

# Scale: The Missing Ingredient in School Reform

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Since 1998, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform has been supporting the efforts of school districts, reform support organizations, adult and youth organizing groups, unions, and, more recently, state agencies and government to improve conditions and outcomes in urban schools. Early on, our work demonstrated the need to create smart districts by transforming conventional districts or creating alternatives that provide schools with needed support and timely intervention, the power and resources to make good decisions, and the information needed to strengthen accountability and engender improvement.

Urban districts that have incorporated these changes, such as Boston, Chattanooga–Hamilton County, Long Beach, and Aldine, to name a few, have raised student achievement and narrowed performance gaps in an increasing number of schools. Yet, each of these systems realizes that more needs to be done to help the vast majority of students meet the standards presented in the new Common Core. School district and community leaders in these cities also realize that future progress for children and youth depends on strengthening supports for learning and development in schools and aligning them with those provided by families and communities after the school day and year end.

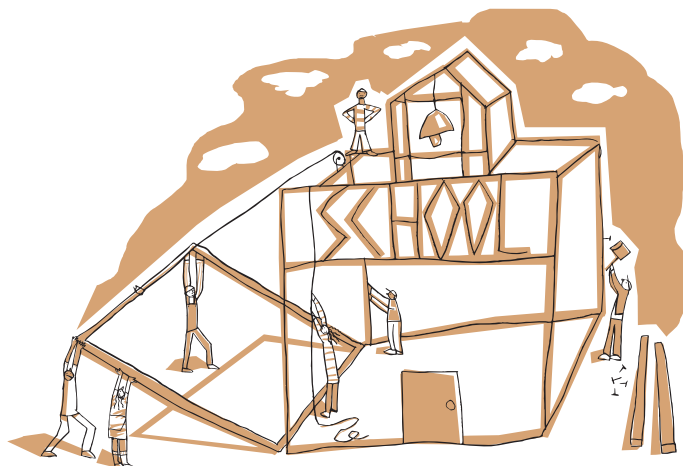
To accomplish this, school districts must operate systematically within a larger network of organizations that we at the Annenberg Institute call a *smart education system* – a citywide platform that creates, aligns, and sustains services provided by schools, city agencies, community organizations, cultural institutions, and

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businesses to promote high-quality student learning and development wherever it occurs. We posit that these systems would:

- maintain multiple and substantial cross-sector partnerships to provide a broad range of services to young people and their families, depending on their needs;
- aim to achieve a broad set of positive outcomes for students and their families and communities – including but not limited to academic achievement – and gather evidence of progress;
- put students, families, and communities at the center of the work;
- share accountability across the system;
- have strategies for managing power differentials, for example by creating meaningful roles for all stakeholders and shifting partner relations away from the standard grassroots-grasstops tensions; and
- have a systematic approach for bringing the work to scale.

We have published *VUE* issues and articles that highlight some of these aspects of smart education systems, like the seminal efforts led by the Harlem’s Children Zone, Manchester Bidwell Corporation, Community Schools, and Tower Hamlets in London. But none have focused on the last bullet in the list: bringing the work to scale. What does it look like



when the principles of a smart education system are understood and implemented across sectors and agencies throughout a community? We can't answer that question empirically, because no community, to our knowledge, has implemented such a system. But by looking across multiple communities, we can begin to glean lessons about the challenges that arise as big cities attempt to work more collaboratively, share accountability, and serve children and youth holistically.

Like many other individuals and organizations, we have also been keenly concerned about the redevelopment of New Orleans and its education system since the city was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In 2009, we brought our interests in smart education systems and New Orleans together by hosting our sixth Emerging Knowledge Forum there, convening New Orleans community leaders with leaders from other cities, universities, and school systems. The goal of the Forum was to make a contribution to the transformation of the education systems in New Orleans, as well as to learn from the efforts that have been undertaken there.

At the Annenberg Institute, one of our strengths and key roles is creating opportunities like the Forum where individuals from many different perspectives come together to learn from each other. We publish *VUE* in that same spirit. While this issue of *VUE* is written by Institute staff and consultants, we have also included, throughout the articles, the perspectives of many other colleagues who attended the Forum or other Institute convenings, or who have published articles in *VUE* in the past.

The articles in this issue focus on New Orleans and the three other sites that served as “critical friends” at the 2009 Emerging Knowledge Forum: Boston Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, and the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice. By drawing on the discussions at the Forum and the data collection we conducted in all four sites, we

examine the challenges of achieving equity and scale in New Orleans, human capital development, cross-sector partnerships, community organizing strategies that combine collaboration and pressure, and data-informed decision-making.

- Alethea Frazier Raynor provides some background on New Orleans before and after Katrina and highlights some of the major concerns that emerged from stakeholder discussions at our Emerging Knowledge Forum.
- Joanne Thompson, Tracie Potochnik, and Ellen Foley describe the successes and challenges that Boston and New Orleans have experienced as they overhaul human capital development systems.
- Jacob Mishook and Alethea Frazier Raynor examine the critical role of data-informed, cross-sector partnerships and look at how partners are working together in Chicago and New Orleans.
- Margaret Balch-Gonzalez, Daniella Cook, and Elizabeth Richards discuss community organizing strategies that balance collaboration and pressure, drawing on the experiences of New York City and New Orleans.
- Ellen Foley describes the power – and the limits – of data in taking reform to scale.

The U.S. Department of Education and many funders are investing resources to strengthen and connect school- and community-based supports for learning and development. The articles in this issue of *VUE*, taken together, provide numerous lessons for communities facing the challenges and opportunities posed by the current policy and philanthropic environment as they move toward going to scale with smart education systems.