

Beyond District/Charter:

How City Leaders Catalyze and
Support Systems of Great Schools

Prepared by Public Impact for Education Cities



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About Public Impact

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Table of Contents

Introduction and Executive Summary

- The School Governance Challenge 4
- The Rise of Alternative Governance Models 5
- Governance Reform: A Role for Education Quarterbacks 6
- About this Report 6
- A Framework for Change: Eight Actions Driving the Success of Education Quarterbacks 7

Case Study: Innovation Network Schools (Indianapolis, IN) 8

- Enabling Conditions: Poor Academic Performance and Charter Growth Not Meeting Demand 9
- The Mind Trust Before Innovation Schools 9
- Catalyzing Innovation Schools 10
- Implementation of Innovation Schools 11
- The Mind Trust Today 12

Case Study: Empower Schools (Springfield, MA) 14

- The Path to Springfield 16
- Founding the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership 17
- Supporting Successful Implementation 18
- Springfield Goes to Denver 20

Case Study: The Recovery School District (New Orleans, LA) 22

- New Orleans’ Struggles Pre-Katrina 23
- The Evolution of the RSD and NSNO 24
- NSNO’s Role in Catalyzing Reform 25
- NSNO’s Role in Supporting Successful Implementation 26
- Direct Investments in Critical Supports 26
- Blueprint Outcome Goals 28
- Indirect Supports: Building Relationships to Keep Reform on Course 28
- NSNO’s Future 29

Conclusion 31

Appendix

- The Mind Trust Timeline 32
- Empower Schools Timeline 33
- New Schools for New Orleans Timeline 35

Endnotes 36

Introduction and Executive Summary

The School Governance Challenge

A vigorous debate rages about the best way to provide all children with the educational opportunities they need to thrive.

The persistence of pernicious opportunity and achievement gaps, and the limited progress in closing those gaps among most major urban U.S. school districts, has led many advocates to propose major changes to the status quo. A study on academic achievement in America's urban schools found that less than one-third of the cities studied made gains in reading or math proficiency over three years, and in 2009, one in four urban ninth-graders failed to graduate from high school in four years.¹ Despite decades of increasing investment in traditional school systems, the work of dedicated and talented educators and system leaders, and the shared desire to do what's best for children and families, traditional school systems have major structural impediments to creating the conditions for success.

As we've said in previous *Education Cities* reports, it's not the people, it's the system.² What, then, are the alternatives? If traditional school systems can stifle schools' success, how might different school governance models create better conditions? And what, exactly, are the conditions that enable a school's success?

In a nutshell: autonomy and accountability. Education advocates seeking solutions that can be implemented at scale see promise in the results from schools structured to empower educators to make decisions about resources, staffing, and more. Crucially, public officials also hold those schools accountable for delivering strong student results.

Without autonomy at the school level, educators struggle to respond to students' and families' needs. They struggle to attract top talent (what professional wants to work in a setting without significant decision-making authority?). And they face constraints when they want to innovate or adapt their instructional models.

Without accountability, "drop-out factory" schools stay open, damaging families and neighborhoods for generations.³

Other structural impediments to strong schools—such as boosting investment in anti-poverty programs, food security, and other social services—may also need attention. But increasing educator autonomy and school-level accountability in traditionally top-down, unaccountable school systems holds significant, scalable promise.

We took a close look at several changes to school governance aimed at providing autonomy and accountability throughout a system. Although they used different models, each of the governance reform strategies focused on creating the conditions of autonomy and accountability. As a result, each has supported:

- MORE RESOURCES CONTROLLED AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL
- MORE EMPOWERED LEADERS AND EDUCATORS
- NEW, INNOVATIVE SCHOOL MODELS
- MORE SCHOOL-LEVEL STABILITY IN TIMES OF TUMULTUOUS LOCAL POLITICS
- GREATER ABILITY TO RESPOND TO STUDENTS' AND FAMILIES' NEEDS

The Rise of Alternative Governance Models

Three overlapping “waves” of governance reform have arisen: mayoral control, followed by state-run turnaround districts, and now, in-district autonomy or innovation zones.

1 THE FIRST WAVE, mayoral control, spread in the 1990s, shifting governance authority from elected school boards to city mayors. The Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago school boards, among others, were dissolved, and those cities’ mayors took control of school districts. Advocates of this approach believed that a mayor could streamline decision-making, empower superintendents to take bold action, and enable voters to hold a single (and known) elected official accountable for schools’ results. While some evidence links mayoral control to gains in student performance,⁴ we believe the impact of mayoral control was limited in part because large urban districts did not use this new latitude to create school-level autonomy and accountability.⁵

2 THE SECOND WAVE established state-run “turnaround districts” that require traditional systems to improve student outcomes in their lowest-performing schools, or cede control of those schools to the state. Louisiana’s Recovery School District (RSD) was the first, in 2003, followed by Tennessee, Nevada, and Michigan.⁶ State turnaround districts are designed to intervene in situations of chronic, lingering underperformance, both directly (by taking schools over) and indirectly (by threatening takeover if outcomes don’t improve).⁷ States may operate schools themselves or through partnerships, and have mostly worked with other operators—usually proven charter school networks—which introduced new school models to the region or state. Turnaround district schools have also had greater autonomy in turnaround districts than in their local districts.

Student performance results in these districts, however, have been mixed.⁸ And state-run turnaround districts have faced other challenges, such as criticism for working around, rather than with and through, local communities. They’ve struggled to clarify whether and how schools return to local governance control.⁹ For example, Louisiana’s legislature recently voted to return authority over the state district’s 52 New Orleans charter schools to the Orleans Parish School Board, the pre-existing school district.¹⁰ But that decision came after years of debate and uncertainty about whether and how governance would shift.

3 THE THIRD, AND MOST RECENT, WAVE of governance reform is the establishment of innovation zones, in which schools are clustered within a district and granted more autonomy and accountability. This comes through formal, binding commitments that shift resources and autonomy in ways that can be changed only with significant effort by governing officials.

These zones constitute a promising middle ground in the school governance reform debate. For example, they:

- maintain local control and keep decisions within the hands of the community, via local elections;
- provide a pathway for the district to embrace a “portfolio” approach to offering a variety of school models and operators, thereby offering families more choices;¹¹ and
- create both the urgency to change and the structural conditions needed for transformative school improvement.

This approach, in its best implementation, can be more collaborative and context-specific than the other two, and holds significant potential for cities across the country.

Governance Reform: A Role for Education Quarterbacks

Any ambitious reform faces challenges, and governance reforms require support on multiple fronts, including support for school operators, strong pipelines of teachers and leaders prepared to work under new structures, communities engaged as partners in change, and supportive policy structures that are thoughtfully crafted and implemented. Occasionally, “traditional” districts—such as Denver and Oakland—have implemented reforms from within, while others have seen the push for reform come from external policymakers, advocates, and others.¹² **In all cases, governance reforms can be more effective in partnership with local education “quarterbacks”**—nonprofit organizations that use their civic leadership role to raise and invest philanthropic resources in schools, talent, engaged stakeholders, and policy—in service of a shared goal of increasing the number of high-quality schools in a city. Bringing civic leadership, resources, capacity, and more, education quarterbacks are uniquely positioned to support the creation and implementation of governance reforms.

About this Report

This report documents how education quarterbacks have supported governance reform in three cities, and why and how they were effective. As profiled in the report, The Mind Trust’s work in Indianapolis shows how a quarterback can identify shared interests among diverse stakeholders to advance a new governance model called Innovation Network Schools, and then put resources behind that model to get it off the ground. In Springfield, MA, Empower Schools has pioneered and supported a structure that brings together an array of organizations and individuals focused on improving outcomes for students. In Louisiana, New Schools for New Orleans has demonstrated how an education quarterback can fill gaps, coordinate efforts, and help develop structures for autonomous systems of schools.

This exploration of why districts need governance reform and how to catalyze and implement it focuses on the following questions:

- 1 why did the education quarterbacks in these cities take the steps they did?
- 2 how did those actions ultimately lead to and support a new governance structure?
- 3 what lessons can other city-based education organizations take from their pioneering experiences?

To answer these questions, we interviewed 27 people in these cities, asking them to describe the conditions surrounding governance reform efforts and the roles of various individuals and organizations. We summarize those roles in Figure 1 on page 8.

We learned that education quarterbacks catalyze reform by:

- identifying opportunities to push for something bold;
- building relationships and legitimacy to drive influence; and
- doing whatever heavy lifting is needed to get reform underway.

After catalyzing reforms, quarterbacks then support implementation success by:

- recruiting and incubating new schools;
- growing and supporting talent pipelines;
- ensuring key community members and “grasstops” advocates are at the table; and
- providing cohesion and coordination.

Put another way, the best education quarterbacks are unafraid to push for novel solutions and willing to do whatever it takes to make those innovations happen, including working through other organizations and existing structures when possible (or necessary), but also rolling up their sleeves and getting directly involved in the hard work this scale of reform requires. This report profiles the three education quarterbacks and offers recommendations for other city-based organizations and leaders contemplating (and/or preparing for) governance reform as a path to better schools for students and families in their community.

FIGURE 1

A Framework for Change: Eight Actions Driving the Success of Education Quarterbacks

The table below identifies eight actions we consistently observed in the three profiled cities. Although the conditions, people, and steps are specific to each city, all three education quarterbacks performed most, if not all, of these actions to *catalyze* governance reform and support successful *implementation*. The case studies that follow apply this framework to explore how and why The Mind Trust, Empower Schools, and New Schools for New Orleans have been able to activate and support governance reform in their cities.

Catalyzing Actions	Examples
1. Identifies and/or helps to identify strategies for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Researches or has experience with the political context of the region ● Creates comprehensive vision and goals for region and the players involved
2. Builds relationships and legitimacy to drive influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engages key members of the community ● Identifies local reform champions ● Uses personal and political relationships ● Lends credibility to the reform effort ● Recruits partners with complementary strengths
3. Takes on the heavy lifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides technical support for the transition ● Drafts a viable reform plan or legislation
Implementing Actions	Examples
4. Expands the number of high-quality, autonomous schools in the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recruits high-quality charter management organizations, education management organizations, and other providers ● Incubates new schools ● Builds capacity in existing high-quality schools for expansion
5. Bolsters talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expands the pipelines of excellent teachers and leaders ● Supports districts and schools to develop and restructure staffing
6. Secures resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Influences public and/or invests philanthropic resources ● Brings state and national support for people and organizations into the city
7. Maintains and uses strong relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seeks parent and community ideas and influence ● Engages and informs key community members ● Brings diverse actors together for a common cause ● Serves as “critical friend” to the district ● Holds schools accountable for results
8. Coordinates reform efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Serves as an intermediary between schools and districts ● Plans strategically ● Spearheads citywide problem-solving ● Encourages innovation

CASE STUDY:

Innovation Network Schools (Indianapolis, IN)

Governance reform: Innovation Network Schools (Indianapolis)

Innovation Network Schools: Innovation Network Schools are autonomous, accountable public schools enabled by state legislation. New or existing schools apply to the district school board to be approved. An Innovation Network School operates under a contract with the district and has access to district facilities. The contract spells out the school's funding and autonomies. Exempt from many district policies and state regulations, Innovation Network Schools must meet performance targets to maintain their contracts.

Quarterback description and mission

At The Mind Trust, we aim to provide every student in Indianapolis with access to a high-quality, world-class education. We do this by recruiting and developing talented, innovative educators, launching high quality schools with the conditions for success and engaging neighborhoods and communities to help lead education innovation. —www.themindtrust.org/about/

Who's who

David Harris: Founder and CEO of The Mind Trust, former Indianapolis Charter School Director

Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee: Superintendent of Indianapolis Public Schools

Maggie Lewis: Co-leader of Lewis-Hubbard Group, president of Indianapolis City-County Council

Al Hubbard: Co-leader of Lewis-Hubbard Group

Bart Peterson: Co-founder of The Mind Trust, former mayor of Indianapolis (2000–2008)

Ahmed Young: Director of Charter Schools, Office of Education Innovation

Outcomes data for all Mind Trust initiatives

Since 2006, The Mind Trust has placed more than 900 teachers and school leaders in charter and district schools, reaching more than 132,000 students. The Mind Trust's Education Entrepreneur Fellowship, Innovation School Fellowship, and Charter School Incubator have received more than 3,800 applications from 48 states and 36 countries, and have raised more than \$72 million to support local schools. The Mind Trust has supported or incubated 11 schools now operating, and is supporting 9 schools under development.

Enabling Conditions: Poor Academic Performance and Charter Growth Not Meeting Demand

In the early 2000s, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) faced deep challenges. Students were leaving the district in droves for other school options. The district went from 110,000 students in 1970 to only 29,000 in 2016, partially due to racial conflict and white flight in the 1970s, plus the consolidation of Indianapolis and Marion County in 1970 called “Unigov.” This reduction in students left many facilities underused or unused. In 2001, less than 50 percent of IPS students entering high school graduated on time. Only 17 percent of black sixth-grade students were proficient in English language arts, and 25 percent were proficient in math on statewide assessments.

In 2012–13, the state began using its authority under Public Law 211, which passed in 1999, to take over and attempt to turn around low-performing schools. Of the first five takeover schools, four were in IPS. By the end of 2014, those four schools were still failing—suggesting a failed takeover law. Charter schools were experiencing greater success in Indianapolis, but significant further charter growth seemed unlikely because of challenges in finding facilities, securing resources for replication, and attracting excellent principals. Indianapolis needed bigger changes for its students.

After years of leadership in education, David Harris, CEO of The Mind Trust, was well positioned to think big. In 1999, when Bart Peterson needed an education advisor for his mayoral campaign, he tapped Harris despite his having no previous involvement in education issues. Harris did his research and crafted a detailed plan to promote successful charter schools in Indianapolis. After Peterson became mayor in 2000, Harris became the mayor’s charter schools director in May 2001, shortly after a law gave the mayor’s office the authority to approve charter schools. Harris took charge of approving new charter schools and holding them accountable. Charters grew and delivered strong results: by 2011–12, Indianapolis had 26 charter schools with 11,500 students, and data from CREDO showed that charter schools outperformed their district peers by achieving an additional two months of learning in reading and an additional three months in math.¹³

After five years in the mayor’s office, Harris recognized the need to respond to the city’s talent gap to support the presence of more high-quality autonomous schools. In 2006, he co-founded The Mind Trust with Peterson to bring talented entrepreneurs, principals, and teachers to Indianapolis, and to support autonomous schools.

The Mind Trust Before Innovation Schools

In its first year, The Mind Trust created the Venture Fund to bring to Indianapolis national talent and advocacy organizations, including Teach For America and The New Teacher Project to provide teachers, and Stand for Children, which focuses on family engagement and organizing, policy and advocacy, and electoral work.¹⁴

The Mind Trust also created the Education Entrepreneur Fellowship in 2007. Fellows design an initiative to address a K–12 Indianapolis need, receiving an annual \$100,000 salary for two years with full benefits, plus professional support and mentoring. Since 2008, nine fellows have been chosen, making Indianapolis an attractive destination for education leaders.

Earl Martin Phalen, for example, began Summer Advantage USA during his fellowship, to offer rigorous academic and enrichment programming for low-income students during the summer. Phalen went on to receive investments from The Mind Trust's Charter School Incubator and Innovation School Fellowships for schools that he founded, and he also supported a school that received an Educator Empowerment Award from The Mind Trust. Another fellow, Mariama Carson, began the Global Prep Academy, a Spanish immersion charter school that is also an Innovation Network School. Through the fellowship, The Mind Trust gave Carson the funds to spend six weeks in Mexico developing the school. "The Mind Trust lets people plug into the things they need to do to launch their educational endeavor," Carson said in an interview. "I didn't need to ask for anything."

"The Mind Trust lets people plug into what they need to do. I didn't need to ask for anything."

—Mariama Carson, Education Entrepreneur Fellow

These Venture Fund and Entrepreneur Fellowship investments helped create a stronger system of organizations in the city to support high-quality schools. But Indianapolis also needed a bigger supply of schools themselves. In 2011, The Mind Trust started the Grow What Works campaign to help grow the most successful components of the now stronger education ecosystem. The campaign raised \$18 million support the efforts of fellowship recipients as well as national partners that The Mind Trust brought to Indianapolis, setting the stage for the next phase of The Mind Trust's work.

Catalyzing Innovation Schools

Despite these successes, The Mind Trust's leaders increasingly believed that the only way to supply enough great schools to meet the need was for IPS itself to substantially change. Too many resources, including operating dollars and facilities, were locked up in a system that was not working well, and Indianapolis needed a way to unlock those resources to support high-quality autonomous schools. Using funding from The Joyce Foundation, The Broad Foundation, and the state, The Mind Trust crafted a blueprint for how the system could shift to one in which schools were freed from typical district constraints, more money flowed directly to schools, and strong school operators could use district facilities. In December 2011, The Mind Trust, along with Public Impact, published "Creating Opportunity Schools: A Bold Plan to Transform Indianapolis Schools," with a detailed plan for enabling autonomous schools and transferring control of IPS from the school board to the mayor.

Proposing mayoral control stirred up plenty of controversy in Indianapolis. The Mind Trust's report made the front page of state newspapers and was the focus of multiple op-eds and editorials, generating more than 90 media stories. In a school board candidates' debate, the moderator asked all candidates for their opinion on the Opportunity Schools report—a sign of its influence in Indianapolis. With the report's publication, The Mind Trust catalyzed two major developments in the years that followed: the election of an IPS school board in 2012 that supported key ideas in the report, and the 2014 passage of Public Law 1321, which created a pathway to the kind of autonomous school system envisioned in the report.

The interest in electing new school board members came in part from an informal group of key community members that The Mind Trust formed in 2012 to discuss how the city should proceed. After much discussion, the group concluded that mayoral control was not politically feasible and would be less desirable than an electoral solution. A few members of the group began to supporting candidates who prioritized the school-level autonomy and accountability needed for great schools to flourish. One group member, Sam Odle, ultimately ran for the school board and won, helping create a board that was poised to make change in 2013.

The Mind Trust also formed and supported a more formal group in 2013 that discussed education issues called the Lewis-Hubbard Group, led by City-County Council President Maggie Lewis, a Democrat, and Al Hubbard, the former Republican Party state chair. The diverse, bipartisan group of about 15 people—including lawmakers, teachers, and pastors—meets regularly. After recruiting Lewis and Hubbard to lead it, The Mind Trust provided funding as well as training on the importance of advocating for autonomous schools. “We could not function without The Mind Trust—they’re our superheroes,” Lewis said of the partnership with The Mind Trust. With this group of leaders, The Mind Trust engaged the community and lent bipartisan credibility to the effort to reform IPS.

The school board change and the growing community support for autonomous, accountable schools proved helpful to the creation of Innovation Network Schools. The new Indianapolis school board appointed Superintendent Lewis Ferebee, who started at IPS in September 2013, and in early 2014, Indiana’s Republican leaders, with the help of the mayor’s office and IPS, proposed legislation to create Innovation Network Schools in Indianapolis. Although many legislators supported it, the bill needed Ferebee’s backing: “The law doesn’t pass unless Ferebee comes to the hearing saying that he needs it,” said Todd Huston, a Republican state representative. The mayor’s office got The Mind Trust on board to support the bill, and these all gave the legislation the push it needed to pass in March 2014, becoming Public Law 1321.

Implementation of Innovation Schools

The Mind Trust worked to support the law’s successful implementation, primarily through its Innovation School Fellowship, established in 2014 with the mayor’s office and IPS. They created the fellowship to ensure that leaders of future Innovation Network Schools would be fully prepared, through planning time and leadership training, to lead an autonomous school. Like the Education Entrepreneur Fellowship, the Innovation School Fellowship provides a salary and benefits, as well as professional support for fellows to create their schools. The Mind Trust also hires an attorney for fellows to negotiate contracts with the district and secure facilities, and funds full-time parent organizers, who work to engage parents in their children’s education, for each school.

The fellows get coaching and resources from The Mind Trust throughout their Innovation Network Schools’ first year of operations and beyond. “I never feel like I’m left in the dark with The Mind Trust,” said fellow Earl Martin Phalen, founder of the Phalen Leadership Academy at 103 (PLA@103). “It’s a trusting relationship.”

“I never feel like I’m left in the dark with the Mind Trust. It’s a trusting relationship.”

—Earl Phalen, Innovation School Fellow

By taking advantage of the governance innovation of the Innovation Schools network, The Mind Trust's fellowship increased the quantity of promising school leaders in Indianapolis.

The Mind Trust also expanded the number of high-quality, autonomous schools in Indianapolis with the 2015 creation of Education Empowerment Awards, which help high-performing IPS schools transform into Innovation Network Schools. When the IPS board decided to pursue the Innovation Schools strategy and agreed to replace or transform at least 15 percent of the district's schools into Innovation Schools, The Mind Trust's grants helped schools make this transition.

The advent of Innovation Network Schools also helped pave the way for the IPS district to increase autonomy for its direct-run schools. Schools get more dollars and control through a new student-based budgeting system. And schools participating in the district's "Opportunity Culture" initiative can reallocate their funding to pay excellent teachers more for reaching more students in highly paid, advanced roles.¹³ Other schools have more autonomy to pursue other designs. Overall, the district is moving toward a "portfolio" model, with many approaches and operators under one district structure.

The Mind Trust Today

The Mind Trust continues to have a role in supporting implementation of the Innovation Network Schools governance reform. In November 2016, a slate of candidates opposed to the reforms called OurIPS attempted—unsuccessfully—to retake control of the school board. As Innovation Network Schools gain traction, The Mind Trust continues its productive and collaborative relationship with IPS and the mayor's office, said Ahmed Young, director of charter schools in the mayor's Office of Education Innovation. This positions The Mind Trust to keep playing a central role in governance reform implementation. IPS, the mayor's office, and The Mind Trust are working on creating "Equity Reports," based on similar reports in Washington, D.C., and IPS plans to have a unified enrollment system for all IPS schools, an effort spearheaded by Caitlin Hannon, a Mind Trust fellow and former school board member.¹⁴

The Mind Trust holds conversations with civic leaders and the community about efforts to create more high-quality schools, to keep families and citizens engaged and informed. The Lewis-Hubbard Group continues to meet and discuss Innovation Schools and other education issues, such as expanding pre-kindergarten. The Mind Trust also maintains its connections with its original partners, giving more than \$18 million to Teach For America and TNTF in the past eight years, infusing Indianapolis with education talent. Additionally, The Mind Trust is considering creating or recruiting a teacher residency program to attract more teachers to IPS schools, independent charter schools, and Innovation Network Schools.

Catalyzing Actions	The Mind Trust
Identifies and/or helps to create opportunities for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Paved the way for change with report:</i> Controversial Opportunity Schools report changed the conversation with its call for autonomous schools and mayoral control. ● <i>Recognized existing political will and conditions for reform:</i> The Mind Trust capitalized on coinciding support from a Republican mayor, reform-friendly General Assembly, and new superintendent to promote Innovation Network Schools concept.
Exerts influence through relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Engaged key community leaders:</i> Convening leaders to discuss Opportunity Schools reforms led to a bipartisan coalition, election of supportive school board. ● <i>Recruited partners with complementary strengths:</i> Stand for Children supported pro-reform candidates; TFA and TNTP came to Indianapolis to recruit teachers, with millions in funding from The Mind Trust.
Takes on the heavy lifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Vigorously promoted a viable reform plan:</i> The Mind Trust used community meetings and media push to disseminate Opportunity Schools report, and absorbed negative reactions from district leaders.

Implementing Actions	The Mind Trust
Expands the number of high-quality, autonomous schools in the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Supported external leaders to start new schools:</i> Innovation School Fellowship offered initial support; support for incubation and charter expansion continues. ● <i>Built capacity in existing high-quality schools for expansion:</i> Education Empowerment Awards, created with IPS, help high-performing schools become Innovation Network Schools.
Bolsters talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Expanded pipelines of excellent teachers and leaders:</i> The Mind Trust provides ongoing support for TFA and TNTP, while exploring similar, new partnerships.
Secures resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Raised substantial funding to support new schools and supportive organizations:</i> Through 2016, over \$27 million in grants supported fellows and other awards.
Maintains and uses strong relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Engaged district leadership to create conditions for success:</i> By hiring an attorney for contract negotiation, The Mind Trust ensures a strong IPS contract with Innovation Network Schools. ● <i>Generated community conversations:</i> Support to convene a bipartisan group led to strong, ongoing advocacy for ambitious reform in IPS.
Coordinates reform efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Played a central role in the city's education affairs:</i> Relationship continues between The Mind Trust, mayor's office, and IPS.

CASE STUDY:

Empower Schools (Springfield, MA)

Governance reform: Empowerment Zones

An Empowerment Zone is a cluster of schools within a district that operates with three essential conditions: independently sustained autonomy with local voice; flexibility at the school level; and a performance-based contract with the district. A voluntary partnership of the state, district, a non-profit board of directors, and the local union created the Springfield Empowerment Zone. A seven-member independent board of directors governs Springfield's zone schools, with representation from the state, district, school board, and city, along with a streamlined collective bargaining agreement (CBA) and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the district that defines allocation of per-pupil resources and roles and responsibilities to Zone schools.

Schools in Empowerment Zones may be required to follow certain district policies (such as Springfield's neighborhood-based assignment policy), but they receive significant charter-like autonomies and can leverage support services to best use their autonomies. In Springfield, each school's principal and the teacher leadership team creates their own plans for schedules, curricula, interventions, staffing, budget, and other key design aspects. These plans are approved by the Zone's independent, nonprofit board of directors, which oversees authorizing and accountability (not operations). While schools in the Zone are part of a unionized district, they operate under a streamlined collective bargaining agreement that maintains traditional employment protections for teachers but eliminates work rules, giving schools greater flexibility—for example, to extend the school day.

Empower Schools considers governance by a traditional district to be the "first way," charter school governance to be the "second way," and empowerment zones a "third way."¹⁵

Quarterback description and mission: Empower Schools

"Empower Schools partners with communities to help them get the schools they want with the results students need. We focus on empowering schools and teachers to have the flexibilities they need to effectively prepare students. We work with policymakers and education system leaders to adopt Third Way policies, structures, and strategies that allow for schools of all types, including both traditional district schools and schools led by proven and promising independent leaders. We capture and share the most promising Third Way practices to inform and shape the national conversation on education reform."
—www.empowerschools.org

Who's who

Brett Alessi: Co-founder and Managing Director, Empower Schools

Tim Collins: President, Springfield Teachers Union

Chris Gabrieli: Co-founder and CEO, Empower Schools

Sarah Toce: Director of Policy, Empower Schools

Daniel Warwick: Superintendent, Springfield Public Schools

Outcomes data for Empower Schools sites:

LAWRENCE TURNAROUND:

After Year 1:

- Math proficiency rates increased by 10 percentage points, to 38 percent proficiency.

After Year 2:

- Student growth increased five points to 52—the highest in district history—and math growth held steady at 57; a score of 50 signifies a full year’s worth of student growth.
- English language arts (ELA) proficiency increased by three percentage points. It was the first time in four years that ELA proficiency had increased.

After Year 3:

- Graduation rates increased to 72 percent, up from 52 percent in the year before receivership.

After Year 4:

- 53 percent of Lawrence students were in Level 1 and 2 schools, which is more than four times the rate in 2011-12, which was only 13 percent.¹⁶

SALEM TURNAROUND:

Bentley Elementary went from being a Level 4 school to a Level 1 school in two years.

SPRINGFIELD EMPOWERMENT ZONE PARTNERSHIP (SEZP) SCHOOLS TURNAROUND:

After Year 1:

- Growth in ELA increased from a student growth percentile of 37 to 38, but decreased in math from 36 to 30.¹⁷
- The composite performance index, which measures the extent to which students are moving toward proficiency, increased from 68.2 to 70.3 in ELA, and from 51.0 to 53.2 in math.¹⁸
- SEZP is expecting greater gains after Year 2.¹⁹

Massachusetts is a national leader when it comes to public education. The state showed the highest scores nationwide for both reading and math in the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2015, and in 2016, just as in 2015, it claimed first place in Education Week’s annual Quality Counts report, which ranks each state on more than 50 achievement, equity, and school finance-related indicators.

But not all districts and schools perform robustly. Many of Massachusetts’ less affluent and more racially diverse cities have historically returned dismal student outcomes. In Lawrence, where 87 percent of students were economically disadvantaged and 89 percent Hispanic, only 31 and 41 percent scored proficient or higher on standardized state tests in math and English language arts (ELA), respectively, in 2009–10. In comparison, the averages statewide were 59 and 68 percent. Lawrence proficiency rates remained low in following years as well; the ELA proficiency rate stayed at 41 percent and math proficiency dipped to 28 percent in 2010–11. In Springfield, where 81 percent of students were economically disadvantaged and 85 percent were students of color, only 27 and 37 percent scored proficient or higher in math and ELA, respectively, in 2009–10, and in 2010–11, proficiency rates only slightly increased to 28 and 41 percent, respectively.

In response to these outcomes, a powerful state law, a state education agency willing to use the law to its fullest extent, and nonprofit education quarterback organization Empower Schools are helping to change the trajectory in Lawrence and Springfield Public Schools. The “2010 Act Relative to the Achievement Gap” holds every district and school accountable for strong academic performance, and places the lowest-performing districts or schools, those in “Level 5” of the state’s accountability system, under state supervision through “receivership.” Lawrence Public Schools, the first district in state receivership, demonstrated impressive gains within just a few years, but it took the familiar route of state

coercion to achieve those effects. In Springfield, some schools became candidates for state takeover, but Empower Schools helped forge a viable path toward a more voluntary and collaborative alternative, one that it hopes holds a significant future in education governance reform: the Empowerment Zone.

The Path to Springfield

When Lawrence Public Schools became the first Massachusetts district facing receivership in 2011, the future leaders of Empower Schools, Chris Gabrieli and Brett Alessi, found themselves with the right allies and expertise to have strong influence over its trajectory. Gabrieli and Alessi were well known and respected by key leaders in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. As a former gubernatorial candidate and co-founder for the National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL), an organization leading a nationwide and intensive state-level initiative to expand learning time for the most disadvantaged students, Gabrieli had been an active leader and networker in state education policy circles for 15 years. Alessi, who joined NCTL in winter 2012 to lead its “New Initiatives” group, had been a leader in the Massachusetts chapter of the nonprofit Education Pioneers, which trains future education leaders. Having worked with Gabrieli and NCTL before, the state commissioner, Mitchell Chester, sought out his help in fall 2011 to support the plan to turn around Lawrence’s struggling schools.

“We thought highly of Gabrieli; we visited Lawrence and were impressed, so the Lawrence model appealed to us.”

—Daniel Warwick, Springfield Public Schools superintendent

As receiver, Chester chose Jeff Riley, previously principal of one of the leading success stories in expanding learning time at a Boston public school. Gabrieli and Alessi agreed to assist because they believed they could draw on their experiences and networks and saw the potential of an untested law. The pair helped develop the overall strategy that put schools at the center and wrote the initial turnaround plan. They helped recruit the team alongside Riley, raised initial private funding, and secured key partners such as TNTF.

Lawrence showed success relatively quickly. From 2011 to 2014, student achievement and growth, as measured by the state’s standardized test and growth measures, increased considerably in math (from 28 percent proficient to 41 percent) and moderately in ELA, and graduation rates increased from 52 percent to 67 percent. Soon, education leaders across the state and nation were taking notice, and Gabrieli and Alessi were recognized as key partners in the design of the turnaround success. Springfield Public Schools Superintendent Daniel Warwick later decided to embrace an adapted Lawrence model because of the district’s success. “We thought highly of Gabrieli; we visited Lawrence and were impressed, so the Lawrence model appealed to us,” Warwick said.

After incorporating as Empower Schools, Gabrieli and Alessi hoped to test how the model, known for providing schools autonomy in exchange for accountability, worked with a key change: rather than having the state take control away from local authorities, they envisioned governance reform that invited the district, union, and state to work together, albeit with the potential of state takeover in the background. They theorized that this approach could yield the same gains in student achievement, but with less distrust and resentment. “Based on our experience in Lawrence, it was clear that our new model would require an outside entity with technical expertise in systems redesign, regional and national credibility, and the local connections to partner with district leaders and leaders in the community,” Alessi said.

When the mayor and school committee of Salem approached Empower for assistance in January 2014, “it was a chance to test our policy and regulation chops, even if on a small scale,” said Sarah Toce, Empower Schools’ director of policy. Empower identified a novel regulatory path by which a struggling school could be restarted with a new leader operating under the wide latitude of autonomies they saw as essential. They planned the turnaround, negotiated the enabling contract with the school board, filed the necessary regulatory materials with the state, recruited the principal, supported the launch of the new school in August 2014 and brought in an experienced nonprofit to advise on the turnaround. In two years, the school moved from the cusp of state takeover to Level 1—the state’s top ratings category. Empower’s work in Salem was crucial in setting the foundation for its work in Springfield.

Founding the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership

Empower Schools contacted Springfield Public Schools Superintendent Warwick in 2014, when three of Springfield Public Schools’ middle schools were teetering on the edge of Level 5, making the schools eligible for state takeover.

“We’d tried everything with no luck,” Warwick said. As a former Springfield school leader with a strong track record, Warwick wanted the same tools and flexibilities that charter schools had to get positive results for Springfield schools. He was eager to chart a new course for the district and became a strong partner with Empower in creating the Zone.

The prospect of replicating the early wins in Lawrence without state takeover appealed to the major players in Springfield.

“Springfield education leaders and stakeholders were looking for an alternative to a state takeover of its middle schools; the state, not wanting to be in the school takeover business, was interested and open to other options; and the union saw the need for a partnership between all parties. All these factors brought about an acceptable solution,” said Beverly Holmes, a Springfield resident and former state school board member, now a state-appointed member of the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership (SEZP) board.

“So with that cooperative view, the SEZP became a reality. Chris Gabrieli was known for his leadership and ability to get things done by valuing and working cooperatively with people. His past performance as chairperson of the Springfield Finance Control Board and his reputation as a successful reformer in the education field gave him the credibility necessary to lead this new initiative.”

With about 4,200 students in the six failing schools—80 percent of all Springfield middle schoolers—Gabrieli saw an opportunity of sufficient scale to change trajectories within New England’s second-largest district, which was open to reform that had support from the superintendent, mayor, and local union leader. The result was the Springfield Empowerment Zone, where Empower Schools saw its vision for collaborative governance reform realized. Rather than keeping all power with the district or surrendering it all to the state, the idea was to share governance with a zone board composed of three local leaders—the mayor, superintendent, and vice chair of the school board—and four independent people selected by the commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE).

Over the next four months, Empower Schools worked to lay the groundwork for the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership, a contractual partnership of DESE, Springfield Public Schools, and local union Springfield Education Association (SEA). Warwick worked closely with Mayor Domenic Sarno, who was also head of the school board, and the two were the main driving forces. They were willing not only to support the plan, but also to

invest political capital to promote, defend, and sustain it. Warwick and Sarno’s advocacy helped bring other players to the table, including the president of the local union, Timothy Collins, who signed onto the new agreement while running for re-election. This type of collaboration with the union in the context of potential state takeover was unprecedented, and key to the success of the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership.

The union and the district engaged in productive and collaborative give-and-take. Empower Schools helped design a new pay scale that, in return for an extended school day, gave most Zone teachers a raise that averaged about \$6,000, and required that principals work with teachers to draft each school’s operational plan. In the end, 92 percent of union members voted for the new agreement

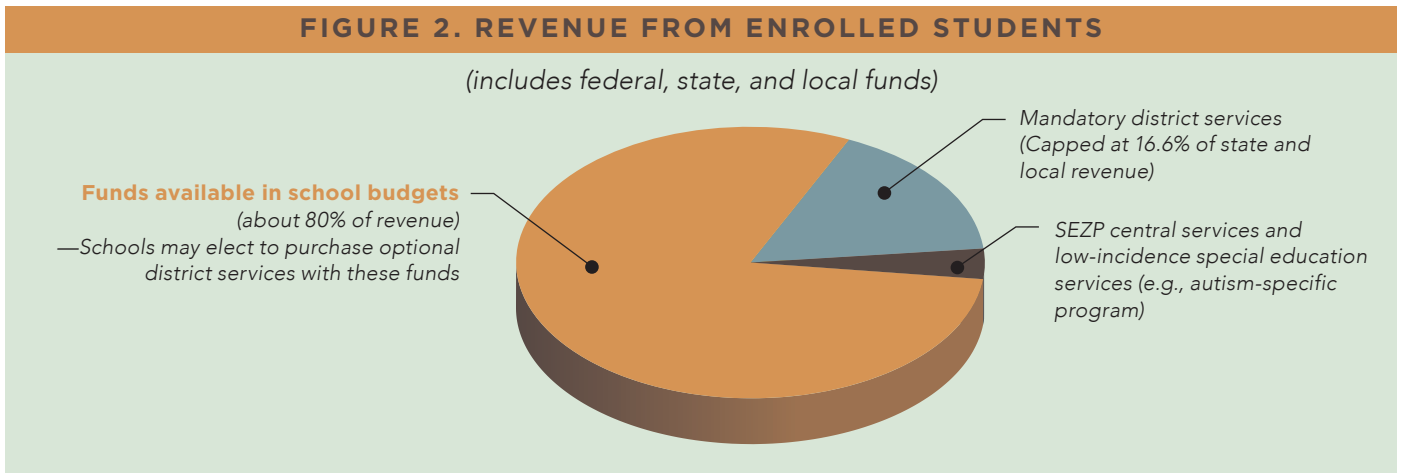
“There are plenty of examples of autonomy being poorly used in the charter sector. Autonomy’s not a strategy, it’s a resource. You really have to support the school leaders who have the will but not the skill yet.”

—Brett Alessi, Co-founder of Empower Schools

Supporting Successful Implementation

SEZP is charged with turning around Zone schools, giving the schools autonomy while setting high expectations for performance. The principal and a teacher leadership team—generally five teachers at each school, four of whom are elected by the school’s teachers—develop the school’s operational plan for curricula, interventions, staffing, scheduling, and budgeting. About 80 percent of revenue from enrolled students goes directly to school budgets, and the rest goes to SEZP central services, low-incidence special education services, and mandatory district services such as payroll and building utilities.

FIGURE 2. REVENUE FROM ENROLLED STUDENTS



After establishing the guidelines for SEZP schools, Empower Schools has continued to serve as an unpaid advisor to SEZP during the transition to an autonomous environment. Empower coordinates the Zone’s budgeting process, organizes board meetings, and works to attract and retain great teachers, school leaders and support partners. Perhaps most important, Empower Schools helps SEZP schools set goals and stay accountable to them. The Zone has one overarching initial goal: for each school to achieve a 50 percent or higher student growth percentile in both math and ELA, which is equivalent to averaging one academic year of growth. While this measure would mean that students in SEZP schools would only stop losing ground relative to their academic peers, it would represent large gains over past performance as the Zone schools are among the lowest-performing in the state. The goals are intended to move to gap-closing targets beyond the 50th percentile of growth.

A seven-member zone board of directors that includes state and local voice oversees accountability, reviewing each school's performance and operational decisions. The schools operate under a streamlined collective bargaining agreement that maintains important protections for teachers, such as a clear grievance policy, while also increasing teacher voice and giving principals the flexibility to staff and add hours to the school day.

"There are plenty of examples of autonomy being poorly used in the charter sector," Alessi said. "Autonomy's not a strategy, it's a resource. You really have to support the school leaders who have the will but not the skill yet."

For that support, Empower Schools matched a chief support partner to each zone school. The partners are proven education nonprofit support organizations, who coach school leaders on their new autonomies and how to use them to achieve their goals. These organizations took on roles they had never taken before; not only did they serve as niche service providers, but they became full turnaround coaches for their schools. TNTP and The Achievement Network (ANet), for example, did not just help schools evaluate teachers more effectively and provide leadership team coaching. They provided broader coaching throughout the turnaround process and were able to provide differentiated support to school leaders, as opposed to a one-size-fits all model adopted by many districts.

Empower works to ensure success for the zone and its schools by serving as the Zone's strategic advisor, providing direct operational supports, and attracting partners and talent. For example, Empower helped bring the highly personalized math curriculum designed by New Classrooms to two Zone schools and also created a new nonprofit organization called Teach Western Mass, working with Massachusetts' Holyoke Public Schools, the state, and several charter schools to attract and retain great teachers—the most important school-based factor when it comes to educational effectiveness, according to research.

"In 2014–15, the school year before SEZP was put in place, we opened our doors with 70 to 80 teacher positions that weren't highly qualified," Warwick said. "Now, those positions are filled, and nearly 100 percent of our Zone teachers are highly qualified."

Teachers can apply to teach at Empowerment Academies, a rigorous additional academic program taking place during a week of vacation in the spring, for a generous stipend, and are eligible for new "advanced" and "master" teacher designations with significant salary increases. Advanced teachers make \$76,000; master teachers earn \$85,000.

While Empower Schools and the SEZP believe in giving the benefit of the doubt to existing principals and teachers if they are willing to take on the challenge of using greater autonomy to meet key goals, they also believe in recruiting great organizations and leaders from outside to start programs where existing efforts are failing.

In the 2016–17 school year, Empower Schools brought in an outside operator for the first time. The Zone's weakest school is now operated by UP Education Network, a nonprofit education management organization that has demonstrated impressive academic gains in Lawrence and elsewhere. UP ranks as the third-highest-performing LEA in Massachusetts based on student growth.

Also, Empower and the SEZP recruited Matt Brunell, the former COO of Building Excellent Schools, which has been a leader in starting charter schools, to work with them to pioneer a new Founders Fellowship. Two "Founders Fellows" were selected to develop plans to start schools-within-schools at weak SEZP schools. The first two graduates of the Founders Fellowship each began in 2016 with a new program for all sixth-graders at two existing schools. If successful, they will expand by one grade per year over the next two years until they each lead their entire school.

Consistent with the logic of the “third way,” Empower and Brunell were able to recruit two charter stars. Anna Breen had been at KIPP for 17 years, including serving as principal of KIPP’s flagship Massachusetts school—an 87th percentile school serving a disadvantaged population. Nate Higgins, a graduate of a pioneering third way school—the Frederick Douglass Academy in New York City—had been an assistant principal with the Democracy Prep charter management organization in New York.

Finally, in a sign that the SEZP is seen as an effective way to address education challenges in Springfield, the Springfield Public Schools recently voted to have one of its lowest-performing high schools, the High School of Commerce, join the zone in 2017–18—adding about 1,500 seats to the zone, an increase of more than one-third.

While the Empowerment Zone model is designed to be fully financially sustainable by reallocating existing public resources within the first two or three years, Empower Schools has brought start-up funding to the zone during the initial design phase, using connections with national, state, and local philanthropists. “We have been very excited to support the innovative work taking place in the Zone under Gabrieli’s leadership,” said Mary Walachy, executive director of the Springfield-based Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation, which has supported key partners such as Teach For America.

While Gabrieli continues to chair the Zone’s board of directors, and three Empower team members work on Zone projects, the Zone now has two co-directors, one focused on school support and student success and the other on financial and operational excellence. The co-directors will increasingly take responsibility for living up to the board’s vision, and Empower is in the process of transitioning its functions to local leadership with the goal of supporting the Zone’s sustainability. Empower and the Zone leaders are also considering creating a teacher residency, and will continue to explore opportunities to support innovation, rapid academic progress, and school autonomy and accountability in Springfield

Springfield Goes to Denver

With the coaching and technical assistance of Empower Schools and a strong partnership with local Education Cities “quarterback” Gates Family Foundation, Denver adapted the Springfield model to create its Luminary Learning Network (LLN) in 2016–17, an autonomous zone of four schools within Denver Public Schools (DPS). These four schools were already Innovation Schools, with waivers from certain state and district regulations. As part of the LLN, they created a new operating model that offers increased flexibility in exchange for increased accountability. A contract with DPS and an independent board with representatives from the schools, district and community can protect the schools from district mandates and politics.

Unlike Springfield, the four LLN schools are not struggling academically. In 2014–15, all four schools were either “Green” or “Yellow” schools, the second- and third-highest tiers of the DPS accountability framework. They formed the zone to gain some autonomy from district measures they identified as barriers to making decisions that benefit students, such as limits on school hours, staffing and curricula. In exchange for additional autonomies, the district will hold the four LLN schools to higher achievement benchmarks: Schools must move up one tier of the district’s accountability framework within three years.

Catalyzing Actions	Empower Schools
Identifies and/or helps to create opportunities for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Strategized based on political and regulatory climate:</i> Empower leaders spotted an opportune moment for change, with agreement from the school board, superintendent, mayor, and unions.
Exerts influence through relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Used long-established personal connections:</i> Gabrieli and Alessi were well known, and used those relationships to get local support. ● <i>Worked through local champions:</i> Empower relied on Springfield Superintendent Daniel Warwick to use his close relationships with the union president and school committee. ● <i>Built cooperative relationships:</i> Empowerment zones were designed to leverage flexibilities that come with state takeover law, while including local voice and buy-in for sustainability.
Takes on the heavy lifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Established a new zone governance model:</i> The zone created an independent seven-person zone board that stressed the importance of local voice and long-term sustainability, but with Gabrieli as chair. ● <i>Negotiated and drafted legal documents:</i> Empower worked with the district, zoneZone, and state to agree to a letter of intent and MOU. ● <i>Helped negotiate an alternate collective bargaining agreement:</i> Empower also drafted and worked with the district and state to negotiate the slimmed-down collective bargaining agreement.

Implementing Actions	Empower Schools
Expands the number of high-quality, autonomous schools in the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Expanded the number of autonomous schools with high-quality operators:</i> The number of autonomous schools is now up to 11, with three proven operators running or starting new schools.
Bolsters talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Expanded the pipelines of excellent teachers and leaders:</i> Along with recruiting other partners and developing the new Founders Fellowship, Empower created Teach Western Mass to attract teachers, and helped create attractive teacher-leader stipendssalaries and stipends.
Secures resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Brought in philanthropic support:</i> Empower uses it connections and results to attract national, state, and local philanthropy to support the SEZP.
Maintains and uses strong relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Used relationships with outside, complementary partners:</i> Empower attracted many outside groups to build existing capacity in zone schools, including TNTP, UnboundEd, and Student Achievement Partners.
Coordinates reform efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Filled critical leadership roles and provided strategic guidance:</i> Gabrieli continues as zone Zone board chair, and Empower attracts funding and resources, and provides direct operational supports and strategic guidance.

CASE STUDY:

The Recovery School District (New Orleans, LA)

Governance reform: The Recovery School District

The nation's first turnaround district, the Recovery School District (RSD), was authorized by the Louisiana Department of Education to take over schools that failed to meet the state's minimum academic standards for four consecutive years. The RSD aims to ensure that all students have access to high-quality educational opportunities that meet their needs, through improving the quality of school options and developing policies that promote equity in access to high-quality schools. The RSD oversees schools across the state, but most are in New Orleans.

When first formed in 2003, the RSD ran its schools in New Orleans directly, functioning as a traditional central office. But over time, it closed its lowest-performing schools and ultimately turned all of its remaining schools over to charter management organizations. In New Orleans today, more than 90 percent of public school students attend a charter school. The RSD oversees 49 charter schools, while the Orleans Parish School Board directly manages six schools and oversees 22 charter schools. Under legislation passed in 2016, the RSD's New Orleans-based charters will be transferred to the oversight of the Orleans Parish School Board by July 1, 2018.

Quarterback description and mission: New Schools for New Orleans

"New Orleans—the nation's first public education system made up of predominately charter schools—has transformed itself since 2005. As a strategic leader in the city, NSNO has a mission of ensuring that our innovative system delivers on the promise of excellent public schools for every child in New Orleans. To accomplish this goal, we (1) invest in great public schools, (2) help schools become more effective, and (3) coordinate solutions to citywide challenges."

—www.newschoolsforneworleans.org

Who's Who

Kathleen Blanco: From 2004–08, governor of Louisiana. Helped create the RSD.

Matt Candler: From 2006–09, CEO of NSNO; now runs 4.0 Schools, a nonprofit incubator.

Patrick Dobard: RSD Superintendent from 2012–2017; CEO of NSNO, effective 3/2017.

Neerav Kingsland: Chief strategy officer, then CEO of NSNO; now a senior fellow at the Arnold Foundation and CEO of the Hastings Fund.

Paul Pastorek: From 2007–11, superintendent of Louisiana Schools.

Maggie Runyan-Shefa: Co-CEO of NSNO since 2014.

Michael Stone: Co-CEO of NSNO since 2014.

Sarah Usdin: OPSB School Board member from 2012–present; founder and former CEO of NSNO.

Paul Vallas: From 2007–11, RSD superintendent.

John White: Superintendent of Louisiana Schools since 2012; former RSD superintendent.

Outcomes data

- In 2004, 31 percent of New Orleans students performed on grade level on state assessments, earning a “Basic” rating or higher. By 2014, that figure had doubled to 62 percent, compared with a statewide increase from 56 percent to 68 percent.
- In 2004, 60 percent of New Orleans students—40,000 students—went to a school that performed in the bottom 10 percent of all Louisiana public schools. By 2014, that had dropped to just 13 percent.
- A ninth-grader entering a New Orleans public school in fall 2000 had barely a 50/50 chance of graduating on time four years later. By 2016, that had risen from 54 percent to 73 percent graduating on time.
- In 2004, the average ACT score in New Orleans was 17, but as of 2015 the average score increased to 18.8.

“On the urgency of the academic situation in Orleans prior to the storm: “If you didn’t go to a magnet school, it was over. Back in 2005, to qualify for the lowest level TOPS, you needed a 17 on the ACT AND a 2.5 GPA. Only 5 percent of graduates in open-enrollment schools qualified. This gives you a sense of how dismal things were for children.”

—Michael Stone, Co-CEO of NSNO

Although New Orleans is a vibrant and resilient city, longstanding dismal education outcomes led people to push for change well before the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. After Katrina forced the closure of many New Orleans schools, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) shut down. The Recovery School District (RSD) then became the decentralized regulator of most of the city’s schools. Coming full circle, as of 2016, the reconstituted OPSB will begin taking back oversight of all public schools in the city.

New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO) has been a leader in New Orleans education since the beginning of the transition from “school system” to “system of schools.” As the education quarterback with the longest record of supporting governance reform implementation, it offers lessons for organizations in other cities attempting to create a similar system. NSNO’s success springs from an intensive focus on great teachers and leaders in the city’s schools; developing deep relationships with the governing entity and a range of community organizations; and providing a set of services and supports that evolved to respond to the city’s and schools’ needs. NSNO will need to evolve again now that governance is shifting back to the local board.

New Orleans’ Struggles Pre-Katrina

In 2005, OPSB was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the FBI was investigating the school system for fraud and theft, leading to at least 11 indictments and one school board member pleading guilty to accepting \$140,000 in bribes. Organizational mismanagement and infighting also plagued the board, which churned through eight superintendents in eight years. Leading up to 2005, OPSB was the lowest-performing school district in Louisiana.

Louisiana’s Board for Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) had, in 2003, gained authority to create the Recovery School District and take over failing schools. Faced with opposition from New Orleans politicians, the RSD had taken over only five schools before Hurricane Katrina struck.

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005. Wind damage, followed by flooding, in 80 percent of the city meant more than 100 of the district’s 128 school buildings were damaged or destroyed. Some of the city’s private schools and magnet schools began to re-open approximately a month after Katrina. But OPSB announced that the school system would remain closed indefinitely.

In November 2005, legislators decided enough was enough and scheduled a special session. They passed Act 35, transferring 102 schools in New Orleans to the RSD.

Evolution of the RSD and NSNO

After taking control of its first New Orleans schools in 2006, the RSD faced many of the same problems that OPSB had. It struggled to provide books for its students, to find room for the many students who returned to the system, and to hire enough teachers.

In 2010, four years after the takeover, every high school the RSD ran scored in the “Academically Unacceptable” range, and only one made its target for student growth. The RSD thus accelerated its effort to charter its schools and function as an overseer rather than an operator. From 2007 to 2014, RSD leaders focused on growing the number of charter schools in New Orleans, with all RSD direct-run schools eventually closed or restarted under charter management.

NSNO was created alongside the RSD in 2003 as a support organization. NSNO focused first on building a “pipeline” of excellent teachers for the city’s charter schools, and later expanded its focus to attracting charter school operators and helping the RSD turn around the lowest performing schools in the city.

The RSD and NSNO have also evolved in their approach to racial tensions over the years. Both groups’ leaders struggled to overcome the perception that they are outsiders. Before Katrina, OPSB employed more than 4,500 teachers, and 71 percent of them were black. After the storm and the takeover of schools by the RSD, those teachers were laid off, and many veteran teachers did not get new teaching positions in the city. At the same time, Teach For America and other alternative educator preparation programs began to see an uptick in their enrollment. Talented teachers from across the country began flocking to New Orleans to find ways to “give back” and be involved in the city’s recovery—but many were white, without ties to New Orleans. Many local residents saw NSNO an entity promoting charter schools and recruiting “outside” teachers—often young, white, and aligning with the RSD and the move away from local control. Critics accused NSNO of favoring charter management organizations (CMOs) in grant distributions over local, “homegrown” operators.

NSNO has committed to fighting this perception. It is diversifying its own team, working with community organizations to build relationships across lines of difference, and investing in community efforts such as the Urban League’s parent leadership academy, which trains and encourages parent leaders to engage in public education to support student success. Similarly, the RSD has tried to be more responsive to the black community, making policy changes to address its concerns, including creating a city-wide discipline policy that restricted what schools could expel students for and a centralized expulsion center—where all students up for expulsion go to have their expulsion hearings and receive an expulsion sentence—to ensure fairness across the city’s schools.

NSNO's Role in Catalyzing Reform

Describing NSNO today, Macke Raymond, director of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), wrote:

“NSNO has combined advocacy, philanthropy, consultancy, and program design to create a unique form of leverage in the community, the state, and the national debate around public schools. Fusing these disparate activities together has led to a new role in the landscape—closer to the action than most funders, more wide-angle in perspective than most school operators, more independent than most advocates, and more strategic than most program designers. NSNO stands at the intersection of these strengths to push, pull, plead, and prod the education community toward better school choices for New Orleans students.”

So how did NSNO, the advocate-philanthropist-consultant begin? When the RSD was created in 2003, a group of education advocates in New Orleans and across the state discussed how they might support it and the schools it took over. Sarah Usdin turned those ideas into an organization six months after Hurricane Katrina.

Usdin, a Kentucky native, came to Louisiana as a Teach For America (TFA) corps member and became its regional executive director, later becoming a recruiter for TNTP. Usdin had deep connections in the national education community. As BESE transferred the 100+ failing schools in New Orleans to the RSD, Usdin turned to the Aspen Institute—led by New Orleans native and former TFA board chair Walter Isaacson—for funding and support in thinking through her plans. NewSchools Venture Fund decided in 2006 to focus on New Orleans, funding an entity that could coordinate funding, school recruitment, and collaborations among the city's other education organizations. This entity would become NSNO.

But NSNO did not start with a true mission or vision. Usdin thought she needed to listen to the RSD and school leaders to learn what supports were needed. She and CEO Matt Candler, who wrote NSNO's business plan, thought NSNO should be a catalyst for innovation and provide a path to open schools and work for reforms. Over the next three years, NSNO shifted from responding to needs to providing more strategic leadership. NSNO led efforts to identify citywide gaps that limit academic excellence and influence city education leaders to address those gaps, support the expansion of high-performing open-enrollment charter schools, provide support to turnaround schools, and recruit and develop high-quality educators and school leaders.

In 2010, in partnership with the RSD, NSNO won a \$28 million i3 grant to invest in proven charter school operators over five years to turn around the lowest 5 percent of schools in New Orleans annually. Additionally, NSNO helped the RSD think through ways to help schools become more effective and coordinate solutions to citywide challenges. NSNO also funded programs and initiatives to address those challenges. This private-public partnership led to innovative governance solutions such as a unified enrollment system, a unified expulsion system, and a new funding model for students with special needs.

NSNO's Role in Supporting Successful Implementation

It cannot be emphasized enough: The RSD model completely flipped the governance structure in New Orleans. The city went from having a school system overseen and operated by OPSB to a system of schools held accountable by the RSD. Though leaner than a traditional school district, the RSD remained a governmental arm, with the bureaucratic constraints of most government offices. Alone, it would have been unable to make the best, most efficient use of its nearly 100 schools' resources. Therefore, NSNO stepped into that role—identifying complementary aspects of schools, the RSD, OPSB, and the state, and combining their efforts to build a stronger, more equitable, and effective system of schools. NSNO supported this new system's successful implementation directly and indirectly. Its leaders made direct investments in critical support areas, such as the supply of great educators, and indirect investments by building strong relationships throughout the city.

Direct Investments in Critical Supports

BOLSTERING THE TALENT SUPPLY

Originally, NSNO was going to focus on helping leaders with back-office supports, but as Usdin talked with school leaders about their needs, it became clear that they most needed help attracting talented educators. This led to NSNO's sponsorship of TNTP—one of NSNO's first big roles in helping support New Orleans charters. NSNO now supports a variety of teacher supply programs, such as Relay Graduate School of Education and Teach For America.

NSNO worked with TNTP to create TeachNOLA, a teacher preparation program that has trained more than 1,000 teaching fellows through 2016. This focus on developing and retaining teachers resulted in the award of a \$13.1 million Teacher Incentive Fund grant by the U.S. Department of Education in 2010—part of which is used to fund MATCH, a graduate program for teachers and education leaders that focuses on training them to make a significant difference in high-poverty schools. NSNO's investment in TeachNOLA paid off. In 2011, 95 percent of TeachNOLA Fellows (in the first year of evaluation) passed the organization's instructional effectiveness assessment. In 2013, the RSD's New Orleans teachers were rated "Highly Effective" at nearly 2.5 times the state average on Louisiana's teacher evaluation system (based 50 percent on value-added ratings and 50 percent on observations). In 2014, 35 percent of New Orleans' teachers ranked in the top one-fifth of all teachers statewide, as measured by Louisiana's teacher evaluation system. NSNO also partnered with Relay's National Principals Academy Fellowship (NPAF) which provides principals with professional development focused on leading data-driven instruction, creating a culture of high expectations, conducting meaningful observations, and providing high-quality feedback to teachers. And in 2016, NSNO received a \$20 million Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) award that helps create teacher pathways within charter organizations, with the goal of developing better teachers and retaining high-performing teachers.

Even with all of the educator training programs it supports, in 2015, NSNO analyzed teacher pipeline data and found that New Orleans will still face a teacher shortage, projected to be as high as 900 vacancies per year by 2020. Thus, it supported four new CMO-embedded teaching residencies in partnership with Relay, starting with a pilot program of 25 residents in fall 2015.

SUPPORTING TURNAROUND WORK

NSNO supported turnaround work in New Orleans with a federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. In partnership with the RSD and Tennessee's Achievement School District, NSNO received \$28 million to accelerate the growth of charter management organizations, which the RSD could tap to annually replace low-performing schools with charter operators. While the RSD strongly supported the idea of closing schools within the bottom tiers of performance, closure wasn't always the best option. Where would students go to school after a closure, and would that option actually be any better? Instead, the RSD adopted restarts, a strategy that lets students stay in place but "restarts" the school under an effective CMO—maximizing those CMOs' impact.

In 2010, the RSD intervened and closed eight underperforming charters. The RSD then assigned local, high-performing charter operators to restart five schools. To date, of the 19 charter restarts in New Orleans since 2010, 17 outperform the schools they replaced.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORK

By the 2010–11 school year, many communities, community organizations, and charter operators had expressed a desire for a more community-driven process over what charter operators the RSD assigned to failing schools. Some perceived that assignment decisions were closed-door deals between charter operators and schools, deals that left out parents and students.

NSNO recognized a need to bring the community and the RSD together and began designing a process for community engagement that would:

- Be transparent to charter operators and communities, especially parents;
- Articulate a timeline with major milestones that all parties adhere to; and
- Give genuine community voice to decisions about where operators go.

Using i3 dollars, NSNO organized community dialogues and capacity-building trainings for parents. NSNO and its community partners agreed that a siting process should include:

- **Early Announcement.** RSD should announce early (October) which schools are "on the table" for transformation or closure.
- **Wait on Decisions.** Community stakeholders (mostly parents) develop a vision for the school, interview operators, and recommend rank-ordered choices to the RSD, with the RSD refraining from making decisions until after it receives the rankings.
- **Intervention.** RSD should provide additional resources to the school being transformed to help it through its transition.
- **Parent Capacity Building.** Parents with children in failing schools should be educated about how to find better options—and may choose to remove their children.
- **Continuing Engagement.** This process becomes the basis for continuing engagement between the selected operator and community members.

While not immediately adopted, over time the RSD recognized the value of the process NSNO and community leaders had drafted. The RSD began using a similar process in 2014, an example of NSNO's influence as quarterback.

SUPPORTING SPECIAL EDUCATION IMPROVEMENTS

In 2013, NSNO created a “blueprint” for improving special education services across New Orleans charter schools. While overall academic performance among students with disabilities mirrored the city’s overall gains, the students who were hardest to serve lacked settings that met their needs. The blueprint’s priorities included:

- increasing system-wide capacity to serve high-incidence disabilities;
- specialty programming for students with moderate and intensive disabilities
- intensive mental health and therapeutic options
- equitable special education infrastructure.

As of December 2016, NSNO had raised \$4.1 million and made significant progress on implementing the blueprint (see “Blueprint Outcome Goals”). For example, the New Orleans Therapeutic Day Program (NOTDP) is a collaboration between the RSD, OPSB, and Tulane Medical School’s Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. The day program serves RSD and OPSB students with the most severe behavioral health disabilities in grades K–8, providing “a caring, therapeutic milieu with positive behavioral supports, trauma-informed approaches, evidence-based mental health practices, small-group classroom instruction, and therapeutic recreation activities.” Additionally, both RSD and OPSB now use a needs-based funding formula that distributes weighted dollars according to the severity of a student’s needs. (In addition, schools receive more funding for students who have been held back and English language learners). Also, NSNO launched the Special Education Leadership Fellowship (SELF) in 2015 with nine fellows, and 20 more in 2016.

“We’re really proud to have hit all of [our blueprint goals] ahead of schedule... And, we’ve gotten the big policy change through—differentiated funding—now being applied to all schools in NOLA.”

—Michael Stone, Co-CEO of NSNO

Blueprint Outcome Goals:

SYSTEM-WIDE CAPACITY TO SERVE HIGH-INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

Expected Outcomes:

- NSNO will invest in at least one high-quality provider to enter New Orleans market to support schools and students with high-incidence disabilities
- Provider is financially self-sustaining after bridge funding helps them come to and scale up in New Orleans
- By 2016, NSNO and operators will launch 10–12 specialized programs to serve ~250 students with moderate and intensive disabilities

INTENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND THERAPEUTIC OPTIONS

Expected Outcomes:

- 45+ crisis beds available at Children’s Hospital and agreed-upon protocol with charter operators to ensure access and transparency
- 1–2 full therapeutic special day programs operating in city (or access to programs in neighboring parishes)—likely by 2017
- 1–2 residential/in-patient programs recruited to begin operating in New Orleans—likely by 2017

EQUITABLE SPECIAL EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Expected Outcomes:

- Changes to funding formula (“Tier 4,” High Risk Pool) in place to ensure sustainability of providing excellent services for students with moderate and intensive needs
- RSD will adopt recommendations on enrollment/accountability in coordination with special education working group of charter operators

Indirect Supports: Building Relationships to Keep Reform on Course

NSNO’s direct investments have helped catalyze the system’s transformation. Just as key has been NSNO’s ability to build, maintain, and coordinate relationships with interested groups. For example, under Neerav Kingsland’s leadership, NSNO began hosting the first meetings between charter operators, RSD leadership, Superintendent John White, and others. This became the catalyst for regular monthly policy meetings between the RSD and charter leaders to discuss upcoming policy issues, get feedback, and roll out system-wide initiatives. The meetings became opportunities for both NSNO and the state/RSD to pitch ideas and receive feedback from school operators. That inspired the RSD to host additional meetings between operators and community leaders to discuss important issues, such as enrollment. For example, much of the work to build support for the unified enrollment system that all New Orleans schools now use was done within these operator-community meetings. While NSNO wasn’t the catalyst for creating the unified enrollment system, its leaders participated in those discussions, sometimes pushing for and other times pushing back on the RSD’s decisions. One former RSD official described NSNO’s role in these meetings and process as “healthy chastening.”

Another example of NSNO's influence is related to the push for turnarounds in New Orleans. When NSNO and the RSD won the i3 grant, they held even more frequent meetings (sometimes weekly) to work on the RSD's turnaround strategy. Although their intentions were aligned—turn around the schools in the bottom percentiles of the portfolio—the RSD acknowledges that it would not have moved at the same vigorous pace if NSNO had not been as focused and pushed to create more quality seats quickly. Further, NSNO served as an intermediary, pushing the RSD to implement restart processes and an aggressive authorization process, but also pushing funders to agree to fund seats instead of schools, meaning they were able to fund management organizations that wanted to expand the grades they served, as well as new schools. This led to more resources beyond the i3 grant for funding and supporting the replication and growth of excellent charter operators in the city.

NSNO's Future

By many measures, education in New Orleans is improving. More students perform on grade level, fewer students attend failing schools, and more students graduate on time.²² Compared with similar school systems across the country, students in New Orleans outperformed many on the PARCC, including Denver, Washington, D.C., and Newark, N.J. Black, male students graduate at a higher rate (65 percent) than their peers statewide and nationally (59 percent each).²³ The expulsion rate has continued to decrease, dipping below the state average (0.6 percent compared with 0.7 percent).²⁴ NSNO's investments and supports for the city have helped students and schools achieve these promising outcomes.

Recently, NSNO leaders supported the return of schools to the Orleans Parish School Board set for 2018.²⁵ While many reformers feel uneasy about the return, Michael Stone, co-chief executive of NSNO, told the *Times-Picayune*, "We've passed the 10th anniversary of Katrina. OPSB has a superintendent. There's no point in waiting any longer."²⁶ However, Stone also said that while he believes in OPSB's ability to take on the challenge of overseeing the city's portfolio, it must first put forth a citywide vision of academic performance and equity for all students. NSNO stands ready to help the school board do just that, given its experience doing so for the RSD, but it remains to be seen if OPSB will be open to the direct and indirect supports NSNO can provide.

"There were monthly meetings between us [the RSD], operators, and NSNO. Those were good conversations. NSNO sometimes pushed for and other times pushed back on our [the RSD's] decisions. I'd say their value-add in those meetings was the 'healthy chastening' they provided."

—Former RSD Official

Catalyzing Actions	New Schools for New Orleans
Identifies and/or helps to create opportunities for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Prepared for the future</i>: Local advocates had already met pre-Katrina, identifying value of a nonprofit to support the RSD. ● <i>Built a vision for innovative change</i>: NSNO's initial business plan focused on opening new schools, providing key supports, and advocating strong policies.
Exerts influence through relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Built on existing relationships and encouraged funders to invest in people</i>: Early leaders' credibility and reputation helps "sell" NSNO to funders as investment in NOLA. ● <i>"Healthy chastening"</i>: NSNO brought operators and the RSD together for regular meetings, leading to changes such as unified enrollment system. NSNO sometimes pushed for and other times pushed back on RSD decisions, a role one RSD official called "healthy chastening."
Takes on the heavy lifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Direct support services and investments</i>: Focal points included recruiting and training teachers; investing in turnaround operators; building community engagement; and creating and funding a blueprint for improving special ed.

Implementing Actions	New Schools for New Orleans
Expands the number of high-quality, autonomous schools in the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Willing to try new things and learn from their mistakes</i>: Charter school incubation program in 2007 had mixed results. NSNO scrapped it, refocusing on supporting expansion of high-quality schools.
Bolsters talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Recruited and sponsored top talent from across the U.S.</i>: NSNO sponsored TNTF early to recruit and train teachers, expanding to support a variety of talent programs, such as Relay Graduate School of Education and Teach For America.
Secures resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Secured diverse funds</i>: Federal i3 grant accelerated growth of charter operators to replace low-performing schools and supported systems such as a unified enrollment system (One App) and a unified expulsion process.
Maintains and uses strong relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Built relationships to keep reform on course</i>: RSD acknowledges it would not have moved at the same vigorous pace without NSNO's press for aggressive change and success in attracting funding to back reform.
Coordinates reform efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Drove self-reflection and improvement</i>: As an intermediary between schools and funders, NSNO could drive accountability by setting the parameters for access to its resources—and then spread successes.

Conclusion

The quarterback organizations in Indianapolis, Springfield, and New Orleans have all approached governance reform differently. But we found that all the education quarterbacks catalyze reform by identifying windows of opportunity to push for bold change, exerting influence through their relationships, and taking on the heavy lifting needed to start reforms.

Then, quarterbacks support implementation by recruiting and incubating new schools, growing and supporting teacher and leader pipelines, creating meaningful roles for key community members, and providing cohesion and coordination among partners. We summarize these “catalyzing” and “implementing” actions again in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3. SUMMARY OF CRITICAL QUARTERBACK ACTIONS IN GOVERNANCE REFORM

Catalyzing Actions

- Identifies and / or helps to identify strategies for change
- Exerts influence through relationships
- Takes on the heavy lifting

Implementing Actions

- Expands the number of high-quality, autonomous schools in the city
- Bolsters talent
- Secures resources
- Maintains and leverages strong relationships
- Coordinates reform efforts

As these governance reforms gain traction and deliver results, city leaders may find themselves increasingly drawn to new governance models for their public schools. They will seek better outcomes for students than currently available under many cities’ traditional district approach, and look for alternatives that empower local communities, that generate more quality “seats” for students and that can be sustained for the long haul. While there is no one right way for a quarterback to catalyze reform and support top-notch implementation, organizations in other cities can learn from the three profiled in this report and consider how they can catalyze and implement transformational changes to their own systems.

The Mind Trust Timeline

Pre-Reform

2001: Less than 50 percent of entering high school students in IPS graduate on time.

May 2, 2001: Charter school law passes after seven years of attempts—the first in the U.S. to empower a mayor as a charter authorizer. State Sen. Teresa Lubbers (R) serves as the bill's primary sponsor, with support from Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson (D).

2001: Indianapolis Mayor Peterson launches charter initiative, selecting David Harris, an advisor, to operate the mayor's new Charter School Office.

2001–02 school year: Three mayor-sponsored charter schools open.

2006: Harris leaves the mayor's office to co-found The Mind Trust, a nonprofit quarterback organization that aims to create talent pipelines and a strong ecosystem for great schools. Peterson is chairman of the board.

2006–11: The Mind Trust forms the Venture Fund to attract top national reform organizations to the city, including TFA, TNTP, and Stand for Children to provide educator pipelines, advocacy, and other critical services. TMT's Education Entrepreneur Fellowship resulted in the founding of new organizations in Indianapolis such as Summer Advantage USA and Teach Plus, further boosting the ecosystem.

2011: The Mind Trust announces the Charter School Incubator with the goal of supporting operators to start 15 to 20 high-quality charter schools over the first five years. Successful applicants in the incubator's competitive process receive up to \$1 million per team to create their high-performing charter school networks.

December 2011: The Mind Trust publishes *Creating Opportunity Schools: A Bold Plan to Transform Indianapolis Schools*. In this report, The Mind Trust advocates for mayoral control and describes its vision of Indianapolis Public Schools as a district that shifts authority and funds from the central office to individual schools.

2012: The Mind Trust convenes many Indianapolis community leaders to discuss the report's suggestion of dramatic district change. Rather than pursue mayoral control, civic leaders join forces to support a slate of school board candidates aligned with the group's vision.

November 2012: Reform candidates win four-year terms, resulting in a majority on the IPS school board.

December 2012: A study from CREDO at Stanford University shows that charter school students demonstrate an additional two months of learning in reading and an additional three months in math when compared to their district peers.

September 2013: Dr. Lewis Ferebee, formerly chief of staff for Durham (N.C.) Public Schools, becomes superintendent of IPS.

Governance Reform:

March 2014: PL 1321 gives IPS the authority to create a category of autonomous schools, Innovation Network Schools, which are exempt from many state regulations and operate outside of IPS's collective bargaining agreement. Dr. Ferebee supports the law's passage.

Implementation of Governance Reform

2014: The Mind Trust creates the Innovation School Fellowship to support fellows as they develop their Innovation School models. Funded by philanthropy, it provides fellows with a salary and benefits to create their models within one or two years.

2014: IPS board and administration decide to pursue Innovation Schools strategy by agreeing to replace or transform at least 15 percent of the district's schools into Innovation Network Schools using the Innovation School Fellowship. These Innovation Network Schools consist of new schools, former charter schools that leased space from IPS, and former high-performing IPS schools.

November 2014: Additional pro-governance reform school board members are elected, solidifying the board's support for Innovation Schools.

2015: IPS and The Mind Trust offer Education Empowerment Awards to assist in transforming high-performing IPS schools to Innovation Network schools so they can take advantage of the greater autonomy for network schools.

2015–16: The charter sector continues to grow. Mayor Joe Hogsett's Office of Education Innovation serves as the authorizer for 33 charter schools with 39 campuses. Two additional charter schools open in 2016–17.

2015–16 and 2016–17: Five Innovation Network Schools open in 2015–16, and an additional four open in 2016–17.

Empower Schools Timeline

Pre-reform

Jan. 2010: Passage of the "2010 Act Relative to the Achievement Gap" authorizes Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to take failing districts into "receivership."

Nov. 2011: The state appoints a receiver for the lowest-performing district in the state, Lawrence Public Schools. The leaders of what is now Empower Schools work behind the scenes to support the Lawrence receivership.

Fall 2011: DESE designates three Springfield district schools a "Level 4" on the state school and district accountability scale, one level away from state receivership. Level 4 triggers a mandatory three-year turnaround period for schools to implement a plan of their design.

Summer 2013: Empower Schools officially incorporates as a 501(c)(3).

Winter and early spring 2014: Empower designs the pathway for a single school turnaround in Salem, MA, recruits necessary partners, and creates all necessary legal documents.

June 2014: Lawrence shows signs of early success. After two years of turnaround efforts, ELA proficiency increases from 41 to 44 percent, and math proficiency increases from 28 to 41 percent. Summer 2014: Despite turnaround efforts, the three Springfield schools designated Level 4 in 2010 have not shown enough improvement to avoid Level 5; meanwhile, three additional Springfield schools fall to Level 4.

August 2014: Bentley Elementary School in Salem re-opens with a new leader and new vision.

Late summer/early fall 2014: As state takeover seems likely, Springfield's mayor, Springfield Public Schools, the state, and Empower Schools begin to explore a partnership in which Springfield's lowest-performing schools would avoid receivership by voluntarily entering an "empowerment zone," gaining new autonomies and support.

October 2014: Springfield School Committee (the local school board) signs a letter of intent to pursue the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership (SEZP).

October–December 2014: Empower Schools assists with collective bargaining negotiations with the Springfield Education Association, negotiations between SEZP and Springfield Public Schools on the memorandum of understanding (MOU), input sessions with interested local groups, and drafting sessions for SEZP's turnaround plan.

November 2014:

- SEZP formally incorporated.
 - 92 percent of teachers in the schools slated for the Springfield Empowerment Zone vote in favor of the new contract. Union leaders convince members that the streamlined contract is superior to state receivership, which could end collective bargaining.
-

December 2014: Springfield School Committee votes 6–1 to approve the MOU between Springfield Public Schools, DESE, and the Empowerment Zone Board of Directors.

June 2016: 53 percent of Lawrence students are in Level 1 and 2 schools, which is more than four times the rate in 2011-12, which was only 13 percent.

October 2016: Bentley Academy named Level 1 school.

Implementation of reform: Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership (SEZP)

January–June 2015: Year 0

- January–March: SEZP schools design their operational plans.
 - April: SEZP sponsors 7th-grade math empowerment academies held during spring break.
-

July 2015–June 2016: Year 1

- July 1, 2015: SEZP becomes fully operational.
 - July and August: SEZP holds principals' institute to prepare new leaders.
 - School year 2015–16: Schools open with new school operational plans and accountability targets.
 - Spring: SEZP reviews school performance and makes operational plan renewal determinations.
-

2016-17 school year: Year 2.

- UP Education Network, a nonprofit school operator with a record of success in other Massachusetts districts, begins operating a SEZP school.
- Impact Prep and Rise Academy, led by two Founders Fellows, begin as 6th grade-only schools within the zone
- October 21, 2016: SEZP board of directors approves Commerce High School to join the zone, making it the zone's first high school.

New Schools for New Orleans Timeline

Pre-reform

May 2003: Act 9 is signed into law by Gov. Kathleen Blanco, allowing the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to take over the operations of a failing school. The Recovery School District (RSD) is created as the tool to do so.

July 2004: The first school is transferred to the RSD.

May 2005: Four more schools in Orleans Parish are transferred to the RSD.

August 2005: Hurricane Katrina hits the Gulf Coast. The mass destruction leads to the displacement of students, teachers, and staff, shutting down the operations of New Orleans Public Schools.

November 2005: Gov. Blanco signs Act 35, which raises the school performance score necessary to be labeled “Unacceptable” and thus eligible for RSD takeover. More than 100 low-performing schools in Orleans Parish are transferred to the RSD.

Implementation of reform: The RSD and New Schools for New Orleans

Spring 2006: Sarah Usdin founds New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), focusing on developing schools, investing in talent providers, and advancing education reform policies.

2007: NSNO initiates a yearlong fellowship program to recruit, select, and support promising charter school founders.

March 2007: Paul Pastorek becomes new state superintendent and hires Paul Vallas as RSD superintendent. The RSD operates a “portfolio” of schools, increasingly shifting schools from direct operation to management by charter school operators.

August 2010: NSNO and RSD receive \$28 million from the federal Investing in Innovation grant program to expand NSNO’s work in New Orleans and support Tennessee as it creates an achievement school district, similar to RSD. FEMA awards RSD and OPSB \$1.8 billion to rebuild and renovate damaged schools (via school facilities master plan).

2011: OPSB loses its “crisis” classification and regains the authority to authorize new charter schools.

Spring 2011: Paul Pastorek resigns as state superintendent; Paul Vallas replaced by John White as new RSD superintendent.

2012: Neerav Kingsland becomes NSNO CEO. Citywide expulsion process for RSD and OPSB schools introduced. John White becomes state superintendent and Patrick Dobard becomes RSD superintendent.

2014: RSD closes its remaining directly run schools, making it the first all-charter school district in the country. Michael Stone and Maggie Runyan-Shefa become co-CEOs of NSNO.

May 2016: The state legislature passes SB 432, which will ultimately place all New Orleans RSD charters under the authority of a single authorizer, OPSB, by June 1, 2018.

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- ¹⁹ The Massachusetts Department of Education classifies its schools into levels 1 through 5, 1 being the best and 5 being the worst. "For a school to be classified into Level 1, the cumulative PPI for both the "all students" group and high needs students must be 75 or higher. If not, the school is classified into Level 2. A school may also be classified into Level 2 if it has low assessment participation rates for any group (between 90 and 94%). Schools are classified into Level 3 if they are among the lowest 20 percent relative to other schools in the same school type category statewide, if one or more subgroups in the school are among the lowest performing 20% of subgroups relative to all subgroups statewide, if they have persistently low graduation rates (less than 67% for the most recent 4-year rate and less than 70% for the three most recent 5-year rates for any subgroup), or if they have very low assessment participation rates for any group (less than 90%). The lowest achieving, least improving Level 3 schools are candidates for classification into Levels 4 and 5, the most serious designations in Massachusetts' accountability system." Level 5 schools are recommended for takeover. Massachusetts Department of Education. (n.d.). About the Data: Accountability and Report Cards. Retrieved from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/help/data.aspx?section=acct>
"Lawrence undoubtedly provides an encouraging proof point that the improvement of chronically underperforming districts serving primarily low-income and ESL students is indeed possible."
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- ³⁵ Interestingly, Sarah Usdin, became an elected member of the OPSB in 2012 and ran unopposed for reelection in 2016.
- ³⁶ New Orleans' Katrina school takeover to end, Legislature decides
- ³⁷ While the seeds for NSNO were planted at the time of the RSD's creation, NSNO did not play a role in the strategic planning that resulted in the passage of Act 9 (creation of RSD) or Act 35 (transfer of OPSB schools to RSD).

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