PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS:

Providing more children
access to great public schools

By Butch Trusty, Managing Partner

Education Cities™

Who We Are

Education Cities is a network of 31 city-based organizations in 25 cities united by one North Star goal: increasing the number of great public schools.

JUNE 2017

Acknowledgements

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Over the past several years, Education Cities has helped leaders in nearly a dozen cities develop "High-Quality Seats" (HQS) plans – a written set of strategies and tactics designed to accelerate the growth and improvement of great public schools. If fully realized, these plans hold the potential to help more than 200,000 children in low-income communities attend better public schools every year, in perpetuity – while leveraging one-time investments totaling $600 million in local and national philanthropy to impact approximately $2 billion in public dollars annually. [1]

These HQS plans are developed for local education "quarterback" organizations (like the members of the Education Cities network), which coordinate investment in the activities required to ensure the plan's success. Quarterback organizations sit outside the system, raise significant local and national philanthropy, and play a vital civic leadership role advancing activities in service of a "quality schools" agenda. We think quarterbacks are strongest when they use a non-profit, venture philanthropy model and develop and execute against a HQS plan as their key strategic framework. The most effective quarterback organizations marry visionary leadership and strategic clarity.

HQS plans are anchored in a time-bound goal for how many new or improved school seats the plan – through quarterback and local coalition leadership – will seek to achieve. These goals are usually set after having undertaken an extensive ecosystem analysis of the city and it's various school operators. However, a HQS plan is not just about investments in schools; we believe that there are many interdependencies in the effort to support quality school growth. For example, HQS plans use a model for how to achieve the seat growth that includes investments in multiple seat-creation pathways, teacher and school leader talent programs, policy and advocacy activities, and community engagement vehicles.

To arrive at a total plan cost, we map out all of these activities, tie them to a general scope and sequence of investments based on ecosystem conditions, and then estimate the cost of all of these activities. The result is an average, all-in, per-seat-created cost to actualize the modeled seat growth goal.

Most city education and philanthropic leaders understand the interdependencies between schools, talent, policy, and community engagement. But few leaders have deeply thought about the multiple pathways to seat creation.

The purpose of this paper is to help city leaders identify and better understand these pathways, their relative advantages and disadvantages, and the benefits associated with hedging against too much emphasis on any one pathway (a common problem across cities).

While each HQS plan needs to be customized to fit unique city contexts and ecosystem conditions, we think there is value in a broader understanding of seat creation pathways, as that understanding could inspire more city leaders to pursue robust HQS plans. And that, in turn, could lead to significantly more and better school options for children and families across the country.

Regards,
Ethan Gray
Founder and CEO
Education Cities

INTRODUCTION

The core of almost any local education quarterback's strategy is the rapid growth of high-quality school options for their city's students. Quarterback organizations, however, must decide on the most efficient and sustainable pathways to realize their school creation and growth goals.

The basic pathways pursued by most cities include:
1. Replication - Existing high-quality district schools and charter school networks in the city open new campuses
2. Recruitment - Existing high-quality charter school networks currently operating in other cities are recruited to open new campuses in the quarterback's city
3. Incubation - New schools are launched by high-potential leaders

The pathways on which the quarterback and their city choose to focus depends on the particular context and reality of each city. For example, a city that currently has several high-performing charter school networks might choose to focus on getting those operators to expand. This strategy would be perceived as less risky and may be quicker than other options.

WHY A PAPER ON SEAT CREATION PATHWAYS?

We encounter many cities that have focused on too small a set of pathways to accelerate the growth of quality schooling options for children and families. The obvious strategies of replicating existing quality schools or recruiting successful external operators hold limited potential for scale and are often not viable options for earlier-stage reform ecosystems or cities with weak school quality policy conditions and/or a small philanthropic base. City leaders should choose from a wider variety of seat creation pathways to maximize the growth of quality options for children and families.

In many cities, the above three pathways are the only ones considered, and some cities pursue only one. Increasingly, cities have either maxed out the potential of their chosen pathway(s) or face new resource constraints and increased political opposition that limit the projected future pace of change.

Through this paper, we hope to encourage cities and local education quarterbacks to think more creatively and expansively about seat creation pathways, in part, by defining their success not as the number of seats created but as the number of students who are able to attend a high-quality school.

After a quick recap of the common seat pathways described above, we are going to focus on three additional pathways and suggest some policy and ecosystem conditions that will need to be addressed for most cities to capitalize on this opportunity. The three additional pathways are:

4. Scaling - Existing high-quality schools add more seats or grades
5. Turnarounds - Struggling schools are restarted under a new operator or a proven leadership team
6. Enrollment maximization - Intentional strategies to ensure that families enroll their child in the highest quality options available

High-Quality Seat Creation Pathways: The current state

At Education Cities, our focus is on improving the educational outcomes for students from low-income families in urban areas. The key interim metric that we track across our network, on the way to that ultimate goal, is the increase in the number of students that attend a "high-quality" school. Unintentionally, often this metric is shorthanded as the number of high-quality school seats created. This shorthand may leave the impression that the only way to get more students into high-quality schools is by creating new schools, often charter schools. Rather, the goal is to build a local public education system that is able to permanently and perpetually shift the quality of the system (by replacing low-quality school seats with higher-quality options). Cities and philanthropist satisfied with only charter school growth strategies, where charter school "market share" is the measure of success - are missing a larger opportunity.

A NOTE ON QUALITY

Education Cities has a very specific definition of high-quality when it comes to schools. We consider schools high-quality when they prepare all students for success in college, career, and life. In particular, we measure this quality threshold by looking at how well a school serves its population of students who come from families identified with a low socioeconomic status.

Recently, Education Cities partnered with GreatSchools to release the Education Equality Index (EEI), which identifies schools and cities where students from low-income families are achieving at or above the level of their more advantaged peers. While not a comprehensive measure of school quality, the EEI "can be used as a starting point for conversations, to make connections across work that is happening in cities around the country, and to celebrate schools and systems making the most progress."[2] For more on how we think about school performance, additional data and commentary can be found on the Education Equality Index website.

For many of our network members, quality is determined by local or state school accountability systems. This means that quality is often synonymous with performance on a set of measurable academic metrics and state standardized tests. We recognize that this definition of quality can be perceived as narrow and may not take into account other aspects of school quality that are important to families, in particular social and emotional development or school culture. We and our members are open to that debate. However, core to our beliefs are the following:

- A high-quality education system requires a high-level of accountability with clear rewards for success and consequences for failure
- This accountability system should focus on results, including both proficiency and growth
- Data on school performance and quality should be transparent and provided to families in a user-friendly formats to facilitate the exercising of their choices
- System resources should be focused on the expansion of access to high-quality options rather than perpetuating low-quality schools

Under this scenario, the most common pathways for high-quality seat creation are:

- Replication - Existing high-quality district schools and charter school networks in the city open new campuses

- Recruitment - Existing high-quality charter school networks currently operating in other cities are recruited to open new campuses in the quarterback's city

- Incubation - New schools are started launched by high-potential leaders

These are the typical core quality schools investments made by local education quarterbacks. However, while these pathways are well-established and often low-risk, they are not always available to cities. Increasingly, even in cities where they have been pursued, with changes in local politics and limited resources, these pathways are often no longer sufficient. These common pathways require access to facilities, an influx of teaching and leadership talent, and, usually, significant philanthropic support during the school startup phase. They also usually result in schools that operate outside of the local school district and/or local teachers unions. While that is not inherently a problem, these dynamics create many political battles that slow the progress for the students and families we all seek to serve.

While we believe that every city needs to have these common pathways as part of their high-quality seats plans, there are also other pathways that should be considered to round out the local seat creation strategy. These other pathways focus less on creating "new" schools and more on creating space for more students to attend a high-quality school. These alternative pathways are:

- Scaling - Existing high-quality schools add more seats or grades

- Turnarounds - Struggling schools are restarted under a new operator or a proven leadership team

- Enrollment maximization - Intentional strategies to ensure that families enroll their child in the highest quality options available

WHAT IS A HIGH-QUALITY SEATS PLAN?

A high-quality seats plan is document that local education quarterbacks develop to guide their work in cities to rapidly create high-quality school seats over a defined period of time. These plans not only establish a high-quality school seats goal, but they also detail the strategies and tactics, across four strategic levers (quality schools, effective educators, supportive policy, engaged stakeholders) that will be employed to achieve that goal. Quarterbacks need these comprehensive plans because a goal without aligned strategies is just hope and strategies without a realistic, but ambitious, goal limit accountability.

While high-quality seats plans can be used for fundraising, external communications, and to inform organizational develop decisions, these plans are not business plans. While high-quality seats plans can be used for fundraising, external communications, and to inform organizational decisions, these plans are not business plans. In general, these plans focus on the ecosystem-building investments of the quarterback's work; though, some quarterbacks may choose to discuss their investments in school facilities or their internal operations.

PATHWAY #1: REPLICATION

Replication is a process by which the operators of an existing school are authorized to open one or more additional campuses that will be governed by the same operator and use the same school model. This is a very common pathway in places that would like to expand the presence of charter schools. It is also a popular strategy among operators to facilitate their network growth.

Ideally, replication is restricted only to operators that have proven their ability to achieve results for kids. As such, it is often thought of as the fastest and lowest-risk pathway for quality seat growth. In fact, in many cities and states, because of its promise, the replication pathway is often treated differently by charter school authorizers. For example, Arizona has a separate, streamlined process for existing schools that are replicating and Illinois previously allowed a "replicating charter" designation that exempted some schools from that state's charter school cap.[3]

When local education quarterbacks are developing their high-quality seats plans, they often begin with an assessment of how many seats might come from replicating operators and think of them as the most likely to succeed at reaching the high-quality level. Replication does face three important barriers to its success as a pathway:

1. Existing supply of high-quality school operators that want to grow. Replication is only a fruitful strategy in cities where there are already successful school operators. Also, those operators need to want to grow. Even in cities where there are existing high-quality schools, local education quarterbacks and authorizers may find that these operators are not interested in operating more campuses.

2. Local preferences for school model diversity. While replicating successful school models makes sense from an overall school quality perspective, cities have to be careful that they have sufficient diversity of school models to allow families to exercise real choice and to ensure that the wide variety of learners can find the school that works best for them.

3. Ability for operators to manage additional organizational complexity as they grow. Part of the success of many schools and operators comes from the school-level autonomy that they enjoy, which allows educators closest to students and families to make decisions about how best to serve their community. As operators grow, they have to strike the right balance between building an effective central support office and not centralizing too much that they mimic unwieldy district bureaucracies.

While replication is most common in the charter sector, theoretically, school districts can replicate their direct-run schools. Under this scenario, a high-performing school leader would be allowed to assume management of an additional campus that would adopt the same academic program and management structure as the leader's "home" campus.

PATHWAY #2: RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is the pathway that cities use to incentivize successful school operators to engage in geographic expansion. To be successful with this pathway, local education quarterbacks and their cities have to identify high-performing school operators and provide them with the support they need to enter a new market.

Often operators would require facilities, startup support, and, sometimes, guarantees of a minimum network footprint before agreeing to be recruited to a new cities. As a result, many cities have the desire to recruit existing operators, as this pathway is relatively low-risk; however, recruitment is more difficult than it may seem. Specifically, recruitment, as a pathway often encounters two hurdles:

1. Intensive resource needs. While recruitment is often low-risk for the recruiting city, operators may perceive it as very risky to their current operations. Entering a new city distracts management, may redirect valued staff, and requires compliance with often very different regulatory regimes. As a result, before committing, operators will often submit term sheets that request guarantees of facility access or support, philanthropic support for startup operations, and guarantees that the operator will be able to serve a minimum number of students or communities to make their business model efficient. These requests are often too significant for most cities to meet in any large scale way.

2. Transferability of experience. Some otherwise successful operators have found that their experience serving a particular community or city does not always transfer to a new geography. Differences in student demographics, state standards, and accountability systems matter and can impair the ability of operators to replicate their success. The bad experiences of some operators across the history of the charter school movement have impacted the popularity of this pathway among operators and cities and local education quarterbacks.

In addition to those clear hurdles, the reality is that there are few true "national" high-quality school operators and many cities chasing them. It can be a very competitive endeavor, and it is more likely than not that a city will find itself on the losing end, perhaps after a multi-year courtship.

Tipsheet: When working on high-quality seats plans, it is best to reserve the recruitment pathway for the (hopefully) relatively small amount of seats that remain to meet the citywide strategy goals after all other pathways have been maximized.

PATHWAY #3: INCUBATION

In many cities, incubation is probably the most familiar pathway. This pathway is used to support high-potential leaders and entrepreneurs as they launch new schools and school networks.

This pathway is familiar to many because the nature of the charter school movement, in most cities and states, has been individuals or individual teams designing and launching their own new schools. Recruitment and replication are slightly more recent phenomena (and still not common in many places) as research has shown that single-site schools may have a difficult time achieving quality or operational efficiencies.[4]

The incubation pathway can be the riskiest of the three standard pathways. Often the schools arising from this pathway are operated by first-time leaders and are implementing new school designs. While we are including any new school that is not a replication or recruited operator in this pathway, the incubation pathway can include actual incubator supports that are designed to increase the likelihood of success of these schools. Some cities and states have created their own school incubators (e.g., The Mind Trust Charter School Incubator, Tennessee Charter School Center, New Schools for Phoenix Fellowship, etc.); other cities have partnered with organizations such as Building Excellent Schools (BES) to source new leaders.

The main barrier in the incubation pathway is access to leaders. In many cities, high-potential leaders already work for high-quality operators and may not be interested in

launching their own schools. In addition to desire, leaders have to put forward schools that can make it through, often, rigorous school authorization processes. As a result, the most successful leaders may require up to two years to develop their school models and make it through the startup phase. Unless philanthropy (or an incubator fellowship such as BES) is available, this process is a significant financial investment for educators.

Despite the risks and its limitations, incubation is often the largest source of seats in high-quality seats plans. Many cities do not have the option of replication, because of ecosystem maturity, and recruitment is too difficult.

Tipsheet: High-quality seats plans should assign estimated "success rates" to each pathway. These rates attempt to quantify the assumed risk involved and ensure that enough philanthropy is raised to overinvest in schools to yield the desired number of quality seats at the end of the plan.

High-Quality Seat Creation Pathways: New options for cities

Of the cities and quarterbacks we have worked with, the above three pathways are the most common. However, as mentioned, these pathways are often not sufficient for cities to reach their citywide quality seat growth goals. The pathways above require significant philanthropy, are difficult to execute or contain significant implementation risk, and increasingly face political and community headwinds - in part, because they are most commonly available only to charter school operators. Therefore, there are at least three other promising pathways that cities should employ.

PATHWAY #4: TURNAROUND

School turnarounds are not new. However, many local education quarterbacks have shied away from a focus on turnaround because of mixed research results on various methods of implementation to date. For our purposes, we are very specifically defining turnarounds as giving an existing low-quality school to a proven turnaround operator or leader to run - essentially a whole-school restart. We are not including efforts that only employ new curriculum or some staffing changes.

The promise of turnarounds is that a city can get more high-quality seats with minimal disruption to students and families. Often turnarounds require the new operator to continue to serve the existing student population and/or attendance zone. For operators, turnarounds are appealing because the school comes with a facility and a base enrollment that helps with budgeting and operational planning. Turnarounds can also be appealing for cities that have an oversupply of low-quality school seats that cannot be replaced due to political or utilization constraints.

Unfortunately, both nationally and definitely within most cities, there is not a critical mass of turnaround operators or educators. Not every successful operator or high-performing school leader is equipped for the difficult task of restarting low-performing schools. Moreover, many cities do not have an established and

predictable mechanism for regularly transitioning schools into turnarounds. In addition, school districts sometimes prefer other school improvement strategies that do not meet the investment standards for the local education quarterback's venture philanthropy. These dynamics mean that turnaround options are explored but marginalized.

There are a few examples of successful large scale turnaround efforts and operators in cities:

- In Philadelphia, PA, and Camden, NJ, Mastery Schools has built a charter school network focused on restarting existing schools, those both previously operated by the school districts and those previously operated by other charter networks. Mastery has been in operation for over 15 years and serves over 13,000 students across 24 schools. Mastery reports that, after at least two years of its turnarounds, reading and math proficiency rates more than double. The network also boasts that 98 percent of its seniors are accepted into college.[5]
- In Chicago, IL, Chicago Public Schools has bet heavily on the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), which manages 31 schools that serve over 17,000 students. In 2016, 94 percent of AUSL-managed schools received a Level 2 rating or higher (68 percent were rated Level 1) under the local district's accountability system. [6]

We believe that there are a few basic parameters that need to be in place for turnarounds to be a fruitful pathway for cities. First, the turnaround operator or leadership team needs to have guaranteed autonomies, ideally in the form of an explicit performance contract. These autonomies include the ability of the new operator to make decisions over budget, staffing, and academic programs. Second, the city needs an accountability system that recognizes the uniqueness of the difficult work of turnarounds. Turnaround providers should be held to ambitious but achievable metrics that initially emphasize growth and changes in school culture and parental engagement. Third, there should be a formal, regular, and transparent process that identifies schools that are eligible for turnaround. Because restarting a whole school is so difficult, operators need enough time and visibility into the future to be able to plan and build capacity. Lastly, because turnarounds almost always will involve the departure of beloved school leaders and teachers, the city needs to invest heavily in community engagement processes that ensure families are informed about the need for change and empower them to help choose which operator is granted control over the existing school.

PATHWAY #5: SCALING

Scaling is probably the pathways that is least common as a pillar of local education quarterbacks' high-quality seats plans. This pathway can be thought of as a variation of the replication pathway. For our purposes, we are defining scaling as a process by which an existing high-quality school adds seats to serve additional students and/or grade levels.

In many ways, this pathway should be an obvious way to increase students' access to a high-quality school. However, in addition to being constrained by space, we find that this outside-the-box thinking is not an ingrained part of school system management. Some charter schools have pursued this pathway to growth, but districts rarely use it for its own schools. Schools are often established to serve a specific grade configuration and enrollment size and pattern. Changes to these foundational decisions are not second nature and may be subject to elaborate bureaucratic approvals.

Our member in Philadelphia, PA, the Philadelphia School Partnership (PSP), may offer the most instructive examples. For example:

- After Samuel Powel Elementary was named as one of the top ten schools in all of Pennsylvania for black student achievement by PennCAN, the school received a grant from PSP to add a middle school to its existing K-4 elementary school. The grant allowed the school to expand enrollment in its existing grades, add a fifth grade, and to partner with Drexel University and Science Leadership Academy, a local magnet high school school, to design a new middle school. The expansion allowed up to 500 additional Philadelphia students to access a high-quality school seat and created a feeder pattern to ensure that families would be able to access a high-quality school from kindergarten through eighth grade.
- PSP has made similar investments in the Boys' Latin of Philadelphia Charter School, Freire Charter Schools and Hill Freedman World Academy. The latter school is a Blue Ribbon, district-operated school that serves a majority free and reduced lunch student body and is ~98 percent African American. PSP's investment helped the school expand to serve students from middle school to 12th grade.

Scaling is likely to be most successful where the existing school model and success is not dependent on the current enrollment size or grades served. Schools expanding through this pathway require a solid leadership team and an academic model grounded in sound pedagogical values and practices. Scaling can also be an effective way for the system to meet the needs and demands of families and communities. Parents are often seeking a "feeder pattern" that gives them confidence that their child will receive a high-quality education for as many grades as possible from educators who are able to get to know them over a period of time. Of course, it is advisable that schools are encouraged to scale to serve additional students that look like the students with which it has already had success. For example, scaling is a reward or pathway for schools that have shown their ability to educate students from low-income families, rather than a way to ask schools serving higher income families to learn how to serve more impoverished communities.

PATHWAY #6: ENROLLMENT MAXIMIZATION

The final pathway is, perhaps, the most obvious way to get more students into a high-quality school, but it is not a pathway that we see often in quarterback or district strategic plans. Enrollment maximization is a pathway to ensure that existing high-quality schools are fully enrolled and have higher utilization rates than lower-quality schools.

This pathway could be particularly useful for local districts who have more ability to assign students, redefine neighborhood boundaries, and provide transportation. However, even within the charter sector, there are strategic activities that authorizers and advocates can do to encourage families to enroll their children in the highest-quality options available.

There are a variety of ways that this pathway might play out in cities:
- When Eric Gordon assumed leadership of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District he raised a concern about the number of available slots at some of the district's top-performing schools. The district set a goal to more actively encourage families to apply to and enroll in high-quality schools for which their children might have the qualifications. The district also considered revamping how the online system that families use to choose schools works or even automatically enrolling students in high-quality options based on their prior achievement.[7]

- The Washington, D.C., Public Charter School Board publishes a list of its Tier 1 schools that have available seats as a way of gently encouraging families to fill those schools before applying to other options.

Enrollment maximization, while obvious, is tricky given our general bias toward more choices for families. We, and our quarterback members, are also sensitive to families' desires to be able to attend neighborhood schools. This pathway would require operators to receive incentives to recruit citywide, the city to provide adequate transportation, and the removal of existing attendance boundaries. It is also helpful for the city to actively manage its school portfolio so that as low-quality schools become under-enrolled and/or underperform, they are consolidated into or replaced by higher-quality school options.

For example, in Georgia, Atlanta Public Schools announced in 2016 that Carver Early College would absorb Carver School of Technology; thereby, increasing the enrollment of the higher-quality school and removing a low-quality option from the city's portfolio.[8]

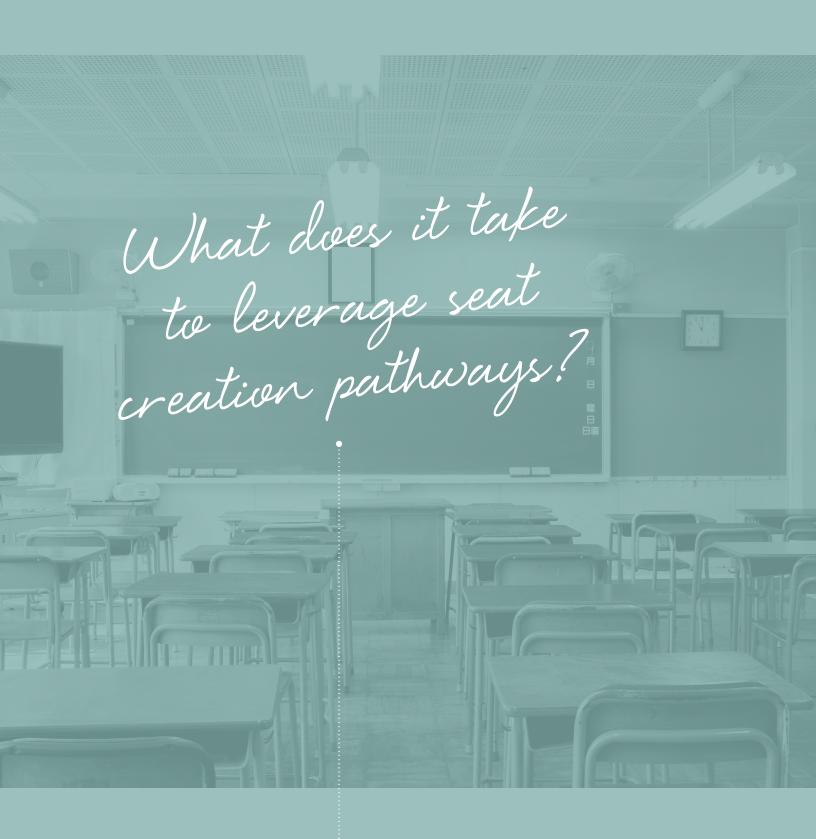## USING 'INNOVATION ZONES' TO SUPPORT SEAT CREATION PATHWAYS

The pathways that we discuss in this paper are surely not the only ways that cities can create more high-quality seats (or increase students' access to high-quality school options). However, we believe that these six are a) the three most common pathways currently used by cities and b) three of the most underutilized, but highest-potential pathways that cities and their local education quarterback partners might pursue. The key shift in thinking is beyond merely new school creation, toward a portfolio that constantly shifts enrollment from low-quality schools to higher-quality schools. Answering the question - are more students able to access a high-quality school today than were able to do so yesterday?

As we have argued previously, the evidence that we see from around the country demonstrates that, more often than not, the highest-quality schools, district and charter, operate under high levels of autonomy and accountability. The easiest way to achieve these levels of autonomy and accountability may be through traditional charter authorization processes. However, some cities - Indianapolis, Denver, Springfield, MA, among others - are creating additional governance models, commonly called "Innovation Zones," to achieve the same results without relying on pure charter school authorization mechanisms.

Innovation zones can include clusters of schools that are technically still part of the school district LEA but are granted more autonomy and accountability than traditional district school have historically been granted. These schools have explicit performance contracts that shift resources and autonomy to the school level.

For the purposes of this paper, innovation zones are important because the zones can create new mechanisms for schools to be created or turned around, scaled, and/or replicated, all while maintaining local control and keeping decisions within the hands of the community, via local elections. We do not consider innovation zones to be a pathways, per se; they are a school governance innovation that facilitates a city's move toward a "portfolio" approach to offer a variety of school models and operators. In their best form, innovation zones help ensure that seat creation pathways can exist in a way that:

- Ensures that more resources are controlled at the school level;
- Empowers school-level educators to make the best decisions for the school and its students and families;
- Encourages the development of a more diverse set of (innovative) school models; and
- Shields high-performing schools from radical shifts in local politics or leadership.

What does it take to leverage seat creation pathways?

Each of the six seat creation pathways that we discuss above have very specific implementation needs and ecosystem conditions required for their success. However, based on our experience working with over 30 local education quarterback organizations in over 25 cities, four basic system elements make all six pathways more likely to succeed.

COMMON ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

A common accountability system is the basic notion that a local public education system focused on quality schools growth needs to hold all schools, district and charter, accountable to the same performance expectations with the same explicit rewards and consequences. Many cities, such as Indianapolis, IN, and Chicago, IL, have implemented nearly common accountability systems. Given the existing differences in how district and charter schools are authorized and governed, in these places schools are held to similar expectations, but the rewards and consequences are still differentiated.

In addition to common performance measurement and accountability, cities should also report this data to families is a clear, transparent, and easy-to-understand way so that families can use this data to make better decisions about where to enroll their child. Louisiana's A-F grades and the color-coded ratings in Denver, CO are great examples of this family-friendly reporting.

UNIFIED ENROLLMENT

A unified enrollment platform provides a city with a way to help families navigate the plethora of choices that a quality schools ecosystem, and the leveraging of multiple pathways, is likely to produce. Many of the highest-performing portfolio systems - for example, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans, LA - have had success with unified enrollment systems and other cities, such as Indianapolis, IN, have announced plans to implement their own systems.

A well-functioning unified enrollment system provides families with an easier way to navigate high-choice systems by providing a one-stop enrollment platform and common application. Families are usually able to use school performance, and other, data to rank their preferences of schools. The school that their child will attend is, then, automatically assigned based on these preferences, available capacity, and neighborhood boundaries, among other factors. Aside from the functional value of unified enrollment platforms, these systems also provide school system leaders and operators with a trove of information about which school models are most popular and which neighborhoods, perhaps, are underserved. In addition to efficiency for families, unified enrollment helps the system make better decisions about which schools to replicate, recruit, incubate, scale, and maximize and, perhaps, where to locate them.

RESOURCE EQUITY

Successful use of the six pathways discussed in this paper, and, in general, the presence of a high-choice, high-accountability system will result in a shifting of enrollment between schools. Each diverse set of school models will also have their own resource needs. To manage this diversification and complexity, cities will need to ensure that resources are allocated equitably and efficiently. Unfortunately, recent research shows that in many cities, resources remain inequitable between district and charter schools.[9] Charters still have difficulty accessing facilities, and that not enough cities use full student-based budgeting to allow resources to follow students.

We recommend three basic guiding principles for resource allocation:
1. Equalize per-pupil funding levels across district- and charter-operated schools
2. Implement a weighted student-based budgeting approach that allows full per-pupil funding to follow students as their families choose the best schools for them
3. Provide free access to public school facilities based on school quality, performance, and community demand.

These are major changes in how public resources are currently allocated, and most cities will not get there overnight, if at all. However, we believe that these principles can serve as guiding lights as decisions are being made and interim reforms are pursued.

LOCAL EDUCATION QUARTERBACKS

About 25 cities currently have a local education quarterback organization. These organizations are typically organized as nonprofit venture philanthropies and raise and align significant resources to support the growth of high-quality schools. Quarterbacks also usually have the resources, connections, and capacity to lead local efforts to identify high-quality, proven leaders and operators that can provide the pipeline of schools that feed into each of these pathways. The value of quarterbacks is that they have long-term, citywide strategic clarity and civic leadership that elevates above the individual needs of any one school, cuts across political dynamics, and outlasts system leadership transitions.

The most effective quarterbacks have a formal high-quality seats plan that:
- Articulates a specific time-bound high-quality seat growth goal and the likely creation pathways and quality distribution for those new seats
- Details strategies for building the city's capacity across four ecosystem levers – quality schools, effective educators, supportive policy, and engaged stakeholders
- Measures the change in the supply of quality seats or schools with an explicit focus on closing achievement gaps for low-income students
- Can be used to raise local and national philanthropy and communicate a strategy to stakeholders

The most effective quarterbacks build the credibility and capacity to lead the implementation of the high-quality seats plan. This includes:
- Being seen as the leading local voice for education reform by a broad cross-section of local stakeholders
- Building and managing a local coalition in support of a quality school agenda and strategy
- Having the staff and board it needs to build local legitimacy and fulfill its mission and strategy
- Raising sufficient resources to execute against the high-quality seats plan

The most effective quarterbacks simultaneously employ a range of strategies across four strategic levers to:
- Invest in multiple pathways to create more high-quality seats and turnaround or replace existing low-quality schools
- Develop a citywide talent strategy to meet the needs of high-quality schools and the broader education ecosystem
- Actively work to create stronger policy conditions to support the growth of high-quality schools
- Invest in the empowerment of families and communities to elevate them as partners in education system decisionmaking.

CONCLUSION: CONTINUING A CONVERSATION

Our goal with this short paper was to describe a set of pathways that cities could pursue to increase the number of students that are able to attend a high-quality school of their choice. There is no "right" answer or "best" pathway to pursue. Rather, a combination of all six is likely what most cities will need.

Our hope is that it spurs a series of conversations locally about which of these pathways would be most fruitful in your city and what it might take to implement them. Much of this work is still very nascent, so Education Cities and others look forward to monitoring progress, capturing lessons learned, and assisting cities improve the effectiveness of the strategies.

We are encouraged that, at least among the cities in the Education Cities network, local systems are moving beyond measuring the number of new schools or charter market share as the sole metrics of success in favor of metrics that focus on the number of students that are attending high-quality schools. Success, for these cities, is the year-over-year increase in the number of high-quality school seats accessible to students. This orientation allows for a broader set of high-quality seat creation pathways to enter the conversation.

We are also encouraged as cities move beyond the charter-district divide toward implementing citywide strategies to increase the number of high-quality schools seats. Such citywide approaches allow cities to focus on establishing the conditions that allow high-quality schools to thrive, primarily high levels of autonomy and accountability, and implementing the policies to support those conditions.

Effective leveraging of these six pathways, we believe, has the potential to rapidly and dramatically increase the number of high-quality school seats in cities and to transform most cities into true portfolios of schools, where families have significant choice among many great options for their children.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Public spending totals represent the estimated budgets of the corresponding local school districts.

[2] Luke Dauter and Samantha Olivieri, "Education Equality Index: Measuring the Performance of Students from Low-Income Families in Schools and Cities Across the Country," (Oakland: GreatSchools and Education Cities, 2017), 5.

[3]Arizona State Board for Charter Schools: https://asbcs.az.gov/applicant-resources/replication (accessed June 2017); Illinois Network of Charter Schools website: https://www.incschools.org/take-action/our-issues/ (accessed June 2017)

[4]James L. Woodsworth, et al, "Charter Management Organizations 2017," (Stanford, CA: Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2017).

[5] Mastery Schools website: http://www.masterycharter.org/approach/academic-program/ (Accessed June 2017)

[6] AUSL website: http://auslchicago.org/ (Accessed June 2017)

[7] Patrick O'Donnell, "Cleveland school district seeks to fill seats at best-performing schools," The Plain Dealer, 2/14/2012, http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2012/02/cleveland_school_district_seek_1.html (Accessed June 2017).

[8] Molly Bloom, "Will the gamble to improve one of Atlanta's worst schools pay off?" The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 1.24.2016, http://www.myajc.com/news/local-education/will-the-gamble-improve-one-atlanta-worst-schools-pay-off/NIxeuqzRACZKjyHLaybzuN (Accessed June 2017).

[9] Meagan Batdorff, et al, "Charter School Funding: Inequity Expands," (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas: 2014).

Education Cities™

A NETWORK OF LEADERS
FOR GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

WWW.EDUCATIONCITIES.ORG