

# Strategy and Program Overview

July 2008



Fostering innovation in public school  
systems so that all students graduate  
ready for college, work and life.

# INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Stupski Foundation is to improve life options for children of color and poverty. We do so by helping education leaders accelerate academic achievement so that all students graduate with the knowledge, skills and aspirations that will enable them to thrive in college, work and life.

Our goal is to develop and implement the instructional components and system metrics – the Learning System - needed to deliver 21st century college readiness by fostering collaborative cross-sector research and development (R&D) and the capacity for innovation in public school districts.

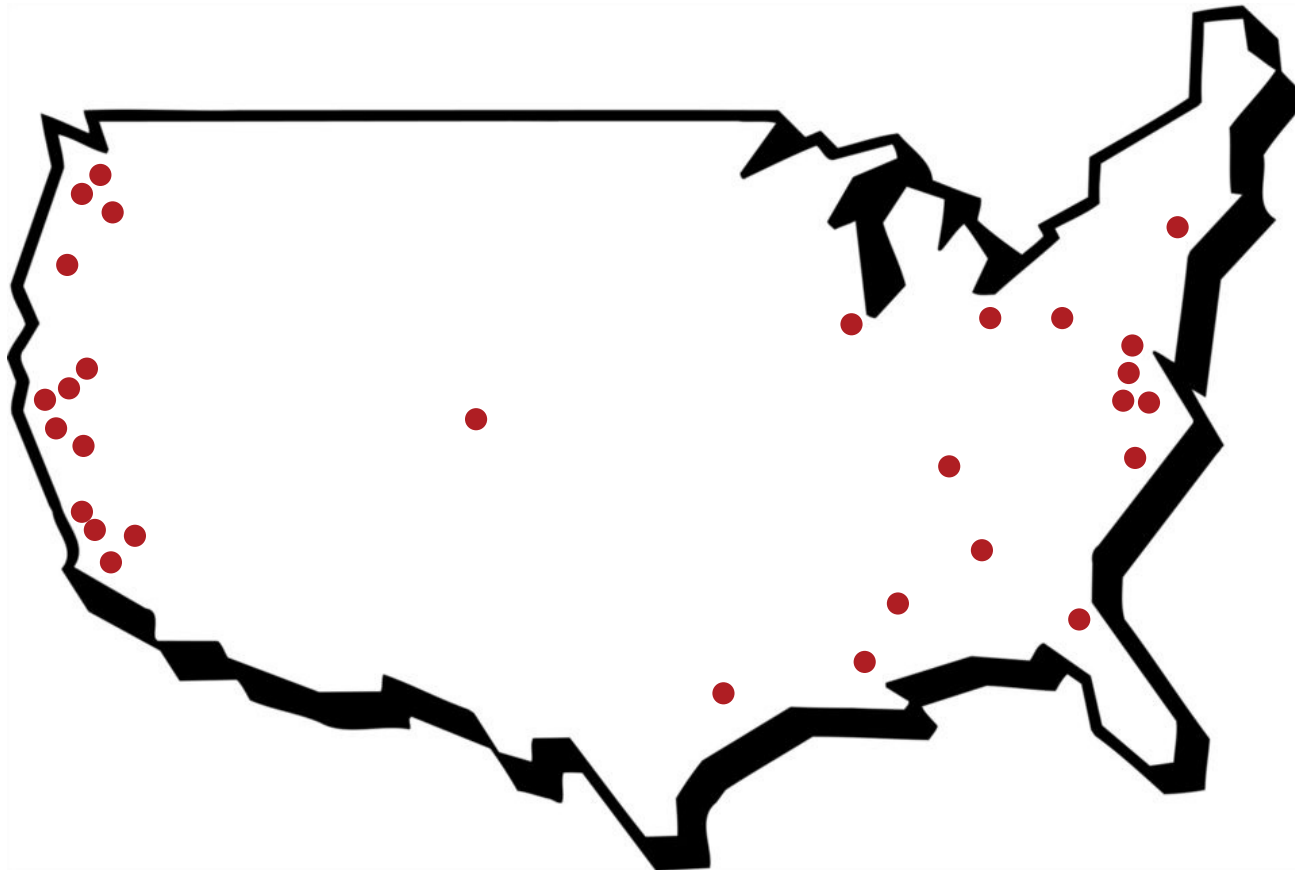
This document details the thinking and reflection that has led us to a new strategic direction and the programmatic expression of that strategy, which we will develop and implement over the next year.

While our strategy has evolved, we continue to believe that the caliber of education in our nation's large public school districts is a significant factor in transforming the lives of children, many of whom are deprived of the opportunity to transcend the barriers of poverty and racial inequity because they lack access to quality education.

# Beliefs & Background

# HISTORY

Since the Stupski Foundation's establishment in 1996, we have partnered with nearly 30 school systems around the country. We have learned that an integrated, systemic approach is needed to transform districts so that all children learn at high levels.



# BELIEFS & VALUES

At the core of our work is a set of fundamental beliefs and values about public education and its role in a democratic society.

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Now, as never before, the future of our country depends on educating all children to high levels. More than ever, highly effective teaching and learning are essential to **transform the lives of all children**, most especially children of poverty and color, and ultimately the communities in which they live and work.

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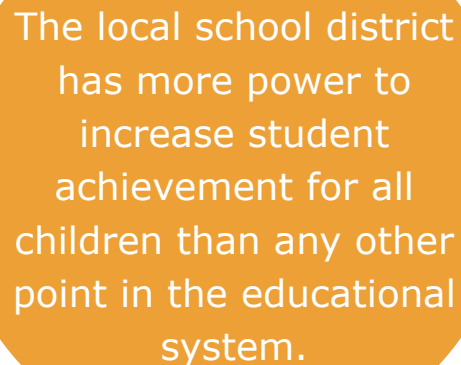
The **staggering disparities** in academic outcomes that continue to persist among poor and minority students are unacceptable. Our ability as a nation to transcend the historical barriers associated with poverty and racial inequity is within our grasp only when every child is assured a high quality education in our nation's public schools.

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Graduating all students from high school with the knowledge and skills that qualify them as **"college ready"**\* is the most meaningful and measurable way to increase life choices and options for all children, but most especially children of color and poverty.

\* We believe that in the 21st century "college readiness" is synonymous with readiness for success in work and life. We define "college readiness" as aspirations, experiences and proficiency at globally-relevant skills and knowledge as measured by assessments such as AP exams, IB exams, TIMMS, PISA and NAEP, together with other quantitative and qualitative indicators.

# THE SCHOOL DISTRICT: THE PIVOTAL ROLE



The local school district has more power to increase student achievement for all children than any other point in the educational system.

The district sets policies, practices and direction that determine the quality of teaching and learning. It also provides the connective tissue between schools and their communities, and between schools and state and federal governments. As such, the district is a key lever of systemic, sustainable change at scale.

Currently, despite dedicated leaders and teachers, most K-12 school systems are not designed or structured to deliver high quality learning that results in elevated levels of proficiency for all students. At present, we do not know how to accelerate student achievement for college or work readiness at scale, particularly for children of color and poverty.

There are approximately 400 large public school districts\* in the U.S. that are located in or encompass low-income communities. Schools in these districts serve nearly 10 million students, the majority of whom are Latino, African-American and / or recent immigrants whose families live on the economic margins of society.

\*This figure is based upon information from **Quality Education Data**, a national marketing services firm that provides research on public schools.

# Change & Reflection

# LESSONS

“The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday’s logic.” – Peter Drucker

We entered the field believing that, by and large, the education system needed support to implement best practices and improve leadership skills.



We discovered, instead, that the system lacked the foundational building blocks of what underperforming students need to accelerate their learning.

We thought that improvement along state standards was an adequate starting point for our work.



In fact, the context in which this generation of students is maturing demands a more rigorous standard: readiness to enter and succeed in a 21st century college education and work force.

We thought an expert consulting model that delivered holistic, flexible advisory services to districts would best leverage our resources.



We learned, instead, that public education desperately needs an R&D capacity to build the knowledge and tools to transform the system from within.

As we embark on this new phase of our work, the fields of education and philanthropy are vastly changed from where they were even a decade ago.

## Standards.

The No Child Left Behind legislation launched a revolution in standards. Soon, a new administration will take the helm and significantly shape federal K-12 policy over the next four years.

## Demographics.

The reality of a permanent demographic shift — “the browning of America” — is seeping into the American psyche.

## Entrepreneurialism.

New reform support and advocacy organizations have introduced new ways of imagining the transformation of public education. Increasing numbers of entrepreneurs in the sector herald a new openness to innovation.

## Resources.

A robust philanthropic and consulting capacity has emerged in public K-12 education. Foundations such as Gates, Broad, Wallace and Annenberg — along with intermediaries such as Bridgespan, Harvard Business School, McKinsey and Parthenon — are bringing ever greater capital, knowledge and analytical capacity to the sector.

## Disruption.

The possibility of widespread disruptive innovation in education is taking hold. New technologies offer the potential of scalable, low-cost ways to deliver customized learning that responds to diverse learning needs.

In this transformed ecology, the foundation’s strategy, approach and role must change accordingly.

# STRATEGIC REVIEW

We believe breakthroughs in education will happen by transcending boundaries. Over the past year, we have invited experts from diverse backgrounds to bring their best thinking to bear in conjunction with that of leaders from education. Their insights and advice have helped to shape a strategy for how our foundation can be most helpful to educators.

It has become clear that if much of what is needed to help district leaders accelerate student achievement does not yet exist in a coherent way, our strategy and methodology must foster innovation and collaborative creation.

Therefore, our work will focus on:

Developing the critical **instructional components** and **system metrics** that will enable states and districts to align around a goal of 21st century college and work readiness.

Creating the capacity within districts to **problem-solve** around critical challenges to delivering a college- and work-ready education for all.

Building the practical **knowledge base** about the implementation of instructional components and system metrics and sharing this broadly among district leaders nationwide.

Increasing the **capital for improved products and services** that help public school systems accelerate learning toward college and work readiness for all students.

# Strategy



## R&D Deficit.

**Less than one quarter of one percent** of the overall education budget in the United States is spent on **research and development** (R&D) — compared to **at least 15 to 25 percent** in fields such as medicine and engineering. Given this lack of investment in R&D, our public school systems have been slow to evolve. Now that district leaders, school principals and teachers are charged with educating all students to uniform levels of proficiency, the consequences of a historic deficit in investment and innovation are being felt acutely.

## Reinvention.

There is a fundamental reinvention that must occur to transform American public education into a world-class system for all our children — one that prepares and equips them for the challenges of life, work and citizenship in the 21st century. This requires translating user-centered research and development processes to the practice of education.

## Cross-Sector Innovation.

Cross-sector collaboration among researchers and practitioners inside and outside the field of education — embedded in the real-world contexts of schools, districts and states — is needed to aggregate what is already known, to innovate and prototype in areas where we still have much to learn, and to test and refine tools and solutions that will accelerate student achievement and readiness for college and career.

Our overarching goal for students in the nation's 400 largest districts has evolved from generally increasing life options to something more specific: build the **skill set** to develop innovation R&D capacity in districts and the **knowledge base** to dramatically accelerate students' academic and socioemotional readiness for success in college, work and life.

This refined goal requires a new **hybrid role** for the foundation:

## Broker.

Leverage and invest resources, convene, create new connections, and build relationships...as venture capital firms do.

## Build Capacity.

Apply methods (user-centered design and development for innovation)...much as product design firms do. Create knowledge (frameworks, diagnostics and instructional tools) that equip leaders to work smarter...much as management consulting firms do.

## Signal.

Use the knowledge and proof points that emerge from our work to influence researchers, other funders, the broader marketplace and public policy in order to achieve scale...as research and policy organizations do.



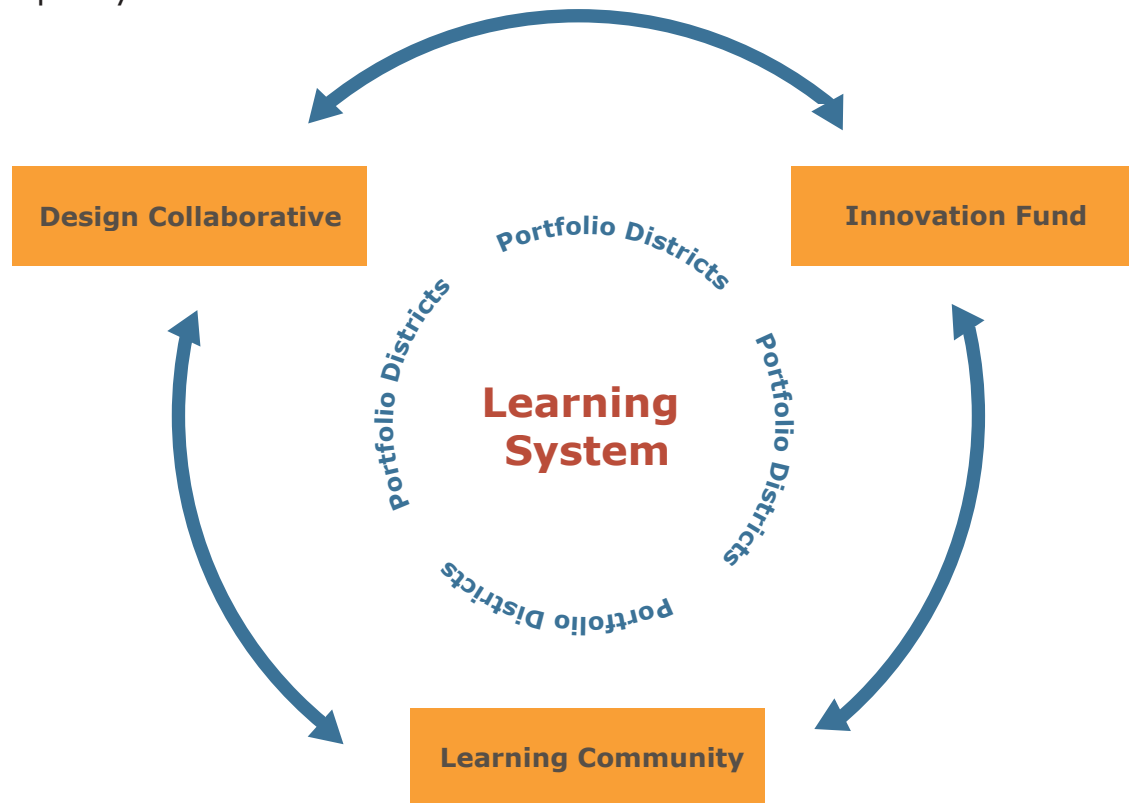
# Program

# PROGRAM STREAMS

The foundation has identified three integrated program streams through which we will implement our new strategy. The unifying focus of all streams will be the development of the Learning System required to transform public school districts in order to deliver 21st century college, work and life readiness for all students.

Over the next year, our work will be designed as tightly-defined learning experiments within these program streams that will provide clear insight into how we might design larger, longer-term programs.

Reflecting the user-centered orientation of our approach, we will engage a small number of districts to refine the Learning System, apply tools and solutions within their schools, and test their potential to build systemwide innovation and R&D capacity.



# COLLEGE READINESS LEARNING SYSTEM

Strategy

Transformation of public education requires a learning system designed to deliver 21st century college readiness for all students. This has seven components:

## Dashboard of College Readiness Indicators:

Cognitive Strategies, Content Knowledge, Academic Behaviors, Contextual Skills

The “dashboard” establishes the student achievement outcomes and performance standards — the **measures of college-work-life readiness** — that will provide evidence of an effective learning system.

## Systems Diagnostics: State, District, School

Systems diagnostics measure the extent to which states, districts and schools have established the systems, services and supports essential to college readiness for all students.

### Curriculum

The college readiness core curriculum identifies the **cognitive and affective skills** that students must acquire at each step of learning to be ready for success at the next level, ultimately exiting schools ready for success in college, work and life.

### Assessments

Real-time performance-based assessments that monitor student performance and growth and provide **quick feedback cycles**.

### Pedagogy

Instructional practices that effectively deliver advanced content and enable teachers to **tailor their instruction** to the diverse learning needs within their classrooms.

### Supports

**Instructional interventions** and **socioemotional supports** that help ensure that student achievement is on the right trajectory.

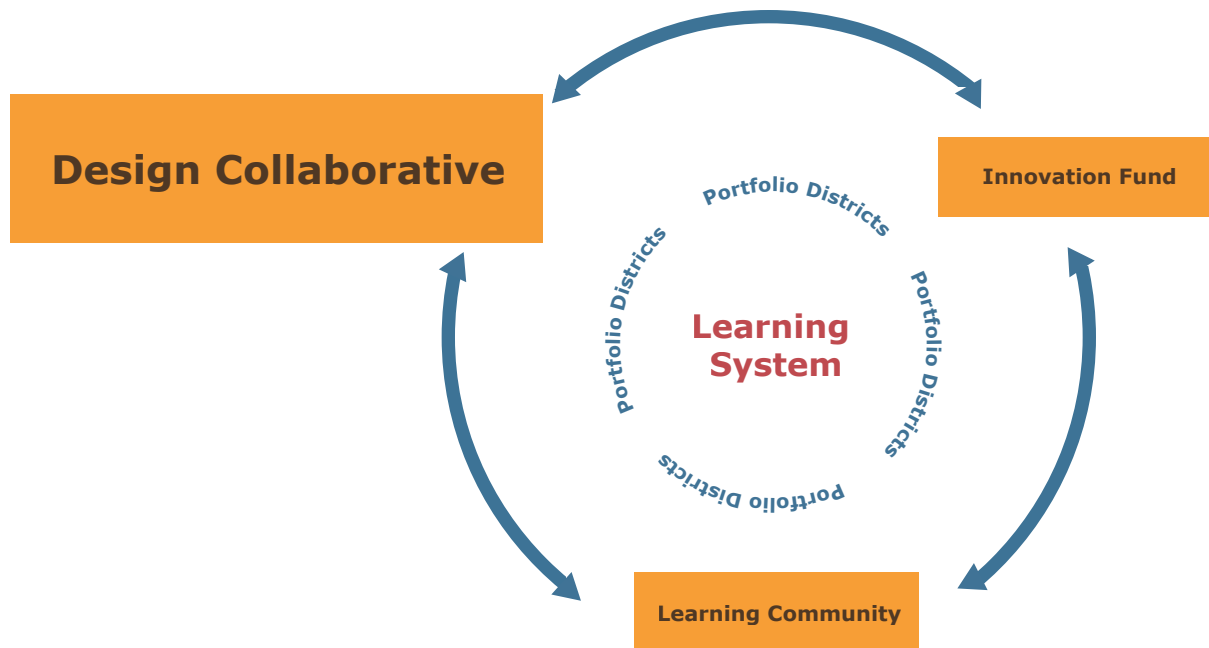
## Leadership/Human Capital

Capacity and Culture to Deliver the College Readiness Learning System

Leadership roles, responsibilities, skills and behaviors essential to creating the conditions critical to the effective implementation of the College Readiness Learning System.

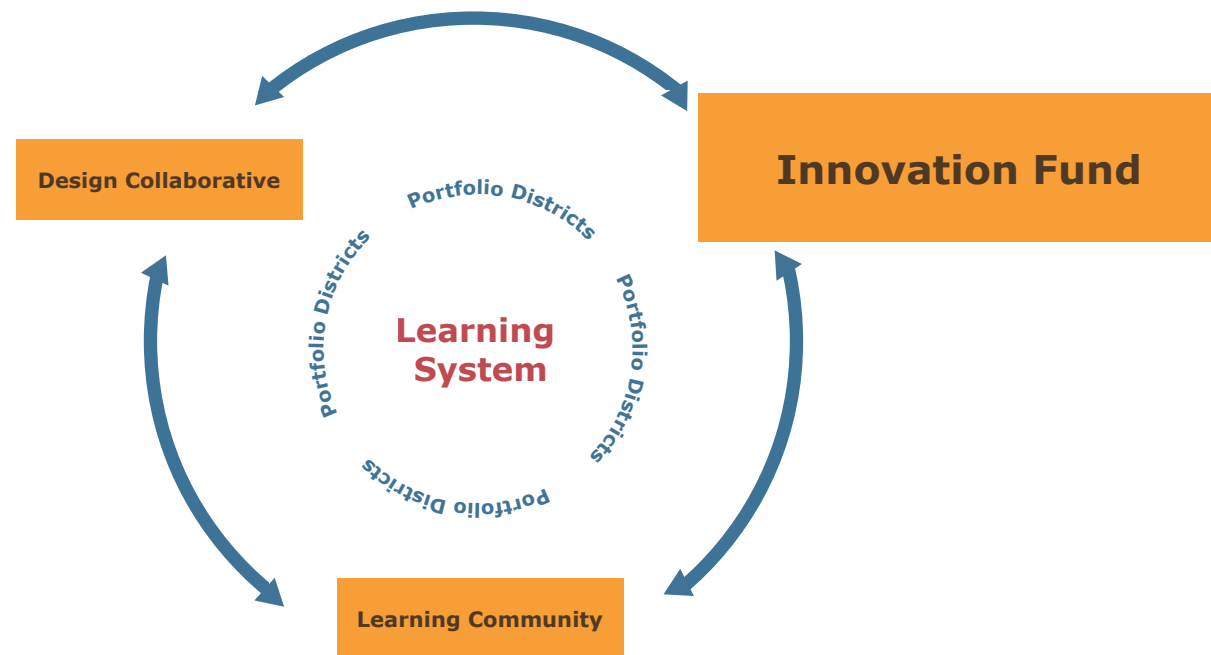
# DESIGN COLLABORATIVE

The foundation will convene a cross-sector Design Collaborative to define, develop and continually improve the Learning System. Our design efforts will bring together practitioners, researchers and entrepreneurs from various sectors and will engage Portfolio Districts as partners and field sites. In 2008-2009, we will recruit world-class experts from a variety of disciplines, a small number of exemplary districts and subject-specific sub-teams to define the contours of the Learning System components.



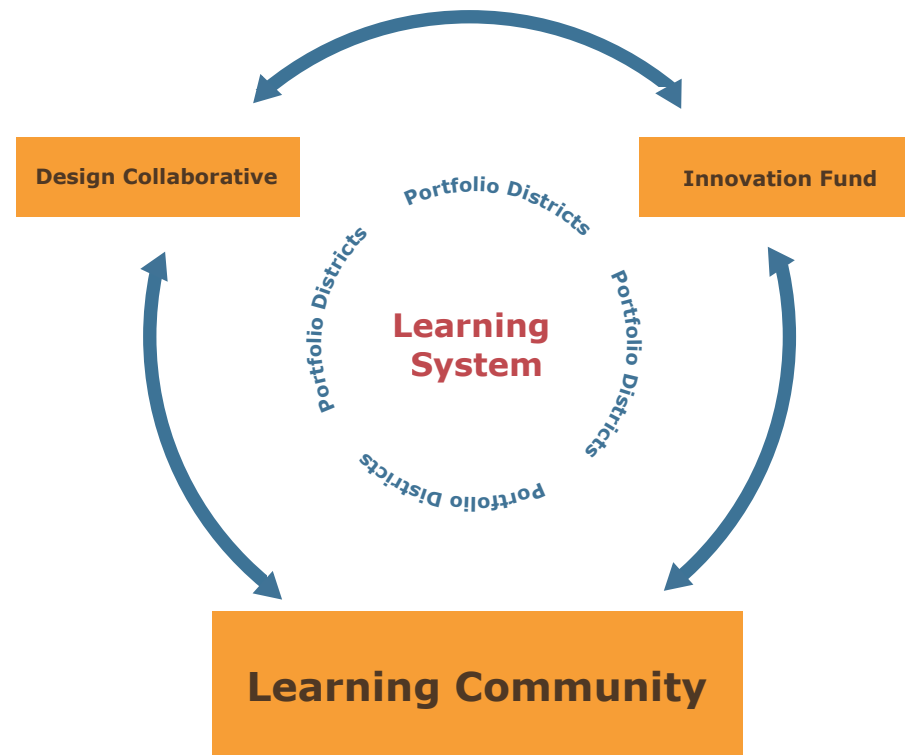
# INNOVATION FUND

To facilitate the emergence of an improved marketplace, the foundation will create incentives, provide seed capital and offer innovation R&D support for developers of products and services that address critical needs within the Learning System and its implementation. These efforts will be catalyzed by needs and opportunities identified by the Design Collaborative, and allow us to learn about our potential role as market broker and provider of risk capital to innovative ventures.



# LEARNING COMMUNITY

With the development of the Learning System by the Design Collaborative and insights gained from its implementation in Portfolio Districts, we aim to create a practical knowledge base about the application of the Learning System and communicate this broadly among public school districts that serve low-income communities. We seek to ensure that the new insights we generate about knowledge and practice are not isolated exceptions, but that they touch as many districts as possible and build the field through online resources and convenings.



# OUR APPROACH

We realize that how we do our work is as important as what our work is about. As we begin this new phase, we are making five commitments:

## **Make it new.**

We've learned that the change we seek requires invention — the components the system needs do not exist in any coherent, practical form. Research, development and innovation are necessary to build the tools that will transform public education.

## **Make it coherent.**

We are systemic and we address root causes. Piecemeal efforts — while sometimes inspiring — cannot change whole systems. Without systemic change, world-class education cannot be delivered at scale.

## **Make it real.**

To bridge the gulf that separates research from practice, our approach is user-centered, focusing on the critical problems faced by district leaders. It is also embedded, so that collaborative problem-solving and the capacity for innovation and design occur and are sustained within the district.

## **Make it smart.**

Transforming education requires resources from both within and beyond the field of education. Our approach is multi-disciplinary and cross-sector. In this way, new insights and understanding contribute to an expanding knowledge base of ways to improve public education.

## **Make it work for kids.**

Our goal is to ensure that all students in our public education system graduate with the knowledge, skills and experiences they need to enter college and the work force and thrive in the 21st century. Everything we do is focused on building tools that transform teaching and learning for these students.

# PARTNERSHIP

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A defining and unifying characteristic of our three program streams — Design Collaborative, Innovation Fund and Learning Community — is the emphasis on collaborative creation and partnership to engage in research, development and innovation. Our approach is user-centered, multi-disciplinary and cross-sector, and our strategy recognizes that transforming education requires resources from both within and beyond the field of education.

We have begun conversations with a number of potential partners who have expressed interest in participating in the foundation's new phase of work. We look forward to developing extensive networks of collaborators and co-developers whose diverse and complementary expertise will contribute significantly to the development of our program streams.

# LEADERSHIP & CONTACT

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