

# BREAKTHROUGH SCHOOLS: D.C.

## ANNOUNCING THE **2016** CHALLENGE

AN INITIATIVE OF CITYBRIDGE FOUNDATION

### INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

CityBridge Foundation is thrilled to announce the next round of Breakthrough Schools: D.C., a school design challenge for educators and school leaders to design and launch next generation schools that advance personalized and deeper learning for students in Washington, D.C. We believe that the introduction and development of breakthrough learning models will allow D.C.'s public schools to accelerate the growth of academic achievement, as well as to demonstrate national leadership in education innovation.

In order to introduce these models to Washington, CityBridge Foundation has raised a \$7.5 million challenge fund called Breakthrough Schools: D.C. **Our goals are to find, fund, and support educators in generating proof points of successful personalized and deeper learning school models, and to nurture D.C. as a hub for education innovation.**

Since 2013, CityBridge has funded 13 new-start and redesigned D.C. public and public charter schools. We are enormously proud of the schools we work with; you can learn more about their work [here](#). In 2016, we aim to find and fund an additional seven schools.

We are looking for “dissatisfied yet optimistic” educators who are committed to creating a bold vision for learning in Washington, D.C., who recognize the power of schools to disrupt historical inequities, and who have the will and courage to lead with skill and passion. Teams can represent new-start schools, schools looking to radically redesign their models, or schools that have a solid foundation but need the resources and supports to take their ideas to a breakthrough level. We are looking for teams that want to join a vibrant and growing community of innovators working and learning together.

The Breakthrough Schools application deadline is **October 14, 2016**. CityBridge will offer programming and supports to any educators interested in developing their vision and design leading up to the application deadline.

**BREAKTHROUGH  
SCHOOLS: D.C.**

ACCELERATES  
INNOVATION IN  
SCHOOL DESIGN IN  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

**ALL STUDENTS  
DESERVE ACCESS TO  
BREAKTHROUGH  
SCHOOLS.**

<sup>1</sup> Childress, Stacey, Aylon Samouha, Diane Tavenner, and Jeff Wetzler. "Dissatisfied Yet Optimistic: Moving Faster toward New School Models—NewSchools Venture Fund." NewSchools Venture Fund. 2015. Accessed April 18, 2016. <http://www.newschoools.org/news/dissatisfied-yet-optimistic-moving-faster-toward-new-school-models/>.



## WHAT IS A BREAKTHROUGH SCHOOL?

Breakthrough schools challenge our current assumptions about school, build on practices that we already know work, and introduce new learning experiences to profoundly improve the student experience.

In the first two rounds of the Breakthrough Schools: D.C. challenge, we introduced a set of design principles to D.C. educators and used those principles to award our grants. During the last three years, we have supported, observed, and cheered on our teams as they strive to make their breakthrough visions come to life. **We now believe that the following three design principles are core to breakthrough schools:**

## BREAKTHROUGH SCHOOLS DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### 1. COMMITMENTS TO DEEP, PERSONAL LEARNING: SCHOOL, DESIGNED TO ONE

What might school look like if we designed it, from the start, to be adaptable, responsive, and challenging for every individual child? Breakthrough schools embrace this design challenge, where educators no longer teach to a standardized average; they no longer move the class forward on a predictable path or pace. **Instead, breakthrough schools are structured so that students receive what they need, when they need it, in ways that are personally tailored**—slowing down when they need more time, going deeper when their curiosity spikes, even encouraging the pursuit of new interests. In breakthrough schools, teachers set clear and challenging learning goals, but then they distribute the work, making individual students' own effort and struggle a part of the formula. Students, themselves, take ownership for the pace and pathway of their learning. They solve problems, make choices, and own the sweet victories that follow sustained, dedicated academic effort.

### 2. INTENTIONAL EQUITY: NOTHING IS WRITTEN

How would school feel different if it were designed, expressly, for equity? **Schools designed for equity would challenge our country's ongoing narrative of disinheritance for some children, based on their race, class, or story.** Intentionally equitable schools write a counter-narrative by constructing a school culture of belonging and worth, where children know they are secure and can take risks and push themselves to accomplishment. True equity for children means our aspirations for them and their societal inheritance are not limited by what has come before—either in a child's life or in the history of our nation. Breakthrough schools hold sacred this ideal of intentional, equitable education. Teachers and leaders in breakthrough schools make their own assumptions—about race, students and schools—vulnerable to question. They wrestle with the hardest topics in urban education, such as poverty and discipline policies. And they constantly test school policies and practices in order to build a culture where love and justice thrive. As to children, breakthrough schools believe in unbounded potential—a future where "nothing is written."

### 3. EXPANSIVE MEASURES: BEYOND THE FALSE PEAK

Mountain climbers know the danger of pacing only to the "false peak," the visible, prominent hill preceding (and often obscuring) the actual summit. Schools, too, have their own version of false peaks in annual (mandatory) state accountability tests. These tests matter for uncovering disparities and for tracking progress, but they can distract educators from deeper, more relevant learning goals.

In breakthrough schools, educators embrace an expansive view of success—and how to measure it. Success is measured as cumulative, individualized progress toward mastery of core content knowledge—knowledge that might be demonstrated through original content creation or critical discourse. Breakthrough schools develop and refine metrics—qualitative and quantitative—to track progress, and they allow for multiple pathways and timetables to reach these goals. Breakthrough schools also know that some important things cannot be measured. They therefore embolden students and educators to invest time in intangibles, such as student attachment to learning and the creation of robust, tightly-woven community. In breakthrough schools, state tests are like a climber's false peak—a non-negotiable to reach and surpass, with ample reserves of stamina and drive left for the summit.

### IT'S NOT "WIRED" WE'RE AFTER

"Wired" is not, in and of itself, a Breakthrough Schools design principle. Educators have always struggled with the trade-off between personalization and scale: A teacher wants the magic of one-on-one interaction, but she must, instead, spread her time across 20 or 30 learners. Technology breaks this traditional linear trade-off and allows personalization to happen, at scale. For this reason, most (but not all) breakthrough schools will infuse technology throughout the school in order to enhance and supplement great teaching. Technology allows vast access to learning resources; it enables the customization key to student engagement; and it supports effective practice, revision, and mastery of content. **But the transformative power of classroom technology is best understood through technology's ability to free up the singular, most valuable in-school resource—teacher time to work one-on-one, or in very small groups, establishing deep and meaningful relationships with students. It's not "wired" that we're after: It's the meaning and engagement that technology-enabled classrooms unleash.**

*Our three design principles represent the best of our community's work to date. We look forward to sharing these with educators across 2016, and we welcome your questions, thoughts, and comments about these principles.*