XQ **The Super School Project**

Putting Ideas Into Action

What does it take to rethink high school?

2 EDITION

You have ideas for bringing change to high school education. The challenge is to make those ideas real.

Start with an ambitious and hopeful vision. Then make a plan.

Change can happen in any community, with sustained effort and a commitment to staying true to a shared vision of a reimagined high school.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

01

What does it take to create a great school design with a practical plan for implementation? What mission-critical practices need to be built in from the beginning to create the kind of culture and operations an innovative school needs?

02

How do you form an effective planning and implementation team? Who needs to be involved, at what level of commitment, and in what roles?
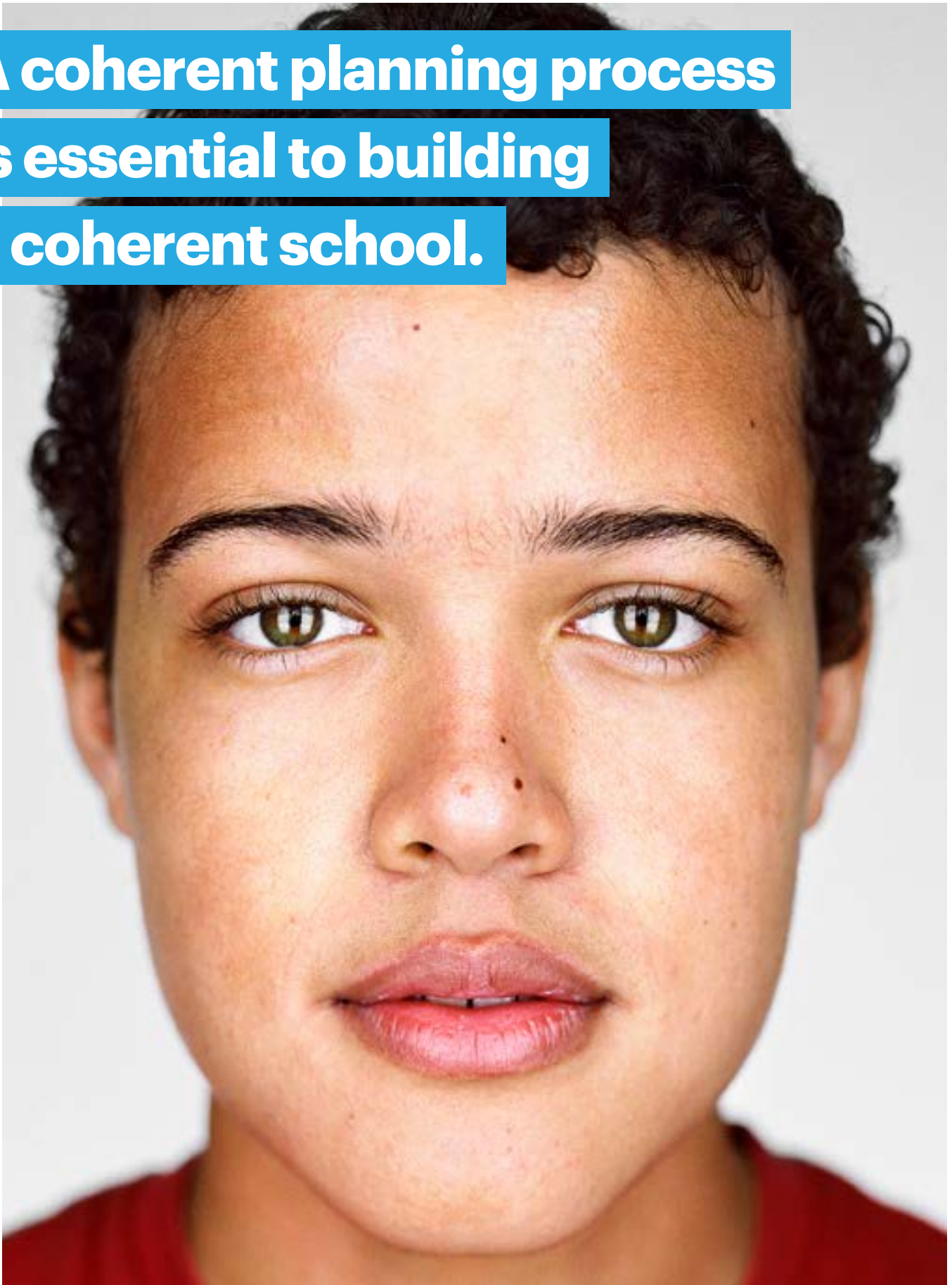
03

What gaps, barriers, and threats prevent effective implementation? How can a team maintain focus on its vision and navigate through challenges? How can a team adapt when its expectations don't match reality?

GET ORGANIZED NOW—

COMPLEXITY LIES AHEAD

A coherent planning process is essential to building a coherent school.

School change requires teamwork. Think creatively about the knowledge and skills needed to make your vision a reality.

A team that takes on the task of designing (or redesigning) and then implementing a plan for school should display a diversity of expertise, viewpoints, and backgrounds. It should include members of the school's community and people who can creatively address challenges, design deep learning experiences, and craft the finance, technology, operations, and human resources systems that make those experiences tangible. Having a wide range of skills and life experiences at the table enriches the school design process and produces stronger overall results.

At certain moments, you may find yourself needing to reach out to people with specialized expertise—for example, a lawyer to think through governance, an architect to help envision the facility, a communications person to rally the community, or other experts with unique talents specific to the school's vision.

The early planning stages are a good time to begin building a network of allies and advocates who will enhance a school's capacity over the long term—but it's also never too late to start.

Which skill sets are needed to shift a school design from imagination to reality? How can community, professional, and other networks contribute to school design teams?

Launching Innovation in Schools

MIT faculty members Justin Reich and Peter Senge created an online course to teach and activate teams of educators by focusing on the role of leadership in schools.

Senge, a systems scientist and one of the world's leading authorities on organizational learning, explains that the key to catalyzing innovation isn't about focusing on what has gone wrong, but rather, is a matter of "understanding, honoring, and respecting what people have already done, and then helping them come together around ideas that will help them take their work forward."

Reich, executive director of MIT's Teaching Systems Lab, argues that schools need to become learning organizations: "The schools that can figure out this step of constant experimentation, evaluation, and adjustment become learning organizations—places where every student, teacher, and administrator in a building has the opportunity to be constantly learning and growing."

Capacity Assessment Tool

How will you know your team's strengths and weaknesses? This tool from the Marguerite Casey Foundation will help you diagnose what your organization needs in order to build its capacity over time.

Launching Innovation in Schools

MIT's Justin Reich and Peter Senge developed Launching Innovation in Schools, an online course available on edX. Reich provides an overview in this blog post.

The Power of Diverse Teams

Surina Khan, CEO of the Women's Foundation of California, writes about the importance of cultivating leadership among those closest to the problems you're trying to solve.
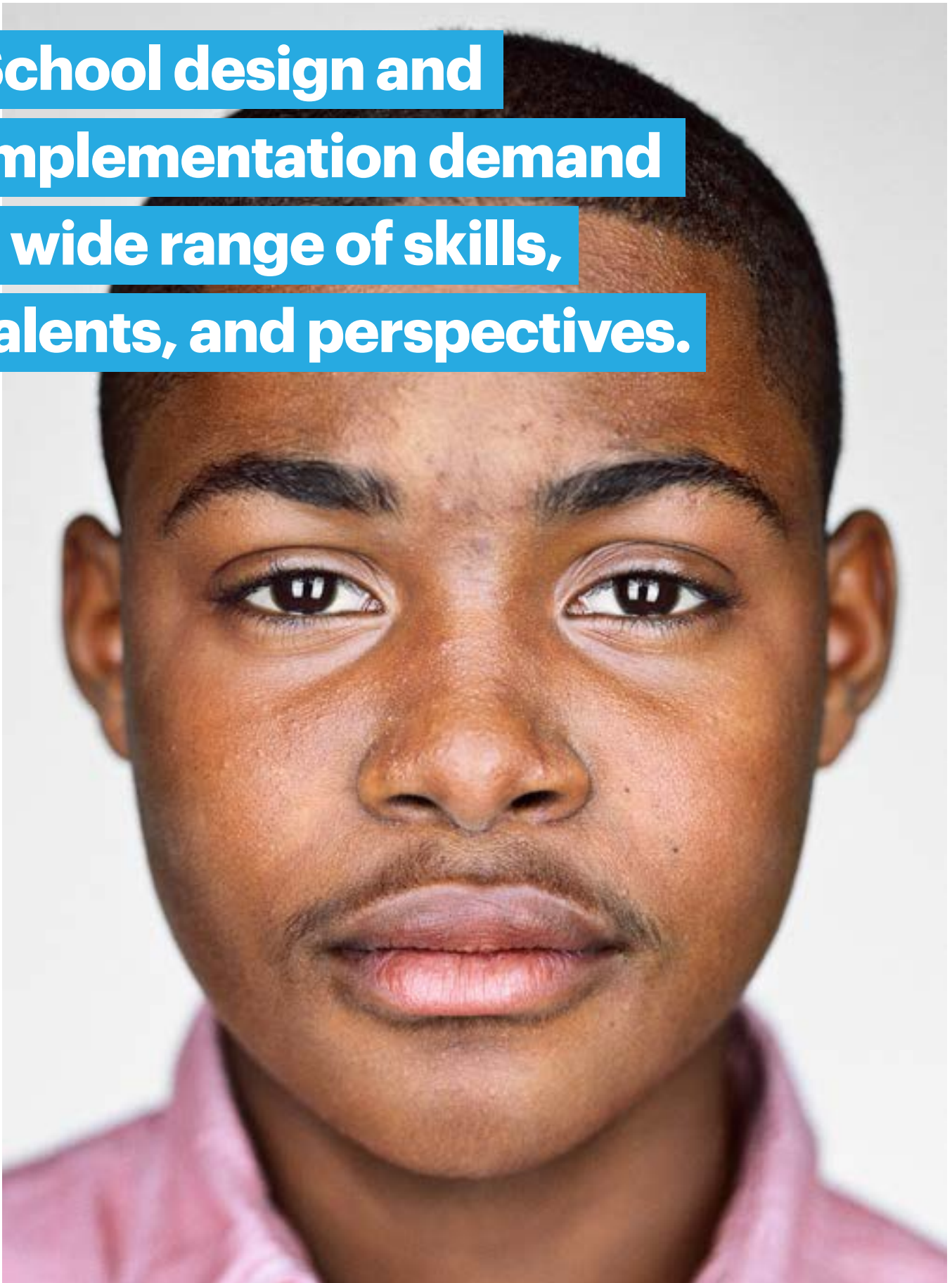
McKinsey's Capacity Assessment Tool

The OCAT, or Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool, from McKinsey & Company, is a free online service that will help you assess your organization's strengths as well as areas it can improve.

School design and implementation demand a wide range of skills, talents, and perspectives.

To create a truly innovative school, develop a well-rounded, sustainable plan.

How will the components of your school design work together? How can you draw inspiration from well-run organizations—in any sector?

A great idea, regardless of its merit, cannot succeed without careful planning and implementation. Once you have a vision for designing or redesigning a school, you'll need to create an outline. Start by developing a detailed work plan that maps the path you and your colleagues will follow. You may be familiar with some standard project planning tools or processes, which can be good starting points. But an innovative school design may also require an innovative planning and implementation process, along with tools specifically focused on the challenges of high school design. You want to build a school that's inclusive, responsive, determined, and entrepreneurial—and your planning process should have those characteristics, too.

To develop a useful work plan, you'll need to consider the component parts of a school, from staffing to ideas for using time, space, and technology differently; from performance management to financial systems. At the same time, it's important to zoom out and look at the big picture of how it all flows together.

The individual pieces of a school design are interdependent. A decision in one place will have ripple effects in other places. Be prepared to weigh inevitable trade-offs, and keep a focus on creative solutions as you move closer to implementation.

As you hammer out a comprehensive strategy, continue to refine your thinking and expand your repertoire of ideas by visiting other schools and organizations. Seek out ideas for overcoming practical challenges by researching what other schools are doing. Share your thinking with colleagues, community members, and allies. And, above all, learn as much as you can about your future students.

McKinsey has created a useful framework for thinking about the domains of nonprofit operations.

1. **Aspirations:** the mission, vision, and overarching goals

2. **Strategy:** a coherent set of actions and programs aimed at fulfilling these goals

3. **Organizational Skills:** the organization's capabilities, including performance measurement, planning, resource management, and external relationship building

4. **Human Resources:** the collective capabilities, experiences, potential, and commitment of the organization's board, management team, staff, and volunteers

5. **Systems and Infrastructure:** the planning, decision-making, knowledge management, and administrative systems, as well as physical and technological assets

6. **Organizational Structure:** the legal and management structure as shaped by governance, organizational design, interfunctional coordination, and individual job descriptions

7. **Culture:** shared values and practices, behavior norms, and the organization's orientation towards performance

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Springpoint Design Guide

What's the process for designing a new school model? This guide offers a practical starting point. It's just one of Springpoint's many helpful tools.

The School Start-Up Checklist

From SUNY's charter school think tank, the School Start-Up Checklist is a helpful snapshot, in spreadsheet form, of the many pieces that need to fit together to form a public school. It's a useful inventory, whether you're planning a district or a charter school.

Framework for School Transformation

New Leaders' framework describes the key levers of school transformation, and outlines the steps a school leader can take to enable school change.
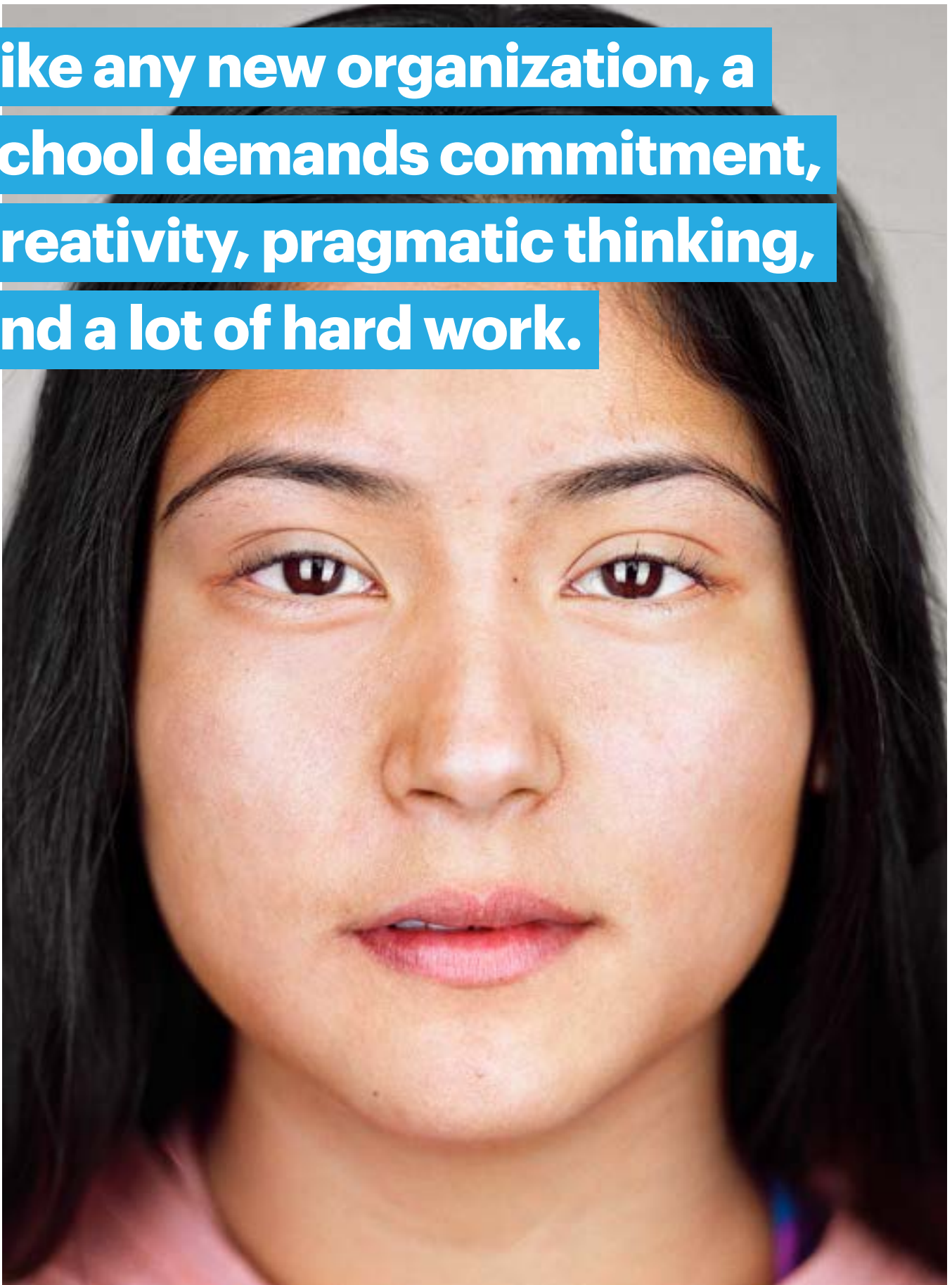
Creating Plans and Systems

An effective school team creates plans and systems so everyone knows what has to be done and who will do it. This video from New Leaders shows how.

Like any new organization, a school demands commitment, creativity, pragmatic thinking, and a lot of hard work.

Active management and problem-solving skills are essential throughout the journey.

The experience of countless school developers—including districts, charters, and organizations that create new schools—shows that it takes time—usually a full year or more—to get ready to open a school. In fact, most experts say an extended period dedicated to planning is absolutely necessary for the successful implementation of a school design.

As a team moves into implementation, its members will quickly discover things don't always go as anticipated. You and your team will be managing lots of moving pieces and a number of contingencies, so unexpected things are bound to happen. Don't let yourself get too discouraged by the inevitable challenges you'll face. Build a team with a resilient mindset and you'll be able to respond well in any situation.

Collaboration, open-mindedness, and transparency are absolute musts in order to make a school a reality. Thoughtful, skilled, and committed educators must be at the center of the process, so their expertise, voice, and leadership are fully reflected in the design and operations of the school. Equally important, young people, their families, and community partners need to be involved at every step.

How can a team keep the school's mission at the center while building in the flexibility to respond to new opportunities, setbacks, and challenges?

(i) A learning organization is one "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together."

PETER SENGE
The Fifth Discipline

Collaborative Professionalism

In an interview in Educational Leadership, Michael Fullan discusses how good autonomy and good teamwork, along with a deep focus on students, can come together to make progress possible. →

Stanley McChrystal on Military Teams

What can we learn from the military about building trust within teams? Stanley McChrystal shares insights in this *Harvard Business Review* interview. →

Talent Matters

The Stanford Social Innovation Review pulls together some of the school's best knowledge on of how social sector organizations are putting talent development into practice. →

Managing Human Capital

How do schools practically manage people? How do districts? This *Education Week* piece by Allan Odden highlights the importance of establishing systems for managing people at both levels. →

High school has a huge impact on young people at a crucial time in their lives

An effective school is a well-planned organization that starts strong and keeps getting better.

The creative inspiration behind a new or redesigned school is just the beginning of a process that, through evolution and collaboration, can reach heights beyond the imagination of the people who initially brought it to life. A school's success can inspire and lead other schools throughout the nation, and even internationally.

GET INSPIRED

DIY Theory of Change

Crafting a compelling theory of change is like making a roadmap that gets you to your final goal. This animated video by UK-based Nesta shows an easy-to-use process for defining yours.

Theory of Change in Action

What does a great theory of change look like? This film from Harvard's Center on the Developing Child depicts the Frontiers of Innovation community's theory of change for impacting the lives of vulnerable children and their families.

Logic Model Development Guide

Logic modeling is a tool to enhance program planning, implementation, and dissemination. This guide from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation helps leaders and community members get started with this process.

How the Circus Thinks About Diverse Teams

How do you assemble diverse teams? Find out more in this interview with the founder of the Big Apple Circus.

How Google Stays Innovative

Google's leadership fosters a creative and adaptive culture from the top down, even as it grows and the task becomes more difficult.

The World of Adaptive Leadership

Every few months, Acumen and the Cambridge Leadership Associates run this free online course on adaptive leadership, a framework developed to help individuals and organizations through times of uncertainty when there are no clear answers.

GET INSPIRED

Build Your Own Racial Equity Guide

Every organization that serves the public should be deeply aware of racial equity. Build your own racial equity guide with this interactive resource from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.
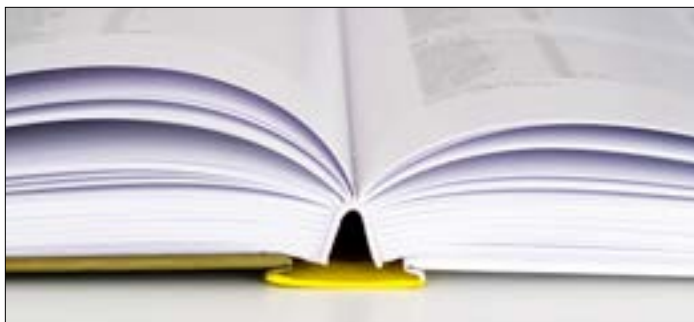
Staff Handbook Resources

A comprehensive staff handbook is essential for establishing a common culture and expectations. Here's a collection of resources, including sample handbooks, from the New York City Charter School Center.

START MOBILIZING TO PUT YOUR PLAN INTO ACTION