Accelerating Success

A Design Guide for Starting a New School Incubator

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INTRODUCTION

Today's major school reform initiatives—charter schools, state accountability systems, even the No Child Left Behind Act—all depend on the supply of a new cadre of strong schools. They require schools with focus, teamwork, expertise, adaptability, and problem-solving skills. Many schools have performed at such a low level for so long, and are so internally divided, that the only way to preserve children's learning opportunities is to create effective new schools. The "new school movement" picked up speed in the last decade with the rapid expansion of charter school laws, interest in small schools, and periodic voucher initiatives. But according to the Center for Education Reform, the supply of new charter schools is seriously dwindling.

Part of the reason for this decreased number of new charter school openings is, without doubt, the challenge of new school start up and the lack of effective support structures for education entrepreneurs. When new schools open it is largely because of Herculean efforts by unusually committed and motivated people who see risk and uncertainty as a challenge rather than a barrier. But even when these superhero school-starters manage to open schools, the results are typically uneven at best, especially for the first two to three years.

One promising new idea to overcome the reliance on superheroes is school incubation. Modeled after successful business incubators that help small businesses get started and stay afloat, school "incubators" or "accelerators" are programs that invest in the development of strong school designs and school founders. A school incubator gives individuals or groups of school administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders the opportunity and place to develop a strong proposal, learn how to avoid the problems that plague school start-up ventures, and implement their plan successfully.

This design guide is intended to help people who are interested in starting a school incubator understand the key decisions they will have to make and learn from others' experiences. The information here represents our distillation of several sources

of information. They include:

- A meeting of school incubator operators in 2002[1]
- A review of school incubator internal and external evaluations
- A literature review on business incubators
- Interviews with heads of business incubators in Washington State

What are school incubators?

Incubators are organizations that aim to decrease the learning curve for new schools and increase the likelihood that promising school plans will succeed. Incubators offer communities an innovative new way to support locally-initiated school designs.

Three key defining features distinguish incubators from other technical assistance efforts. Incubators are:

1. **Focused:** They limit work to start-up phase of school development.
2. **Time-limited**: They work with school developers for a finite period.
3. **Selective:** They limit their services to school developers with a demonstrated capacity for success.

For example, management organizations such as the Edison Company and even the Catholic Archdiocese serve some incubation functions, but because the interdependent relationship between the individual school and its parent organization is ongoing in duration they are not really incubators. Certainly, technical assistance efforts such as the Coalition of Essential Schools and most charter school resource centers should not be considered incubators, as they are not selective in choosing schools and usually offer ongoing support.

Appendix A (page 35) provides a description of existing school incubators and contact information.

Design guide for starting a school incubator

If you are interested in starting a school incubator, this guide

will help you identify the most important decisions to be made, from defining the purpose of the incubator to measuring its success. The guide is organized in the following sections:

- Defining goals and expected results
- Choosing clients
- Deciding on program offerings
- Setting the terms of the incubator/client relationship
- Assessing incubator progress and impact
- Incubator organization
- Marketing and funding the incubator
- Incubator location and facilities
- Conclusion

Each section starts with a narrative of the key decisions incubator designers must make and, when needed, provides insights and examples from people who are currently operating school incubators. The decisions mapped out here are intended to be value-neutral; we try to leave enough room for a wide variety of approaches to incubation while staying true to the definition provided above. Each section ends with "decision trees" to summarize the key decisions needed and follow-up questions they might raise. While the early experience of several school incubators can provide some guidance, we believe it is too early to say that there are definitive answers that will increase a community's or an organization's success in promoting the development of effective new schools.

This guide is part of a series of publications about school start-up and incubation published by the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE), including:

- *Stimulating the Supply and Building the Capacity of New Schools and School Developers*
- *The New Schools Handbook*
- *A Toolkit for Incubating and Coaching New Schools*

For a web-based and regularly updated version of this document or for other products published by CRPE, visit our web site **www.crpe.org** or contact us at crpe@u.washington.edu.

DEFINING GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS

As with any new venture, a school incubator will only be effective if its goals are focused and clear. Before launching a school incubator, make sure you can state clearly what sort of school you hope the incubator will help start and why you want to help that type of school get started.

What do you hope to change?

If your primary goal is to invest heavily in educational excellence, the first question you should consider is how you will define quality. Will you choose particular comprehensive school "designs" such as Success for All or Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) schools? Or will you look for certain design elements in a new school idea, such as the Coalition of Essential Schools principles or small school size and potential for replication? Or do you think many kinds of schools are needed, and you want to help each start on its own terms?

If your primary goal is to support new models of innovation, you should be clear about how you will decide whether one particular new idea is better than another. Are you only interested in innovations that promote certain goals such as greater personalization for high school students or improved parent involvement? If you decide your organization's main goal is to support innovative ideas, you need to plan for the possibility that not all of the schools you help will succeed. Innovation is experimental by nature and carries a higher risk of failure. Consider how it will affect the incubator's reputation to have helped schools with a poor academic track record. Plan how your incubator will respond to potential criticisms of supporting schools with uneven results.

At Boston's Pioneer Institute, a small group of fellows is selected each year and taken through a curriculum designed to help them prepare to start a new school in two years. If your primary interest is to choose good leaders or teams of people to work with and help them find or develop strong school designs, you should decide how you will identify "promising" teams. The Charter Schools Development Center (CSDC) in California looks for "hyper-motivated" people. You might want

to look for groups with specific skill sets (e.g., a balance of education and business skills or good community contacts). An approach to incubation that emphasizes people does not necessarily exclude the possibility that the selection process includes consideration of their proposed school. It just means that the incubator must decide how much to emphasize applicants' skills and potential as opposed to their ideas for a new school.

If your goal is to promote social justice or community development via new schools, you need to decide whether you will focus on schools that aim to serve particular populations or whether you will focus on new schools in particular neighborhoods.

There is no one right reason to incubate schools. Whatever your goal, your purpose will have to emerge from your community's needs, political context, and expertise, and adapt as that environment changes. The Dayton Education Resource Center, for example, started with a goal of developing a broad array of school options in Dayton, but is now focusing more narrowly on choosing high quality people and designs that can demonstrate academic results quickly. The organization saw this as a necessary strategy to help charter schools survive in a combative political environment. The following decision tree illustrates the key design decisions and follow-up questions to consider when you are developing or evaluating your incubator.

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS
What do you hope to change?

Why incubate?

Create more schools with proven educational designs

Develop new models of innovation/ choice

Support promising leaders/ leadership teams

Promote economic/ community development

How will you define "proven"?

How will you decide whether an idea is innovative? Will you turn away any potential clients? Why?

How will you identify "promising" leaders/teams?

Will you have a regional focus? Will you focus on schools that intend to serve a particular population of students?

How will you communicate those desired qualities to potential clients?

What difference do you think it will make?

Depending on your goals, you may hope, for example, to see higher achievement rates in charter school programs or a certain number of quality new school options for Native American children. Some organizations also expect incubator graduates to mentor or otherwise assist other new school developers or replicate their designs in order to increase the reach of the incubator's work. The important thing is to define success clearly and know how you will assess whether the incubator and the schools it helps start are successful.

Accelerating Success

The Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) incubator has the overall mission of supporting small school development. Every year, BayCES sets specific internal organizational goals designed to help its clients develop district-approved implementation plans, to open on schedule, and to help comprehensive conversion high schools complete the structural changes necessary to convert to small schools. Similarly, the Institute for the Transformation of Learning (ITL) sets quantifiable goals every six months for its many school assistance programs. For instance, in 2003, ITL aimed to have 80% of its client schools advance one stage in the district's accreditation process.

Incubators should also be clear about their goals and expected outcomes at various stages of a school's development. The following sample model can be used to help you design your own goals for your incubator's operations.

Table 1.
Sample incubator goals for various stages of school development

Stage of school development	Goal
Potential applicants	Incubation should turn potential applicants into actual applicants.
Applicants	Incubation should give applicants a higher chance of renewal.
New schools	Incubated schools should be "better" schools than other schools (e.g., less turbulent start-up, more early indicators of quality instruction and operations).
Schools in operation for more than a few years	Incubated schools should be more likely to have their contracts renewed, more likely to be able to demonstrate success.

Below are three decision trees that ask a series of questions to help define how your incubator and clients will interact, especially at key development stages.

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS

What difference do you think the incubator will make?

Should clients give back to the incubator in any way?

YES

NO

In what capacity?
For how long?

What other incentives exist for schools to take the incubation experience seriously?

Monetary

Educational

How much?
When will they be required to pay?

Will you require successful schools to assist other new school developers?

Accelerating Success

When will you determine a client's readiness to graduate?

- When client is stable financially
- When client is stable organizationally
- At the end of a predetermined time period
- Client decides readiness

What indicators of independence will you look for?

- When authority to start school (e.g., charter) is granted?
- When school opens?
- Other?

How will you know whether your graduates are successful?

How will you define success?

What is your expected success rate?

Do you expect any clients to "fail" (e.g., not open a school)?

What number of failures is acceptable?

What indicators and methods will you use to track client outcomes after graduation?

Choosing clients

It is important to know and state what qualifications and skills you expect participants to have before announcing the incubator and putting out application materials. Are you looking for a base level of competence in certain areas? What are your minimum criteria for working with a group? These questions are the same whether you want to incubate just one kind of school or work with many different school designs.

The following are examples of how two incubators choose their clients:

Charter Schools Development Center (CSDC)
The goal of the Charter Schools Development Center's Incubator Project is to promote more schools with very solid education and business plans and strong political savvy. The Center believes schools need these things to survive in California's increasingly unfriendly charter environment. The CSDC selection process includes: (1) a screening process—both parties get to know each other a little better and perform due diligence (check reputations, etc.), and (2) a formal application process. Schools are selected for the qualities of the development team and the likelihood that the team will be able to get a charter (mainly, whether the school will be located in a district that is friendly to charter applicants).

Institute for the Transformation of Learning (ITL)
In addition to working with school leaders starting schools "from scratch," the Institute for the Transformation of Learning works with school development teams that are designing new plans for existing schools. The Institute for the Transformation of Learning selects teams that have, in ITL's opinion, strong capacity to implement and sustain change in their schools. For example, the incubator might turn away a group that did not have support from the school principal.

Think carefully about how you will know whether a group or individual has the qualities you seek before you commit to a long-term agreement to work together. You might find it helpful to develop a list of questions you will ask of every applicant. Below is a list that Doug Thomas of EdVisions uses to assess a group's commitment to EdVisions' principles.

- What do you want to change about your school?
- Are you going to be able to get the authority to make these changes?
- How will you measure results?
- How big is your school going to be?

The decision tree below displays questions to ask and evaluative criteria to use when selecting clients.

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS
Choosing clients

What standard issues need to be addressed before clients apply to the incubator?

Clear mission	Funding commitments	Commitment from "sponsor" (e.g., school district)	Other

How developed should their mission be before starting the program?

How much funding should they have secured?

How formal a commitment should they have secured?

What type of evidence will you require?

How will you know whether a client meets your criteria?

Informal screening process	Formal application and review process	Outside reviewers	Reference checks	Other

DECIDING ON PROGRAM OFFERINGS

The actual program of assistance or curriculum is the core function of an incubator, so think carefully and strategically about what kind of help the organization will offer and how the organization will specialize. To be an effective incubator, you may not be able to offer equal help with all elements of new school development. You'll have to decide whether you think the new schools you are trying to promote in your community most need help with business skills, back office functions (such as payroll services or administrative support), education plan development, or all of these things. This decision should flow directly from the mission or purpose of the incubator. If the primary goal is to focus on increasing the number of new schools and the range of schooling options in a community, your incubator might focus on issues critical to scale: helping schools find facilities, avoiding typical early financial problems, replicating successful programs.

One way to decide which areas and tasks your incubator will offer (and which areas will be priority program offerings) is to list all the different tasks people starting new schools must accomplish at various phases of development. A sample planning sheet is provided in Appendix C.

As you design your program offerings, one of your most important decisions will be how much to do "for" your clients. If your goal is to make school teams self-sufficient, it can't be too much. Jennifer Feller from the CSDC described this tension as a constant challenge: "It's tempting to fall into the role of parenting because it's rewarding to feel needed. To avoid it, we make our teams do the first draft on all of their documents and plans. Even if they have to revise it 20 times, they're better off having done it themselves." The CSDC used to fill out forms for their clients, but found this to be a problem because the school teams often did not fully understand and feel ownership of the end products.

The CSDC incubation process:

Once an individual or group is selected for the incubator, the first step is an orientation designed to lay out the entire process ahead. In a strategy they term "shell shock," the incubator staff try to make clients realize how much work is ahead and how difficult it will be to open a school. But at the same time, incubator staff also try to inspire those clients and assure them they will get the support they need to succeed. A customized school start-up plan is developed with a timeline of one to two years, depending on client needs.

After orientation, the incubator staff meets monthly with clients for detailed check-ins on their progress and has regular interaction through e-mail and phone calls. Within a few months, clients are expected to have in place a "mini-proposal," which helps them begin to say what their mission will look like in practice and serves as a marketing tool and focal point for the remaining planning time.

The incubation process culminates in a comprehensive plan that serves as the basis of the charter application, which itself has many iterations. Incubator staff will help clients apply for a charter and will even assist in the contract negotiation process.

The CSDC works with clients on a one-year contract, but staff members plan to extend the contract by another year on the belief that a thorough planning process takes a full two years.

At the Institute for the Transformation of Learning, incubator staff members use an interesting approach to help school leaders develop their school change plans quickly. The incubator takes clients to Ernst and Young's Accelerated Solutions, a facility designed to support decision makers of all types. The intense three-day workshop has the latest technology available to provide "at your fingertips" access to information, trained facilitators, and deadlines to help school leaders develop an initial design quickly. Later, school leaders get longer-term assistance in a variety of areas needed for successful school transformation. In designing curriculum for each group, Director Bob Pavlik says he looks for "tipping points," or key additional information or exercises, to get leaders to move to the next level in their school's change process.
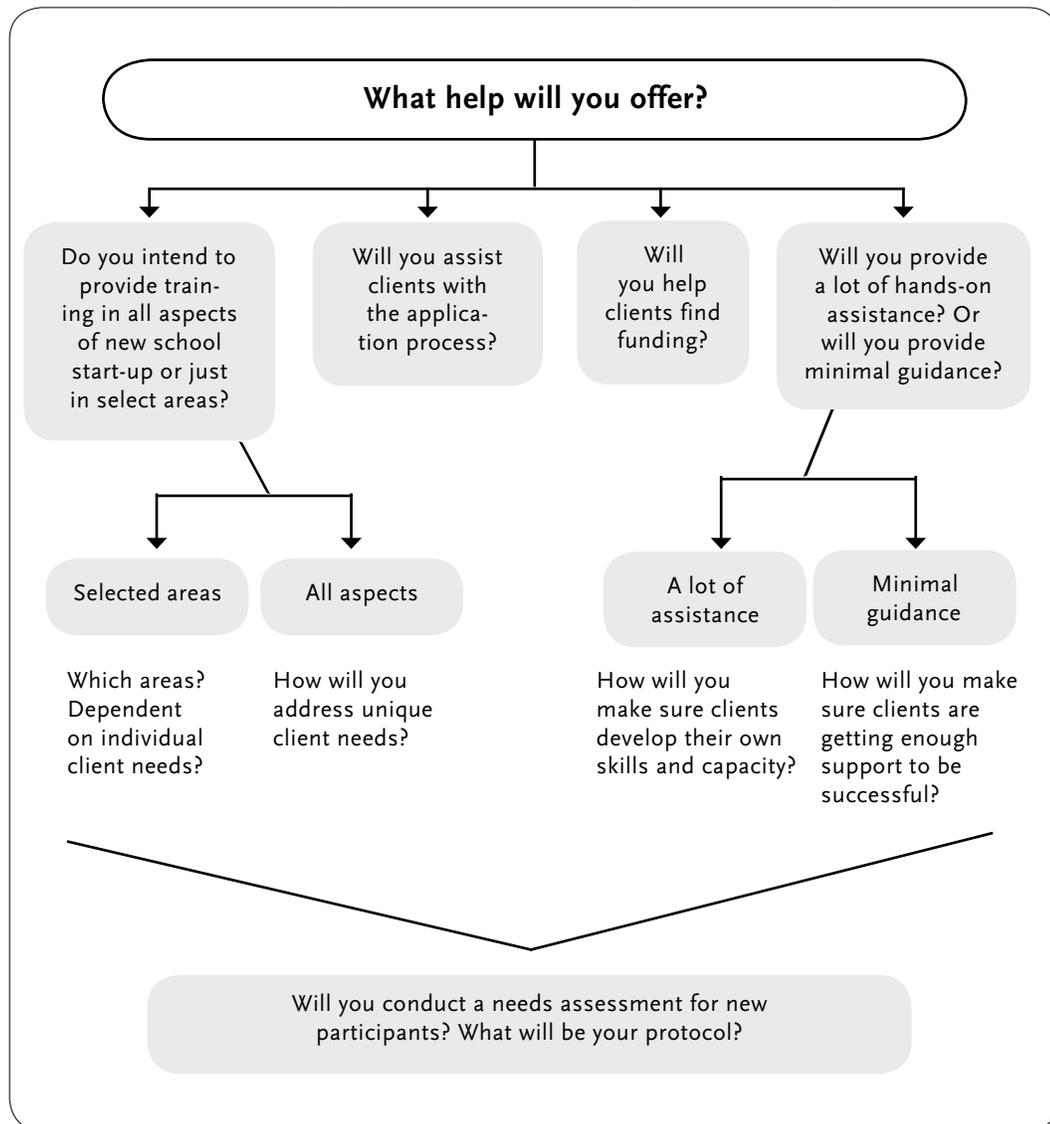
This section's decision tree is designed to help you choose the types of training that your incubator will offer, as well as the delivery method that works for you and your clients.

A final note of caution on curricula and tools: most school incubators will find they are working with school developers with diverse learning styles. A community activist group, for instance, may not be comfortable using tools they perceive were developed by elite researchers or businesspeople. Other individuals may respond more positively to dialogue about a particular issue than to written exercises. For example, the BayCES incubator staff found that those clients starting conversion schools wanted different types of planning tools than those clients starting new schools, and that all groups appreciated a variety of instruction: brainstorming, PowerPoint presentations, team discussions, and writing time. Give some thought to this challenge and try to find or develop more than one tool for a particular topic.

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS
Deciding on incubator program offerings

What help will you offer?

Do you intend to provide training in all aspects of new school start-up or just in select areas?

Will you assist clients with the application process?

Will you help clients find funding?

Will you provide a lot of hands-on assistance? Or will you provide minimal guidance?

Selected areas

All aspects

A lot of assistance

Minimal guidance

Which areas? Dependent on individual client needs?

How will you address unique client needs?

How will you make sure clients develop their own skills and capacity?

How will you make sure clients are getting enough support to be successful?

Will you conduct a needs assessment for new participants? What will be your protocol?

How will you deliver that help?

What access to experts will clients have while they are in the program?

Curriculum specialists?
Legal advisors?
Financial advisors?

What methods/tools will you use to build your clients' capacity?

Coaching/instruction?
Anecdotes/case studies?
Sample documents?
Diagnostic tools?
Workshops?
Networking with other participants?
Providing mentors?
(How will you attract mentors to participate? Will you ask or require graduates to become mentors?)

Will you provide all resources in-house or refer clients to some external resources?

SETTING THE TERMS
OF THE INCUBATOR/CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

Formality and level of prescription

The formality of a partnership between an incubator and its participants can vary from highly informal handshake agreements to very formal written contractual relationships. A written contract provides more leverage if the incubator is concerned with quality control and might help avoid misunderstandings about roles and responsibilities of both parties. On the other hand, some incubators believe informal arrangements promote greater trust and cooperation.

Whether the agreement is formalized or not, decide which elements of incubator assistance and client actions will be negotiable and which are not. For instance, will you expect clients to achieve a certain amount of progress, such as a complete business plan or demonstrated abilities, before graduation? Will you expect each client to adhere to certain educational principles such as aligning their curriculum with local and state standards? Some incubators include in their graduation criteria the ability to set goals, establish action plans, and implement programs.

The **EdVisions Cooperative** in Minnesota, which invests in and helps develop new, small, highly personalized schools, has an informal agreement with its partner schools, but insists its partner schools have:

- A design that is personalized and project-based,
- Sound financial principles,
- A rigorous evaluation plan,
- A professional development plan,
- Commitments from a sponsoring agency,[2]
- Clear and democratic principles of governance,
- Quality control principles, and
- Compliance with all state requirements.

This is a subjective list—its success relies on a high level of professional judgment on the part of EdVisions—but the organization fears a more prescriptive approach would lead to "cookie-cutter" schools that lack legitimate ownership and change.

2. For some incubators a "sponsoring agency" might include a school district, charter authorizer, archdiocese or other private school network, or independent private group.

While the risk of replicating designs in name only is probably most central to the challenge of incubating "design-specific" schools, every organization investing in the design of new schools must decide what level of prescription it is comfortable with.
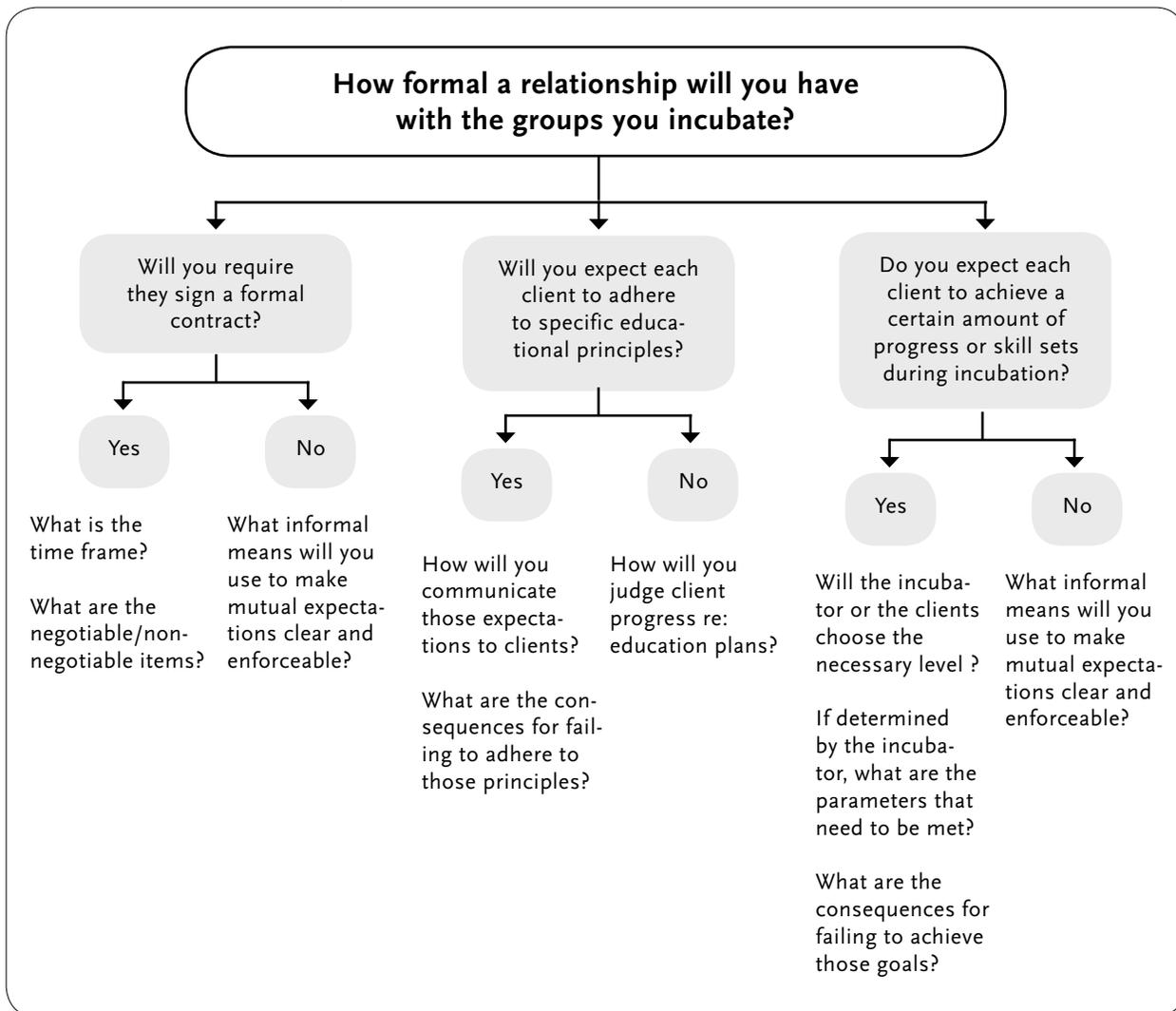
The length of time you agree to work with a client is another important consideration for at least two reasons. First, your clients are likely to underestimate the amount of time needed to develop a quality proposal. Most school incubator staff believe that 18 to 24 months is a necessary amount of planning time for a new school, but this is often a surprise and disappointment to start-up teams who are eager to put their ideas into practice. Second, incubators may find it useful to use specified time lines as deadlines for struggling clients.

This section's two decision trees are intended to help you define your expectations for the incubator/client relationship, especially with regard to the level of formality in your partnership and your expected time frame for working with clients.
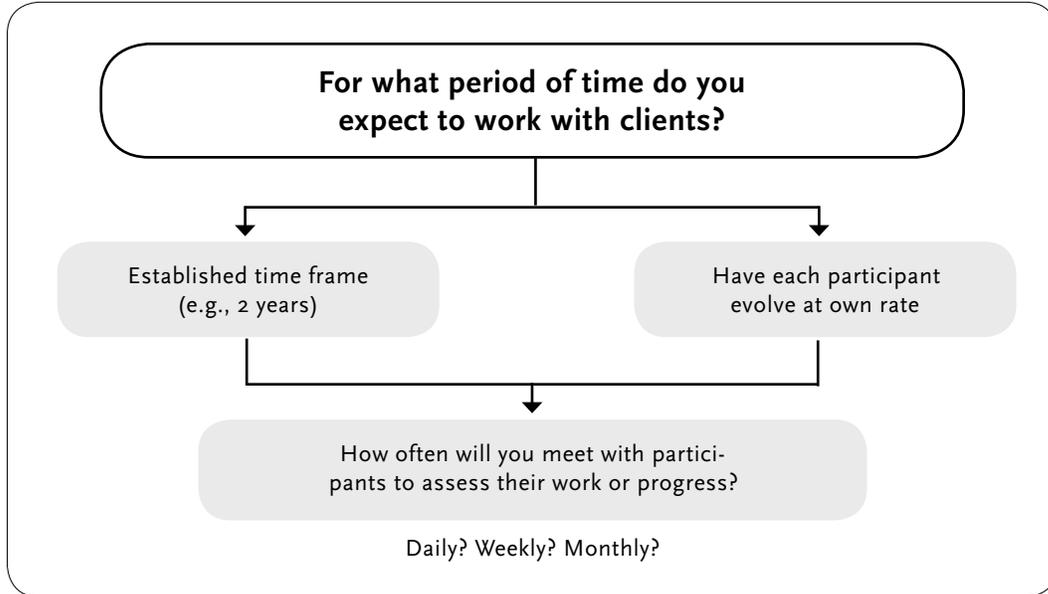
KEY DESIGN DECISIONS

Setting the terms of the incubator/client relationship

How formal a relationship will you have with the groups you incubate?

Will you require they sign a formal contract?	Will you expect each client to adhere to specific educational principles?	Do you expect each client to achieve a certain amount of progress or skill sets during incubation?

Will you require they sign a formal contract?

Yes — What is the time frame?

What are the negotiable/non-negotiable items?

No — What informal means will you use to make mutual expectations clear and enforceable?

Will you expect each client to adhere to specific educational principles?

Yes — How will you communicate those expectations to clients?

What are the consequences for failing to adhere to those principles?

No — How will you judge client progress re: education plans?

Do you expect each client to achieve a certain amount of progress or skill sets during incubation?

Yes — Will the incubator or the clients choose the necessary level ?

If determined by the incubator, what are the parameters that need to be met?

What are the consequences for failing to achieve those goals?

No — What informal means will you use to make mutual expectations clear and enforceable?

For what period of time do you expect to work with clients?

Established time frame
(e.g., 2 years)

Have each participant
evolve at own rate

How often will you meet with participants to assess their work or progress?

Daily? Weekly? Monthly?

School success and quality control

The success or failure of your clients will reflect on your organization. The extent to which that matters depends on a lot of things, including how closely you associate yourself with your clients and the schools they start and run, how closely they associate themselves with you, and on the politics of the community in which you and your client schools are operating.

Eric Premack, Co-Director of the CSDC says, "If a school blows up, you will be in the splatter zone." To get clients to take him seriously, Premack says he uses "guilt, fear, terror, and inspiration" in addition to formal leverage. He finds that anecdotes about successful schools are some of the best sources of inspiration, and the "shock value" of taking people through an all-day workshop can also be useful "because of the sheer number of things to think about."

Seriously consider how to best build quality control leverage into your partnership for two reasons: (1) because your organization's reputation will depend on the quality of the schools you incubate, and (2) because you almost certainly care whether your clients make progress in opening a school successfully.

You can do this in at least three ways:

- If you provide or control start-up funds for the client, you can withhold funds if they fail to uphold their commitments. The National Council for La Raza does this with school start-up groups they support.

- Build language into your contract identifying specific milestones at which one or both parties can decide to end the partnership and define financial and other terms for such dissolution of the partnership. The CSDC allows for such milestones. This way, they have the option to walk away from groups that are not performing, and can also use that leverage to keep groups on track.

- If you have a "brand" or name associated with your organization, you can consider making use of that name contingent on whatever factors you care about.
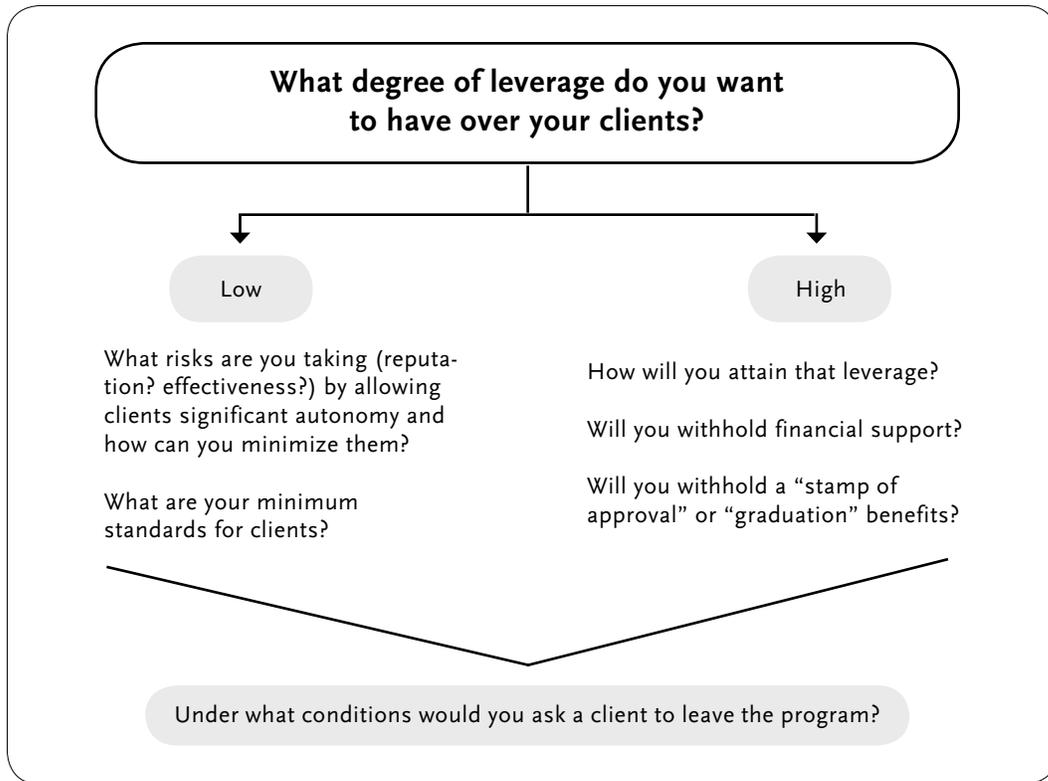
The process of incubation itself can also build in quality control "levers." You can establish firm criteria for graduation or completion of the program. You can use those requirements as a tool for tracking and encouraging client progress by communicating those requirements to clients early in the process and by regularly measuring progress toward those goals.[3] Quality control decisions are vital not only to your clients' success, but to your incubator's as well. The following decision tree should help you decide on the appropriate level of quality control for your organization.

3. See "Expected Results" section, p. 7, for specific guidance on establishing graduation outcomes.

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS
School success and quality control

> **What degree of leverage do you want to have over your clients?**

Low

What risks are you taking (reputation? effectiveness?) by allowing clients significant autonomy and how can you minimize them?

What are your minimum standards for clients?

High

How will you attain that leverage?

Will you withhold financial support?

Will you withhold a "stamp of approval" or "graduation" benefits?

Under what conditions would you ask a client to leave the program?

Assessing incubator progress and impact

Your definition of progress and your means for assessing it should flow directly from the incubator's mission and goals. At a minimum, any incubator that hopes to reduce early start-up problems should develop a list of early indicators of smooth start-up at the end of the first full year of operations. Such a list may look something like this:

At the end of their first year of operation, the schools we incubate will have:

- *Opened/stayed open*
- *Found/opened an appropriate facility*
- *Demonstrated community support or at least little or no community opposition*

- *Financial surplus/breakeven/loss*
- *Stayed out of trouble with regulators*
- *Secured a stable and competent staff and leadership*
- *Fully implemented a "sound educational program"*
- *Met enrollment/business plan targets*
- *Quality control systems in place*
- *Minimal enrollment turnover*

You should be able to quantify these early indicators of success through public records, newspaper reports, and a school's internal documents. But you may wish to go further by interviewing the school's authorizer, other government regulators, parents, and community members.

You might want a school with superior test scores after one year, but most incubators find that a well-functioning board and a clear instructional strategy that all staff understand and implement enthusiastically are more realistic early goals, and are good leading indicators.

Most incubators will have goals that go beyond minimizing early start-up problems, however. There are a variety of approaches to more complex and, ultimately, more meaningful incubator evaluation.

Myrrha Pammer explains how the Dayton Education Resource Center designed client assessments to inform incubator progress:

> *"From the start of each new partnership, we set up a process for measuring results on their part and on our part. In our first meeting, the school completes a needs assessment. This serves two functions: it creates a roadmap for getting them the help they most need, and it also creates a baseline we can later use to see how much they've learned from us."*

The Dayton incubator also asks clients to evaluate workshops and to fill out a satisfaction survey at the end of the contract. But although the incubator staff want to make sure their clients are happy with their services, Pammer says, "Our ultimate success is whether the kids attending schools we've worked
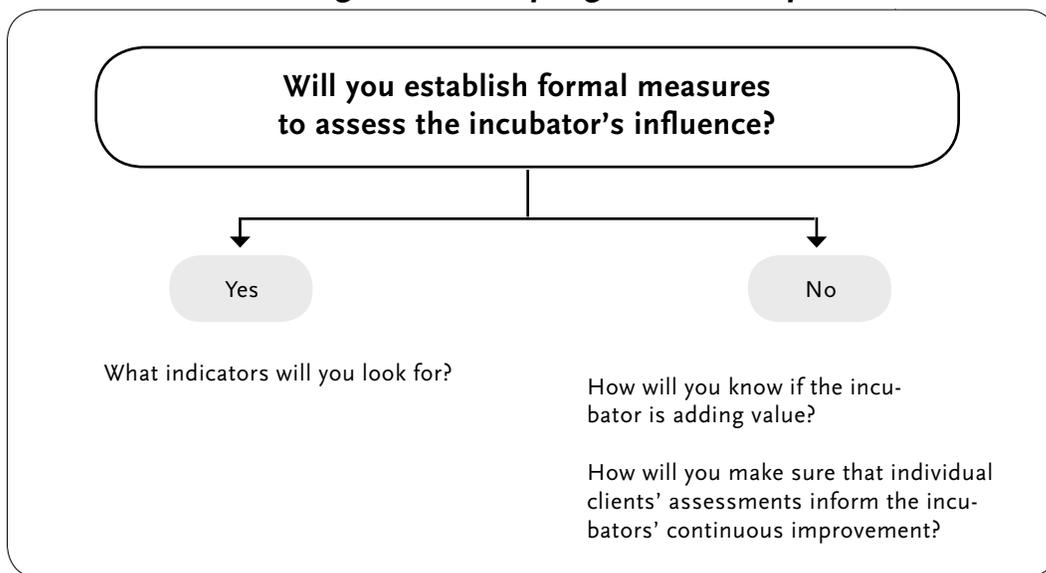
with are doing better than the kids in district schools." In two years of working with school developers and evaluating their progress, the Dayton incubator learned that they hadn't paid enough attention to helping schools with financial planning. They also saw the need to help school founders deal with legislative and regulatory changes that could affect them.

The Pioneer Institute measures its own success in simpler terms: by the number of charter schools they help get started. Originally, the program set a goal of having its fellows garner 66% of the charters issued by the Massachusetts State Department of Education. To date the fellowship has had a 71% average success rate. Similarly, SchoolStart judges its success by the number of contracts it obtains to help start schools and how many of those groups are then approved to start schools. Contract goals are established each year, and the organization hopes to have 25 partner schools open by 2005.

This section's decision tree is deceptively simple. Assessing influence is a complex process. The questions below are meant to help you begin to identify what your incubator expects in the way of impact.

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS
Assessing incubator progress and impact

**Will you establish formal measures
to assess the incubator's influence?**

Yes

No

What indicators will you look for?

How will you know if the incubator is adding value?

How will you make sure that individual clients' assessments inform the incubators' continuous improvement?

INCUBATOR ORGANIZATION

The previous sections described issues incubator developers should consider for managing relations with clients. This section's focus is on the organizational structure of the incubator itself.

Effective organizational decisions made at the start will allow incubator staff to focus more completely on the core functions of incubation. Look for strategic alliances with organizations providing similar services or offering expertise that you don't have on staff. The Dayton Education Resource Center partners with the Chamber of Commerce for business planning and diagnostic services.

For each service you plan to offer, consider whether you can think of ways to buy the expertise you know your clients will need but that you cannot currently provide. (The planning table in Appendix C has a column for this purpose.) Incubator operators recommend contracting heavily in order to keep your core staff small until you have funds and a track record to expand your staff expertise. If you plan to contract, consider working only with people and organizations that have earned your respect and trust, so that your clients can rely on the quality of your brokerage.

Consider how your staffing plan will keep pace with plans for expanding services to more schools. SchoolStart, which originated in Minnesota but plans to serve many other states, places high priority on hiring staff members with strong experience starting schools of their own and then bringing state teams together for regular training and planning.

Other practical considerations for incubators include decisions about the legal status of your organization, including corporate status and governance issues. These and other questions are outlined in the decision tree below. School and business incubators can be organized in a variety of ways. Just make sure you think through all of your options and have a good rationale for whatever you decide.

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS
Incubator organization

```
┌──────────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
│   Will you operate as a   │      │   Will you operate as an  │
│       for-profit or a     │      │ independent organization  │
│  non-profit organization? │      │   or part of another group? │
└──────────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────────┘
```

Will you have a
supervising board?

Yes   No

What will their role be? (Oversight?   Who will take responsibility
Engaged with incubator's opera-   for organized mission, strat-
tions? Voting rights? Advisory?)   egy, and accountability?

How will they be selected?

What will be the length of
their appointment?

Which services will you provide yourself and which will you provide
through contractors or partnerships with other organizations?

MARKETING AND FUNDING THE INCUBATOR

Decisions about how the incubator will prioritize its client base and market its services are closely tied to earlier decisions about goals and expectations. An incubator designed to focus on community and economic development will surely want a strict geographic focus. An incubator that aims to dramatically increase the number of schooling options will likely want to maximize enrollment and marketing. Marketing decisions also have practical funding implications and need to be considered as part of an overall financing strategy.

Other practical funding issues: Who will be in charge of acquiring funding? Who will work on new funding and maintaining grants? (Staff? Board members? Volunteers?) Decisions about funding are practical for the financial health of the incubator but also carry implications for the relationships the incubator has with its clients and the community. Heavy reliance on a particular source of private funding may influence how the incubator is perceived by potential school authorizers and clients. If you worry that people might peg your organization as having a certain bias or conflict of interest, it is probably best to pursue as much funding diversity as possible. Another important decision is whether to charge your clients. Some incubators choose to do this to build a revenue base. Charging a fee to clients also creates a capacity threshold: only those clients who are savvy enough to raise initial funding and serious enough to want to make an investment will apply, thus screening out clients who may be less likely to succeed. Existing incubators range from having heavy reliance on fees for a self-supporting organization (CSDC charges clients approximately $75,000 for its services) to relying heavily on foundation support.

The EdVisions Cooperative is an example of an organization that relies on various funding sources:

EdVisions provides its schools with a $150,000 start-up grant over three years and additional personal coaching services and resources valued at $50,000 to $100,000. Services to partner schools include "conversation day," teacher conferences, regular school visits, and telephone support. They also include summer workshops and workbooks that show project proposal forms, rubrics, and other printed materials.

The cooperative has ten member schools paying a fee of 2% of the annual gross pay and benefits of the schools' staff. In return, the cooperative provides payroll and benefits processing and access to various professional development activities.

EdVisions received a second-wave Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant of $5 million and continues to obtain contracts for professional development and technical assistance services. Two years ago, it won a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Charter Schools with the Center for School Change (CSC) to provide two Midwest "Charter Starter" workshops. EdVisions and CSC are applying jointly for another grant to expand the "Charter Starter" workshops nationally and to develop a workshop for charter school leaders.

SchoolStart currently relies on a mix of funding sources from local and national foundations and fees, but eventually plans to be a self-sustaining fee-based organization.

The decision tree below is designed to get you started thinking about the implications of your marketing efforts.

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS
Marketing and funding the incubator

How will you attract clients?	How many clients will you serve at a time?	How will the incubator be funded?
Media?	What is your maximum and minimum enrollment?	Grants and private donations?
Marketing?	Will you set regional limitations?	Fees from participants?
Word of mouth?		How much will you charge? When will you ask to be paid? (Before incubation? After the school is up and running?)

Incubator location and facilities

Facilities-related decisions will have major budget implications and should be considered carefully. Facilities-based incubators, which provide physical space for new organizations until they are ready to exist independently, are common in the business world, but may not be feasible or essential for school incubators. It may not be practical, for example, for a school to start in one area and then move 20 miles away, so a facilities-based incubator may only be practical in high-density areas.

Even if the incubator will only serve as a meeting place for clients, the "look and feel" of the facility is important. A dingy run-down office space is unlikely to inspire the energy and creativity that the Ernst and Young Accelerated Solutions space does, for example. If you want clients to act professionally and be successful, invest in facilities that send that message. This last decision tree asks questions regarding the type of office and related support that is right for your incubator and its "message."

KEY DESIGN DECISIONS
Incubator location and facilities

Will you provide physical office space for clients to operate for their first few years?

Yes

What type of accommodations will you provide?

Will you charge "rent?" How much?

No

Will you offer clients any help finding and acquiring facilities?

Will you provide administrative office support?

Yes

Support staff? Equipment? How much will you charge for this service?

No

Will you offer clients any help finding and attaining such services?

Conclusion

School incubators offer a potential contribution to meeting the challenge of quickly starting large numbers of effective new schools that is unique. More than simply offering general technical assistance, incubators funnel support to the most promising ideas and people during the critical start-up phase and tailor that support to their needs. More so than school design networks or management companies, incubators can support a broad array of effective school options in a community and offer support unique to local preferences and politics.

Combined with other approaches, incubation may help school reforms of all types realize their promise. Like any new initiative, however, the name alone will not guarantee success. Incubators will contribute to scale only when they make conscious decisions about their purpose, offerings, organizational structures, and measures of success.

The Center on Reinventing Public Education will continue to analyze and inform the development of school incubators and other promising ideas that deliver on the urgent need for creating excellent new learning opportunities for American children.

Appendices

Appendix A

Existing school incubator programs

Charter Schools Development Center - Incubator Project
The Charter Schools Development Center's incubator project provides a two-year training program for charter school planning teams. The CSDC's Incubator Project is an opportunity for promising charter school development teams to partner with some of the most experienced charter school experts in the state. The goal of the Project is to foster the development of educationally successful, organizationally sustainable schools by providing expert technical assistance in key aspects of charter school design, focusing on areas where the development teams are less experienced. For more information:

Eric Premack, Co-Director
Laurie Gardner, Co-Director
CSU Institute for Education Reform
California State University, Sacramento
6000 J Street, Room 327
Sacramento, CA 95819-6018
Tel: 916.278.6069
Fax: 916.278.4094
http://www.csus.edu/ier/charter/center.html

The Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) -
Small Schools Incubator
Founded in 1991, BayCES began incubating new and "conversion" schools in 2001 in response to the Oakland small schools movement and Oakland Unified School District policy. It provides training through workshops and meeting facilitation to design teams and conversion schools at all stages of development. BayCES also provides coaching services to schools in OUSD. For more information:

Elena Almazol
BayCES
1720 Broadway, Fourth Floor
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel: 510.208.0160
Fax: 510.208.1979
http://www.bayces.org

Accelerating Success

EdVisions Cooperative

The EdVisions Cooperative works to replicate the model developed at the Minnesota New Country School. This learning model is now being implemented in nine other small schools, including sites in St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Milwaukee. EdVisions Cooperative personnel work with planning groups to implement student-centered teaching strategies, management systems, and teacher preparation partnerships. Proposals for replication sites are accepted on a solicitation basis only. For more information:

Doug Thomas
EdVisions Cooperative
Box 518
Henderson, MN 56044
Tel: 507.248.3738
Fax: 507.248.3789
http://www.edvisions.com

Institute for the Transformation of
Learning - School Design and Development Center

ITL's School Design and Development Center (SDDC) has been working with Milwaukee's charter, sectarian, and nonsectarian schools since 1997. They provide workshops and technical support in the areas of education, business, legal compliance, and the transformation of learning. SDDC also offers programs to help new schools gain accreditation. For more information:

Robert Pavlick
School Design and Development Center
750 N 18th St.
Milwaukee, WI 53233
http://www.itl.mu.edu

Pioneer Institute - Building Excellent Schools Fellowship

Beginning in 2001, the Pioneer Institute's Building Excellent Schools program has enrolled ten fellows. Selected fellows receive rigorous training in developing the educational program, conducting community outreach, and building a non-profit organization. At the end of two years the fellows have developed their own charter school model and proposal. For more information:

Linda Brown, Executive Director
Building Excellent Schools
262 Washington Street, 7th Floor
Boston, MA 02108
Tel: 617.227.4545
Fax: 617.227.4551
http://www.buildingexcellentschools.org

APPENDIX B

A comparison of different approaches to increasing the supply of new schools

To help boost the number of new schools quickly and reduce the problems new school founders typically face, foundations and private investors are trying a variety of approaches, including charters school technical assistance organizations, school design networks, and for-profit or non-profit school management organizations. The most common strategies for new school "scale" are represented in the table below. In general, these efforts differ in two ways: (1) how specific they are in defining "good" schools ("theory of change"). The more "agnostic" programs are those that believe all schools need general support for efficient operations, good decision-making structures, and effective fiscal management. On the other end of this continuum are organizations that support the implementation of very specific school design networks, and (2) they also differ on the level of collaboration and commitment scale-oriented efforts demand from their partners ("intensity of relationship"). All of the scale efforts offer assistance to new schools; incubation is a subset of these efforts.

Common approaches to increasing the supply of effective schools[4]

	Agnostic operations support for scale	Broad idea of "good" school	School design networks
Assistance	Charter School Technical Assistance Centers	Coalition of Essential Schools	Catholic Schools
Loose partnership		BayCES Oakland School Incubator Project	EdVisions New School Venture Fund
Partnership	SchoolStart Venture Capital	Pioneer Institute Fellowship Program Charter School Development Center Incubator Program	Education Management Companies /Charter Management Companies (e.g., KIPP, Edison)

4. Information about the types of services these organizations provide can be found in Appendix A, p 35.
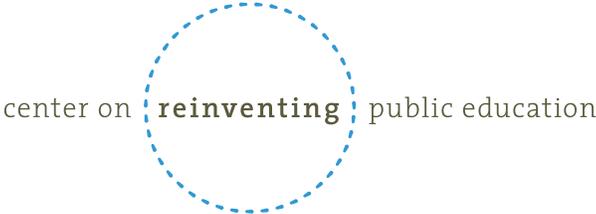
Appendix C

Planning sheet for designing program offerings		
Service needed by new schools	**Will incubator provide it?**	**If incubator won't provide it, who will?**
Pre-planning		
☐ Identify community need for new school		
☐ Build coherent leadership team		
☐ Develop a clear vision for school		
☐ Find a potential authorizer		
Planning		
☐ Draft basic business, operations, and educational plan		
☐ Draft full application		
☐ Recruit consultants		
☐ Establish decision-making processes		
☐ Gauge the market		
☐ Manage local politics		
☐ Negotiate with an authorizer		
Start-up		
☐ Hiring staff and maintaining school cohesion		
☐ Working with parents		
☐ Developing board and governance relations		
☐ Managing liability, insurance, and risk		
☐ Working with authorizer and resolving disputes		
Maintenance/growth		
☐ Running back office functions (payroll, budget reports, etc.)		
☐ Managing facilities		
☐ Reporting and accountability		
☐ Continuous improvement/quality control		
☐ Program expansion/ replication		

The Center on Reinventing Public Education at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington engages in research and analysis aimed at developing focused, effective, and accountable schools and the systems that support them. The Center, established in 1993, seeks to inform community leaders, policymakers, school and school system leaders, and research communities.

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