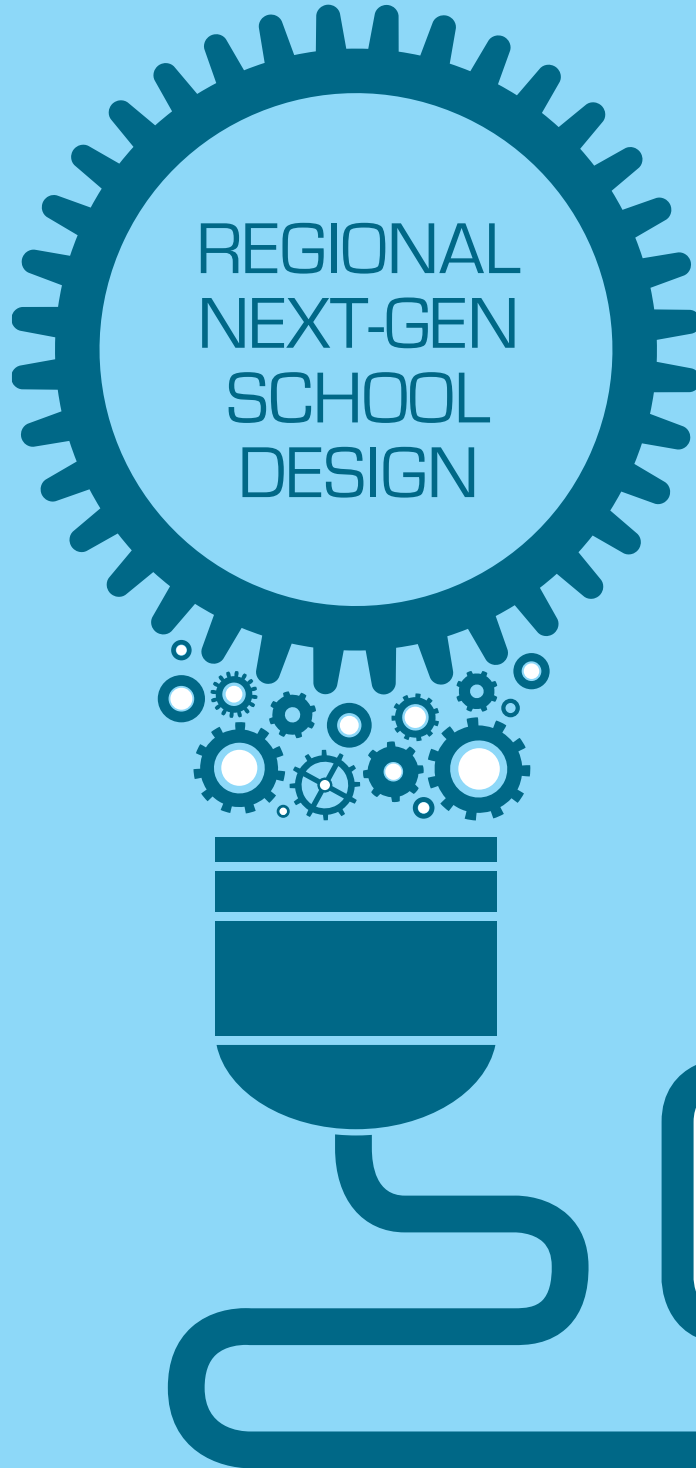


GETTING SMART ON



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



NEXT GENERATION
LEARNING CHALLENGES

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Introduction

Tom Vander Ark,
Founder and CEO, Getting Smart

Next Generation Schools at Scale: 49 New NGLC Grantees

It's not the technology that is transformative; it's the powerful learning experiences teachers can facilitate for 30 students (or 300 or 3,000) that prove to be a game changer. Being able to string together powerful experiences into personalized pathways creates the potential to boost achievement and completion rates at scale. That's the focus of [Next Generation Learning Challenges](#) (NGLC), an initiative of [EDUCAUSE](#).

NGLC announced today that, through six regional programs, 49 school teams received grants as part of a \$25 million K-12 initiative to create new and transformed secondary schools; that includes 29 new or redesigned K-12 schools that will open this fall.

Backstory. Formed in 2010 with support from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and the [Hewlett Foundation](#), NGLC launched grant programs to support 10 new breakthrough postsecondary degree programs and 58 new breakthrough secondary schools. Support has also been provided for dozens of blended learning, open-core courseware, learning analytics and Deeper Learning tools.

In 2013, [Broad Foundation](#) and the [Michael & Susan Dell Foundation](#) added their support to six regional funds. Partner organizations are [CityBridge Foundation](#) (Washington, D.C.); [The Colorado Education Initiative](#); [LEAP Innovations](#) (Chicago, Illinois); [New Schools for New Orleans](#); [New England Secondary School Consortium](#) (working in five New England states); and the [Rogers Family Foundation](#) (Oakland, California).



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Next-gen framework. As Andy Calkins [explained last year](#), next-gen models fuse aspects of blended, competency-based, personalized and student-centered learning into a coherent whole. They are activated by project-based approaches and staked to rigorous, college and career ready outcomes.

From a student’s perspective, the [Attributes of Next Generation Learning](#) are:

- » Personalized to my needs and learning goals
- » Flexible so that I can test different modes of learning
- » Interactive and engaging to draw me in
- » Relevant to the life I’d like to lead
- » Paced by my own progress and measured against goals I understand
- » Constantly informed by different ways of demonstrating and measuring my progress
- » Collaborative with faculty, peers and others, unlimited by proximity
- » Responsive and supportive when I need extra help
- » Challenging but achievable, with opportunities to become an expert in an area of interest
- » As available to me as to every other student

NGLC co-published a toolkit with [iNACOL](#) (where I’m a director) to help educators build next-gen models. [RETHINK: Planning and Designing for K-12 Next Generation Learning](#) provides guiding questions, resources and tools to customize approaches. The guide addresses comprehension of next generation learning models; planning for and managing change; designing next generation learning opportunities; and engaging the planning team and stakeholders in the process.

Outcomes. When it comes to the question of “[What should graduates know and be able to do?](#)”— we see growing appreciation for broader aims of college and career readiness. (The [NAFTrack Certification system](#) that combines school and work feedback is a great example.) To help bring clarity to all of the different success definitions associated with college, career and life readiness, NGLC developed MyWays, a synthesized definition and toolset to map a student’s current readiness and subsequent plan to attain a deeper and richer definition of success. Building on [work by David Conley](#), [Summit](#) and others, MyWays surfaced 20 competencies arranged in four general areas: Content Knowledge, Creative Know How, Habits of Success and Wayfinding.

20 Competencies Comprise the MyWays Model



This framework recognizes the depth and complexity of student success. NGLC is working on assessment strategies for harder-to-measure items and will release MyWays tools this summer.

Smart Cities. The six intermediaries were chosen given their capacity to support new and transformed schools. Instead of adding technology to the schools we have, this opportunity designs new schools using new tools to produce new experiences that aim toward new outcomes.

Every region of the country needs this capacity, and we make that case in [Smart Cities That Work For Everyone](#).

When these regional funds schools open, there will be more than 100 schools serving 50,000 students with transformed teaching and learning models. That's a start; however, there are 100,000 schools that need the same guidance and support.

[Originally posted](#) on Getting Smart blog, 18 June 2015.

6 Next-Gen Learning Hubs: Assets, Partners and Challenges

Sarah Luchs, K-12 Program Officer at Next Generation Learning Challenges

Six regions in the nation are taking on a new approach to education reform that iteratively but dramatically changes the way learning happens in schools. They are helping schools and teachers take on next generation learning strategies based on research, best practices and access to emerging technologies. These strategies build upon what individual students already know and can do, meet their individual needs and help them carve their own paths through learning. The six regions [recently announced](#) grants, professional development and technology support for 49 schools through the NGLC Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools.

In [The Inside Story](#), I described how the Regional Funds partners help educators to design instruction, school, and systems of support around students. Here’s how each site is building its own ecosystem of educational innovation.



New Orleans

Ten years after Hurricane Katrina, the commitment to excellence and equity endures in the education culture of [New Orleans](#). You can see evidence in two recent citywide celebrations: [New Orleans Excellence in Teaching Award](#) and [Senior Shout-Out Day](#). Add in a revitalized sense of entrepreneurship, and you get that special roux —a distinctive flavor of New Orleans. [Breakthrough Schools: New Orleans](#), led by New Schools for New Orleans, leverages this “educational roux” through informal and formal channels. Informally, educators are able to test

tools and network with others who identify as tech-minded teacher-leaders at regular EdTech meetups sponsored by partner Educate Now! On the formal side, a national competition brought new school designs to the city, and a local grant opportunity helped existing schools explore, pilot and implement personalized learning.

- » **Assets:** Citywide commitment to excellence and equity in education. Largest charter market in the nation. Student achievement and college readiness indicators that are on the rise.
- » **Partners and Technical Support Providers:** [New Schools for New Orleans](#), [4.0 Schools](#), [Educate Now!](#), [Orleans Parish School Board](#), [Louisiana Recovery School District](#), [CA Group](#), [NewSchools Venture Fund](#)
- » **Challenges:** Strategies that raised students’ basic skills to date may not offer continued growth. Engaging even more diverse stakeholders in discussions about learning design.



Chicago

In [Chicago](#), the thinking is bold and creative, and the action is fast-paced and fun (like a [Second City](#) comedy skit in which meaningful connections are made, remade and re-invented in the second act). That sustained momentum is built for and with city educators. Two years ago, lead partner LEAP Innovations collaborated with The Chicago Public Education Fund to pilot the NGLC Regional Funds with a three-month design program. Now [Breakthrough Schools: Chicago](#) engages the planning grantees in a [10-month professional development series](#) tailored to meet

their school redesign needs. The unique opportunity to engage in skill-building activities, collaborative planning and like-minded community discussions promises to keep school teams from singing the blues.

- » **Assets:** Strong partnership with district schools and charter schools. Co-location with tech hub [1871](#). Commitment to professional development for instruction and teacher-led innovation. LEAP [Pilot Network](#) and [Collaboratory](#), where educators access new personalized learning tools and strategies plus support to implement them. The Chicago Public Education Fund's [Summer Design Program](#) for educators to create innovations that solve school-based, student-centered challenges.
- » **Partners and Technical Support Providers:** [LEAP Innovations](#), [The Chicago Public Education Fund](#), [Chicago Public Schools](#), [The Joyce Foundation](#), [Northern Trust](#), Gates Foundation (through [Chicago's District-Charter Collaboration Grant](#)), [Afton Partners](#), [Great Schools Partnership](#), [Aylon Samouha](#)
- » **Challenges:** Supporting the growing pipeline of schools, some of which don't receive grant funds. Integrating related strands of work to enable educators to drive and tailor tech solutions.



Washington, D.C.

The [nation's capital](#) is small, but the regional strategy proves monumental, wrapping itself around the educational environment like the Beltway encircles the city. Led by CityBridge Foundation, [Breakthrough Schools: D.C.](#) supports both charter and district efforts at whole-school innovation through workshops, coaching and convenings. The charter environment, ripe for bold new school models, provides high levels of autonomy afforded under strict oversight. And grassroots, teacher-led innovation within the district gets a lift from CityBridge's parallel talent strategy,

the [Education Innovation Fellowship](#). Given its size, Washington, D.C., could soon reach a tipping point for next-gen learning. To date, CityBridge has selected and supported 13 school teams as planning grantees, but it has surfaced and engaged more than twice that number of next-gen learning innovators in two short years. The goal is 20 new or redesigned schools; 15 percent of the city's students would benefit.

- » **Assets:** Synergy of strategies. Ongoing [proposal supports](#). Fifty-four Education Innovation Fellows. An annual [Education Innovation Summit](#). An education environment evenly split between district and charter schools, both with active and supportive leadership.
- » **Partners and Technical Support Providers:** [CityBridge Foundation](#), [D.C. Public Schools](#), [2Revolutions](#), [Afton Partners](#), [NewSchools Venture Fund](#), [FOCUS](#), [D.C. Public Charter School Board](#)
- » **Challenges:** Continuing to attract competitive designs and applications from district-led school teams. Sustaining efforts when a tipping point is reached.



Colorado

As we travel to [Colorado](#), the landscape becomes both expansive and mountainous. Our sense of scope and scale changes. The regional strategy here engages reform at all levels of public education simultaneously. Statewide intermediary, the Colorado Education Initiative, coordinates a coalition of three traditional districts, two schools per district and the state Department of Education. The coalition remains committed to an open process, exemplified by the inspiring public Pitch Day during which six schools presented their plans for redesigning learning

as part of the grant selection process. The transparency supports cross-district learning and sets the tone for statewide next-gen learning. A primary driver for [Breakthrough Schools: Colorado](#) is the state’s high school graduation requirements, which allow districts and schools to create their own path, with community input, for guiding students toward graduation. Building the ecosystem here is like climbing a mountain; each step offers deliberate and steady progress. Through a comprehensive and collaborative strategy, coalition members attend to all the interconnections between policy, procurement, school redesign and educator support.

- » **Assets:** [Graduation Requirements](#). State-level partners committed to providing enabling policy conditions. Advisory board representing all partners.
- » **Partners and Technical Support Providers:** [Adams County School District 50](#), [Colorado Springs District 11](#), [Thompson School District](#), [Colorado Department of Education](#), [Colorado Education Initiative](#), [2Revolutions](#), [Rose Colby](#), [Buck Institute for Education \(BIE\)](#), [Project ARC](#), [Emergenetics](#), [G&D Associates](#), [School by Design](#)
- » **Challenges:** Scaling and sharing practices across school teams. Engaging statewide leaders who have not yet benefited from the design thinking process.



New England

In a region largely dotted by small districts, [New England](#) values self-sufficiency as much as community interdependence. Like its cottage industries, small fisheries and prestigious colleges, the region’s [Next-Gen Personalized Learning Initiative](#) remains committed to a local context and is capable of influencing a national market. New England’s approach draws upon an educational culture of local control and teacher-driven change. The desire by teachers, schools and districts to shift toward proficiency-based learning, with the backing of the local community,

drives the effort in New England. There’s a history of competency-based education in the five states, primarily through enabling state and district policies.

The [New England Secondary School Consortium](#) (NESSC), coordinated by the Great Schools Partnership, builds upon this history, providing customized support to develop educators’ capacity and to refine district policies. The relationships began when teams visited each applicant from NESSC’s League of Innovative Schools to understand the school environment and witness first-hand what was already in place. School improvement coaches were matched to selected schools according to their specific needs and plans. Schools now receive 40 days of personalized coaching support per year.

- » **Assets:** Strong state and district policy environments for competency-based education. Coaching. Partner expertise in proficiency-based learning. Annual [High School Redesign in Action](#) conference.
- » **Partners and Technical Support Providers:** [Great Schools Partnership](#); State education agencies from [CT](#), [ME](#), [NH](#), [RI](#), [VT](#); [New England Board of Higher Education](#), [New England Association of Schools and Colleges](#); [Nellie Mae Education Foundation](#)
- » **Challenges:** Scaling throughout a five-state region.



Oakland

California's [Bay Area](#) is home to Facebook, Google, eBay and Apple as well as popular next-gen schools like Summit Denali and Leadership's Oakland R&D. It's not surprising, then, that the current educational culture in Oakland favors a bootstrapping mindset and the use of technology for learning, collaborating, networking and working smarter. Many charter and district schools in the surrounding area, including Oakland Unified, use blended learning in their classrooms, and [NGLC in Oakland](#) leans on the expertise of local educators. Instead of designing its own workshop

series, Oakland's intermediary partner Rogers Family Foundation pulled together a [Learning Map](#) of carefully-curated workshops and additional supports that leveraged both local and national expertise. The initiative emphasizes support for school redesign, develops educator skillsets and focuses on change through adaptive leadership, which prioritizes root assumptions in a hearts and minds approach over technical change and surface-level fixes.

- » **Assets:** Regional culture of innovation in education. Local expertise in and commitment to blended learning. The tech expertise, innovation culture and funding resources available from Silicon Valley.
- » **Partners and Technical Support Providers:** [Rogers Family Foundation](#), [Oakland Unified School District](#), [Oakland Public Education Fund](#), [Mastery Design Collaborative](#), [Educate78](#), [Parker Thomas @ Mirus Labs](#)
- » **Challenges:** Coordinating and integrating the resources of the city and region to design schools with the greatest impact. Measuring impact across different and dynamic models.

[Originally posted](#) on Getting Smart blog, 22 July 2015.

How Districts and Charters Shape Local Strategies for Next-Gen Learning

Sarah Luchs, K-12 Program Officer at Next Generation Learning Challenges

Looking across the six sites participating in the [NGLC Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools](#), we see that their local context—the [assets, partners and challenges in their region](#)—influences the strategies used to build an ecosystem where next-gen learning can thrive. Given all the possible influencing factors, the NGLC cohort is intentionally diverse. We believe it points to a notion that there's not a single best way to incubate next-gen learning. A key to unlocking how it may work best in your locale becomes an issue of fit.

Collectively, the NGLC regional sites provide support for many more plans to redesign both district and charter schools than new school designs (only charter examples in this cohort). The mix of districts and charters varies by site, as illustrated in the chart to the right, highlighting schools that have received at least a planning grant.

Regional Funds Site	District		Charter		Total
	New	Redesign	New	Redesign	
New Orleans	0	0	2	15	17
Washington, D.C.	0	3	5	5	13
Oakland	0	5	3	2	10
Chicago	0	13	4	5	22
New England	0	19	0	1	20
Colorado	0	6	0	0	6
Total	0	46	14	28	

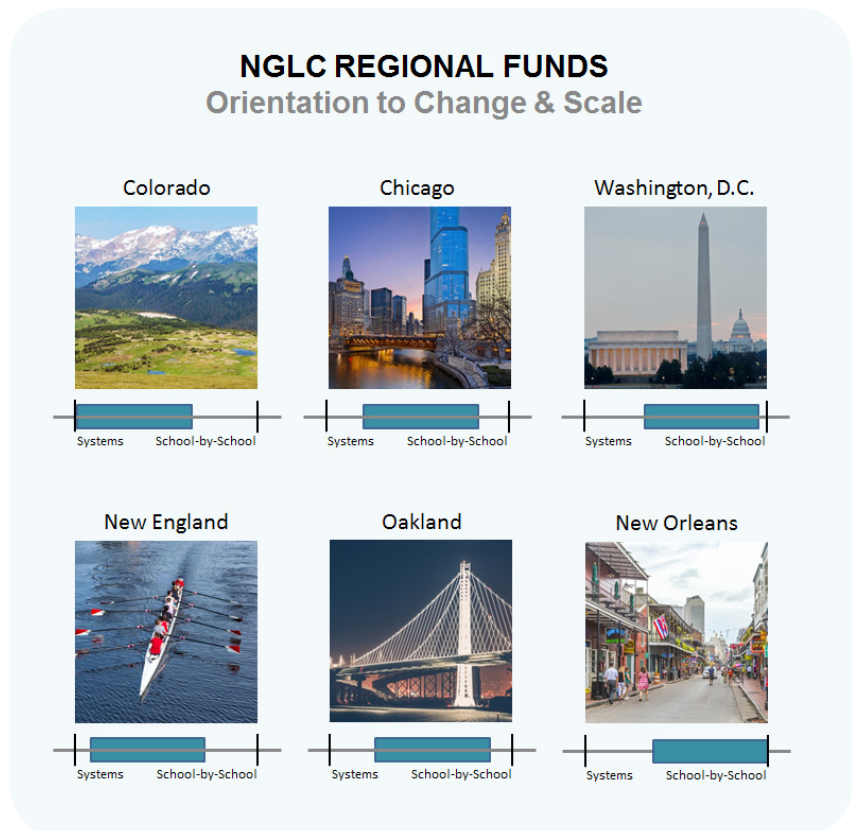
From a strategy perspective, the regional approach may be determined more by the balance of new school startups and redesign of existing schools, regardless of their district or charter affiliation. One useful way to think about this may be by looking at orientation to change in the region along a continuum from systems to school-by-school. A system's orientation concentrates on the connections between policy and practice and attends to the full K-12 education system, from state to school level. A school-by-school orientation reflects grassroots change one school at a time, inviting a variety of solutions and entrepreneurial educators to create the ecosystem. All the sites work with, support and invest in school teams, and each one embraces both systems and school-by-school change, but they use them to different extents in their strategies.

A Systems Approach to School Redesign

- » *Driver for Change*: A call to action in state-level policy
- » *Values*: Alignment, buy-in at multiple levels, ongoing supports for educators
- » *Schools*: Representative schools marry together strategies such as project-based learning, individual student data portfolios and competency progressions. Examples include [Deer Isle Stonington](#), [Great Bay Charter](#) and [Holmes MS](#).

State and local education agencies are built for stability more than innovation. As a result, regional partners in Colorado and New England, both intermediaries, play a facilitating and coordinating role in supporting district and state next-gen learning objectives. Both school practice and district and state policies are viewed as essential ingredients in a strategy that seeks a systems approach to school-based transformation. In Colorado, the regional partners attend to district policy revisions as part of the strategy, working to create enabling conditions in which school redesigns can flourish and to learn how the system can create new incentive structures. New England employs a principled strategy of [Global Best Practices](#) combined with [proficiency-based learning and graduation](#).

Every participating school is an existing school that's redesigning the learning experience. With one exception, they all can be found in traditional districts. Representing a coalition of the willing, each school team and its leaders competed for this opportunity. With this approach, we observe greater consistency in both the next-gen model types adopted in these regions and in the types of supports provided.



Benefits:

- » School leaders are supported in the redesign process by their supervisors, evaluators and budget authorizers.
- » There's an opportunity to scale next-gen learning practices from an individual school to all schools in a district and across a state.

Challenges:

- » It is difficult to overcome entrenched practices when "changing from within." Pressure exists to implement only proven practices.
- » School-based transformation that is district-supported or policy-driven blurs the lines of ownership between school educators and district or coordinating leaders.
- » Redesigns are iterative in their evolution, making it challenging to see the transformation and its effects.

School-Driven Innovation and Bold New Designs for Learning

- » *Driver of Innovation:* Individual edupreneurs, underserved students/communities, city-based branding
- » *Values:* Educational equity, calculated risk-taking, improving achievement through innovation and diversified talent pipelines
- » *Schools:* A mix of iterative redesigns and a handful of new niche learning designs resulting from flexible chartering environments. See [Rooted School](#), [Monument Academy](#), [New Orleans Charter Science and Math High School](#), and [Cleveland ES](#).

The regional next-gen school design effort in New Orleans and Washington, D.C., is predominantly charter-focused. These regional sites support models for new schools and existing school redesigns. Part of their market-based strategy involves recruiting new innovators inside and outside the region and supporting them to create break-the-mold school designs. Another part of the strategy involves working with leaders of established charter management organizations to pave the way for innovation within highly-codified school models and strongly-branded networks. Similar to the district redesigns in Colorado and New England, charter school redesigns take a more iterative approach to innovation, building on current practices and resources rather than inventing something entirely new. In Washington, D.C., district redesigns are also part of the mix. These get driven by self-directed teachers and school leaders more than by district-organized teams. Innovative whole-school models are emerging in these district schools, a result of the trusting relationships between the lead partner and the district. Both sites have a multifaceted strategy for incubating personalized, next-gen schools, but the element that most distinguishes them is their recruitment of entrepreneurial leaders for new schools.

Benefits:

- » In general, charter environments enjoy more flexibility and fewer barriers to innovation than districts.
- » Plans for new schools are not limited by existing structures or school cultures.

Challenges:

- » Multiple operators and a less-centralized innovation strategy make it more challenging to ensure that next-gen learning reaches the region's students equitably.
- » For existing CMOs, it's hard to change when their model has proven successful.
- » The recruitment of school operators who are new to the region demands attention to communicating with local communities and addressing the local needs.

A Balanced Portfolio of Schools

- » *Driver of Innovation:* Community of educators interested in improving student success
- » *Values:* Networked learning, tech-enabled solutions
- » *Schools:* A mix of bold transformations—[Great Lakes Academy](#) and [Unity MS](#)—and forward-leaning iterative redesigns—[Chavez](#), [CICS West Belden](#) and [Garfield Elementary](#)

The Regional Funds in Chicago and Oakland involve districts and charters, and they employ multiple tactics to support new schools and redesigns. Although the strategy is focused on school-level transformation, the lead partners recognize the need to draw in both district leaders and leaders of established CMOs, and they are deliberate about communicating and engaging with them. Building on trust, lead partners serve the district by providing support for research and development around next-gen learning, support for innovative teachers in their schools and funding and professional development for whole-school redesigns. Partners are transparent in their communications and, at key moments in the selection process, district staff members participate in the review of school proposals. These partners remain committed to building a community that learns with and benefits from diverse models, conditions and strategies.

Benefits:

- » Partners provide a layer of professional learning to both districts and charters that would otherwise be unavailable. They also create unique cross-pollinating effects.
- » Partnerships ensure a truly regional perspective that any one organization in an educational ecosystem cannot achieve.

Challenges:

- » Multiple strategies divide the attention of regional partners and challenge their capacity to effectively coordinate across multiple partners and strategies.
- » When many stakeholders are involved, trust, partnership-building and the development of a shared vision are vital but take more time to achieve.

Lessons for Regional Next-Gen School Design

Although the NGLC Regional Funds are new, our observations suggest that regional innovation may be most successful when it works within the strengths of the local ecosystem, harnessing the flexibility of charters and the stability and endurance of districts.

In general, it may be easier for new school concepts and designs that look and feel really different to emerge from charter environments, where flexibility is welcomed and few existing structures and traditions compete with creative notions. However, large districts with innovation-focused leadership can offer room and support for inventive designs. And it is in general easier to scale and sustain redesigns within a district. It may take longer, but district redesigns hold potential for having long-term impact.

As Robin Lake, Director of the Center for Reinventing Public Education, recently [wrote](#), “Delivering 21st-century learning experiences at scale will take much more than just inventing interesting new school designs. If we’re serious about innovation, states and districts will need to tackle politically difficult subjects like union contracts, accountability policies and school-level autonomies. We’ll also need to tackle some pretty boring—but essential—implementation work to replace antiquated and risk-averse central office systems and habits with nimble and updated ones ... We know the values and practices necessary for school systems to achieve much greater levels of dynamism in their problem solving. It is in our power to make these changes.”

Lake’s commentary applies to charter organizations as well. The regional strategies face similar challenges and use similar messages and tactics for charters belonging to established CMOs as they do for district schools. A similar dynamic exists between a school and its CMO as it does between a school and its district. Partners may use different language to communicate, but the fundamentals of the strategy remain the same.

Whether district or charter (or a combination of both), at NGLC we believe that these regional sites are [constructing portfolios](#) of “high-quality schools that match the needs and interests of students, families, educators and the broader community.”

5 Best Practices for Reimagining Professional Development This Year

Sarah Luchs, K-12 Program Officer at Next Generation Learning Challenges

It's critical to invest in people if the promise of next-gen learning is to be realized. Educators help create and enable personalization. Educators put technology to use. Educators co-design and cooperatively manage learning environments (along with students, parents and other individual and organizational influences). To be a next-gen educator, you must know next-gen learning, must have experienced it firsthand and must be able to model it through your daily actions and interactions.

Several new resources outline necessary or recommended next-gen mindsets and skill sets. Teacher competencies for [learner-centered teaching](#), [blended learning](#) and [Deeper Learning](#) are good examples, and yet relatively few comprehensive supply-side offerings exist.

So, how do we position aspiring next-gen educators to be successful? Based on our experience working with six partner sites in the [NGLC Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools](#), we've observed a thoughtful mirroring of the elements of next-gen learning, specifically building skills in personalized, blended and competency strategies; a commitment to professional learning in which educators exercise choice and become agents of change; and a flexible design that enables educators to shape and direct a large portion of their own learning—addressing the what, when and how. If you think this description sounds like next-gen learning environments for students, you're right. That's intentional.

1. Use blended learning and online platforms to build a learning network.

Educators participating in the Regional Funds use online platforms—like New Orleans' [Personalized Learning Community of Practice](#)—to communicate with their school teams, access learning modules, upload work products and share resources across teams asynchronously. Then during face-to-face workshops (such as New Orleans' [Personalized Learning Group Meetings](#)), participating school teams engage in discussion, dive deeply into design thinking, collaborate with experts and apply new learning to planning their own school designs.

The resulting learning network creates a “virtual home” for participating educators, and it reinforces their shared identity—as members in a community of innovative and sometimes tech-savvy change agents taking on the challenge of next-gen personalized learning. Since they're not working alone, educators can tap into the power of this community identity—the power to create, to collaborate and to persist with the encouragement of like-minded colleagues.

After Dwight Davis of Wheatley Education Campus in Washington, D.C., participated in regional partner CityBridge Foundation's [Summer Design Institute](#), he [shared](#) how he planned to create a sense of community similar to what he experienced there among teachers at his own school.

Blended strategies that foster connections between and among educators, while engaging them in content, help accelerate learning and build a lasting sense of community.

2. Create space for unlearning, reflection, inspiration and imagination.

Effective professional learning employs creative methods for tapping our curiosity in order to unlock more knowledge. Educators working with regional partners often remark that next-gen learning wasn't what they initially assumed and that, the more they know and grow, the more they're aware of what they don't yet know. For me, this is a litmus-like indicator of an engaged learner, especially when that reflective insight gets shared with wonder and excitement instead of frustration or discontent.

The Regional Funds sites provide a space for educators to view the current system with a critical lens. The goal is to identify what today's schools do and don't do well, since they were designed for a different time, different set of assumptions and different purpose. This process of reflection can make unconscious paradigms visible and facilitate a constructive process of unlearning.

Participants can then look to [NGLC's national network of next-gen learning schools](#) to serve as inspiration for what's possible. Several regional partners invited leaders from these innovative schools to facilitate workshops and serve as mentors throughout the training process. Participants looked at case studies, videos and profiles of NGLC-funded schools. They went on site visits to see how these models operate, to experience their culture directly and to observe instructional practice.

It's at this point that many educators, now curious from their own experience, begin driving more of their own learning by seeking to understand these new models. Educators determine the school model design elements that resonate with them and how to translate that inspiration into the school they're imagining. What aligns best with their educational philosophy and vision for student learning? What works best for their school community?



"Errika Baker Reflects on Breakthrough Schools: Chicago Workshop" video by NextGenLC (NGLC) on Vimeo.



In this video, Errika Baker of University of Chicago Charter School, Donoghue Campus, describes that process, addressing how she might apply to her school what she learned this summer through a [Breakthrough Schools: Chicago](#) workshop on scheduling and staffing.

3. Adopt competency-based learning so educators can master next-gen learning design.

Because competency-based professional learning values the expertise that educators possess, the approach opens up space for learning opportunities to attend to the emotional aspects of change. When participants examined the current system, for example, it wasn't just an analytical exercise; it was an emotional experience. I've observed many participants talk about a particular child who wasn't served well—someone the teacher wanted to help but couldn't within the traditional system. This personal connection to the challenges confronting the current system then became a driving motivator to consider different models for schools and for entirely

new possibilities (previously unimagined). It unleashed their expertise, empowering them to apply their knowledge and skills to the challenge of next-gen learning design.

Competency-based learning emphasizes what learners know and can do rather than how much time they spend engaged in formal learning, like in a classroom or workshop. Most regional sites provide significant content and skill building in next-gen academic models, which integrate blended, competency-based and personalized learning to different extents. They address the mechanics of school and help school teams rethink staffing, scheduling, use of space and the deployment of technology. They delve into issues previously taken for granted such as change management or how to engage colleagues who have not had the benefit of next-gen-focused professional learning. While this proves important content and skill-building material, participating educators demonstrate mastery of next-gen learning design when they propose designs that are visionary yet achievable, incorporating principles of next-gen learning that are personalized to fit their school's needs and community strengths. Often, though not always, securing funding for implementation may serve as a kind of authentic assessment.

4. Provide personalized learning through coaching to support learner agency.

Coaching plays a prominent role in cultivating next-gen professional learning. [Coaching strategies](#) are powerful because they honor educator agency. Unlike experts, advisors and managers, coaches rarely give answers or advice; instead they listen, and through thoughtful questioning, they push team members to discover their own best answers and next steps. Coaches help teams stay on track through regular check-ins, and they pave the way to supporting and providing what teams say that they need. Coaches are flexible and expect needs to change. A coaching model of professional learning opens up time for learning as a journey, rather than treating it only as a requirement, destination or end goal.

Each team of educators in the Regional Funds is actively engaged in planning a next-gen learning school. Regional partners are purposeful in creating the conditions that set up these educators to succeed. Therefore, it may seem ironic to think that's largely achieved by granting them the freedom to fail—meaning permission to try out new ideas and strategies, to make mistakes and to shift local designs based on new information. This is part of educator ownership of the school model and choice in one's learning experience. Educators have skin in the game. It's their ideas that get put into practice. Coaches can help these adult learners to trust insights that failure can provide, to build on their own strengths and to become confident in their role as change agents.

Although all sites share coaching, it takes a different form in each location of the Regional Funds initiative. Coaching remains a cornerstone of [New England's](#) strategy for school-based transformation. The Great School's Partnership deploys coaches directly to each site to guide and support schools. In [Washington, D.C.](#), and [Chicago](#), a combination of internal and external coaches are used. Sometimes the coaches have a special expertise such as having started a new school themselves and can play a supportive mentor-like role; but even in these cases, they do not posit that they have the answers or that their work should be emulated. [New Orleans](#) and [Oakland](#) contracted external coaches to support school teams. Embedded coaches support the schools in [Colorado](#) and prove key partners in the initiative.

5. Engage in Deeper Learning to pull it all together.

Deeper Learning involves mastering core content while learning to think critically, collaborate, communicate, direct your own learning and believe in your ability to learn. Here are three fundamental principles that you can use to assemble your own next-gen professional learning program:

This is pioneering work. There's no silver bullet.

The six Regional Funds sites have made an investment of time, resources and ongoing support, [because that's what it takes](#). While they may not have all the details worked out, the coordinating partners know that only a long-term commitment to the professional learning of the educators in their region will lead to success for their local initiative. They curate and iterate thoughtfully in order to serve and support these willing, able and courageous next-gen pioneers in a territory still largely unexplored.

Learning is socially-constructed.

The most powerful professional learning has come from the relationships among and across school teams, through face-to-face convenings, coaching and online or networked interactions. The building of a community has exponentially improved the quality of designs developed by participating schools and accelerated their capacity for change. Leveraging the national network has provided a boost, but local context and shared experiences provide the most fertile ground for the growth of next-gen learning.

Learning requires agency.

Participating educators are making a choice to take on the challenge of next-gen school design, and they need freedom to make decisions about what that design looks like. It's their own learning journey that's exciting. Rather than providing professional development that's prescriptive, the sites offer the time, space and support for school leaders and teachers to utilize their agency. It's a good reminder of what students need for learning, too.

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7 Roles of a Next-Gen Learning Ecosystem

Sarah Luchs, K-12 Program Officer at Next Generation Learning Challenges

Partnerships can spur the growth of next-gen learning in a community and allow it to flourish. Local collaborative learning networks, incubating hubs and next-gen learning ecosystems are built upon partnerships. These networks attract educators, entrepreneurs, funders and community leaders. Some network models ([innovation clusters](#), [smart cities](#), [hive networks](#)) are loosely coordinated, inclusive and far-reaching while others ([regional funds partners](#), [emerging harbormasters](#)) utilize a tighter coordination focused on narrowly-defined innovations. Whether you start with a classroom, a school or a learning network, partnerships help you think about the key strategies that give your effort its unique character and defining focus.

The partner organizations for the six [NGLC Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools](#) sites serve as coordinating entities for a network focused on next-gen, personalized learning school models. They are the bridge builders that bring stakeholders together and facilitate a set of “[backbone functions](#)” necessary to collaborative work. At NGLC, we have observed seven roles that provide these functions and move the Regional Funds networks forward. Look for ways that these roles can be fulfilled in your community to jump-start your own learning network, or, if you’re already part of one, to take it to the next level.



1. Funder

Partner organizations raise funds for investment, shape new opportunities based on need, seek national, regional and local matching funds and help sustain positive changes over time. [Rogers Family Foundation](#) and [CityBridge Foundation](#), local private foundations themselves, have long-standing commitments to education in their community. Foundations still rely on partnerships; for example, CityBridge receives targeted support from Microsoft and NewSchools Venture Fund.



2. Lead Entrepreneur

Our schools have to be more fluid and proactive in meeting the changing needs of society and of the students they serve. That’s [a new notion and a different expectation](#) for most schools. Regional partner organizations have fewer regulations and greater flexibility in spending than districts and charter organizations. They also have a diverse network in which to tap ideas, resources and talent. This positioning makes them a nexus for R&D in next-gen learning. NGLC Regional Funds partners serve as champions for an innovation mindset. Their efforts have successfully connected local educators to entrepreneurs, and they have infused national expertise and ideas into the local ecosystem. [New Schools for New Orleans](#) and partner [4.0 Schools](#) exemplify this best.



3. Talent Scout

Before any funds were distributed, the Regional Funds partners spent a good deal of time identifying, recruiting and welcoming educators in their midst who are curious, forward-leaning and willing to try something new to better help their students. For example, [LEAP Innovations](#) worked with The Chicago Public Education Fund, the

district and after-school networks to identify educators citywide who may be interested in next-gen learning. CityBridge Foundation started the Education Innovation Fellowship to create a pipeline of next-gen teaching talent. Sometimes it's a surprise for district and charter organization leaders to see who steps forward.



4. Next-Gen Professional Learning Provider

Regional Funds partners offer [professional learning](#) to educators that mirrors personalized, blended and competency-based strategies; where educators exercise choice and become agents of change; and with a flexible design that enables educators to shape and direct their own learning.



5. School Incubator

With a focus on increasing the number of students properly prepared for college, career and lifelong learning, each partner is catalyzing support for new and redesigned school models. Most Regional Funds sites support school teams with multiple specialty providers, whereas [New England Secondary School Consortium](#) is itself a direct technical assistance provider. The technical support addresses a range of needs as teams move through a process of imagining, planning and implementing a next-gen school. [Design thinking](#) exists as one foundational topic shared in all sites.



6. Policy Shaper

Regional Funds partners find themselves in a unique position to reflect upon questions and identify policy conditions that enable and restrict next-gen learning practices. The New England Secondary School Consortium helps inform and support conversations among state and local leaders that have led to changes in state policy. For example, proficiency-based graduation is now required in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont and encouraged and enabled in Connecticut and Rhode Island. The [Colorado Education Initiative](#) and LEAP Innovations are working to identify a set of flexible and robust success metrics. Regional Partners keep a pulse on the quality and conditions of learning for students and educators. They may be involved in vision setting and progress monitoring across multiple indicators and often employ help from an outside research entity.



7. Ecosystem Builder

Leveraging deep local knowledge and roots, Regional Funds partners act as master connectors and networkers. They arrange school visits, host convenings and promote community dialog and learning events. They tell the story across their local networks, [support professional connections](#) and champion new developments in practices and tools. As each site is a nascent hub of rapidly-developing new learning models, each one provides inspiration, creates opportunities for celebration and helps manage growth and change. Building trusting partnerships remains job number one, and the quality and diversity of these relationships can make or break the network.

Finding these roles in your community

Regional partnerships, consortia and intermediaries are not new concepts. What is new, though, is choosing to see the world from the view of the learner, tapping into collaborative tools for greater impact, recognizing the need for R&D to support equity and excellence at scale plus a growing interest in being connected, purposeful and resourceful about our work and learning. The seven roles show up

in the NGLC Regional Funds work specifically as well as in other ecosystem models and learning networks more generally—sometimes with different names or labels. For example, the seven roles can be easily cross-walked with the five key strategies mentioned in the [Remake Learning Playbook](#), even though the network models are not the same.

Others are doing the work too. Boston's [Center for Collaborative Education](#) is just one of 10 organizations in the [Emerging Harbormasters Network](#) and is now working to establish a Massachusetts Personalized Learning Network. But you don't need to be part of a formal initiative. Central Pennsylvania's [Capital Area Intermediate Unit](#) regional, school design grant challenge is an example of a "D.I.Y." self-starter, building an ecosystem without external funds or external technical assistance.

With the seven roles in mind, you can start thinking about which role you and your organization fulfill, who you are connected to and what's still missing in your learning network or ecosystem. The idea is to build mutually-beneficial partnerships around the strengths of organizations, to combine and share resources toward common goals and to extend and share learning in ways that promote new synergies or create constructive, cross-pollinating effects.

So, what will you do? How can you help build a stronger ecosystem in your community that supports next-gen learning?

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Conclusion

Sarah Luchs, K-12 Program Officer at Next Generation Learning Challenges

A Next-Gen School for Every Child

Picture yourself visiting a school, observing excited and engaged students and hearing from educators who seem equally jazzed about their own experience. A colleague next to you leans in to say, “Wow! What a great school; I wish my kid went to a school like this!” Do you find yourself asking, “Why aren’t more kids in schools like this one?” (Or, do you instead think, “I’m lucky ... my kid actually attends a school like this one.”) At the end of the day, the questions many of us ask relate to how we can scale quality schools. How can we support the growth of school models that consistently and perpetually reinvent themselves in ways that ensure quality, equity and access?

At its core, the [NGLC Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools](#) initiative focuses on bringing more high-quality schools to more students. It’s an outgrowth and evolution of a prior investment strategy in individual next-gen learning schools. Schools in the NGLC national network exist as beacons for the potential future of K-12 education. They inspire. These bold, innovative school models use the most advanced learning science and educational research— integrated learning technologies, with unique applications of time, talent and other resources— that are operated sustainably on public funds.

However, they are primarily new charters, scattered across the nation, serving different communities and needs. Few schools share the same state accountability system, funding structures or talent pipelines. Daily, they bump up against policies and traditions that prevent their models from fully taking root. Sometimes they face concerns in their communities stemming from confusion about the true meaning of next-gen learning and questions about the ongoing iteration involved in developing new kinds of schools.

What about the rest of the nation’s schools? The majority of students attend existing district-run schools. We won’t reach them through a national strategy that relies on creating a few excellent new schools.

By nurturing the growth of next-gen learning regionally, we have found a viable way to engage significantly more existing district schools in the redesign process, due largely to the role of the Regional Funds coordinating partner. The partners leverage the national network of NGLC schools to power locally-developed school demonstration sites. Subsequently, they employ an ecosystem approach to support and sustain them.

The Regional Funds hold promise for the growth of next-gen learning because they focus on both the ecosystem and the school design.

The Regional Funds partners have been positioned to do the following: remove barriers; explain the power and promise of fresh approaches while remaining sensitive to local context; engage the local

community, educator, and policymakers; and provide different kinds of supports than those historically available. They support teacher-leaders and next-gen practices through local networks in which the system context is shared. This enables a common framework for collaborative learning.

The result? In June, the six Regional Funds sites [announced](#) new grants to support next-gen learning in roughly 50 schools. In the course of this one round of grantmaking, the number of next-gen schools in the network doubled—increasing from just over 40 to more than 90; this resulted in a more balanced portfolio—consisting of roughly half charter and half district schools.

In this blog series, I tried to uncover the strategies used by the six Regional Funds sites to achieve this level of growth and to offer lessons others can use to support next-gen learning in their communities. Here are some highlights:

Regional influences. Building an ecosystem of educational innovation [looks different in various regions](#). Why? Because the ecosystem incorporates local culture, depends on available regional assets or those that can be developed and reacts to existing challenges. This diversity proves a strength; it offers something for everyone and every place, in terms of transferring the learning.

New system designs. Scaling next-gen learning isn't just about "interesting new school designs," as CRPE's Robin Lake [writes](#). It also requires taking on "politically difficult subjects" and "some pretty boring—but essential—implementation work," she claims. Our education system was not designed for change. But to provide students with excellence, we need an education system that can adapt—that can take on "nimble and updated ... central office systems and habits" and "much greater levels of dynamism in their problem solving." The Regional Funds engage district and charter management leaders both to create the nimble, updated, dynamic conditions as well as dispositions that support the work of educators in their schools. Check out their wide [range of approaches to school redesign](#).

Cultural shifts. That change to a nimble, dynamic system is just one part of the cultural shift that next-gen learning requires. It parallels the culture of entrepreneurship, startups and design thinking. Even though the purpose of education—a public good—is not equivalent to the goals of business, can you imagine a local educational ecosystem that embraces R&D or that continually evolves pedagogical strategies and the use of critical resources such as space, time and talent? Examining what works and doesn't, while never losing sight of the big picture, translates to good professional practice. The difference in these sites may be the pace at which that iteration and reflection occurs—and the commitment to informing a fluid design process that is never really finished.

Can you imagine an ecosystem that places students at the center of learning, designs schools around their individual

Personalized Learning Podcast series from the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation

- [CityBridge Foundation rethinks education in Washington, D.C.](#)
- [LEAP Innovations grows student engagement in Chicago, IL](#)
- [New England Secondary School Consortium facilitates knowledge sharing](#)
- [Colorado Education Initiative empowers educators](#)
- [Rogers Family Foundation puts students at the center of their education in Oakland](#)
- [KIPP and New Schools for New Orleans encourage collaboration in education](#)

needs, strengths and interests and evolves as the students change? The Regional Funds partners are positioned to support educational R&D in their communities. They nurture [a community of forward-leaning educators](#); they create space and opportunity for school teams to reflect on current practices, rethink school design and pilot new ideas; and, perhaps most importantly, they serve as “champions for an innovation mindset.”

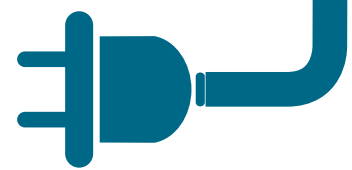
An ecosystem of learners. The most important element of an ecosystem for next-gen learning? People. It’s the heart of [reimagining professional learning](#) and the soul of building trusting partnerships in [any next-gen learning ecosystem](#). At NGLC, we view technology as a valuable tool to support personalized learning at scale. It’s simply a tool that people choose to use (or not), but our motto is: Lead with the learning. Because, in a next-gen learning ecosystem, every person—from children to adults—is a learner.

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