# THE WORKSHOP SCHOOL

## BUILDING A SCHOOL AROUND A VISION OF LEARNING THAT EMPHASIZES CREATIVITY, COLLABORATION, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE

> *"The world needs problem-solvers, and students need an education that prepares them to confront the world's real challenges. We have shown that when we engage students in a rigorous, real-world project-based learning environment, we dramatically improve their chances for success in college, career, and community."*
>
> **Matthew Riggan, Co-Founder, The Workshop School**

## KEY FEATURES:

- ☑ **New School**
- ☑ **Lab Rotation and À La Carte Blended Model**
- ☑ **Project-Based Learning**
- ☑ **Competency-Based Learning**

## AT A GLANCE:

**Start Date:** Fall 2013

**Grades Served:** 9-12

**Location:** Philadelphia, PA

**Operator:** The Workshop School

**Operator Type:** Nonprofit

**School Type:** District

**Setting:** Urban

**Students at Start:** 92

**Students at Capacity:** 480

## MODEL TOOLBOX:

**Student Information System:** PowerSchool, eScholar

**Gradebook:** District's gradebook

**Assessment Tools and Approaches:** Project Foundry, digital portfolios, state assessments, NWEA MAP

**Digital Content Providers:** ALEKS Math, Empower 3000

**Project Software:** Google drive, CAD/Autodesk, Adobe Creative Cloud

**Hardware:** 1:1 notebooks

**The Vision:** The mission of the Workshop School is to unleash the creative and intellectual potential of young people to solve the world's toughest problems. Three core principles underscore the breakthrough design of the school:

- *Put the work first.* Authentic work defines the curriculum and the knowledge and skills students need.
- *Trust students to make decisions.* Decision-making makes them responsible for their work and their ideas, driving ownership of their learning.
- *Make the most out of failure.* The most important part of the learning process is what happens *after* a bad decision is made or a specific approach doesn't work.

**The Academic Model:** From these core principles emerged a different kind of school. Projects rather than subjects drive the curriculum and the schedule. Teachers focus on helping students figure out the right questions rather than the right answers. Teachers work intensively with students to cultivate the habits of mind to take ownership of their work. They help students figure out what they need to learn in order to complete projects and determine criteria for completing them successfully. Student progress is based on demonstration of mastery and real world impact rather than seat time. And technology is not a subject within the curriculum; it is the means through which work gets done.

The project-based learning model has four stages: 1) make it up (envision), 2) make it real, 3) make it better, and 4) make it happen. All students are expected to take at least two projects through stage four by the time they graduate. Projects are managed using an online system, Project Foundry, which allows students and teachers to align project work with state standards and track credits by subject area.

The day is divided into two large, flexible blocks of time with students working on projects in the morning and learning "building blocks" in the afternoon, either by working independently with online resources or in small seminars. They progress through the school based on demonstrated mastery of applied knowledge and skills and based on project performance. Students are expected to demonstrate mastery and growth in Common Core English language arts and mathematics as well as in collaboration and communication, ownership and commitment, critical thinking and problem solving, and awareness.

**The Organizational Model:** Staffing, scheduling, budgeting and facilities are all driven by the school's

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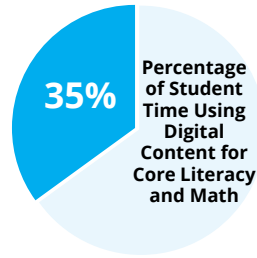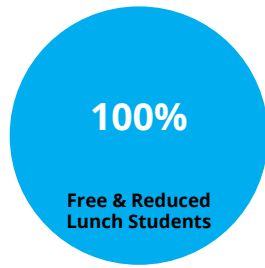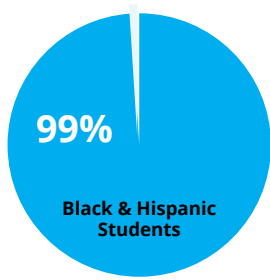
instructional model. The school uses a modular organization: it currently has one lower house that will serve grades 9-10 and plans to add two upper houses to serve grades 11-12, each in separate facilities. Lower houses focus on introducing students to the project model and core competencies. Upper houses will be field- or problem-focused.

The initial lower house facility is provided by the school district. Future houses will use existing district facilities or be co-located with university or business partners. Each house is a mix of large group pod space, small team meeting space, individual carrels, and shop space for hands-on work. Students and teachers are organized into advisories (about 15:1) that pair up for project work. Team teaching responsibilities are flexible and can be reconfigured based on expertise and project needs.
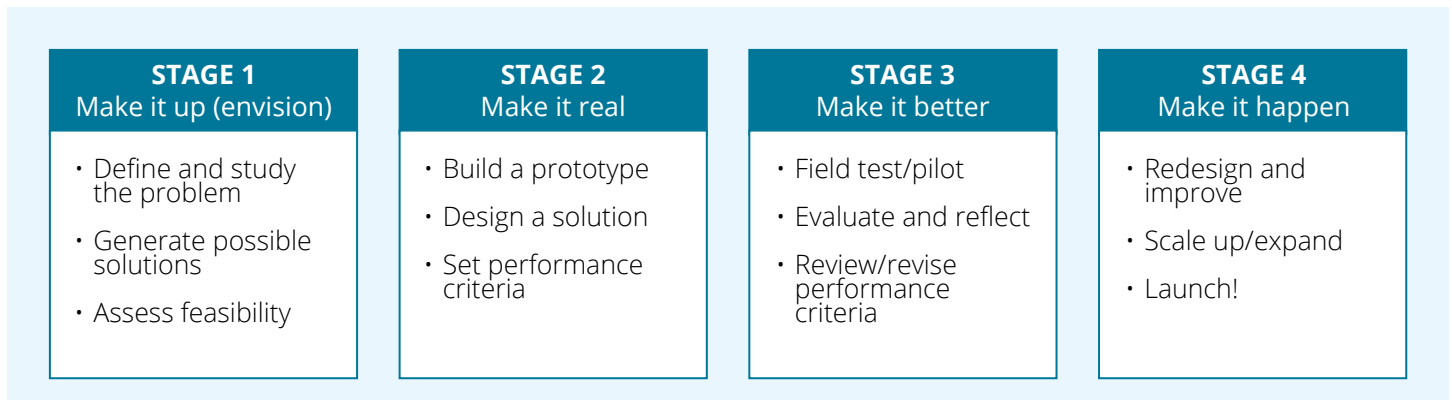
The model aims to be sustainable, cost-efficient, and evolutionary, all of which enable its ability to scale.

- *Sustainable:* The academic model doesn't demand overextended staff in terms of time and students served. Teachers develop relationships with approximately 40 students a year, a stark contrast to a traditional teaching load possibly serving 150 students a year.
- *Cost-efficient:* The financial model focuses the majority of expenses on instructional staff and project tools and supplies, keeping per-student costs down.
- *Evolutionary:* Rather than replicating individual schools, the Workshop School will create and expand a network of lower and upper houses as demand requires and resources allow.

**The Operator:** The Workshop School is a partnership of Project Based Learning, Inc. and the School District of Philadelphia. Since 2011, the operators ran an alternative senior year program for 30 district students called the Sustainability Workshop, which was a two-year pilot of the model. Working within a large urban district in partnership with the teachers' union, the partners created a whole school design from the pilot project that serves the same student population that one would find in a neighborhood high school in Philadelphia.

## THE WORKSHOP MODEL

| STAGE 1 Make it up (envision) | STAGE 2 Make it real | STAGE 3 Make it better | STAGE 4 Make it happen |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Define and study the problem<br>• Generate possible solutions<br>• Assess feasibility | • Build a prototype<br>• Design a solution<br>• Set performance criteria | • Field test/pilot<br>• Evaluate and reflect<br>• Review/revise performance criteria | • Redesign and improve<br>• Scale up/expand<br>• Launch! |

Borrowing from principles of design thinking, the project model is constructed so that students can do rigorous work with clear deliverables within each stage. The scope and ambition of the projects and the specific skills required to carry them out successfully become more intensive as students advance through high school. To take a project through stage four, students must clearly define and fully understand a significant problem, develop and field test a solution, assess its impact, and make changes or refinements based on that feedback, and then, ultimately, put it to work in our world..

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