping to develop, launch and strengthen many more of them. We intend to create a portfolio of early-stage model providers and invest in them to test their approaches, build out their offerings and connect with schools and systems around the country who are interested in partnerships.

This brings us to this request:

If what we have described as a model provider fits your organization, or you want to explore what it might take to become one, we want to hear from you. Please take a few minutes to confidentially share your idea with us, and we will use this as the starting point for a follow-up conversation. We look forward to hearing your idea!