# Seven Components of a Portfolio Strategy

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## CRPE PORTFOLIO STRATEGY

Center on Reinventing Public Education

# The Seven Components of a Portfolio Strategy

*The portfolio strategy gives families the freedom to attend their neighborhood schools or choose one that is the best fit for their child. It supports principals and teachers—those who work most closely with students and frees them to use their best ideas to ignite student learning. And it relies on city leadership to support and expand successful schools until every child in the city is in a great school.*

## Good Options and Choices for All Families

In portfolio cities, families have the freedom to attend their neighborhood school or choose one that best fits their child. Portfolio cities make sure there are good schools in every neighborhood, but they try to avoid mandating school assignments. They also give families useful information and support to make enrolling clear and simple.

Portfolio cities approach school choice in two ways: 1) broadened student assignment policies, and 2) improving existing schools and opening new schools by chartering or replicating high-performing district schools.

## School Autonomy

In portfolio cities, principals and teachers—the people who work with students everyday—can decide what and how to teach to bring out the best work in their students. The principal is the center of the portfolio strategy.

## Pupil-Based Funding for All Schools

The pupil-based funding model links money to each student in a school, rather than to school positions. It allows principals to make spending choices that make the most sense for their school and to make sure as much money as possible is spent directly in classrooms, rather than at the central office.

## Talent-Seeking Strategy

The most important element of education is the people who teach and lead the schools every day. Every city needs smart, compassionate, motivated, creative people working in the schools and district offices. Portfolio cities focus on developing the strong people they have and seeking new talent from the best training programs, districts, charter schools, and other sectors.

## Sources of Support for Schools

Schools need to be able to make use of the best ideas and materials available. Those things may come from the district, but they also might come from local organizations or from online providers. Portfolio cities help schools find these best ideas, training, or materials, and allow them to choose and purchase what they want within their budget.

## Performance-Based Accountability for Schools

Schools need to be caring, cheerful, exciting places. They also must be places where children learn the challenging things they need to succeed in the world. For all the possibilities that portfolio cities give to schools, schools must be able to show they are teaching all students, and that students are engaged and prepared for the next grade or transition.

## Extensive Public Engagement

Cities need to know what families want and value, and cities need to show what they will deliver. This strategy brings a lot of changes to schools. It works best if it channels the needs and dreams of communities for their children, and translates those into new opportunities for families, teachers and school leaders.

# Good Options and Choices for all Families

*In portfolio cities, families have the freedom to attend their neighborhood school or choose another one that best fits their child. These cities make sure there are good schools in every neighborhood, but they try to avoid mandating school assignments. They also give families useful information and support to make enrolling clear and simple.*

*Portfolio cities approach school choice in two ways: 1) broadened student assignment policies, and 2) improving existing schools and opening new schools by chartering or replicating high-performing district schools.*

### Student Assignment Policies

A workable and fair school selection system is not easy to build, especially at the outset. Productive and unproductive schools are often unevenly distributed across a city, and some neighborhoods have few high-quality options. By allowing families to opt out, some schools will be under-enrolled. However, this is the beginning of the portfolio process of identifying weak and low-productivity schools, predicting whether improvements can happen with strong supports, and opening new schools or expanding strong schools in underserved areas.

More cities are tackling these enrollment challenges. Denver and New Orleans have implemented common enrollment across district and charter schools. New York City holds all-city school admissions lotteries at the same time for middle and high schools, so no school can gain an advantage by "jumping the gun." It also places all students simultaneously so that everyone has a known chance of gaining admission to the most popular schools. Hartford has its own long-established choice process, which tries to protect children whose parents do not express a choice by entering them in lotteries automatically.

### Improving Options for Students

School choice is not enough, however—leaders need to ensure that an array of high-quality schools is available throughout the city. Portfolio cities create opportunities for existing schools to improve by giving schools autonomy, developing talent pipelines, and offering a menu of high-quality internal and external support services. The cities also open new schools to give all neighborhoods immediate access to schools with a solid instructional plan or a record of achievement. These new schools can be opened and run by the district or by an outside provider, such as charter schools.

Denver has been able to identify which schools need attention and which schools are high achieving by using accountability systems that rate school growth and achievement. Denver has replicated high-achieving, oversubscribed schools in underserved neighborhoods. New Orleans has increased the overall quality of schools and the numbers of children who are in them: in 2005, 75 percent attended academically unacceptable schools; in 2013, only 17 percent did.[1]

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**HOW TO...**

### Change Student Assignment Policies

- ☐ Eliminate policies that mandate school assignments
- ☐ Create student assignment systems that give students and families choices about where they go to school
- ☐ Develop effective communication channels to ensure parents have the information they need to make the right choice for their child
- ☐ Urge families to consider schools known to be productive

### Improve Options for Students

- ☐ Provide autonomy, talent, and support for longer-term improvements in low-performing schools
- ☐ Coordinate neighborhood needs and preferences with creation of new schools
- ☐ Infuse promising new options in neighborhoods that have few high-quality options
- ☐ Open distinctive new district or charter schools, deliberately creating new options and sharpening the focus of these schools to attract students

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1. New Schools for New Orleans, "Student Achievement," November 6, 2013, http://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/data-center.

## ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON GOOD OPTIONS AND CHOICES

### On Choice

☐ School choice for all families

☐ Equity and access to all schools for special education students and English language learners

☐ Coordination of common enrollment systems and school information for families across sectors

### On Options

☐ New schools opened based on family/student/neighborhood need

☐ Schools replaced based on performance outcomes

☐ Intentional development of new district schools or homegrown charter schools

## METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

**Is the district creating a wide scope of choice?**
- Increasing % of seats in choice schools
- Increasing % of choice schools that are high performing

**Is the district creating equitable opportunity and participation in choice?**
- Increasing % of students enrolling through choice systems
- Declining % (or number) of students enrolling after assignments
- Increasing equitable representation of high-needs students in high-performing choice schools
- Increasing equity in the ratio of high-performing seats to neighborhood students by geographic zone
- Increasing % of parents ranking a high-quality school as their top choice

**Is the choice system efficient?**
- Enrollment growth in high-performing schools outpaces growth of other schools
- Increasing positive correlation between demand and quality schools
- Increasing % of students offered seats in 1st or 2nd choice school

**Are parents and students are satisfied with the range of school options and choices?**
- Improving parent satisfaction with schools
- Declining number of mid-year transfers
- Increasing % of students enrolling in matched school
- Increasing % of students re-enrolling in matched school

# School Autonomy

*In portfolio cities, principals and teachers—the people who work with students every day—decide what and how to teach to bring out the best work in their students. The principal is the central driver of change in the portfolio strategy.*

A superintendent/CEO implementing the portfolio strategy believes the most important figure in improving student achievement is the school leader, who should be given as much authority as possible to make the right decisions for their school: choosing who is part of their teaching and administrative team and having the budget and freedom to buy the curriculum and services they feel are right for the school. In exchange, principals need to work within their budget and be held accountable for results. Applying this freedom to all schools, not just charter schools or high-performing traditional schools, means that existing schools are strengthened, have a greater chance to do what they need to succeed with students, and can be held accountable for performance.

Autonomy is important because it removes the school system from the inherent conflict of telling schools what to do and then faulting them when it doesn't go well. It also gives principals and teachers the freedom to do what they think is right for individual students, something that is very hard for a central office to do well at the individual level.

There is a debate about whether to offer universal autonomy or earned autonomy; that is, only giving freedom to higher-performing schools. Those who believe in the latter feel that they have too many schools with weak leaders and that autonomy would cause the school to fail. One short-term / long-term solution is to pilot autonomy with strong leaders while shoring up the remaining schools, aggressively developing new leaders, and then moving to universal autonomy within three to five years.

It is an open question whether leaders with little or no autonomy can ever excel. Without autonomy, principals are frustrated by accountability systems that demand better results from them when they have almost no control over who teaches the students, what curriculum they are taught with, and how they can spend money in support of student achievement.

**EXAMPLE**

## School-Level Autonomy in Three Districts

**1.** In early 2002, **New York City's** then chancellor Joel Klein started a pilot of school autonomy with a 60-school Empowerment Zone. Leading this small group of schools was a cohort of early-adopter principals who were attracted to these ideas and ready to be held accountable for their work. Autonomy was eventually shared district-wide over the course of several years, which gave the district time to work with leaders who may not have had strong operational skills. It also gave some principals time to decide to stay or leave.

**2.** In **New Orleans**, almost all schools have been charters since 2005 and have had full autonomy from the Recovery School District (RSD). The small number of RSD-run schools had various levels of autonomy. However, because of continued low performance, as of 2014, all of those schools have been converted to charters with full autonomy.

**3.** In **Denver**, roughly 30 innovation schools have waivers allowing them to control staff selection and dismissal. When combined with charter schools, these schools make up nearly half of Denver's schools. Innovation schools are also able to control budget and pay, and Denver is considering more autonomy over curriculum for all schools. Currently, schools that apply for a waiver to use a different curriculum are almost always approved.

## ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON AUTONOMY

☐ All schools control:
- Staff selection and dismissal
- Budget
- Pay
- Curriculum choice

☐ Autonomies are defined through MOUs, performance contracts, or charters

☐ Schools are free to seek contractual waivers or exemptions

## METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

**Is the school district granting greater autonomy?**
- Increasing % of principals identified as autonomous
- Increasing % of school-level expenditures discretionary to school
- Declining number of new staff placements made by direct placement

**Are the principals are using autonomy?**
- % of schools that choose own instructional support organization(s)
- % of schools selecting a curriculum other than the district curriculum
- % of schools with alternative pay structures
- % of principals trying new schedules and class configurations

# Pupil-Based Funding for All Schools

*The pupil-based funding model in the portfolio strategy links money to each student in a school, rather than to school positions. It allows principals to make spending choices that make the most sense for their school and to make sure as much money as possible is spent directly in classrooms.*

School leaders need authority to use money flexibly. They may need to extend school hours or vary class sizes according to student need and teacher ability. They may decide to create their own mix of junior and senior teachers, and make trade-offs between staff salaries and instructional technology or purchased services. Pupil-based funding in the portfolio strategy empowers school leaders with these freedoms.

System leaders need to be able to expand or open new schools as they close or replace chronically low-performing schools. To do this, funds need to follow students from the closed schools to whichever schools they next attend.

Ensuring that funds follow the student means the vast majority of dollars flow to schools based on enrollment and can be used by schools to pay for salaries and other resources, and to purchase assistance from the central office and independent providers. All schools should be responsible for paying rent, and charter schools should have fair access to rent school facilities. As few dollars as possible are held in the central office to pay for oversight functions and new schools development.

## Why Do Portfolio Districts Need a New Funding Model?

- Flexible funds are needed to close unproductive schools and open new ones
- Funds are tied up in central office programs and formal administrative structures and need to be released
- School leaders need to be able to use money flexibly to:
  - Extend hours the school is open
  - Vary class sizes according to student need and teacher ability
  - Create their own mixes of junior and senior teachers
  - Be free to make trade-offs between staff salaries and instructional technology or purchased services

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**EXAMPLE**

## Evolving Portfolio Funding Strategies in Districts

In **New York City**, former Chancellor Joel Klein created a wholly new system for allocating funds. The prior funding formula was based on programs and staffing tables, which he shifted to one based on student enrollment. He introduced the idea to the Empowerment Zone school autonomy pilot, and applied it citywide within five years. He also shrank the central office and its roles so that school leaders could control the lion's share—70 percent—of all funds. His aim was to get the number closer to 85 percent.

The **Louisiana Recovery School District** moved rapidly to a student-based allocation model as the numbers of charter schools grew to make up the entire district. They continue to critically evaluate their own model so that the funding distribution is as equitable as possible. In 2014, they reworked their special education funding weights to better reflect the true cost associated with those service needs.

**Denver** has been implementing a pupil-based funding system since 2007. The district retains 5 percent of total funds for central office, another 22 percent for centrally organized but school-facing services, and sends the remaining 73 percent to schools. Schools that are directly managed by the district get 73 percent of funds in student-based budgeting dollars; innovation schools (public schools in Colorado that have greater control over hiring teachers, setting the school calendar, and budgeting) have the opportunity to take the dollars instead of services from the 23 percent that is centrally organized but school-facing.

## ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON FUNDING

- ☐ District funds are allocated to schools based on the number of students and student type
- ☐ High proportion of district funds are being sent to and managed at the school level
- ☐ Prices set for facilities and central services are the same regardless of sectors
- ☐ Plan is in place to identify and address schools with low productivity (low achievement, low enrollment, or high costs)

## METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

**Are there are more dollars in schools?**
- Declining share of district revenue managed and controlled by central departments
- Increasing equity in per-pupil (or per-pupil type) school funding between district and charter portfolio schools

**Are dollars following students?**
- Increasing equity in per-pupil type allocations
- Increasing positive correlation between enrollment and school-level expenditures
- Increasing % of total dollars spent in the building available to principals as discretionary

# Talent-Seeking Strategy

*The most important element of a student's education is the people who teach and lead schools every day. Every city needs smart, compassionate, motivated, creative people working in the schools and central office. Portfolio cities focus on developing the strong people they have and seeking new talent from the best training programs, districts, charter schools, and other sectors.*

The portfolio strategy demands a lot from people in terms of performance. It requires teachers and principals who have the capacity and initiative to drive self-directed school improvement in a strong accountability environment. It also requires individuals who can thrive in a re-missioned central office—moving away from supporting programs and monitoring compliance and toward a system that exists to serve school leaders and improve student outcomes.

When a city pursues a portfolio strategy, it emphasizes school freedom of hiring: it tries to maximize the quality of choices schools have but doesn't assign teachers or professional development. To do this, it must be able to negotiate a host of complex relationships and support, monitor, and manage a differentiated system of schools.

Fiscal constraints can force portfolio systems to limit their hiring, but strategic portfolio cities continue to use every opportunity to promote and attract exceptionally talented people and make them available to struggling schools. In order for the portfolio strategy to work, it is critical to identify and develop strong principal and teacher pipelines to supply a growing group of autonomous schools.

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**EXAMPLE**

## School District Human Resources Re-Imagined

- **New Orleans Recovery School District** used talent recruitment to re-norm a struggling system of schools by finding new talent through outside providers such as Teach For America and the New Teacher Project, requiring existing teachers to pass national skills tests, and recruiting promising school leaders from as far away as Europe.

- **Washington, D.C.** re-envisioned how human resources is managed in the district by assigning a core member of the leadership team the job of managing the talent strategy. The chief talent manager oversees all policies and practices of talent including sourcing, development, deployment, performance management, rewards, retention, and splitting transactional (managing payroll and benefits) and strategic (solving problems like recruitment) aspects of HR into two separate offices

- **Washington, D.C.** changed the culture in the central office through the use of new performance metrics and accountability tools for the central office. These increased the sense of purpose, urgency, and accountability in the central office.

- **New York** increased principal control over teacher hiring by ending the "bumping" of junior teachers out of schools by senior ones, requiring "excessed" teachers to apply for vacancies instead of being assigned to them, and allowing any teacher to transfer without regard for seniority.

- **Denver** revised their principal and teacher compensation systems to include financial rewards for performance.

- **Tennessee Achievement School District** offers financial and career pathway incentives based on performance.

## ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON TALENT

- ☐ Policies in place for using alternative pipelines to find/develop talent
- ☐ Recruitment of new principals from proven pipelines
- ☐ Recruitment of new teachers from proven pipelines
- ☐ Intensive development of teachers, leaders, and district staff
- ☐ Performance-based evaluation system in place to recognize or remove teachers and leaders
- ☐ Innovative plans in place to increase the numbers of students taught by strong teachers and leaders

## METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

**Is the school is using resources that help it find and attract high-performing teachers and principals?**
- Increasing % of new principals hired from proven principal pipelines
- Increasing % of teachers hired from proven teacher pipelines
- Increasing number of applicants per open position (especially in high-needs schools)
- Decreasing variation in the number of applicants across schools

**Are high-performance staffing policies better-distributed and retained?**
- Increasing retention rate of high-performing staff across schools
- More even distribution in high-performing staff across schools
- Increasing % of high-performing district staff retained by the district
- Increasing positive correlation between teacher performance and teacher salary

# Sources of Support for Schools

*Schools need to be able to make use of the best ideas and materials available. Those things may come from the central office, but they might also come from local organizations or from online providers. The central office in a district using the portfolio strategy plays a key role in helping schools find these best ideas, training, or materials, and allowing them to choose and purchase what they want within their budget.*

City education leaders do not view the central office as the sole provider of schools or of services to schools. These leaders understand that the central office is just one source of talent and ideas. In some instances, for example, a successful charter school model may better serve students, or an external vendor may offer a more tailored professional development series. By allowing outside operators to run schools and by giving budgetary autonomy to all principals, schools can purchase the services they find most useful from vendors or the central office.

### New Sources of School Operators

Portfolio cities invite groups of educators to run their own schools. Some of these groups might be found inside the traditional system (e.g., principals and teachers who have an idea for how they would work together if given the freedom to put their ideas into action). However, internal groups are not the only possible new school providers. To make sure children get the best possible new schools, leaders of portfolio cities look both inside and outside their existing options.

New York City has given new freedom to groups of school employees and has relied on local nonprofit groups with relevant expertise. A good example is New Visions for Public Schools, a nonprofit organized to create new schools in low-income areas of New York City (20 years before Chancellor Klein came onto the scene). New York City, Louisiana's Recovery School District, and Chicago's Renaissance 2010 initiative were all built to use existing nonprofits and encourage formation of others; they recruited national school operators like KIPP, Achievement First, and Green Dot.

In seeking to open 100 new schools during its Renaissance 2010 initiative, Chicago sought to attract some "big name" national providers. However, the district mainly relied on established local organizations recruited and sponsored by an independent business-funded philanthropy, the Renaissance Schools Fund. Denver, Baltimore, and Hartford also sought to encourage new local school providers and attract established national groups. Their moderate but steady rates of new school formation have required philanthropic investment and creation of new schools offices in the district headquarters.

### New Sources of Support for Schools

Creating a more diverse set of assistance organizations allows portfolio cities to reduce the size and change the role of the central office staff. Per-pupil funding increases, and schools have the money to buy the specific support services they need, ranging from school-specific professional development, budgeting, HR, curriculum, assessment, and analysis.

The central office shifts to play several important roles. It can be instrumental in identifying unmet support needs and promoting the formation of needed providers, either by providing seed funds or working with nonprofits that do this (like New Schools for New Orleans). It can also place accountability on vendors by assessing their performance (e.g., performance gains of schools they work with, satisfaction surveys of schools that have used the services) and sharing that performance information with schools.

In New York City and Chicago, the range of options available to school leaders is enormous, from professional development providers set up by colleges and former leaders of central office units, to major multi-service operators that can provide everything from teacher and leadership training to board development, self-assessment tools, and overall management of entire schools.

Louisiana's RSD leadership did not want to build a large, permanent central office. Former Superintendent Paul Vallas was hoping to rely heavily on independent providers, but could find only a few locally. New Schools for New Orleans (NSNO), an independent nonprofit, took on the job of creating an infrastructure of school support organizations. It hoped to encourage new and existing organizations to offer services that autonomous schools need, from facilities maintenance and accounting to teacher training and advice on school improvement. NSNO seeded development of these organizations, which then covered their operating costs from school fees.

## Providing Services to Schools: The Traditional District and the Portfolio District

**Traditional District**

- Large central office is sole provider of services and schooling
- Central office has expertise to help some schools improve instruction—but not all
- Schools that need something the central office can't provide are out of luck
- Efforts to encourage school-based initiatives are thwarted by rigidity of central office structure
- Schools are permanent institutions operated by the district

**Portfolio System**

- Highly scaled-back and streamlined central office has the role of regulating schooling providers and schools services providers
- School leaders looking for support can buy services from the central office or from organizations including colleges, businesses, and nonprofits
- The portfolio system and outside operators provide teacher and leadership training, board development, curriculum, facilities maintenance, even overall school management
- Schools are held accountable for results and are closed if they fail to perform

### ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON DIVERSE SOURCES OF SCHOOLS AND SUPPORT

- ☐ Schools are free to choose support from an array of independent providers
- ☐ Procurement policies enable schools to work with vendors, regardless of established district contracts
- ☐ Strategies in place to engage independent providers (educational technologies, professional development, interim assessments)

### METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

**Do schools have access to adequate support resources?**

- Increasing % of principals reporting satisfaction with current support provider
- Increasing % of principals reporting access to support providers that meet their school's needs
- Increasing % of principals reporting adequate access to data to inform decisionmaking

**Are current school support providers are providing high-quality support?**

- Increasing % of schools experiencing student growth after partnering with a support provider(s)
- Increasing % of providers working with schools that experience growth after commencing support work

# Performance-Based Accountability for Schools

*Schools need to be caring, cheerful, exciting places. They also must be places where children learn the challenging things they need to succeed in the world. For all the possibilities that portfolio cities give to schools, schools must be able to show they are teaching all students, and that students are engaged and prepared for the next grade or transition.*

In a portfolio city, it is commonly understood that effective educators get rewarded and effective schools get replicated. Struggling schools get a strong array of supports, and chronically low-performing schools are replaced by more promising leaders or organizations.

To determine whether a school is replicated, supported, replaced, or closed, portfolio cities use performance measures. The best measures provide city education leaders with warnings and clues about how well all of its schools are functioning. These accountability systems rely on tests and other indicators of school climate and organizational health: absolute performance on tests, student growth, course completion, graduation rates, student engagement, college or post-high school training attendance and completion.

These measures are the start, not the end, of the accountability process. Denver, and for many years, New York City, have looked closely at the circumstances of all struggling schools to see what other circumstances may be influencing their outcomes: prior preparation of students, increases in students learning English or who have special needs, leadership changes, and changes in neighborhood conditions. Many portfolio cities also consider factors such as demographic trends and family choice data, including waitlist length. If a district is considering closing a school, leaders will also want to know whether better options are readily available, weighing factors such as the availability of qualified school leaders and lead teachers in current recruitment and training pipelines, or the capacities of charter operators and other providers. Taken together, all of these factors can suggest what might be done for the children in the existing school, including trying to improve the school as it stands, giving children chances to transfer to better schools nearby, or replacing the school with a new district-run or charter school with a specific mission that is attractive to the local community.

## ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON ACCOUNTABILITY

- ☐ Schools have rich and timely information on student and school performance
- ☐ Common school performance framework is in place
- ☐ Performance framework uses multiple measures: student performance, student progress, school climate, student engagement, equity and access, long-term student outcomes
- ☐ Performance framework is used as a significant factor in: school expansion, intervention, replacement/closure decisions
- ☐ Publication of a school report card based on common performance framework

## METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

**Are schools investing in their promise?**
- Increasing % of new schools that are expansions or replications of successful schools
- Increasing % of low-performing schools hiring proven principals

**Are schools divesting from failure?**
- Increasing % of persistently failing schools are replaced or closed
- Declining % of principals with failing records retained (3 years with low performance and no growth)

**Are new investments paying off?**
- Decreasing % of students in failing schools
- Positive average achievement gain for students moving from closed school to another traditional or charter school
- Positive average achievement gain for students moving from closed school to newly opened school
- Equal or higher performance for students in newly opened schools relative to comparable students in comparable existing schools

# Extensive Public Engagement

*Education leaders need to know what families want and value, and communicate how their strategy will deliver results that reflect those wants and values. The portfolio strategy brings a lot of changes to schools. It works best if it takes the needs and dreams of communities for their children and translates those into new opportunities for families, teachers, and school leaders.*

Implementing a portfolio strategy can create enormous conflict. Opening new schools, assessing teacher and leader effectiveness, attracting new teachers and leaders from alternative sources, allocating funding directly to schools, replacing persistently low-performing schools—these are all challenging decisions. The work is very difficult to sustain without broader support from the community. Since the people most engaged in public education, particularly school employees and their unions, have reason to oppose many of these changes, leaders need to also seek support from new beneficiaries. Leaders must build an audience for public education reform among parents and community leaders.

Portfolio leaders must attend to community concerns and create opportunities for families and the community to help shape and invest in the work. The portfolio strategy is a complex, multi-year effort that leverages the work of multiple initiatives simultaneously to move city schools in a positive direction for students. Leaders must gather evidence about the impact on students and help the community not only understand the strategy but also understand how any benefits are results of the portfolio strategy. Most importantly, the communication must be strategic and multicentric. It must be strategic in that the CEO must always work to tell a coherent and consistent story and tie both positive and negative results to the strategy. And it must be multicentric in that, whenever possible, school leaders should support the strategy by handling the messaging and communication about their own schools.

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**EXAMPLE**

### Public Engagement Lessons Learned the Hard Way

- **New York City |** Former Chancellor Joel Klein put in countless hours in churches and community meetings, but parents and educators still considered him remote and unresponsive. In 2012, nine years into the work, almost 75 percent of public school parents felt that things were about the same or worse, even as graduation and achievement rates for all students steadily—and for some groups dramatically—increased.

- **New Orleans |** Recovery School District leaders shunned public meetings for a long time while they were working desperately to get new schools started. Many in New Orleans credit Paul Vallas and Paul Pastorek for fast action, but still condemn them for failing to consult.

- **Denver |** Superintendents Michael Bennet and Tom Boasberg have been strategic about public engagement, generating new sources of support and learning the value of working quietly with key groups before rolling out big initiatives. Their work on this front has helped Denver move forward with less strife than many other portfolio cities.

## ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- ☐ Solicit ideas, values, and concerns from families and communities about school and district decisions
- ☐ Form partnerships and coalitions with key stakeholders
- ☐ Develop a communication plan to convey information about reform strategy (including strategic plan, implementation schedule, annual updates, and external progress review)
- ☐ Make a plan for helping district and school staff understand and support the strategy
- ☐ Empower principals to be lead communicators about school and district strategy
- ☐ Publicize criteria and schedule for school closings and openings; offer clear and better options for families affected by closure

## METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

### Is communication about the strategy effective?

- Increasing % of parents that reporting understanding of the reform strategy, need for school closures, need for new schools, role of charter schools
- Increasing % of educators reporting a solid understanding of the city's reform strategy
- Increasing % of community members who understand the city's reform strategy

### Is the community satisfied with the strategy?

- Increasing % of parents reporting high confidence in the school district
- Increasing % of parents from closed schools who are satisfied with their new schools
- Increasing % of parents in new schools who are satisfied with their schools
- # of community-based organizations formally engaged in district initiatives

### Is the district effectively communicating the impact of the strategy?

- Increasing % of parents who understand the student outcome results of the reform
- Increasing % of school board members who understand the student outcome results of the reform
- Increasing % of community members who understand the student outcome results of the reform