springpoint
PARTNERS IN SCHOOL DESIGN

Designing New School Models

A Practical Guide

Introduction

Springpoint is a national nonprofit organization that supports the design and launch of new, innovative public high schools.

Since 2013, we have partnered with school districts, school networks, and charter management organizations around the country to design and launch twelve new high schools in six cities. Next year, we will support teams in opening five more. Together these schools will serve over 6,000 students at capacity.

We provide design guidance, implementation support, and technical assistance to partners as they reimagine secondary schools. Our support often begins with a student-centered school design process, elements of which we share here.

This guide is a snapshot of the most salient insights from our current work, together with a curated selection of tools that illustrate the importance of discovery, synthesis, alignment, and iteration throughout the school design process. We hope this resource is useful to practitioners, school leaders, families, and communities working to reimagine the experience of school.

DOING SCHOOL DIFFERENTLY

There is an urgent and growing national conversation about the limitations of traditional school models—particularly high schools—in the context of new demands for student achievement. The 21st century is poised to shatter our old paradigms of both study and work. "Success" as we have historically defined it will demand more of young people—academically, socially, and professionally—than our schools are currently preparing them to deliver.

To be successful in this new context, young people need opportunities to develop creativity, self-direction, and critical thinking and collaboration skills, which are not often embedded in typical high school learning experiences. They need innovative guidance for navigating new paths to college and career success, and personalized support throughout the journey. They need intentionally designed schools that offer new modes and methods of learning and accelerate student growth and achievement. Most of all, they need high schools that are reimagined as adolescent learning ecosystems where young people can be active agents in their own development.

Incremental improvements to schools are not enough to meet this challenge. We need fundamentally new designs for school itself. Put simply, we need to do school differently.

"Success" as we have historically defined it will demand more of young people—academically, socially, and professionally—than our schools are currently preparing them to deliver.

OUR WORK AND OUR PARTNERS

Much of our work over the last four years grew out of our participation in Carnegie Corporation of New York's Opportunity by Design initiative: a bold challenge to reimagine what 21st century secondary school can be and do for young people. Carnegie Corporation catalyzed this initiative and generously funded Springpoint and our partners to engage in the challenging and inspiring work of launching new high schools.

We have been fortunate to work closely with a diverse collection of district, intermediary, charter, and nonprofit partners as they assembled design teams, opened new schools, and worked to ensure the organizational, policy, and structural supports necessary for their schools to thrive. Accordingly, our supports are flexible, adaptive, and responsive to each partner's unique context.

Our partners include:

- Brooklyn Laboratory Charter School
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- Denver Public Schools
- Internationals Network for Public Schools, together with Prince George's County Public Schools and CASA de Maryland
- School District of Philadelphia
- Providence Public Schools
- The Urban Assembly, together with the New York City Department of Education

...a bold challenge to reimagine what 21st century secondary school can be and do for young people.

Springpoint's support is not limited to design assistance. We collaborate with leaders to develop a comprehensive school development and planning process that includes design, launch, implementation, and ongoing iteration.

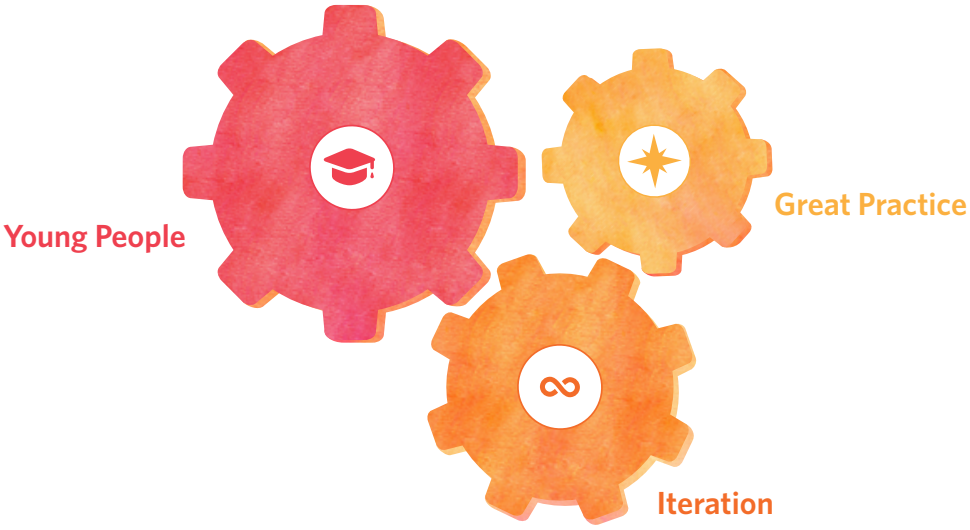
Specifically, we focus on:

- **School Model Design:** we lead partners through a structured, student-centered design process grounded in the needs of young people and their communities.
- **Strategic Planning:** we work with partners to plan for launching schools, helping them sequence priorities and allocate time, people, and resources in a way that will best serve their organizational needs.
- **Capacity Building:** we provide training, coaching, and implementation support to partners and schools. This work supports the implementation of new models and drives continuous improvement.
- **Resource Development:** we develop, collect, curate, and share resources that are essential throughout the process of designing, launching, and supporting new models.

As we established our approach to partner support, we drew inspiration from the work of innovators, both within and beyond the field of education. We interviewed practitioners who designed and launched new schools in cities across the country; district, charter, and intermediary leaders who supported this work; and experts who served as advisors to both. These conversations allowed us to understand the supports that had been most helpful, the constraints that had been the most limiting, and the processes that had produced the strongest ideas. We also researched design theory and improvement science methodologies to identify practices that could inform and sharpen our work. Throughout, we drew on our expertise in youth development theory and practices to ensure that our design process centered on students.

OUR PRIORITIES

As we guide our partners through the process of designing and launching new schools, we ground our work in the following core priorities.



- **Young People.** In order for new school designs to efficiently and effectively meet the still-evolving challenges of 21st century post-secondary study and work, young people must be the central focus of any design process.

  Rather than attempting to replicate established models or approaches, design teams should ground their work in an understanding of the young people, families, and communities their schools will serve. They develop this understanding by talking to and learning from young people themselves—and then they must commit to designing a new model that is responsive to students' assets, experiences, expectations, and ambitions, and aligns to their needs.

  In support of this priority, we emphasize qualitative data collection early and throughout the design process—via interviews, observations, focus group discussions, visits, and design collaborations—alongside quantitative data analysis. This approach also helps establish more equitable and collaborative relationships between design teams and their communities, and between the adults and young people at the heart of this work—all of which can live well beyond the launch of the school.

- **Great Practice.** Mining great schools, industry partners, and innovative organizations for the best practices in instruction, operations, and iteration—and then curating and organizing them to meet the needs of specific young people and communities—can yield new school designs that accelerate student achievement.

  Emphasizing design principles and distilling great practice requires designers to be less focused on wholesale model replication, and more focused on building schools that meet the needs of specific students, using the tools, context, ideas, and knowledge at hand to develop ideas that are new and bold. Where best practice is not yet established, design teams work to invent new approaches that remain centered around student needs.

- **Iteration.** Schools that are built around young people by definition must be learning organizations, committed to continued adaptation, iteration, and change.

  Students and their communities should learn and grow together. This means that a school's initial design is just that—the first version of an evolving design. Our teams embrace an understanding of their role in guiding that evolution strategically around new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

  Springpoint's support emphasizes the positive, *essential* value of iteration. It is critically important to commit to continued learning, designing, refining, and improving. In great schools the culture of iteration permeates, through classrooms and beyond, and promotes sustained excellence and achievement.

Schools that are built around young people by definition must be learning organizations, committed to continued adaptation, iteration, and change.

WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND

In our work with partners and their design teams, we have gathered insights into what strategies, practices, and approaches can be helpful. Here are a few things we advise school designers to keep in mind.

- **Commit to redefining the experience of school.** A deliberate school design process encourages teams to fundamentally rethink the purpose of school, and explore broad possibilities for how schools can meet student needs.

- **Believe young people can achieve great things.** Design teams must begin their work with the fundamental conviction that young people bring unique assets and capabilities, and that with the right supports and opportunities, they can succeed.

- **Identify the policy conditions that may enable flexibility.** Choice and flexibility—over staff, time, resources, accountability systems, and educational programs—presents rich opportunities to think creatively about the design of a school.

- **Adopt design principles to guide the work.** Springpoint's integrated design principles can provide a strong starting point for those interested in articulating principles that are specific to their local context and student needs. However, keep in mind that schools should be designed for young people, not ideas.

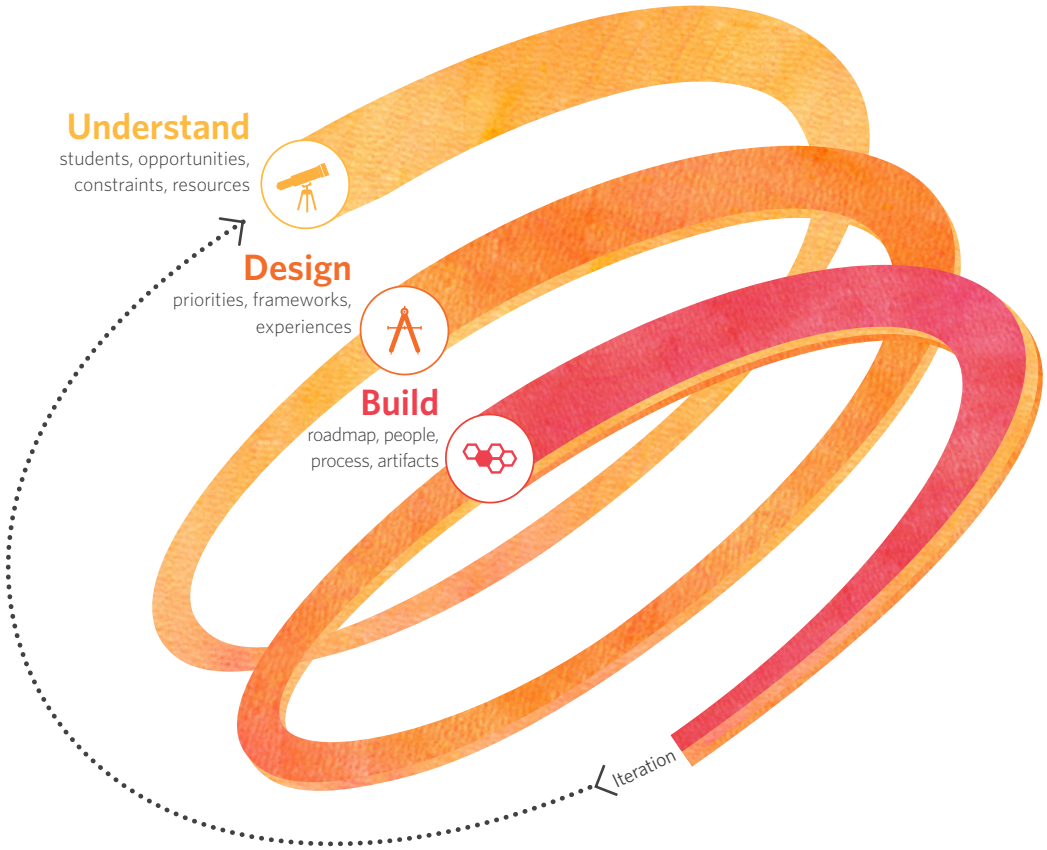
- **Engage local communities.** From the start, teams should cultivate a positive community ecosystem, inclusive of young people and their families, community-based organizations, local leaders, teachers, experts, and other diverse stakeholders.

- **Remember that school design is never finished.** A true design process is ongoing—as long as schools serve students, so too must they be in a constant state of reflection, adaptation, and improvement.

The School Design Process

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

To support our school design partners, we developed a collection of experiences, resources, and expertise that we can rearrange, reassemble, and customize to help design teams produce great new school designs in their unique contexts. We called this collection a "design process," as that term is broadly understood by the field to contain the elements we describe here. But what we have developed has more consistently resembled a conceptual Erector set, with perhaps a few nerdy friends crammed into the box. The design process we initially developed has evolved considerably since we started this work, but it is still organized into essential "phases" or, more accurately, categories: *Understand*, *Design*, *Build*.



It is important to keep in mind that these categories represent rough distinctions rather than concrete silos for this work. We developed them to help teams both understand and navigate the phases of the work, and to identify the skills, knowledge, and experiences their design team would need in order to create a robust school design. However, we want to emphasize that this work is highly cyclical and that each phase in the process is iterative—teams should return to these activities and projects at any given time both during the process and after the school opens. The work in the *Understand* phase may begin the process, for example, but it does not conclude when teams move into *Design* or *Build*. It continues through those phases, and well beyond the launch of the school.

The tools accompanying this guide are a sampling of the tools we use with partners. They are intended to promote discovery, synthesis, and reflection during the design process. Developing a robust school design involves many additional steps outside these tools, but we hope they can serve as illustrative guideposts.

Springpoint's process embodies the same commitment to iteration that we seek to instill in our partners. Our approach to school design continues to evolve as we learn more from our partners and the emerging field. As our practice grows, we will continue to add to this body of knowledge.

The tools accompanying this guide are a sampling of the tools we use with partners.

Understand

The Institute of Design at Stanford suggests launching a design process with *empathy* as the entry point; the design firm IDEO's process uses *discovery*. We see the merits of both, and have called this phase different things since our launch. But, given the complexity of the work school designers undertake, we have most consistently landed on *Understand* as the best descriptor of our starting point. It integrates elements of both discovery and empathy, and so best reflects our aim during this phase of the work.

We believe great school design should be grounded in the needs of students. That is why we ask design teams to first develop a deep, foundational understanding of the students and families they will serve. We suggest focusing on these three essential questions.

- Who are your **students**?
- What are your **opportunities and your constraints**?
- What **resources** will you be able to access and cultivate to support your work?

To answer these questions, we developed a sample sequence for how teams might navigate their way through them. During this phase of the design effort, teams are often working to expand their understanding of all three questions simultaneously, but we will discuss them here in order of importance and impact.

On the following pages are a few examples of what experiences and design products might look like for a design team during this phase of the work.

While some of these questions are answerable in a finite time period, most require ongoing inquiry, revision, and expansion.

We encourage teams to think of this phase of the work as primarily exploratory and organizational—with the goal of getting the best first answers to as many questions as possible in one place, and synthesizing the information they have collected into a framework that can inform the priorities and decisions of the next phases of the design process.

In order for new school designs to efficiently and effectively meet the still-evolving challenges of 21st century postsecondary study and work, young people must be the central focus of any design process.

QUESTION 1.

WHO ARE YOUR STUDENTS?

Practically speaking, we recommend teams structure this phase of the work around a series of cyclical data gathering efforts, designed to produce guidelines for how to build a school model that is uniquely responsive to the young people it serves. We encourage teams to study both qualitative and quantitative data during this phase. For example, looking at both student academic performance data, and the information gathered from surveys and focus group discussions. In order to develop coherent, evidence-based conclusions, we suggest that teams pause between each cycle to synthesize information and identify new questions.

If teams are new to each other, or to their students or communities, we suggest that they begin this work by mapping the assumptions they are making about their students, using categories they can return to throughout each cycle. It can be helpful for teams to identify both the gaps in their knowledge and their assumptions in advance of their data collection work.

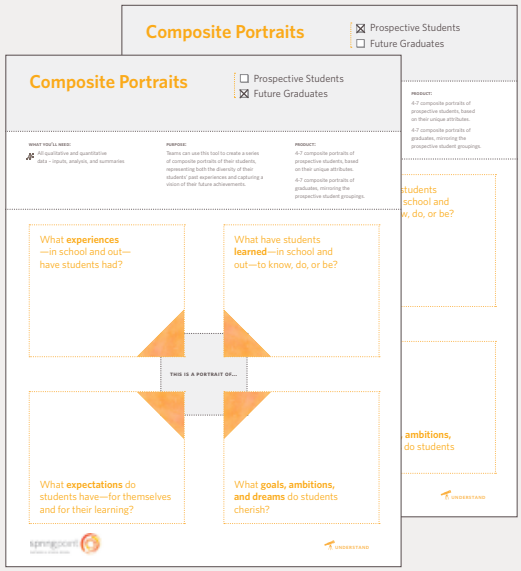
We recommend concluding each cycle with a reflection, noting where assumptions have been confirmed or invalidated, and any new discoveries. The work of reconciling these assumptions at the conclusion of each cycle of data gathering prepares design leaders and teams to generate composite "portraits" of prospective students that outline what students need to know and do to be successful in the school model.

Throughout this cycle series, we recommend that teams use a consistent tool to organize and synthesize their findings—either ours or their own version—to capture the layers of understanding they develop through the process. Our sample tool is simple, and asks teams to sort information they gather about their students into four key question categories:

- What **experiences**—in school and out—have students had before they come to your school?
- What have students **already learned**—in school and out—to know, do, or be?
- What **expectations** do students bring to your school—for you and for themselves?
- What **goals, ambitions, and dreams** do the students coming to your school hope for?

Teams should use this phase of the work to deeply understand the diversity of their student population. They should not limit their "portrait" of prospective students to a single composite (e.g., "an entering student"), but rather develop a portfolio of portraits that reflect the composition of their student population, and that will help explore both the variety and nuances of their prospective students' experiences. Depending on the context, this portfolio can be organized categorically, aligned to patterns presented by the quantitative data review (e.g., demographics, student performance patterns, etc.), or thematically, clustered around data points gathered in qualitative research efforts.

This *composite portraits* tool helps design teams organize and synthesize their findings.



A printable tool can be found at the end of this section.

We also suggest that teams add a visioning exercise to their portrait portfolio by creating a few composite portraits of future graduates of their new school—imagining what graduates might know, do, and be after four years of an extraordinary high school experience—that mirror the structure of their prospective student portraits. We encourage teams to capture in their future graduate portraits both the dreams and aspirations students have for themselves, and the expectations the world will have of them as adults.

Here are a few examples of how teams might define and run some of their data gathering cycles in this phase of the work.

Cycle 1: What do you already know?

Sample Activity: Gather and review all available data about student experiences and performance from existing systems, including demographics, attendance, academic performance data, and whatever else you can find. Analyze the data to identify trends, patterns, and further research questions. Use a whiteboard to take notes on what you notice. Ask your design team to review the data and add their observations to yours. Ask the folks who source and manage the data you have collected what you might be missing.

Synthesis: Sort your notes into your synthesis tool categories, starring the places that fill a knowledge gap and noting where assumptions have been confirmed or invalidated. Make a list of the things you still do not know about your future students, and ask your design team to look at your list and help you expand it.

Cycle 2: What do you observe?

Sample Activity: Gather your design team and a few helpers, including students whenever possible. Ask everyone to work in pairs to help collect more data to add to what the team knows so far about your students. Share the list of questions you still have about your students from the last activity. Use those questions to design observation activities that can help you fill in the gaps in your current understanding. Here are some examples of observation activities:

- Collect a diverse group of student writing samples from feeder schools, and assess them using a rubric aligned to English Language Arts standards.
- Observe several classrooms in each feeder school, taking notes on the ways students are engaged in learning.
- Visit lunch and recess at feeder schools, taking notes on how students interact with adults and each other.

- Spend a few afternoons at after-school programs or community centers used by students at your feeder schools, taking notes on what types of learning experiences they offer.

- Interview teachers, counselors, and leaders at feeder schools and after-school programs, taking notes on how they describe the learning experiences and achievements of the students in their programs.

Synthesis: Bring your team back together and to share findings, returning to your whiteboard to take notes on the patterns you observe. Again, sort these observations into your synthesis tool categories, starring the places that fill a knowledge gap and noting where assumptions have been confirmed or invalidated. Make a list of the things you still do not know about your future students, and ask your design team to look at your list and help refine it.

Cycle 3: What do students and their families tell you?

Sample Activity: Organize your team and helpers again. This time, ask them to help you develop, run, and record a series of interviews and discussion experiences for your school's prospective students and their families. Here are a few examples of what your teams may try.

- Invite students to upload videos of their answers to your synthesis tool questions. Ask your team to review those videos and capture their responses.

- Invite students and their families to participate in focus group roundtables. Buy them dinner and spend the evening listening to participants talk in small groups about their answers to your synthesis questions.

- Ask your team's student and family members to use the synthesis tool questions to interview other students and their families, capturing their responses and adding them to your collected data.

Synthesis: Bring your team back together and share your findings, returning to your whiteboard to take notes on the patterns you observe. Again, sort these observations into your synthesis tool categories, starring the places that fill a knowledge gap and noting where assumptions have been confirmed or invalidated.

After teams have run through a number of cycles like these, depending on their context and needs, we recommend they pause, and return to examine the original questions from their synthesis tool. Teams often repeat their first simple experience of answering these questions, but this time with richer, more precise answers informed by their data gathering cycles. This enables them to create more accurate, nuanced, and detailed composite portraits that reflect the diversity and lived experience of their community.

The mission should be deeply informed by the way students describe their goals, ambitions, and dreams...

We recommend teams use what they have learned about the students their schools will serve to construct working drafts of the school's **mission and vision.**

The mission should be deeply informed by the way students describe their goals, ambitions, and dreams, and should guide every design decision that teams make during and beyond the design process. The vision statement is informed by student and family expectations. It should consider what is required to close the gap between what students have already experienced and achieved—synthesized within the *composite portraits of prospective students*—and who they will become as graduates, which is captured in the *composite portraits of future graduates*. Every element of a school's design should be in service of creating systems that will enable students to reach their dreams in their own ways. We strongly encourage teams to include student and community voices in both the drafting and revision process to give these "users" an active role in the creation of these essential elements.

QUESTION 2.

WHAT ARE YOUR OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS?

While the process for gathering information in response to this question varies according to a design team's context, there are a few common products teams often create during this phase. We advise teams to make these products "rough draft" working outlines, rather than polished narratives. These outlines should live within the team as shareable files are continually updated as new information emerges.

- A survey of the **regulatory environment** the new school will need to navigate, including federal, state, and local laws and policies; any relevant labor contracts; and any special context for the project, including any waivers, grants, special contracts, or organizational relationships that may impact the school design.

- An analysis of the **political landscape** surrounding the new school, its community, and the city and state at large, with an eye to identifying any potential allies or conflicts, and understanding the dynamics of decision-making within that context.

- A reference sheet for the **operational systems** (e.g., hiring, budgeting, enrollment, facilities) the school will need to navigate with a particular focus on collecting essential timelines and baseline requirements for core functions.

- An annotated list of the **accountability measures** used to assess progress at the school, including student performance metrics, public reporting of school data, teacher and leader evaluation systems, and timeframes/reporting mechanisms/ transparency for each.

- A summary of how the team has reviewed and internalized the **design principles** that provide the framework for the project, with special notes as to how the context, as examined in previous surveys, will impact design work for each principle.

We encourage teams to look at what they learn during this phase of the work through the lens of opportunity (i.e., clearly articulated accountability measures can serve as helpful external milestones for measuring student progress), and to build their designs from that positive frame. But sometimes a constraint is a constraint, and identifying it as such can help teams build contingency plans, or identify targets for advocacy within appropriate channels. Either way, teams need to have as clear an understanding as possible of the parameters that will shape their work before moving into the design phase.

QUESTION 3.

WHAT RESOURCES WILL YOU BE ABLE TO ACCESS AND CULTIVATE?

We strongly encourage teams to begin identifying and cultivating resources to support their work as soon as they dive into the project. The categories teams use to sort these resources vary depending on the local context, but we have found these to be very common:

- **Financial resources,** including both organizational budgets and additional funds from grants or donations.

- **Potential partners,** including organizational (e.g., corporate or nonprofit "sponsors" or foundational partners); programmatic (e.g., college preparatory, scholarship, or career and technical education programs); and community-based partners (e.g., service or other local organizations).

- **Potential advisors,** including local leaders in government, business, or advocacy; expert practitioners from the field (aligned to any governing design principles); and advocates in policy or local politics.

- **Potential design collaborators,** including expert consultants, strong school leaders and teachers, graduates of local high schools and colleges, colleagues from feeder schools, state and local colleges, and others.

- **Design inspirations,** including best practices, tools, and resources sourced from a broad variety of schools and organizations, tagged to specific design principles.

In this phase of the work, teams may want to create an internal taxonomy for resources aligned to their design principles, again using simple structures and shareable data systems so that all members of the design team can contribute ideas and connections. The team should also continuously update their collection as they grow their network of partners. We encourage teams to view this question as an introduction to the ongoing work of resource curation, which will be a constant throughout the design process and beyond.

Composite Portraits

- [ ] Prospective Students
- [ ] Future Graduates

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

All qualitative and quantitative data – inputs, analysis, and summaries

PURPOSE:

Teams can use this tool to create a series of composite portraits of their students, representing both the diversity of their students' past experiences and capturing a vision of their future achievements.

PRODUCT:

4-7 composite portraits of prospective students, based on their unique attributes.

4-7 composite portraits of graduates, mirroring the prospective student groupings.

What **experiences** —in school and out— have students had?

What have students **learned**—in school and out—to know, do, or be?

THIS IS A PORTRAIT OF...

What **expectations** do students have—for themselves and for their learning?

What **goals, ambitions, and dreams** do students cherish?

Design Process | Phase 2

Design

Shifting gears from *Understand* into *Design* can be a challenging transition for teams. Often the data generated by the first phase seems overwhelming, as do the breadth of design options. Springpoint collaborates with design teams to customize our templates for the experiences and tools teams need to navigate this shift. We remind teams that the work of design, though it begins with this phase, should be coded in the school's DNA, and must continue well beyond the school's launch and early years. Above all, the mission and vision the team drafted in the previous phase of the work—with and for young people—should serve as the lodestar in this phase.

Often, because of hiring and school launch timelines, teams may have to do this work in intense bursts with a wide range of collaborators and little time. We have refined our understanding of which specific design elements are most essential for teams to develop during this phase, especially in circumstances that require a streamlined work plan. We generally recommend teams prioritize these elements, using either our tools and templates, or their own versions.

- A list of **core design priorities** for the school's design, based on the information gleaned from the *Understand* work and aligned to the mission and vision
- A set of three **model design frameworks** to capture key design decisions for foundational academics, college and career readiness, and personal enrichment
- **Experience maps** for each year or unique phase of development within the school's sequence, to test feasibility and calibrate the balance of design elements

Although teams can, and often do, move through these elements sequentially, creating drafts that they return to with each new development cycle, it is important to note that, depending on the local context, constraints, and team availability, design leaders may remix these elements and their iteration cycle timeline. We encourage teams to develop a work plan for this phase that both protects the team's commitment to keeping young people at the center of the design, and maintains a practice of efficient and effective iteration.

We detail some examples of how teams can create these elements below, and include some examples of the tools themselves at the end of this section.

CORE DESIGN PRIORITIES

To identify and map the core design priorities for this phase of the work, we suggest that teams return to the information they gathered during the *Understand* phase, with these activities in mind:

- Itemize graduate **"goals"** aligned to the mission and vision, and informed by information from students and their families.
- Map those goals to potential **model design elements.**
- Describe the **experiences** and **outcomes** of those model design elements, mapped to both students, teachers, and staff in the community.

These insights will generate a broad range of possible programmatic elements—more, usually, than a coherent school design can accommodate. We then ask leaders to prioritize these elements with their teams, using three questions:

- What is **essential** to achieve our mission?
- What is helpful, but can be part of **a future** iteration?
- What is useful, but will need to be provided by an **external** partner or resource?

Next we ask teams to consider these questions to further refine their priorities:

- Is this element **aligned** to our mission and guiding design principles?
- Is it **feasible**, given our constraints and opportunities?
- Can this element be **integrated** seamlessly with the others into our design, or does it require connective tissue?

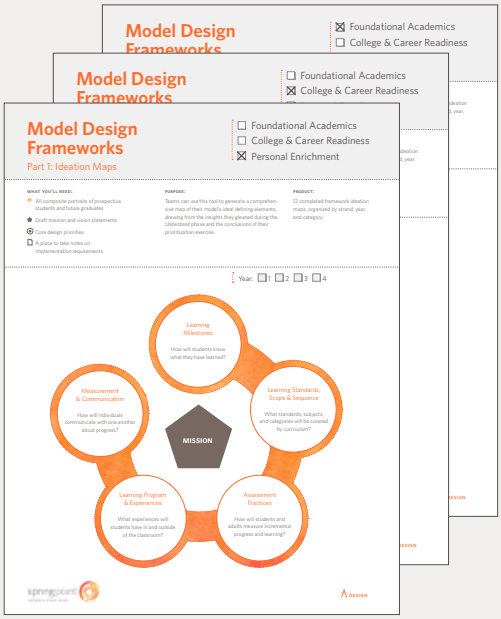
MODEL DESIGN FRAMEWORKS

Once teams have identified their core design priorities, we ask them to work through a series of design mapping activities, each focused on a central element of their school's model, to create a comprehensive framework of their model's key elements.

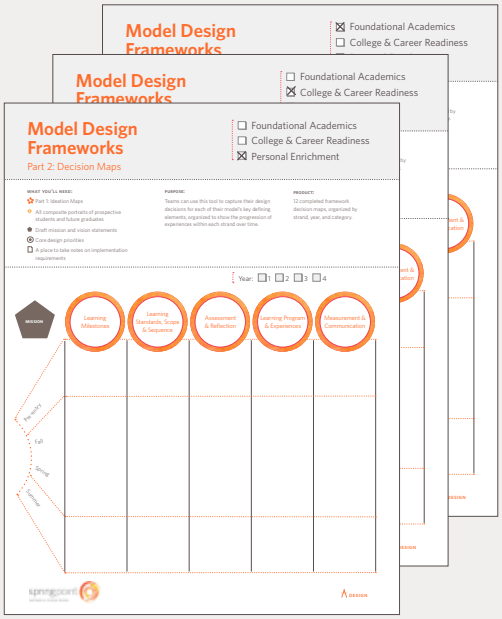
We cluster these mapping activities into three broad categories, each with its own associated **framework** document:

- FOUNDATIONAL ACADEMICS
- COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS
- PERSONAL ENRICHMENT

Design teams can create comprehensive frameworks of their model's key elements using these tools.



Model Design Frameworks
Part 1: Ideation Maps



Model Design Frameworks
Part 2: Decision Maps

A printable tool can be found at the end of this section.

Within each framework category, we ask teams to consider the following programmatic elements using their identified core priorities:

- **Learning milestones:** How will students know what they have learned? How will they present and commemorate their growth?

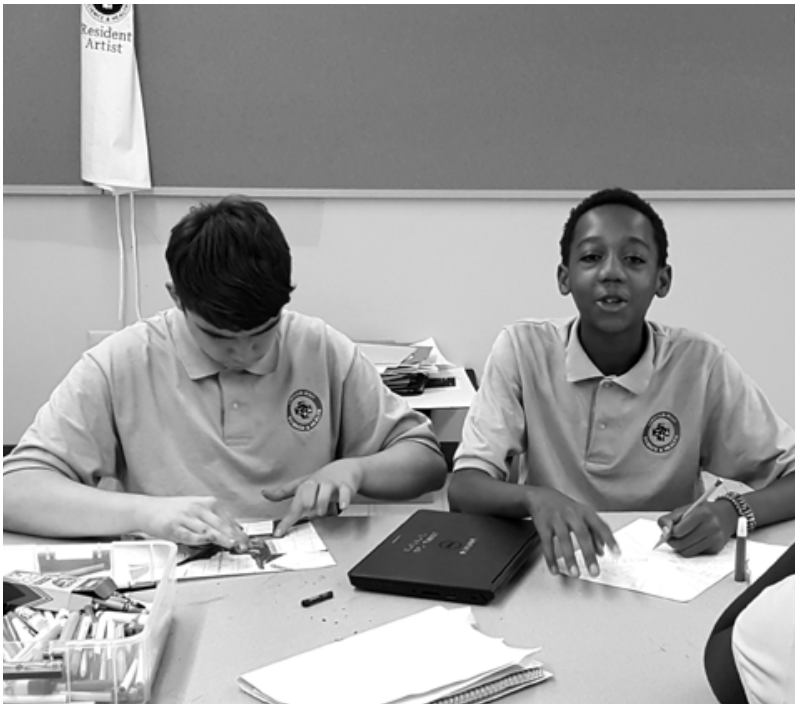
- **Learning standards, scope, and sequence:** What standards, subjects, and categories will be covered by curriculum? In what order and context will students absorb new content and skills?

- **Assessment practices:** How will students and adults measure incremental progress and learning? How will this map to identified constraints?

- **Learning program and experiences:** What experiences will students have in classrooms? In school, but outside of class? Outside or after school? How will these experiences interact with one another? How will we calendar, schedule, and program these experiences efficiently?

- **Measurement and communications:** How will individuals communicate with one another about progress, including teachers, students, families, and community?

For each element, teams outline key design decisions, map progressions broadly against time, and keep a running tally of the systems, staffing, and resource requirements presented by their model. The decisions made within each category inform decisions in the following category. Teams often work on all three frameworks simultaneously, with ideas sparked in one inspiring decisions in another.

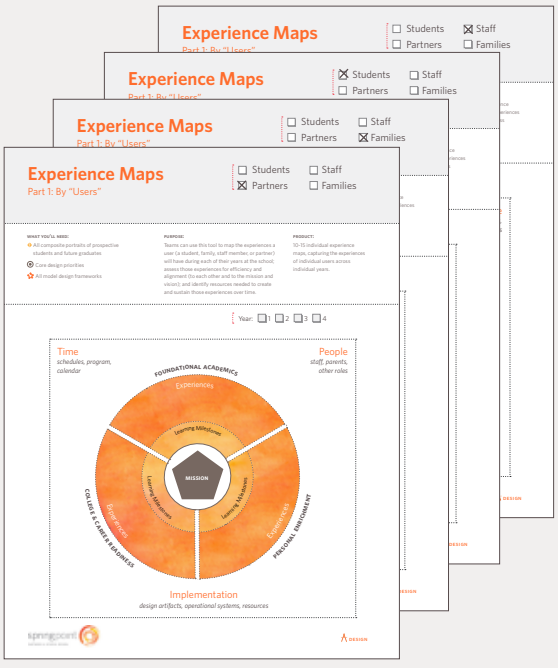


EXPERIENCE MAPS

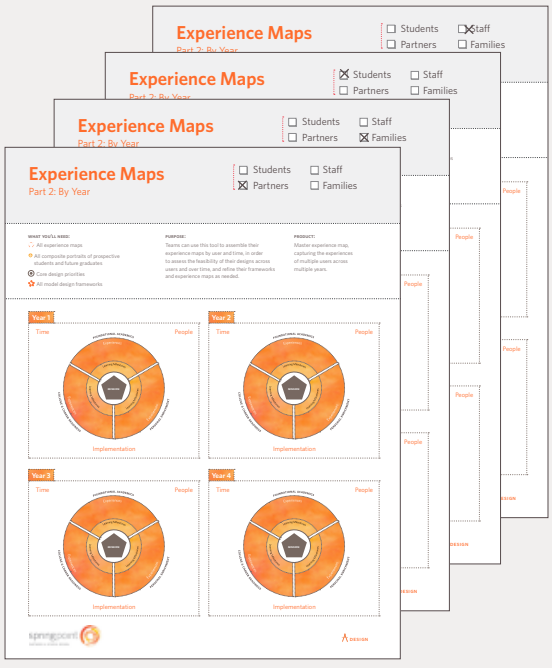
One challenge school designers face is that it can be difficult to test prototypes of design components in a real-world setting. We collaborate with teams to solve creatively for this constraint—with limited pilots, focus groups, simulation activities, etc.—but those options tend to vary depending on local opportunities and relationships. For everyone, we recommend beginning the prototyping work with a pressure test of their model designs through the lens of their various user experiences.

We have created a series of tools teams can use to map the breadth of experiences a "user"—a student, a teacher, a family member, a leader, or a partner—might have in the space of a year across all three framework categories. This exercise helps teams test for alignment, both between the framework categories, and to the broader mission. It also helps teams refine their understanding of time and resource allocation, staff support and development, operational systems, and practice guidelines required to implement this vision. Finally, it can help generate the critical parameters for implementation planning, particularly for calendars, schedules, programs, and organizational structures.

With these *experience maps*, design teams map the breadth of experiences a "user" (students, staff, partners, families) will have throughout their time with the school.



Experience Maps
Part 1: By "User"



Experience Maps
Part 2: By Year

A printable tool can be found at the end of this section.

Model Design Frameworks

Part 1: Ideation Maps

- ☐ Foundational Academics
- ☐ College & Career Readiness
- ☐ Personal Enrichment

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- All composite portraits of prospective students and future graduates
- Draft mission and vision statements
- Core design priorities
- A place to take notes on implementation requirements

PURPOSE:

Teams can use this tool to generate a comprehensive map of their model's ideal defining elements, drawing from the insights they gleaned during the *Understand* phase and the conclusions of their prioritization exercise.

PRODUCT:

12 completed framework ideation maps, organized by strand, year, and category.

Year: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4

Model Design Frameworks

Part 2: Decision Maps

- ☐ Foundational Academics
- ☐ College & Career Readiness
- ☐ Personal Enrichment

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Part 1: Ideation Maps
- All composite portraits of prospective students and future graduates
- Draft mission and vision statements
- Core design priorities
- A place to take notes on implementation requirements

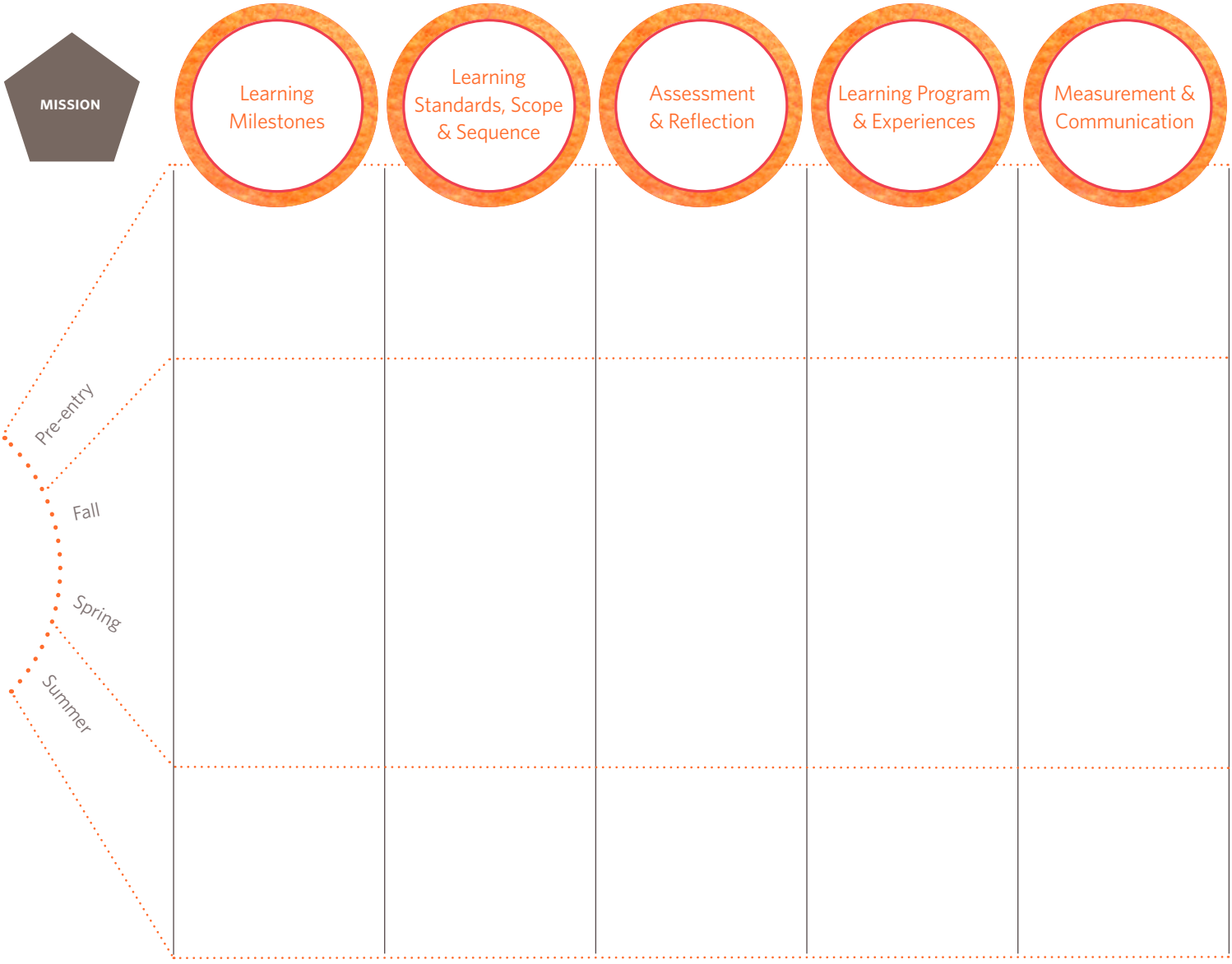
PURPOSE:

Teams can use this tool to capture their design decisions for each of their model's key defining elements, organized to show the progression of experiences within each strand over time.

PRODUCT:

12 completed framework decision maps, organized by strand, year, and category.

Year: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4



Experience Maps

Part 1: By "Users"

☐ Students ☐ Staff
☐ Partners ☐ Families

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- All composite portraits of prospective students and future graduates
- Core design priorities
- All model design frameworks

PURPOSE:

Teams can use this tool to map the experiences a user (a student, family, staff member, or partner) will have during each of their years at the school; assess those experiences for efficiency and alignment (to each other and to the mission and vision); and identify resources needed to create and sustain those experiences over time.

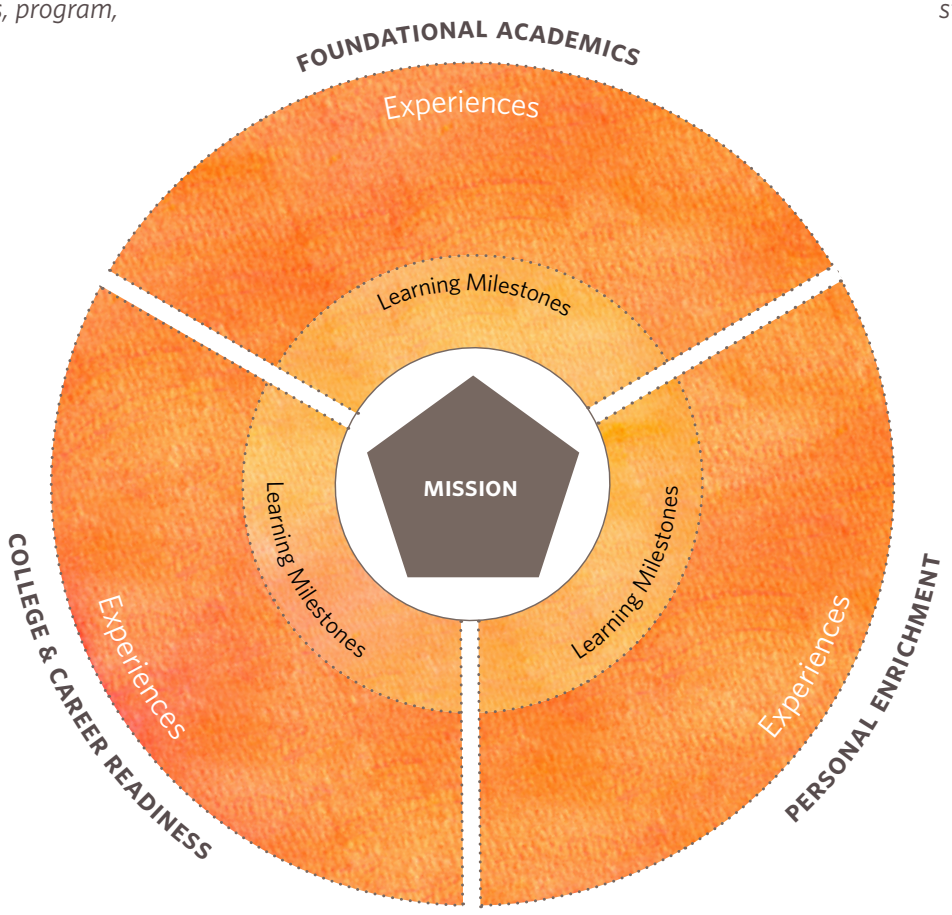
PRODUCT:

10-15 individual experience maps, capturing the experiences of individual users across individual years.

Year: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4

Time
schedules, program, calendar

People
staff, parents, other roles



Implementation
design artifacts, operational systems, resources

Experience Maps

Part 2: By Year

- [ ] Students
- [ ] Staff
- [ ] Partners
- [ ] Families

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- All experience maps
- All composite portraits of prospective students and future graduates
- Core design priorities
- All model design frameworks

PURPOSE:

Teams can use this tool to assemble their experience maps by user and time, in order to assess the feasibility of their designs across users and over time, and refine their frameworks and experience maps as needed.

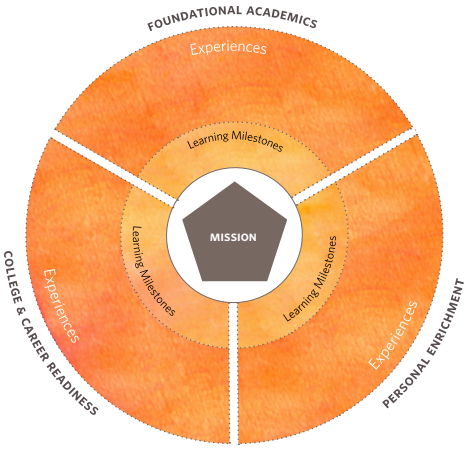
PRODUCT:

Master experience map, capturing the experiences of multiple users across multiple years.

Year 1

Time

People

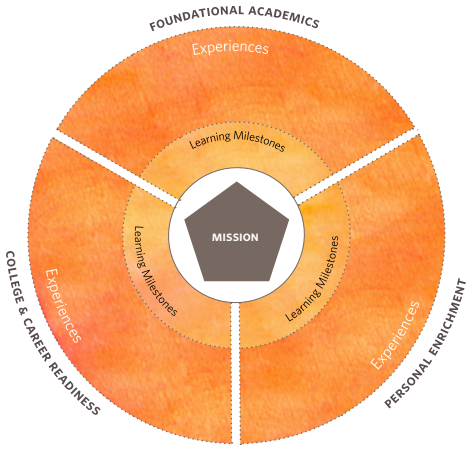


Implementation

Year 2

Time

People

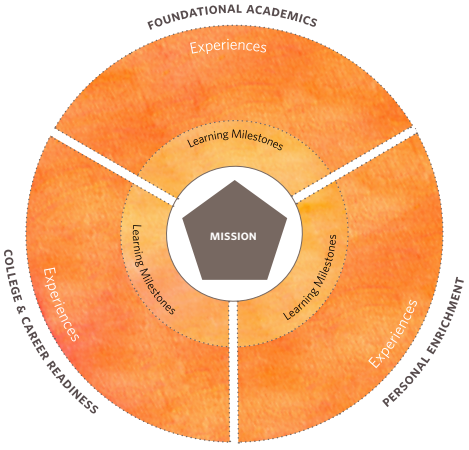


Implementation

Year 3

Time

People

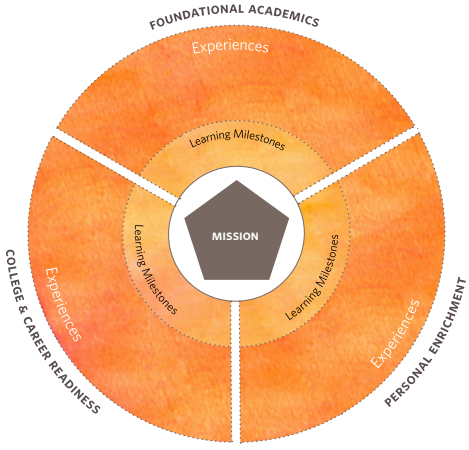


Implementation

Year 4

Time

People



Implementation

Build

It is important in this phase to maintain a clear focus on the school's guiding mission and on its commitment to iteration. Depending on when design teams can begin their design work, they may have shorter or longer runways to school launch, in terms of either time or resources. As with each previous phase of the work, we collaborate with design teams to map a support plan, and create activities and tools that meet their unique needs. On the following pages are examples of a few common elements teams include in this phase of the work.

STEP 1.

UNDERSTAND AND PRIORITIZE IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS.

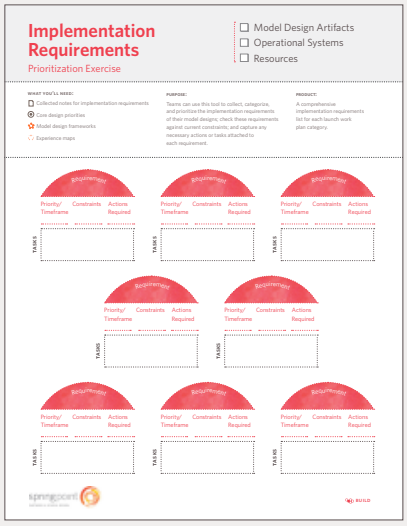
Once teams have built out the first draft of their design, tested as many elements as they are able to, and refined their vision into a workable model, we recommend that they return to their ongoing lists of implementation requirements to revise, expand, and refine them. We ask teams to consider the implementation requirements in these three core categories, and encourage them to add additional categories required by their unique context:

- **Model design artifacts:** The unique aspects of practice that define the model's foundational academics, college and career readiness, and personal enrichment design strands.
- **Operational systems:** The systems and structures the school will need to develop to support each of the three design strands.
- **Resources:** The resources the school will need to acquire, develop, or cultivate in order to fully implement the vision of the three design strands.

Because new school model designs often include complex new structures or practices that take time to develop, teams need to plan an implementation roadmap extending well beyond the school's launch. So that leaders can prioritize their time and focus in this critical phase of the work, we advise that teams tag implementation requirements with both associated constraints (e.g., contracts, regulations) and a timeline-based priority ranking (e.g., must-haves for fall).

We have learned that the resource planning categories below will take up a majority of a design team's focus as they approach launch. We recommend looking at constraints and must-haves in tandem to isolate the high-need areas that require resolution during the pre-launch phase.

This tool can help teams synthesize the collected tally of implementation requirements into one comprehensive list and prioritize and plan around them.



A printable tool can be found at the end of this section.

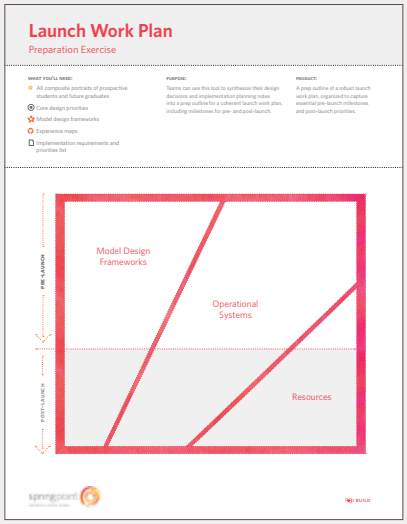
STEP 2.

CREATE A DETAILED LAUNCH WORK PLAN FOR THE SCHOOL'S FIRST FULL YEAR.

The spring and summer months before a new school opens can present an overwhelming array of practical dilemmas—too many tasks, not enough hands or time, and a persistent fog of uncertainty pervading every question or decision. Often teams focus on the immediate path they have to navigate to ensure that their schools open on time. The challenge is that once the team's ideas meet its students, something inevitably breaks down. Either design components need tweaking, or systems are not properly calibrated, or better practice guides need to be developed. Because this transition can feel abrupt, and can be difficult for both leaders and their teams to navigate, we encourage teams to create launch plans that incorporate both the runway to launch and the intense and rapid iteration work that has to happen in the school's first year. A launch work plan ideally includes—at minimum—the following elements:

- **Spring pre-launch:** implementation planning
- **Summer pre-launch:** design roll-out
- **Fall post-launch:** design roll-out and iteration planning
- **Spring post-launch:** iteration planning and new design work
- **Summer post-launch:** design roll-out and iteration planning

Design teams can use a *launch work plan* tool to synthesize all the design decisions and implementation planning into a coherent plan that takes them to and through launch.



A printable tool can be found at the end of this section.

STEP 3.

ASSEMBLE AND BUILD ESSENTIAL MODEL DESIGN ARTIFACTS.

Each of the *model design frameworks* categories —foundational academics, college and career readiness, and personal enrichment—outlines key decisions design teams make to create their models. These documents serve, in effect, as the best summary representations—the blueprints—of the structure and practice that will comprise the new school. To bring these designs to life, teams need to flesh out their decisions with artifacts that guide the development of each component of the school. We work with teams to develop this list of artifacts, depending on the requirements of their design and context, but generally, the artifacts fall into these core categories:

- **Instructional planning guides and resources,** including the school course scope and sequence; templates with instructions, models, and guidelines for course, unit, and project planning; sample curriculum materials; and other materials as required by the model.

- **Measurement tools and resources,** including standard rubrics and/or learning progressions; templates with instructions, models, and guidelines for formative and summative assessment practices; systems to capture, analyze, and share measurement data; tools to support staff evaluation and leadership development; and other materials as required by the model.

- **Practice guides and resources,** including guides for structured peer and team collaboration; guides for delivery of instruction and student support; guides for essential operational procedures; and other materials as required by the model.

- **Communication tools and templates,** including style guides and templates with instructions for publications, letters, social media, and all forms of written and verbal communication, as required by the model.

- **Calendars, schedules, and programs,** including master calendars for foundational academics, college and career readiness, and personal enrichment; daily, weekly, monthly, and marking period schedules (as needed); and individualized student programs, as required by the model.

Implementation Requirements

Prioritization Exercise

- [ ] Model Design Artifacts
- [ ] Operational Systems
- [ ] Resources

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Collected notes for implementation requirements
- Core design priorities
- Model design frameworks
- Experience maps

PURPOSE:

Teams can use this tool to collect, categorize, and prioritize the implementation requirements of their model designs; check these requirements against current constraints; and capture any necessary actions or tasks attached to each requirement.

PRODUCT:

A comprehensive implementation requirements list for each launch work plan category.

Launch Work Plan

Preparation Exercise

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

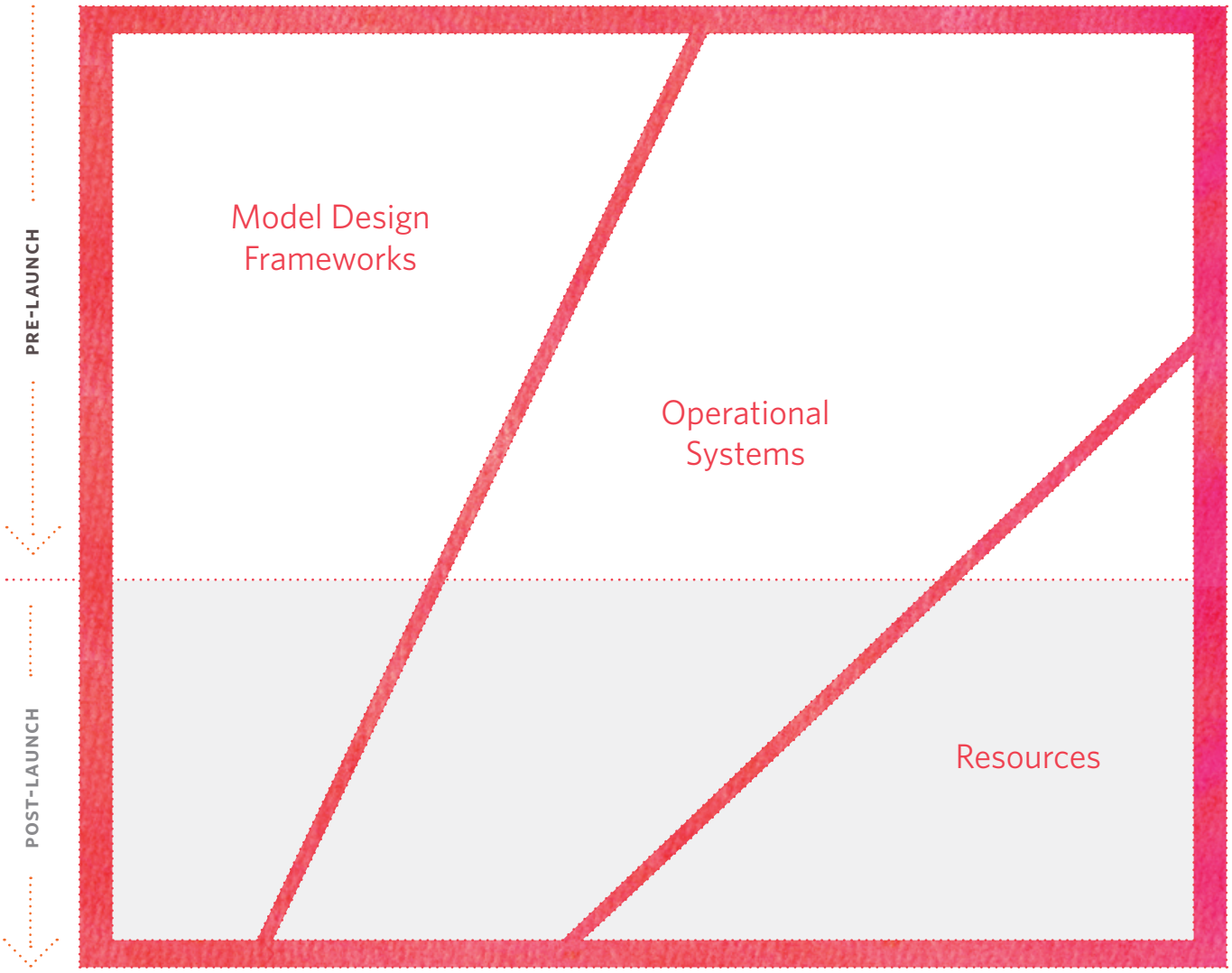
- All composite portraits of prospective students and future graduates
- Core design priorities
- Model design frameworks
- Experience maps
- Implementation requirements and priorities list

PURPOSE:

Teams can use this tool to synthesize their design decisions and implementation planning notes into a prep outline for a coherent launch work plan, including milestones for pre- and post-launch.

PRODUCT:

A prep outline of a robust launch work plan, organized to capture essential pre-launch milestones and post-launch priorities.



Looking Ahead

The work of designing new schools and bringing them to life is challenging, inspiring, sometimes seemingly impossible, but above all else, essential.

It is a rare and lucky privilege for our team to support and collaborate with so many extraordinary leaders engaged in this effort —and to learn so much in the process.

We hope this first collection of insights and resources from our design work has been helpful, but must note that it only represents a fraction of the investment required to launch and grow a new model and a new school.

Inevitably, as model designs "meet" the young people they are built to serve, school leaders and their teams discover a host of new wrinkles they have yet to plan or fully design for. Over time, students grow and change—and new students with new dreams and new needs continue to arrive. To become a strong, vibrant, effective school, it is essential for leaders and their teams to continue in the foundational practice of iteration they established in their design work: keeping a constant watch on the school's fidelity to its mission and vision for student achievement; preserving time to listen and continue to learn in order to deepen understanding; and committing to building and refining new solutions as they are needed.

In this publication's companion (coming spring 2017), we have collected some of the systems, practices, and resources that help innovative new schools thrive in their early years. As we continue supporting innovative school model designs that can create great outcomes for young people, we are excited to add our voices to the growing conversation.

Springpoint is funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York, whose generous support allowed us to develop the school design process outlined in this guide. The statements made and views expressed here are solely the responsibility of Springpoint.

SPECIAL THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As we developed the school design process outlined in this guide, we drew from research on the history and outcomes of new small school development efforts nationwide, together with the tools, practice guidelines, and resources from the fields of design thinking and youth development theory. We are grateful to leaders and practitioners around the country who shared their insights, advice, and best practices for engaging in this work. Explore our resource library for more on the research and inspiration that informs our work.

In developing the design process outlined in this guide, we were particularly indebted to the thought partnership of Michele Cahill, Amanda Crowell, Leah Hamilton, Tracy Fray-Oliver, Doug Knecht, Leonard Medlock, Michael Rothman, Antonia Rudenstine, LaVerne Evans Srinivasan, Saskia Levy Thompson, and Springpoint's invaluable team of expert consultants and collaborators, including Mitra Grant, Elana Karopkin, Michele Phillips, Joseph Pinto, and Carolyn Yaffe. We are especially grateful to the dedicated school designers and leaders in Cleveland, Denver, New York, Philadelphia, Prince George's County, and Providence, who inspire us with their tireless commitment to reimagining schools for young people.

ABOUT US

Springpoint is a national organization that supports the design and launch of new, innovative secondary school models that connect young people to postsecondary success. Our mission is to enable all students, regardless of environment or background, to succeed in high school, college, and beyond. Springpoint provides customized training, support, and resources to school designers, system leaders, and other partners as they develop, launch, and grow new schools. Since 2013, we have worked with district, charter, and intermediary partners to design, open, and sustain twelve new high schools, with five more opening next year. At capacity, these schools will serve 6,000 students across the country.

Springpoint also seeks to advance a broader understanding of how intentional school design and implementation can result in transformative success for students and their communities.

This guide is a part of that ongoing effort.

For more, please visit our website:
www.springpointschools.org