

# Reimagining Space, Time & Staffing

*These fundamental structures can help propel your students' learning — or halt it. This toolkit includes top tips, strategies, and resources from NGLC grantees for rethinking these critical elements of school.*

Created by Next Generation Learning Challenges & 2Revolutions  
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NEXT GENERATION  
LEARNING CHALLENGES

**2Revolutions**  
Do What You Love For Good



“If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow.”

*John Dewey*

## Contents

Space . . . . .	Page 1
Time . . . . .	Page 13
Staffing . . . . .	Page 21
Looking Ahead . . . . .	Page 28



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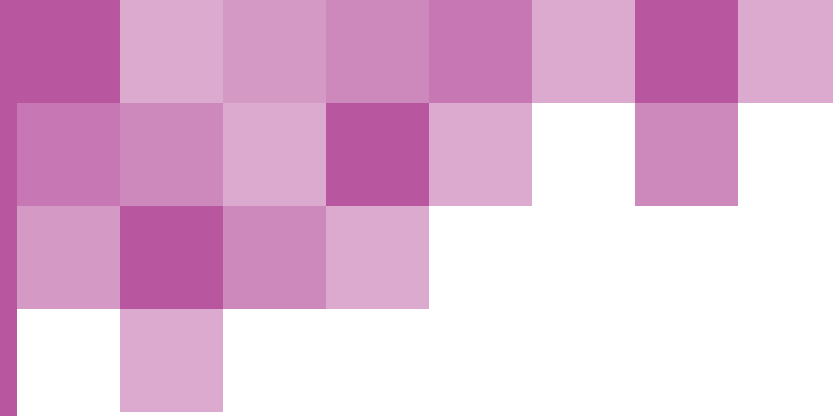


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# SPACE

“Rethinking spaces is about experience first, and things second.”

from *The Third Teacher* by Cannon Design



When you visualize school, what comes to mind? Chances are long hallways lined with lockers, classrooms with desks facing the front of the room, a cafeteria, library, and gym are some of the first physical and structural elements to pop into your head. Next gen learning experiences often don't "fit" within these traditional learning spaces. In *The Third Teacher*, a leading resource in the field of learning space, the authors recommend the focus of the physical design be on the *experience* you want for your learners.

But next gen educators face obstacles to innovation when it comes to redesigning spaces:

- Budgets that require tough trade-offs
- Old or ill-fitting buildings
- Physical spaces that often lag behind the continuous evolution of the school model and student learning needs
- Fixed mindsets of the physical look of the school

Breakthrough schools in the NGLC network — both district and charter — are tackling some of these obstacles and making strides to ensure their physical and virtual spaces enable the learning they want. Discover the lessons they have learned about space, dive into how they use it, and then use the provided tools and resources as you rethink space.

## Top Tips to Rethink Space



Let the Student Experience Drive Your Design



How You Invest Reflects How You Feel



Collaborate with Community Partners



Utilize ALL Spaces for Learning



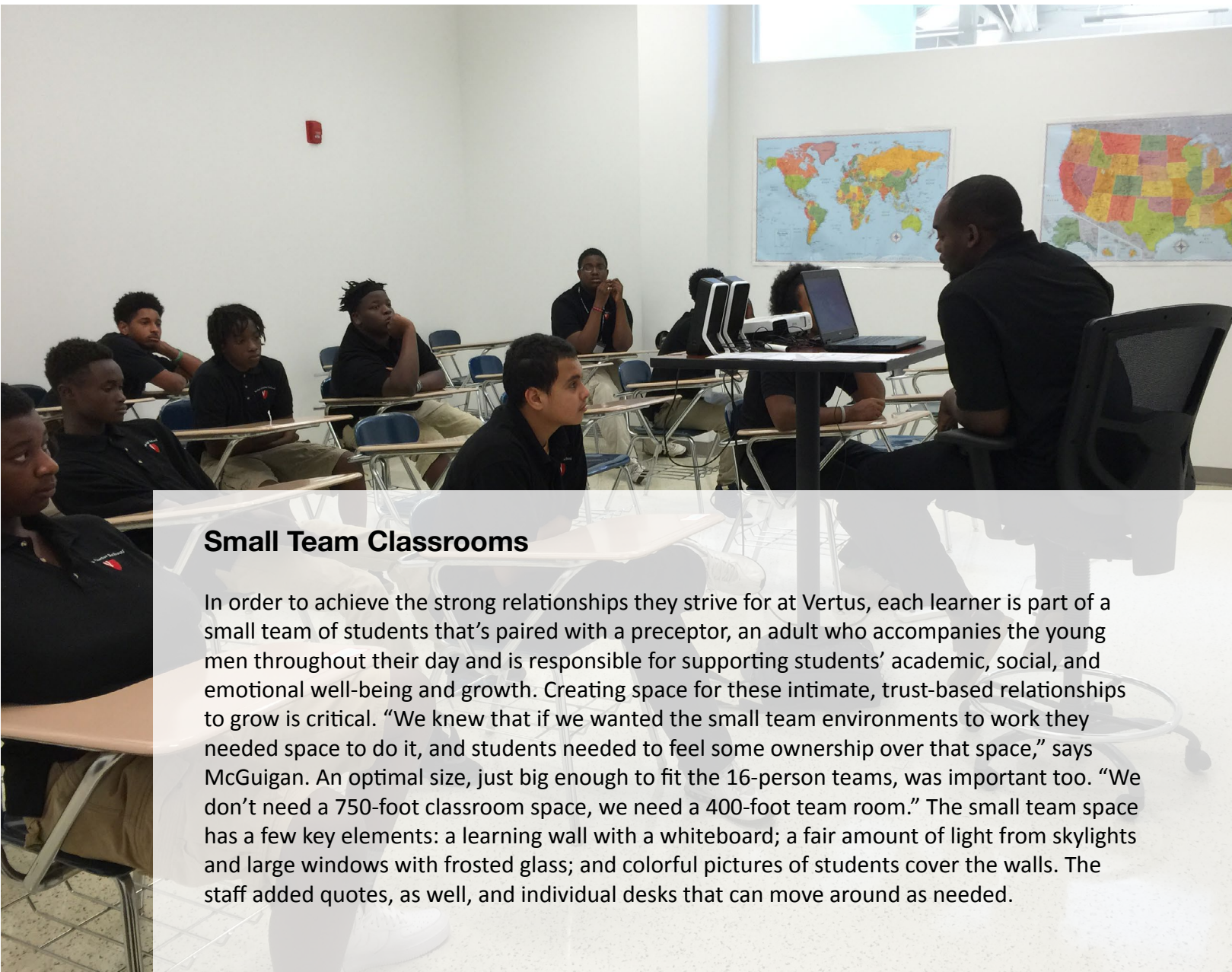
Repurpose & Save: Rethinking Space Doesn't Need to Break the Bank





## Let the Student Experience Drive Your Design

Vertus Charter School in Rochester, New York, is working to shift the paradigm of secondary education. “Our goal is to reinvent high school for those that need it most: inner city boys of color,” says CEO and Co-Founder Leigh McGuigan. “The program drives our space.” Vertus’ model focuses on four pillars: building strong relationships; personalized, mastery-based year-round academics; character education; and career prep. That’s why after two years in operation the school has opted to move into another city building to allow for greater flexibility. At Vertus they’ve focused on design of three key spaces: Small Team Classrooms, Learning Labs, and Adult Spaces.



### Small Team Classrooms

In order to achieve the strong relationships they strive for at Vertus, each learner is part of a small team of students that’s paired with a preceptor, an adult who accompanies the young men throughout their day and is responsible for supporting students’ academic, social, and emotional well-being and growth. Creating space for these intimate, trust-based relationships to grow is critical. “We knew that if we wanted the small team environments to work they needed space to do it, and students needed to feel some ownership over that space,” says McGuigan. An optimal size, just big enough to fit the 16-person teams, was important too. “We don’t need a 750-foot classroom space, we need a 400-foot team room.” The small team space has a few key elements: a learning wall with a whiteboard; a fair amount of light from skylights and large windows with frosted glass; and colorful pictures of students cover the walls. The staff added quotes, as well, and individual desks that can move around as needed.



### Learning Labs

At Vertus, students move between small group instruction and self-paced learning using online curriculum in learning labs. “Our learning labs are 1,300 to 1,800 square-feet and are set-up to allow students to work at their own pace supported by adults,” says McGuigan.

When the school first launched, three learning lab configurations were prototyped. This approach allowed the staff to observe, study, and refine the design to optimize self-paced and independent student learning. One helpful lesson they learned through these three configurations was where to invest funds and where not to. For example, in one learning lab they implemented dividers (expensive structural pieces that go between each desk to help keep students focused on their own computer), but it ended up being a waste of money, says McGuigan. Since all students were working at their own pace and had different activities on their computer at any given time, dividers didn’t make much sense. What did make sense: limiting the number of teams working in the lab simultaneously. By capping the number of teams in the learning lab to a maximum of two at a time they created the best optimization of the space — no equipment needed!





## Adult Spaces

“Because transitions are difficult for our students, we construct our model so teachers move instead of students,” says McGuigan. A home base where staff can work, collaborate, decompress, and store their belongings and teaching materials is absolutely essential. The collaborative adult room has lockers for each staff member and an abundance of natural light.



### Get Started:

With your team, write down or draw out the key elements of your learning model. Then put on an architect’s hat and survey the spaces in your school. What do you notice? For example, is your learning model built on co-creation and collaboration, but individual desks face the front of the classroom? Do you emphasize hands-on learning, but your lab space is a disorganized small room in the corner of the building? Keep a list of what’s working and what’s falling short.



### Learn More:

This [infographic](#) by USC Rossier School of Education provides research on how color, wall design, and layouts affect learning; use it to brainstorm what might work for you. Then check out [this creative and inspiring school](#) that has stretched the limits of what “school” could look like when personalizing learning for kids.

“What we believe about children is visible in the choices we make within our schools. Nowhere is this more evident than in the environment.”

*from Community Playthings*



## How You Invest Reflects How You Feel

“Space sets the tone for the culture. When the building is uninspiring, the students can internalize that,” says McGuigan. “How do students hold themselves in the new space? The space should have a lot of value, symbolic value, that’s very meaningful.” Vertus’s new space is a 10-year rental in an old manufacturing building. “I think our biggest change with the move is helping our students feel more respect for themselves,” says McGuigan. “Especially if the building looks fancy and not school-like. We have very high ceilings, a lot of skylights, an interesting design; we want them to feel like they’re worth more.”

**Design Tech High School (d.tech)** in San Mateo, California, aims to create a culture of “extreme personalization” that helps students develop content knowledge and creative problem solving skills for success in college and beyond. Their space plays an enormous role in nurturing that culture.

“If you’re trying to work toward extreme personalization and doing a lot of projects, you need really flexible spaces,” says Cerra. “We have rolling whiteboards. Our projectors are on carts. The seats and student desks are on wheels — moving is a huge theme! You need to be able to reorganize easily.” d.tech also created visual transparency in their space, with lots of windows to see into the various spaces so there could be “casual supervision of where students are and what they are doing without having to be too authoritarian about it,” says Cerra.

## Lessons learned from d.tech

### **Visual distraction is not nearly as problematic as audio distraction.**

d.tech has a big warehouse space for creating and making. “But the noise is really hard to manage and it’s exhausting to teach and to listen out there,” says Cerra. As they worked on their new building, which is launching in the fall of 2017, the team was much more interested in managing volume and audio seclusion. “We find that visual distraction isn’t too much of a problem. If people are milling about and going about their business it’s not too distracting.”

### **Have students occupy a range of spaces during independent time.**

“The thing we really learned is when students need to be focused, working independently, they should be distributed around the school’s spaces rather than all congregated in one classroom space. They do a lot better if they have some freedom to wander. As long as there is some light supervision, that really works better.”



### **Get Started:**

Sometimes we don’t realize how the unconscious choices we make in our spaces affect how our learners feel. It’s time to change that: Run a design loop with your students. Bring groups of students together and have them share out how they want to feel in school to be able to learn best. (For example: safe, quiet, focused, inspired, lots of colors, or soothing colors. Opinions might vary. Track them all!) Next, ask them to share out adjectives for how the current school spaces make them feel and reflect on the differences. Together you can prototype solutions to make the space align to how they want to feel — and make sure to set up experiments to test these prototypes. For instance, students might complain furniture is uncomfortable, so as a group find ways to bring in more comfortable seating arrangements, then have students analyze whether their learning has shifted.



### **Learn More:**

Use this [design thinking toolkit](#) from IDEO to help plan your design loop with students and staff.



August 12, 2016 d.tech Groundbreaking Ceremony at Oracle Parkway in Redwood City.





## Your Local Community is a Treasure Trove: Use It!

**Metro Schools** includes Metro Early College Middle and High Schools and Metro Institute of Technology (MIT) in Columbus, Ohio. Their buildings are located on the campuses of Ohio State and Franklin University, and students participate in courses at both locations, in addition to some courses at Columbus State. As a mastery-based, early college model location mattered — it was essential to be in close proximity to a college or university, says executive director Meka Pace, to create a true ecosystem of learning. Throughout the day, students move between classes located in their high school to other buildings on campus for college courses. Rather than recreate spaces that the college already has, Metro utilizes the campus spaces: kids eat lunch in the university dining halls and access the theater, fitness centers, student halls, and other amenities.



### Get Started:

You don't have to gain access to a local college campus or even be an early college model to benefit from extending your learning spaces beyond the walls of your school. There are so many opportunities to strengthen learning experiences by placing them within your local community. Approach local nurseries or greenhouses for science class; see if any recreation centers, like the YMCA or larger athletic complexes, are interested in housing kids for physical education and health classes; find the community-run playhouses and explore what performances and learning could happen there. The ideas are endless, and community partners are often eager to help.



### Learn More:

To help you build relationships with community organizations, check out the [Community Partner Toolkit](#) from Generation Schools Network, Colorado Education Initiative, and 2Revolutions for resources such as community partner codes of conduct, evaluation materials for assessing whether a partner is the right fit for your school, budget templates, and student survey samples.



## Utilize ALL Spaces for Learning

"You wouldn't be ood and awed" by Metro's buildings, says Pace, "because they are [not] the latest and greatest architectural school buildings. They look like office buildings." But, she adds, "What I do think is special is how we think of the space inside." Metro utilizes all of their spaces. "We consider every part of our building a learning space." That means hallways, nooks and crannies, even the roof at times, is used for learning. Walls are not barriers to the learning process in this school," explains Pace.

The Metro team purposefully created this atmosphere of anytime, anywhere learning. "We have lots of classrooms that open up into larger spaces. We also have lots of community spaces with round tables and other furniture for collaborative work stations and for students to congregate." Many of the rooms use glass to divide the space, giving it a transparent, open feel. Flexible walls let staff and students reconfigure as needed and feed into the idea that learning happens wherever you need it to.



### Get Started:

Take a look around: are you taking advantage of all the spaces in and outside of your school? Can you be using these spaces differently?



### Learn More:

Utilizing all your spaces for learning effectively sometimes requires a cultural shift. Having students stay on task in hallways and other non-traditional learning spaces is easy when the building culture is right. Sign up for the course "[Student Culture: Engage, Empower & Amplify](#)" on the NGLC Labs platform to learn more about creating and nurturing culture. The course, created by educator and designer Jim Stephens of 2Revolutions, has four units: What is Culture?; The Adolescent Brain; Relationships: Co-Creation & Power; and Co-Creating through Empathy.

Students collaborating at Metro





## Repurpose & Save: Rethinking Space Doesn't Need to Break the Bank

Without the option to build a new space or undergo significant renovations, Horry County Public School's [Whittemore Park Middle School](#) decided to repurpose a current space. "We had to get our teachers to work together in engagement, alignment, and assessment," says Judy Beard, former principal of this district school. But they didn't have a space to collaborate. To make room, the school got rid of their big conference room and turned it into a collaborative space, calling it the Think Tank. "We filled it with comfortable furniture and small tables with lazy susan's and stools." Now, teachers have designated time once a week to come to the Think Tank. "It's not evaluative. It's a time when we sit shoulder to shoulder and work together."

Like Whittemore Park, many schools don't have the option to invest in the physical space, but that gives you a chance to be creative. "When we started the school we bought as much used furniture as we could," says McGuigan of Vertus. "This not only saved money, but it gave staff and students a chance to try out a range of furniture before investing in more expensive pieces."



Metro Learning Labs



### Get Started:

As you're considering your space, look into small changes and tweaks you can make that are totally free or don't cost much: declutter, paint the walls, hang up student work or photos of students and staff, create various spaces in your learning environment for certain activities. Make sure to involve your students in the work of creating your spaces — it will give them more ownership and it will ensure you're designing spaces where they feel comfortable and can thrive. Space is often considered a capital investment, but you can do much to innovate and iterate, test and improve, at a very low cost.



### Learn More:

Check out places like [ReStore](#), nonprofit home improvement stores run by Habitat for Humanity, that sell lightly used building materials, lighting fixtures, furniture, and other home and building resources. Salvation Army, Goodwill, and local consignment shops are also great places to shop around for low cost solutions. And don't hesitate to make the idea of low cost prototypes a learning experience for your students — have them set a budget and then find creative ways to meet their needs within it.

### More Helpful Tools & Inspiration as You Redesign Your Space

[The Third Teacher](#) is one of our favorite thought-leaders in the realm of space. Consider doing a book study of [their work](#) or check out their Twitter account, website, and resources.

[Community Playthings](#) is a company that builds and designs furniture for kids to play and learn, and this short article from them on [How The Environment Inspires Curriculum](#) is a great starter read for exploring your space and its impact on learning.

[Next Gen Tools: Blended Learning Classroom Design](#) explores Merit Prep's blended learning space; a useful lens if you want to consider an open-floor plan focused on blended learning.

[Next Gen Tools: e3 Civic High School Facility](#) looks at e3 Civic High's beautiful school, which occupies space within a state-of-the-art library in downtown San Diego and was designed to encourage the personalized, project-based model of the school.



# TIME

“How we spend our days, is of course, how we spend our lives.”

Annie Dillard, Author



How we organize our time — the “schedule” — can both drive and constrain learning. Most schools use a rigid daily and yearly schedule, structured around bells, marking periods, and semesters, and days that follow the same routine over and over regardless of the learning goals. But creating flexible, personalized environments that are more fluid and allow students to learn through many modalities, at their own pace, and with lots of opportunities for support, requires a new approach to organizing time. It can be a primary lever to personalize a school model. Use these tips and tools to get started.

## Top Tips to Rethink Time



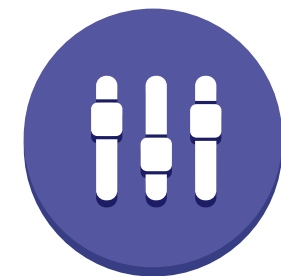
Let Students' Pace Drive the Schedule, but Create Guardrails



Each Week Can Be Different



Break Up the Schedule



Try Custom Schedules for All Learners





## Let Students' Pace Drive the Schedule, but Create Guardrails

At d.tech the pace in which a student works is highly variable. Teachers create the curriculum for a course and they put as much of the full curriculum as possible up on the school's learning management system (LMS). Once all of the materials and assignments are loaded, recommended deadlines for major assignments are articulated, but students work completely at their own pace. Their daily schedule allows for it. "We have students in math who have completed a whole semester or year of geometry in a few months," says Cerra. On the flip side, some students are working at a pace that doesn't align with what the teacher originally set. "Some students will need more than one semester to finish a semester's worth of work," and that's OK.

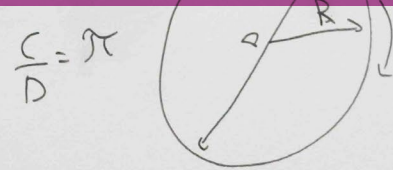
Vertus follows a similar model of letting pace drive time. Students move throughout their day with their learning team and spend 200 minutes per day in the learning lab, where they can work on whatever content they choose in whatever order, based on their needs. The schedule prioritizes this team and personal time to really meet students where they are. "If they are reading at a third grade level, we meet them there," says McGuigan. "We chop courses into units so they can advance through them at their own pace."

The variability of pace at both of these schools can create challenges. "Students often take more time when they don't need more time, just like we do as adults!" says Cerra. This past school year (2015-16), d.tech instituted a deadline policy, in which students had to turn assignments in by a certain date. If they couldn't meet that deadline, they had to write a proposal advocating for more time. Once they propose an extension and the teacher grants it, they can set a new deadline. "This still lets us personalize the pace, but it puts the responsibility in the student's hands and it helps our teachers with workload; rather than having our staff chase students down for assignments, more of our students are turning assignments in by the recommended deadline," says Cerra.



### Get Started:

To begin planning a flexible schedule that lets students move at their own pace, have multiple work sessions and conversations with students to brainstorm how they want to be held accountable for completing the curriculum. d.tech or Vertus's model might be perfect for you, but other methods may work better. Consider an advisory model for accountability or another method to help students stay on track with the more open-ended opportunities provided by a less structured schedule. You'll want to make sure that the flexible schedule you set meets state and district guidelines around time or that you are able to secure a waiver that allows your new schedule to operate as desired.



### Learn More:

[Roots Elementary School](#) in Denver, Colorado has been testing and refining their daily schedule to allow students to move at their own pace, with a schedule that changes each day to meet students' needs. Watch this [video](#) to see how it works and get ideas for whether a similar model makes sense in your environment. Read this [publication](#) for a deeper dive into Roots. For an example of a district school that has adopted competency-based progression over seat-time requirements, explore [Sanborn School District](#) in New Hampshire. (Take a close look at their [District Competencies Handbook](#) for helpful information on why the district chose to make this shift; what the components of their system look like; how students spend time and learn, and more.) The [CompetencyWorks blog](#) written by Brian Stack, the principal at Sanborn High School, is also a great resource to understand the shift.

MIT (Metro Institute of Technology)







## Each Week Can Be Different

d.tech has also tossed aside the convention of a static weekly schedule. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday students follow a traditional set schedule, where they move between classes, like English or science. During those class times, students work at their own pace and participate in group work and teacher-led instruction. Then teachers use the data from those three “work days” to create personalized, ever-evolving schedules for “lab days” held every Thursday and Friday.

A main goal of lab days is to help students develop the self-direction d.tech staff knows is essential to be successful as adults. Lab time varies student by student. For example, 14-year-old Maria might spend part of her lab day building a hydro-garden in the school’s Makerspace with a cohort of fellow students that are excelling in science, facilitated by a science teacher. Then she heads to an elective offered during lab, like painting, and then to her newspaper club meeting where she’s the editor. The rest of the day is spent in independent learning time working through the curriculum for her classes on the LMS. Lab is also used for remediation, so students that need one-on-one support with an instructor or extra time in a course are tagged (via the scheduling tool d.tech uses) to have an extra English course or attend a tutoring session.

Although students have choice, the schedules for lab days are created by the staff using an online tool built by a Facebook engineer. Once students receive their lab day schedule they might see they have some unscheduled time, and it’s up to them to use the time wisely. The Makerspace is open full-time during lab days, and students can just drop in and go work on whatever they want, says Cerra. “Kids are building a guitar. Others are building a skateboard,” she explains. “They can go in there, mess around, and learn a skill.”



### Get Started:

Come together with your team and ask yourself the following questions about time as it relates to your school’s vision: *What are your goals?; How can a different approach to time, within a day and across a week — for both students and staff — help you better meet your goals?; What are the trade-offs?* It helps to be visual during an exercise like this, too, so sketch out or write down all the various learning experiences you want and rearrange them on a wall by day. Throw out all your assumptions about what it has to look like!



### Learn More:

Trying to redesign your schedule can be challenging, but luckily there’s software and organizations out there to help. Consider applying for the [ABL Accelerator](#), an organization that pilots new scheduling tools with schools that are rethinking their approach to time. (You can read this [piece](#) in EdSurge to learn more about it.)



## Break Up the Schedule

Some next gen schools hit pause on their weekly schedules and build in completely new learning experiences. d.tech employs this method, holding two week intercessions every eight weeks where they offer deep enrichment opportunities, like programming classes, dance, yoga, typography, and more. If the enrichments are popular with students they will in turn offer them during lab time. These enrichments are taught by outside professionals and experts, which gives students a chance to learn and engage with other adults. During each intercession, d.tech staff are immersed in two-weeks of professional learning.



### Get Started:

Poll your students and staff: If they could totally pause “school” what would they do with that time? What learning experiences or enrichments would they love to dig into as a group or individually? Let all options be on the table: sports, camping, team building, art, hiking, mechanics, programming, theater, volunteering in the community, the opportunities are endless! And if intercessions won’t work for your school community, spend some time exploring when you can break up the schedule — every other Wednesday? Every Friday afternoon? One-week immersions? — to create deep learning opportunities for both students and staff.



### Learn More:

Watch this [video](#) on what a day in the life of students looks like at [Denver School of Innovation and Sustainable Design \(DSISD\)](#), a new competency-based district high school that has many unique spins on scheduling, including a play on intercessions.

I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.

Maya Angelou

Vertus School





## Try Custom Schedules for All Students

At Metro’s campuses, each individual student has a custom-created schedule that’s right for them. “We don’t schedule students based on a grade band. Every ninth grader is not taking the same course, since their readiness skills are different,” says Pace.

The custom schedules at Metro are based on three 15-week semesters of learning with a five week January-term after the fall semester, which is used for remediation and acceleration. In this mastery-based school, “If a student didn’t get an A in the fall, we use the five weeks to remediate what they need to continue to work on,” says Pace.

In a student’s second phase of their academic career (typically in their third and fourth years), the custom schedule shifts to one that models a college student’s schedule. Students might have an 8 a.m. class three days a week on the college campus with internships in the afternoon or they might bounce around from a high school course to a college one, says Pace. “It’s not the same thing every time and every day of the week.” Depending on a student’s achievement, some may transition to a full-time college student schedule, taking all their courses at the university.

Managing this variety of schedules requires some logistical ‘gymnastics’ so Metro has a full-time academic advisor from Ohio State University that schedules all of Metro students’ college courses.



### Get Started:

How are you using time as a school? How much time are students spending in class versus in transitions or other non-learning activities? As a first step to find out, use the School Time Analysis Tool from the National Center on Time and Learning. This web-based tool lets you plug in and see how you’re actually using time collectively across your school, a necessary step before rearranging time in support of learning.

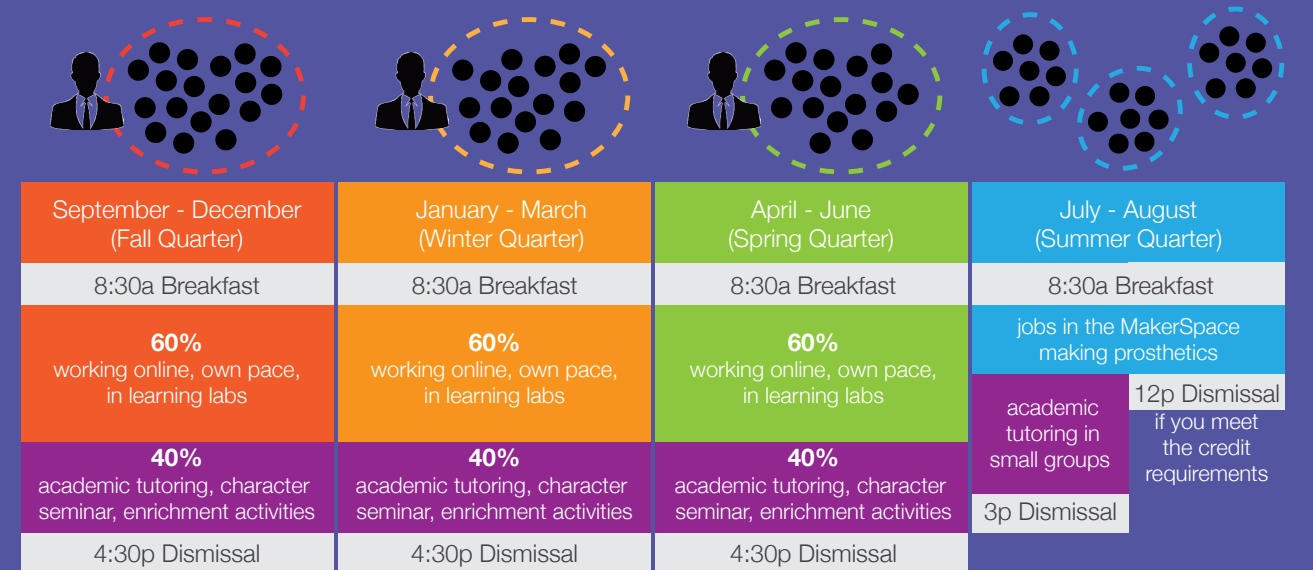


### Learn More:

Read this study, [The Case for Improving and Expanding Time In School](#), to understand the research behind implementing better and more effective use of time in schools to transform student learning.

## Learning All Year Long

At Vertus, school runs all year long. “We don’t do anything fancy like intercession, we just come and bang away at learning for 200 days a year,” says McGuigan. Vertus has three main goals for extending the year: “First, to give students more learning time to catch up academically. Second, to make sure they don’t lose any learning — they can’t afford any summer learning loss,” says McGuigan. Lastly, to keep students connected to the school community. Here’s how Vertus structures its full year of learning, which can help you consider whether a model like this works for you:



## More Helpful Tools & Inspiration as You Rethink Time

Read this white paper by Batelle for Kids on [Leveraging, Time, Talent, and Resources: Rethinking critical levers to optimize student performance and teacher effectiveness.](#)

Explore the different kinds of learning time students have throughout the days and weeks at Summit Public School.

Check out this [NGLC blog](#) from Generation Schools Network on making time for the professional and personal competencies that are key for student success in the real world.



# STAFFING

“Every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists they become the best they can possibly be.”

Rita Pierson, Educator

Staffing in many schools is still quite traditional: teachers assigned by subject and/or grade level to cohorts of students. Although that approach might work well for parts of your model, next generation schools call for creative staffing configurations that focus on meeting students' needs as opposed to filling a particular position. Read on to explore tips from breakthrough school leaders on rethinking staffing, and for resources and tools you can use as you investigate new staffing approaches for your model.

## Top Tips to Rethink Staffing



Think Beyond  
Your “Traditional”  
Teachers



Move Beyond  
Convention and  
Hire For What  
Students Need



Look for  
Versatility

*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*

Quote in the Hallway at Vertus School

Martin Luther King, Jr.





## Think Beyond Your “Traditional” Teachers

Change is hard, especially when we consciously and unconsciously expect school to be and look a certain way — and staffing is part of that. Policies and union contracts may place limitations on staffing in schools, but our mental models also limit our ability to think differently: most of us went to elementary schools staffed with grade-level teachers and secondary schools staffed with teachers specializing in specific content areas. We may never think twice about this structure. At Vertus, content specialists for the high school’s core subjects works, but they were dissatisfied with the side-effect that one adult was not with a single student all day long. Vertus took that design challenge head-on, creating a full-time, daily support role, called a preceptor; an adult that’s responsible for a learning team of 12 to 20 young men all day long. The preceptor teaches students their character seminars, goes with them to all their classes, eats with students during meal time, and serves as a coach, mentor, and assistant teacher.

“Every minute of the day the preceptor is with their team, with the exception of one to two breaks,” says McGuigan. “Our preceptors are there to build strong relationships with our boys. The short job description we’ve had for this role is helping teach young men how to be men. These adults need to be able to understand our students’ worlds and relate to them and love them unconditionally.”

It’s very hard work, McGuigan admits, but with a background in corporate finance and law, she doesn’t shy away from it and hires a staff that aligns to that mindset. “If a mom can’t find her son at 2 in the morning, she is going to call our preceptors. It’s a role that doesn’t have a lot of boundaries.” One day preceptors might be calling a social worker or a housing official. Another day is spent tutoring and spending significant time on a student’s academics. “It’s a very big job, so our preceptors need to have the relationship skills and the willingness to work,” says McGuigan.

Metro also played with tradition, by looking beyond their own staff and into their university partners — giving students a chance to interact and work with a range of adults, from professors to advisors and extracurricular coordinators. As an early college school, this is fundamental to their model. “We staff to the core,” says Pace, meaning they focus on having teachers for core subject areas, like math and English. “Anything beyond that, students take at the university.” It’s not only less expensive, but it also keeps students integrated into the university in a meaningful way.



### Get Started:

Is there an element that is fundamental to your model that really requires you to consider staff differently? At Vertus, having an adult with a group of students all day was core to changing the paradigm of traditional high school. At Metro, giving students the chance to learn and work with adults in a post-secondary environment is an absolute necessity. Maybe you’re working to really zone in on social and emotional learning: Do you have a specific position focused on that or is it something you are just adding onto the plate of your current team? Perhaps you are working to launch a wrap-around school with a range of additional services. What needs to be brought in-house versus what can you partner with outside organizations to do?



### Learn More:

Sometimes the most innovative ideas come from looking outside your own industry. Read about new ways health care institutions are staffing their hospitals and clinics from the [Institute for Healthcare Improvement](#). Consider whether visits to a range of community organizations to review their staffing models is a good place to start as you brainstorm your own unique approaches.



Instruction Time at Vertus





## Move Beyond Convention and Hire For What Students Need

Having run and worked in a range of businesses outside of education, McGuigan’s other key tip for staffing is to “get beyond the conventional notions of what kind of professionals you have to hire and think about what students need. Then try to fit that into the legal, regulatory, and certification requirements — rather than starting with the assumed bureaucratic imperatives.”



### Get Started:

Putting this into practice, determine what really matters for students and how much it matters, says McGuigan. Study what’s working for your learners and why, and then look for that in your staff. Some qualities can be learned and others are much more fundamental. For example, Vertus has hired boy scout troop leaders and retired military personnel as preceptors — they were not certified teachers when they started — but for McGuigan that wasn’t essential for the role they play with students. The competencies and experiences they brought to the table were what mattered.



### Learn More:

Explore and build off of Vertus’ [hiring matrix](#), which makes explicit the qualities their school has deemed most important in staff.



## Look for Versatility

Next gen models are like start-ups, there’s often no playbook and you have to learn as you go. This means a versatile staff that brings a range of competencies and qualities to the table aligned with your core student needs, is a huge asset. Because it may seem daunting to rethink staffing in a highly regulated district environment, this may be the most useful of the tips for designing an innovative approach to staffing in a district school: Whittemore Park, a district school, looks to nurture that versatility from the start through partnerships with Coastal Carolina University’s education program. Ed majors at the university spend time mentoring middle school students, giving them a chance to build their chops and relationships, while also learning how to work in a blended, co-teaching environment that emphasizes a range of diverse skills as opposed to overemphasizing subject-matter expertise. At Metro, Pace often looks for educators who have a range of skills and interests, for example, being a certified math educator and also a technology pro who can teach programming.



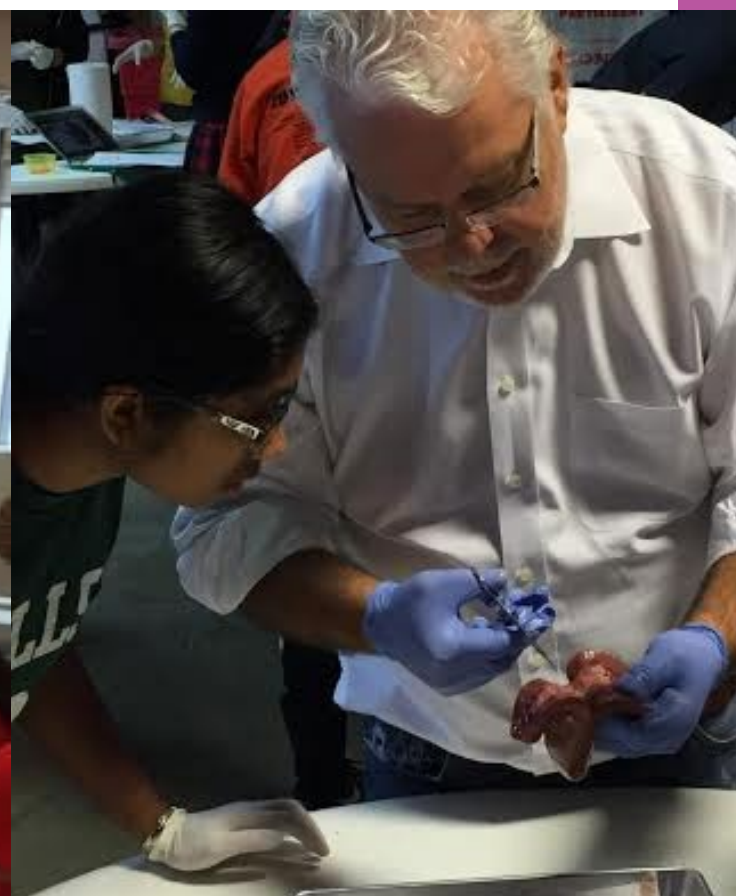
### Get Started:

“I think the main piece of advice I have if you’re starting a school that’s different, especially if you haven’t served that student population or it’s a different kind of instructional model, is try to buy yourself as much flexibility as you can,” says McGuigan. Use that piece of advice to guide yourself through a series of questions about versatility in staffing: What roles lend themselves well to versatility? Where do you want to invest most? Where can you cut back? How can you let your staff co-create the best positions for themselves, using their talents that align to the vision of your school? Bring together a cohort of teachers, staff, and other school partners to ask yourself questions about staffing and really get down to the root of what you want to do.



### Learn More:

Explore other unique staffing models on [Opportunity Culture’s](#) website, an initiative launched by Public Impact to help schools extend the reach of excellent teachers and rethink how educators’ roles are defined.





## Full Staffing Models

Check out these graphics to see how Vertus and Metro staff their entire school.

### Vertus Staffing Model



2 Co-founders



3 Deans

Deans are responsible for maintaining a positive school culture, supporting staff and students, enforcing school rules, and fostering strong relationships within the Vertus community.



9 Preceptors



8 Teachers

Teachers are learning engineers who support students in their online coursework through small group and individual instruction, monitor student progress, and provide the right set of courses and lessons to meet each student where he is.



3 Learning Lab Managers



6 Operations Staff

Chief Operating Officer, Operations Assistant, Head Custodian, Communications and Enrichment Coordinator, Human Resources Specialist, Business Manager



2 Special Programs Staff Members

### Metro Staffing Model



Executive Director



3 Principals  
(one for each school)



Educational &  
Administrative Consultant



Advisors

Advisors serve as a 1:1 advocate for each student and stays with the students throughout their time at Metro, helping to support them with career choices, academic planning, habits of mind and social and emotional growth.



2 School Counselors



2 Counseling Interns



OSU Academic Advisor



Development Officer



37 Core Teachers

x 37

## More Helpful Tools & Inspiration for New Approaches to Staffing

Watch Rita Pierson's TED Talk on how when you boil it all away, learning is about relationships.

Read this white paper, *Beyond Classroom Walls: Developing Innovative Work Roles for Teachers*, by the Center for American Progress on how schools are experimenting with providing opportunities for teachers to engage in more flexible roles in and outside the classroom.

Check out NGLC and iNACOL's *RETHINK: Planning and Design for Next Generation Learning toolkit's* section on staffing models (starting on page 17) for a set of guiding questions to consider as you design (or redesign) your staffing approaches, along with a range of great resources to explore.

# LOOKING AHEAD

Where kids learn (the physical environment), when they are learning (time), and what adults are involved in helping them (staffing) are core elements of your model — but they are not the center. The center is your students, the relationships you're creating, and what and how they are learning. Sometimes we can become caught up in trying something cutting edge we lose track of the why behind it all. Don't. Use these ideas to branch out and expand your thinking and approach, but only if it's in service of your learners, values, and vision. These structures should never be the driver, but they certainly can help. We can't wait to see what you do next.





NEXT GENERATION  
LEARNING CHALLENGES

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