
Implementing New School Models

Center on Innovation & Improvement

An effective system of support addresses three key components of constructive change: incentives, capacity, and opportunity (Rhim, Hassel, & Redding, 2008). Incentives are inducements or motivators that encourage change, and capacity is the ability of the district and school to respond to incentives in constructive ways that improve outcomes. States and districts also need to extend the opportunity to change by providing space for new schools to be created and new ideas given wings. Examples of opportunities that allow for the introduction of new school models are strong charter school laws and state procurement policies that permit districts to hire external providers—such as education management organizations or charter management organizations—with proven track records to transform chronically low-performing schools. Examples of new school models include the Academy for Urban School Leadership, Achievement First, Expeditionary Learning Schools Outward Bound, and Green Dot Schools. Schools adopting new models will require autonomy (opportunity) to implement innovative learning environments while being held accountable for performance through renewable contracts. School options are wide-ranging and include variations such as global citizenship, entrepreneurship, talent, and gender-specific schools. Other new school model options, such as dual language academies, respond to the specific need for enhancing student outcomes for second language populations. Adoption of proven new school models is a key component of the Renaissance 2010 initiative in Chicago. Research to date indicates that some Renaissance 2010 schools are performing on par, others are lagging slightly, and some are performing slightly ahead of their counterpart schools (Akitunde, 2009). In other words, although there is not evidence of universal success, the schools are on a growth trajectory that appears to indicate movement in the right direction, and they are providing the district with a laboratory to test established whole school models as well as develop new ones. The lessons learned from the opportunity to implement new school models inform school improvement efforts across the district. The Center on Reinventing Public Education recently released a new report exploring adoption of multiple new school models as a strategy to drive district-wide school transformation and the link supplied below provides more information.

Effectively adopting new school models involves a rigorous selection process and key autonomies. A benefit of school models is that they incorporate an establish structure and control of the multitude of variables at play in a school by reducing the range of possible ways of doing things to a focused core, establishing coherence and order in a school (Redding, 2006). It is not difficult to describe an effective school or to envision space for a new school. The problem lies in the successful implementation and in maintaining the integrity of the model. Careful implementation planning is the key to success, and faulty planning is the road to failure. The failure of a school reform model to deliver the expected results can be attributed to three causes, or a combination of the three: a) the prescribed practices are not sufficiently powerful to improve student achievement; b) the practices are not organized and presented in a manner that makes successful implementation likely; and c) the practices are not implemented well (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Mascal, 2002).

Action Principles

For State

1. Revise policy and/or legislation to remove barriers that would discourage space for new schools and decrease the amount of time it takes to convert/close a school.
2. Provide autonomy for schools to operate more independently, such as with fewer duplicative reporting requirements.

For District

1. Develop a rigorous application review and selection process to identify promising or established new school models.
2. Include district teams in thorough review of potential models.
3. Develop a long-term plan to recruit and train school leaders.

4. Craft key relationship terms with new school operators to make certain they can be held accountable for key performance goals.

For School

1. Carefully craft the vision for adopting a new school model and make the case for why its approaches will produce the desired results.
2. Tend to the details of implementation by setting implementation goals, including improvement targets and timelines. Focus on closing the achievement gap and improving the learning of all students.
3. Provide broad-based orientation and professional development so that staff at all levels are fully aware of the needs and potential of the new school model.
4. Recruit a critical mass of committed support for the new school plan among key stakeholders such as parents, community organizations, local businesses, and the philanthropic community.
5. Cultivate support for the establishment of a positive learning culture among staff hired to work in the new school.
6. Develop a clear plan of action and adhere closely to the integrity of the chosen program to maintain fidelity of implementation.
7. Set goals for significant improvement by students including those who have previously failed.

References and Resources

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