STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO LAUNCHING SINGLE VS. MULTI-GRADE SCHOOLS

A REFERENCE GUIDE FOR SCHOOL DESIGN TEAMS

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introduction

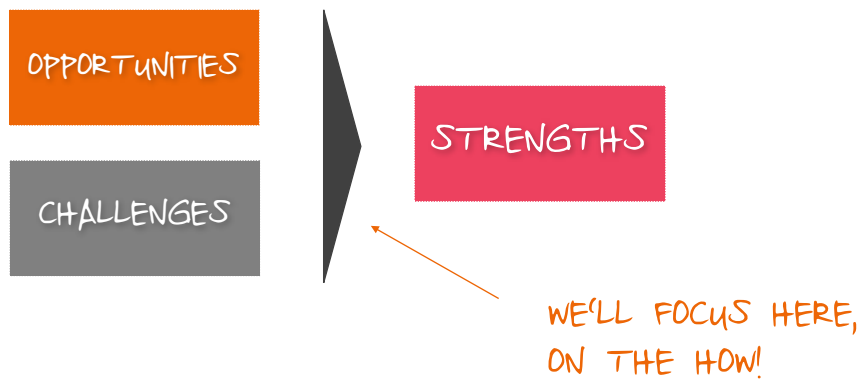the big picture: opportunities and challenges overview

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DEAR (COURAGEOUS AND AWESOME) NEW SCHOOL DESIGNERS:

Welcome to this quick-and-dirty reference guide to strategic new school design with a specific focus on the unique opportunities and challenges related to the grade composition of your new school model.

This guide offers you a careful preview of the opportunities and challenges you can anticipate in the design and implementation work ahead, as well as a set of strategies you can employ to optimize the success of your launch and the first year of operation. Our goal is to help you turn both challenges and opportunities into realized strengths, whether you are opening a grow-a-grade model, or a new school with multiple grade levels.

OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

STRENGTHS

WE'LL FOCUS HERE, ON THE HOW!

Let's jump right in.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

THE BIG PICTURE: MULTI-GRADE VS. SINGLE-GRADE LAUNCH

Before we dive into the details of the opportunities and challenges at hand, let's take a look at the big picture. What do you need to know right now about single- or multi-grade new school launches? What should we be looking out for?

	MULTI-GRADE OPPORTUNITIES Typical single-grade "cons"	MULTI-GRADE CHALLENGES Typical single-grade "pros"
MODEL DESIGN	• **RAPID DEVELOPMENT.** With multiple grades, you can move through the start-up cycle rapidly, achieving stability more quickly • **FORESIGHTFUL DESIGN.** By necessity, multi-grade schools avoid creating a small "mom & pop" operation that is no longer sustainable once students and staff double in size	• **DESIGN LOAD.** In multi-grade launches, you'll be designing 2+ years of academic programming in a short period of time. In single grade launches, you can focus on just the year ahead.
CULTURE	• **RELATIONSHIPS.** With multiple grade levels, you have opportunities for multi-age mentoring and role-modeling • **STABILITY.** By starting with multiple grade levels, you can minimize the cultural destabilization that results from doubling in size between years 1 and 2	• **HONORING COHORTS.** In multi-grade launches, it can be tricky to create a culture that both distinguishes between and blurs distinctions between ninth and tenth graders • **ONBOARDING.** The more students in the building, the more students to onboard into the new model!
ACADEMICS	• **INNOVATING WITH PRECISION.** With more students and staff on board, you may be better positioned to pilot programs in a setting that more closely resembles the school at full capacity.	• **OPTIMIZING STUDENT GROUPING** to support academic growth with multiple grades of students can be challenging, particularly if there are marginal performance differences between ninth and tenth graders
COSTS AND EXTERNAL FACTORS	• **ECONOMIES OF SCALE** can more quickly be achieved in multiple grade level settings, particularly with operating and administration costs, allowing for more effective resource allocation	• **SUCCESS MEASURES.** High stakes tests and the opinions of key stakeholders come into play when older students are slow to make adequate progress

DESIGN CULTURE ACADEMICS COSTS/EXT

Take a moment to reflect on the following three questions:

1 Which opportunities do you think you are **best positioned** to take advantage of, and why?

2 Which **challenges** do you feel are **most concerning** to you, and why?

3 Which of these align to your **expertise**, and which do you **need** to **learn more** about?

Now let's drill down. As you explore each of the opportunities and recommended design strategies described below, keep in mind that opportunities present a set of *enabling circumstances.* It will require purposeful action and planning to turn opportunities into strengths. Whether you are opening a single-grade or multi-grade-level school, you are in an exciting position to capitalize on lessons learned for the benefit of your new school community.

We'll start by exploring **model design** and **school culture**, then move to **academics**, and finally **costs and external factors**, and we'll frame our exploration primarily from the perspective of multi-grade launches. From this perspective, plus signs denote opportunities and minus signs represent challenges. As you progress through each set of opportunities and challenges, consider keeping a running log of ideas, actions, and questions that emerge for you and your team and that you can circle back to together as you plan your design and development stages.

Creativity…consists largely of rearranging what we know in order to find out what we do not know. Hence, to think creatively, we must be able to look afresh at what we normally take for granted.

George Kneller

#1 MODEL DESIGN

+ RAPID DEVELOPMENT　　**+ FORESIGHTFUL DESIGN**　　**- DESIGN LOAD**

1.1 Move through the start-up cycle rapidly, achieving stability more quickly

There's no question: four-year growth periods characterized by significant year-to-year change can heavily burden staff and lead to burnout. Each year, teachers have to develop new and additional programming, work with new colleagues and students, adapt to new policies and practices, and prepare to do it all over again. This typically leads to significant turnover in years four to six of new school model life cycles. By opening with multiple grade levels, you have an opportunity to reach full capacity, stabilize, and implement your model in full swing—in essence, get where you're going —much sooner.

1.2 Avoid creating a small "mom & pop" operation in year 1, and then redesigning the operational model in year 2 to accommodate double the students and staff

Starting with two grades creates the conditions for administrators and staff to create initial practices and routines that will work at scale. A school of 100 or more students can be run like a small family. A school of 200 or more students must have a clearer, more codified way of operating, with practices that are typically scalable to larger groups of students. If you're opening a single-grade school, this is a key challenge that you can overcome through careful and strategic planning, design, and development.

DESIGN　CULTURE　ACADEMICS　COSTS/EXT

Multi-grade launches push us to think about design that's scalable.

BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS: Imagine it's December and 10% of the students in the school are struggling to attend on a regular basis. In a school of 100 students, these 10 students can receive quite a bit of attention and support without overly burdening individual staff members. In a school of 200-250 students, this number jumps to 20-25 students. What is the procedure and who are the people who will support these students?

STAFF SUPPORT: In a school with five or six teachers, if one third of your staff is struggling, it's feasible for the school leader to provide supports organically —perhaps spend a lot of time one-on-one with each struggling teacher. But what happens when the staff doubles, and so does the demand for the school leader's support, guidance, and feedback? When? To what extent?

PROGRAMMING: Programming students takes significant time. As your school size jumps from 100 students to 200 students or more, the complexity of programming also increases. What's the fastest, most careful way to get this done? If a scheduling change is required mid-year, how will this be accomplished?

STRATEGY #1: CREATE A BLUEPRINT FOR THE LONG TERM

Whether you are preparing for a single-grade or multi-level grade launch, invest the time and effort into building structures, procedures, and protocols that anticipate and support effective school operations and school programming in systematic ways well before launch. If you struggle to anticipate these operational needs, reach out to a veteran school leader who is willing to share the nuts and bolts of their approach.

Another related strategy is to create a four-year blueprint for your school model, identify the must-haves for each year, and make sure your year 1 design aligns with your longer term plan for both operations and programming.

DESIGN CULTURE ACADEMICS COSTS/EXT

STRATEGY #2: CREATE DESIGN-SUSTAINABILITY PARAMETERS   HIGH IMPACT

Define a few questions that frame sustainability criteria through which all of your design decisions can be filtered. Make sure they are visible, and make sure your team commits to them, such that design decisions must meet the criteria prior to building or investing resources. Keep them simple. Here are two examples:

Will this [*approach/model/program/service*] work in year 2 and 3 of our model? Will it work when we are at full scale?

If [X person] leaves the school faculty for any reason, will this [*approach/ model/program/service*] be able to live on successfully?

1.3 Designing multiple years of academic programming in a short period of time

For multi-grade start-ups, the most significant downside of a shorter start-up cycle is the challenge of designing multiple years of academic programming by, before, and during your first year. This not only creates an immense sense of pressure on your teaching team, it can also put you at risk of implementing a half-baked curriculum or set of programs that feel fragmented, disorganized, or sub-standard. It also creates a set of conditions that can frequently cause members of your team to default to old ways of doing things because of the lack of resources, support, or time to adequately prepare. If you're planning for a single-grade school launch, don't make the mistake of thinking you're immune! This is a significant obstacle for all new school launches—just proportionately larger for multi-year new school launches.

STRATEGY #3: SOURCE FROM EXISTING PRODUCTS   SHORT TERM

It is unwise to launch with the expectation that your team will build and curate all curriculum in time for the first year of operation—unless you have a significant head start! **We advise that you strategically source quality curriculum in order to ease the burden on your teachers.**

You can approach this in two ways.

First, your team can begin by exploring reputable online banks of already curated curriculum. For example, you can access discipline-specific digital books and learning resources from platforms like ck12.org, or access "Collections" and follow high-rated teachers or curriculum curators on the gooru.org platform.

Secondly, you can adopt or purchase more "packaged" curricula and then adapt them to your context. Make sure to find products that will support ELL students and students struggling with reading and writing. Not sure where to start? Here are two great resources to help:
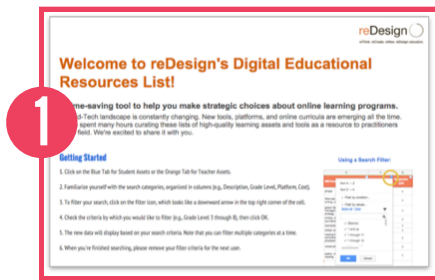
Check out **reDesign's Digital Educational Resource list**—a Google Sheet chock-full of online curricular resources and educational games that span K-12. The list is organized by key information (e.g., cost, grade level, or platform type). Use filters to refine your searches. Both EdSurge and Common Sense Education have similar product indexes.
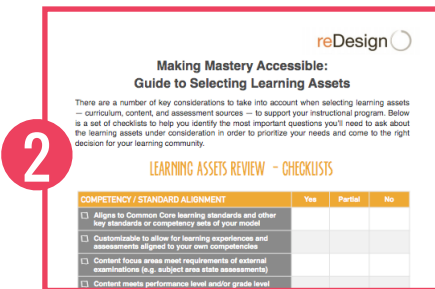
Check out this **Guide to Selecting Learning Assets**. It is organized as a set of checklists that can be used to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of online learning assets for your model, district parameters, and mission before you make an investment.

STRATEGY #4: ESTABLISH A CONTINUOUS DESIGN PROCESS   LONG GAME

Set in place a process for developing your own competency-driven coursework over time. Start small. Set goals around building a handful of courses or units, some performance tasks, and/or some seminars. Take inventory of your teaching team, then consider how you might organize your team to leverage the strengths and interests you've identified.

DESIGN   CULTURE   ACADEMICS   COSTS/EXT

If you're not planning to use an off-the-shelf product, it is worth thinking about hiring curriculum designers to get the process started, develop some templates, create exemplar courses, and train teachers in curriculum development. Check out the Practitioner Spotlight below for several suggested approaches to consider.

PRACTITIONER SPOTLIGHT

One school we studied used an off-the-shelf product in year 1, then established an interdisciplinary **curriculum design team and process** to guide in-house curriculum development over time. All teachers participated, alternating roles by learning cycle and serving as either designers or peer reviewers of the work.

Here at reDesign, we partnered with one school to help develop a few exemplar courses that teachers could not only use, but also model the development of future courses on. Based on the school teams' interest, we created both student-facing courses and teacher-facing courses. Here's an example of a teacher-facing unit called Food Matters.

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Now let's move on to our discussion of school culture, and continue to explore ways that new single- and multi-grade schools can turn opportunities and challenges into strengths.

#2 CULTURE

+ RELATIONSHIPS   + STABILITY   − HONORING COHORTS   − ONBOARDING

2.1 Multi-age opportunities for mentoring and role-modeling

High schools that open with ninth grade students only often struggle to create a strong culture because there are no role models and the range of adolescent development is very narrow. The ninth grade often effectively becomes a second year of eighth grade from a developmental perspective. Adding older students, who have already been in high school, can create more opportunities to foster maturity in students.

2.2 Avoid the cultural destabilization that results from doubling in size between years one and two

School designers often say that the second year is much more challenging than the first, partly because the challenges come as a surprise. Business wisdom says that doubling in size in a year is dangerous, as it becomes immensely difficult to effectively manage culture, operations, and quality in the midst of such dramatic change. The same holds true for school start-ups despite the conventional wisdom that growing one grade at a time is best practice.

2.3 Creating a culture that both distinguishes between, and blurs distinctions between, ninth and tenth grade students

Tenth grade students will need to feel acknowledged for being older and more experienced, and it's important to remember that their experience and level of maturity

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are potential assets that can be built upon to foster leadership among older students, and a sense of aspiration among younger students. Make sure to capitalize on this right from the start, as it will send an important signal to your tenth graders that you value their unique role. Without doing so, order students might be resistant to be part of a school that makes no distinctions between them and ninth graders, even if the distinctions are more culturally symbolic and less academic.

Also note that some tenth graders will feel much more urgency about graduation than ninth graders. They will want to know how they are doing, whether they were able to bring credit with them from their previous school, and how they can accumulate required credits. These are important concerns to heed.

STRATEGY #5: CREATE COHORT-BASED DISTINCTIONS

Consider creating cohort-based distinctions along one or both of the following two dimensions:

ACADEMICS: if you find that your tenth grade students struggle with specific skill gaps—or are not ready for forthcoming high-stakes test—consider creating special "booster" courses specifically for tenth graders that focus on building essential background knowledge or skills. If your tenth graders seem to be in a strong position academically, consider creating another type of academic experience that is unique to tenth grade students.

CULTURE: Consider creating grade-based distinctions around college prep experiences: tenth graders can visit more schools, perhaps do an overnight trip, and have two or three parent meetings about envisioning college, paying for college, and applying to college. While all students should visit colleges and learn about college, tenth grade experiences can be more intense, including taking the PSAT, practicing the SAT, ordering college catalogues, and beginning to practice writing their personal narratives.

PRACTITIONER SPOTLIGHT

One school we studied integrated Naviance, a digital college and career readiness support tool, in a distinctive way across each grade level. Specifically, the school unlocked certain tools/features/experiences for older/higher-level cohorts. Purchasing a tool like Naviance could help ninth and tenth graders feel like they are having different experiences.

2.4 Onboarding many more students into the model at one time is challenging, especially as the model itself is still in its very early stages

The complexity of onboarding processes for new students in new school models—particularly for schools seeking to introduce innovative approaches to teaching and learning—is often underestimated. This is not just about transferring academic records. This is about making sure students *learn how to learn* in your new school model. And yes, there will be a learning curve for all students! As a result, even your orientation model should undergo a rigorous design process, and will require a significant investment in time for planning and preparation (See Design Strategy #7 below).

In a multi-grade launch, the design challenge is creating a truly personalized and intimate experience for a much larger group of students. The desired outcome for orientation is that every student has developed a bond with at least one adult and a small group of students. How will you successfully accomplish this during your orientation? Let's check out a strategy for ensuring a strong start for all students.
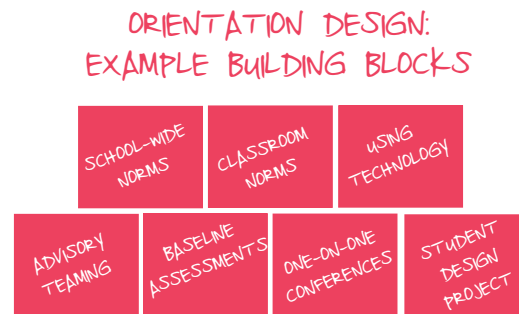
STRATEGY #6: SCRIPT & BUILD YOUR ONBOARDING MODEL   HIGH IMPACT

Regardless of whether you are opening a single or multi-grade school, you'll want to take great care in how you approach your orientation. In your first few weeks of school, you are setting the tone, establishing expectations, giving students a preview of what life and learning will be like in your school. You are doing this in both explicit and tacit ways, and you'll want to make sure that what you are *saying* is consistent with what students are *observing* and *experiencing*. We recommend that you dedicate 2-3 weeks for onboarding before regular classes begin. Consider these three design tips:

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i. Define your building blocks for the orientation experience that connect to your desired outcomes. For example, if your goal is a strong teacher-student bond, you will want to make sure that teacher-student conferences are one of your building blocks, as well as dedicated advisory or small group time. If your goal is that students begin to internalize a set of school norms and values, you'll want to embed a set of value-based activities as one of your building blocks. Once you've determined your building blocks, you'll want to think about time allocations and meaningful sequencing or spiraling for each.

ORIENTATION DESIGN:
EXAMPLE BUILDING BLOCKS

SCHOOL-WIDE NORMS

CLASSROOM NORMS

USING TECHNOLOGY

ADVISORY TEAMING

BASELINE ASSESSMENTS

ONE-ON-ONE CONFERENCES

STUDENT DESIGN PROJECT

ii. Create a detailed storyboard and script for a powerful onboarding experience. Begin by establishing a specific frame for the task. For example, you can choose your school values and then storyboard around how these values will be meaningfully integrated into every onboarding activity. You could also choose to storyboard for the first day of orientation, one day in the middle, the final day of orientation, and the first day of regular classes. Alternatively, you could storyboard for one of the specific building blocks you've listed above. Then, as though you were writing a screenplay—carefully crafting not only the dialogue, but also highly specific details about the setting, the mood, the interactions between characters, the equipment or materials needed, and so forth—create a storyboard and script.

iii. Build the artifacts. The storyboarding activity is not the end game. The purpose of storyboarding process is to help illuminate the many documents, activities, templates, and other resources you'll need to source, create, and organize prior to launch: documents to coordinate teacher roles, define staff responsibilities, clarify schedules, introduce and guide student activities, facilitate discussions, and so forth.

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#3 ACADEMICS

3.1 Piloting innovations in a setting that most closely resembles the school at full capacity

A fairly straightforward point: with more students and staff on board, you will be better positioned to pilot academic programs in a setting that more closely resembles the school at full scale. You will not only have greater flexibility in course programming, you will have a larger staff to work with as you configure your courses and academic programs. As a single-grade school, you will unfortunately be much more constrained in your course offerings and programming efforts until you are able to bring on more staff, and this limits the programs you can offer in your first year.

CASE IN POINT

COURSE PROGRAMMING: With multiple grade levels and therefore more teachers, you have greater flexibility when course programming, and this can make it possible to offer a broader array of courses without teachers having to prep three or four different courses at a time. A larger staff also means a more diverse set of strengths and interests to draw on as you consider other aspects of your school model that might depend heavily on your human capital (as they nearly always do).

STUDENT-TEACHER CONFIGURATIONS: Starting with multiple grade levels enables you to hire at least two teachers in each discipline, which allows students to potentially work with more teachers in a given year. If courses are not yearlong, students might work with one teacher for a trimester or semester, and then with another teacher.

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3.2 Grouping students to maximize academic growth, particularly if there are few academic differences between ninth and tenth graders

If you are launching with multiple grade levels, and you find that there is little distinction in academic performance between ninth and tenth grade students, it might be difficult to support effective grouping of students in ways that maximize academic growth. Here are a few quick strategies to help:

STRATEGY #7: EMPLOY FLEXIBLE GROUPING

Flexible grouping is a critical tool for optimizing student learning and growth—and this impacts a number of decisions that you'll need to make in your first year. Flexible grouping allows you to be responsive to student needs in real time. If this wasn't on your radar before, it's time to dedicate some time to deeper learning around flexible grouping and how this strategy impacts your programming and scheduling plans. Take these three essential steps to explore flexible grouping and enable it to thrive in your school.

1. Organize your instructional model around college readiness learning standards or academic competencies, rather than traditional courses. Ideally, students are able to move forward once they demonstrate competency, regardless of their age. If the sequencing isn't too rigid, then students can also make choices about which competencies to work on, and which courses to select. All of these collectively create exciting opportunities for personalization. The first step is to adopt and adapt a set of competencies that align to your mission, vision, and academic requirements for graduation. Ready to organize learning around competencies? Check out this Competency Adoption Guide to help you build on the work of others in the field, and avoid duplicating the creation of academic competencies.
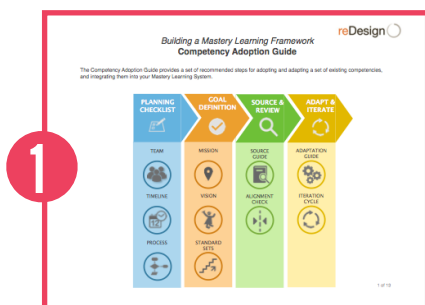
This **Competency Adoption Guide** describes a rigorous four-step process for adopting and adapting a set of college- and career-aligned competencies—so you can build on the work that has already been done, rather than reinvent the wheel.

2. Use intake assessments and interim assessments to track growth and give student feedback. Your first assessment will enable you to gather and analyze key baseline data. Thereafter, you will want to administer two or three additional assessments throughout the year to track and measure growth. This is especially important for ELL students who are deep in language learning and need timely feedback and guidance in order to accelerate their learning.
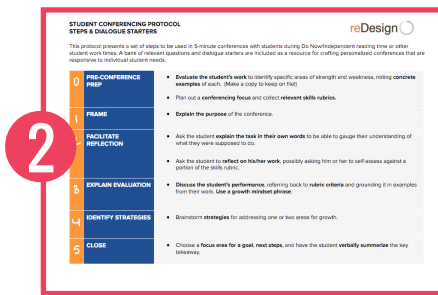

Check out this **Student Conferencing Protocol: Steps and Dialogue Starters** to help provide step-by-step guidance to teachers on facilitating high-quality student conferences.

3. Organize the school schedule and calendar to allow for flexible groupings of students. Here are two key resources for learning and tinkering:

This **Innovations in Scheduling slideshow** showcases districts and schools that are breaking with traditional schedules to introduce flexibility around where and when learning takes place, pushing the envelope of learning possibilities with a host of innovative practices.
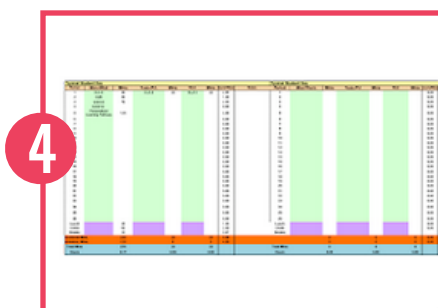
Check out the **Schedule Prototyping Tool** under "Personalization" on our Design Lab - Mastery Learning Design Guides web page. It's a downloadable Excel spreadsheet that gives you an opportunity to "play" with different arrangements of time for groupings of people.

STRATEGY #8: CLARIFY YOUR PROMOTION & CREDITING POLICY   HIGH COMPLEXITY

If you are opening as a multi-grade-level school, make sure you have a clear and fair process for honoring the credit profile of incoming tenth grade students. Because you may be addressing significant academic

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gaps among your older students—and therefore you may, in practice, arrange students in groups that do not necessarily reflect their grade level (as described above)—it is important to help tenth grade students feel that the work they completed in their previous school "counts" and that they are not losing ground at your school.

We recognize that this may feel like a worrying compromise to make, for example, if you are a competency-based school and concerned that tenth grade students have not met your own internal criteria for advancement or credit attainment. You may be wondering: Will this set a dangerous precedent? Will it backfire down the road because we've technically advanced students who weren't ready? Does this undermine our school values? These concerns are valid, but know that we've seen this play out in multiple competency-based schools and if handled properly, this will not be a major setback. We strongly advise that you honor the credits your students have been issued anyway, and instead focus on providing the personalized instructional supports to help them get caught up. Ultimately, your goal is to help them feel momentum toward graduation and engaged in the learning opportunities that your school is providing. As designers, remember the long game: each year, your school will become more rigorous.

Struggling to put together a comprehensive grading, promotion and crediting policy? Check out this design guide: **Building a Mastery-based Grading Policy** a great resource for designers that includes a number of exemplars and key design considerations.

3.3 Sequencing two or more years of coursework to maximize academic growth across all subgroups of students

How will you maximize academic growth across all subgroups, including emergent bilinguals (ELL) and students with special education needs? In multi-grade start-ups, you may find this more challenging because you have two or more years of coursework and program offerings to configure. Here are several key steps you can take to approach this challenge strategically.
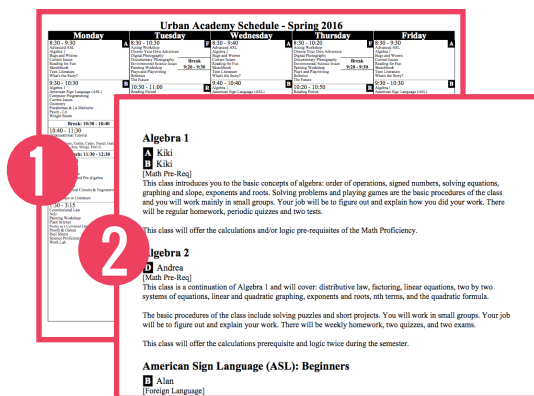
STRATEGY #9: RETHINK COURSE SIZES AND SEQUENCES

1. **Make purposeful decisions about the size of courses.** Will courses be ten weeks long? A trimester? A semester? Key considerations:

   - Shorter courses (8-10 weeks) provide more flexibility in programming ninth and tenth grade students together, because you can more flexibly and responsively group students throughout the year, sometimes joining ninth and tenth grade students, and sometimes separating them. The longer the courses are, the fewer opportunities you'll have to group students dynamically based on their needs.

   - Shorter courses help teachers approach instructional design in a more modular way, which can be immensely helpful for schools with struggling learners, as you can focus deeply on something for a period of time and then move on.

   - Shorter courses mean more opportunities for student choice because course offerings will cycle through multiple times throughout the year, rather than only once or twice.

   - Shorter courses create additional learning and crediting opportunities for students who may not meet the requirements for crediting the first time they complete a course. For example, if a course is offered at the beginning of the year and again in a second or third trimester, students who may not have passed the first time can have another opportunity. If your shorter courses are built around a select set of competencies, now you are able to create meaningful recuperation opportunities for specific, measurable learning targets or college readiness skill-sets.

   - Shorter courses can mean that students get broader exposure to your teaching team. This can create real learning advantages for students, such as by enabling all ELA teachers to work with all students, rather than assigning one teacher to each grade level, which tends to limit the range of courses and learning experiences that can be offered.

2. **Make purposeful decisions about the kinds of courses that will be offered,** and make sure they can be aligned with state graduation requirements. In a district setting, you may need to make choices based on a pre-existing course catalogue. If you're competency-based, this will require you to create a simple crosswalk between your competencies and district courses in order to help facilitate grade conversion and crediting.

3. **Make purposeful decisions about sequencing.** Determine which courses must be completed in a sequence, and which ones do not. Consider creative approaches to using course structures for student onboarding, baseline assessments, and gathering critical data to make placement decisions. Here are a few practitioner examples:

PRACTITIONER SPOTLIGHT

One school that we studied serves overage under-credited youth who are typically only enrolled for a short window of time. In order to maximize time, the school generated a student-facing ROADMAP to guide course sequencing. The roadmap is organized around three domains: Math (focus: number sense), Science (focus: health and science literacy), and Humanities (focus: reading and writing). All new students are placed in a 12-week-long seminar for each discipline, of which they can't test out. In Seminar, students take intake assessments, and learn the core elements of studying in each discipline. Seminar teachers work to carefully evaluate students' strengths and needs so that students can move into coursework based on their level of competence. For example, some will move into level one Math courses on Numeracy, Number Sense, and Intro to Algebra, while others will move into Geometry or more advanced Algebra.

If your launching with multiple grades, your older students will similarly have a shorter "runway" for learning and crediting prior to graduation. **For this reason, models that serve overage under-credited youth can be very helpful to learn from.**

4. **Find ways to promote student agency and personalization in course selection.** Human capital will likely be your biggest constraint here, and therefore single-grade launches are considerably more limited in year 1 than multi-grade schools. While there is currently very little rethinking of "how to do courses," there are a few exceptions:

Check out this **sample schedule** and **annotated course catalogue** from Urban Academy (UA). At UA, much of course sequencing is determined by students and their advisors, based on the interests and needs at specific moments in time. It not only fosters choice, it is responsive to student needs and creates meaningful opportunities for students and advisors to reflect and make decisions together.

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5. **Prioritize course offerings and sequences that enable targeted supports to struggling students.** This means having strong intake assessments to determine students' language, reading and writing competence, as well as the provision of booster or prep courses on background knowledge and foundational skills that will be critical for high-stakes tests.

CONSIDER THIS

ACADEMIC ON-RAMPING: For schools serving large numbers of overage, under-credited students, emergent bilinguals (ELL), and special education students, consider creating a more primary category for learning essential ELA skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and in pre-algebra. Be careful to avoid scripted, low-level off-the-shelf curriculum that disengages students from the start. Instead, consider using a tool like **reDesign's Digital Educational Resource list** (referenced earlier) in order to identify high-interest—possibly even game-based—tools to help students build background knowledge and foundational skills.

SUPPORTING EMERGENT BILINGUALS (ELL): Consider another layer of strategic sequencing: develop a *task set sequence* that mirrors the way language naturally develops: focus on speaking and listening **performance tasks** or **formative tasks** (**debate**, **Socratic seminar**, **speech**, **infographic**, **photo-essay**) and tasks that support reading development (**text annotation**, **reflective summaries**) then move to tasks that involve writing when students should be able to transfer many academic skills they have learned with reading, speaking and listening tasks. The graphic below illustrates this strategic sequence.

PERFORMANCE TASK SEQUENCING STRATEGY

HEY SCHOOL DESIGNERS: SEE ALL THOSE PERFORMANCE TASKS SHOWN IN THE NIFTY GRAPHIC ABOVE? YOU CAN GO FETCH 'EM FOR FREE AT REDESIGNU.ORG/DESIGN-LAB. WE KNOW. IT'S CRAZY.

Visit the "Design Lab" at http://www.redesignu.org/design-lab and access free, open-source performance-based task guides for all of the above performance tasks. Also check out the "Formative Tasks" Collection" (illustrated below) designed to help students through each step in the learning process as they work to complete performance tasks, regardless of the content area.
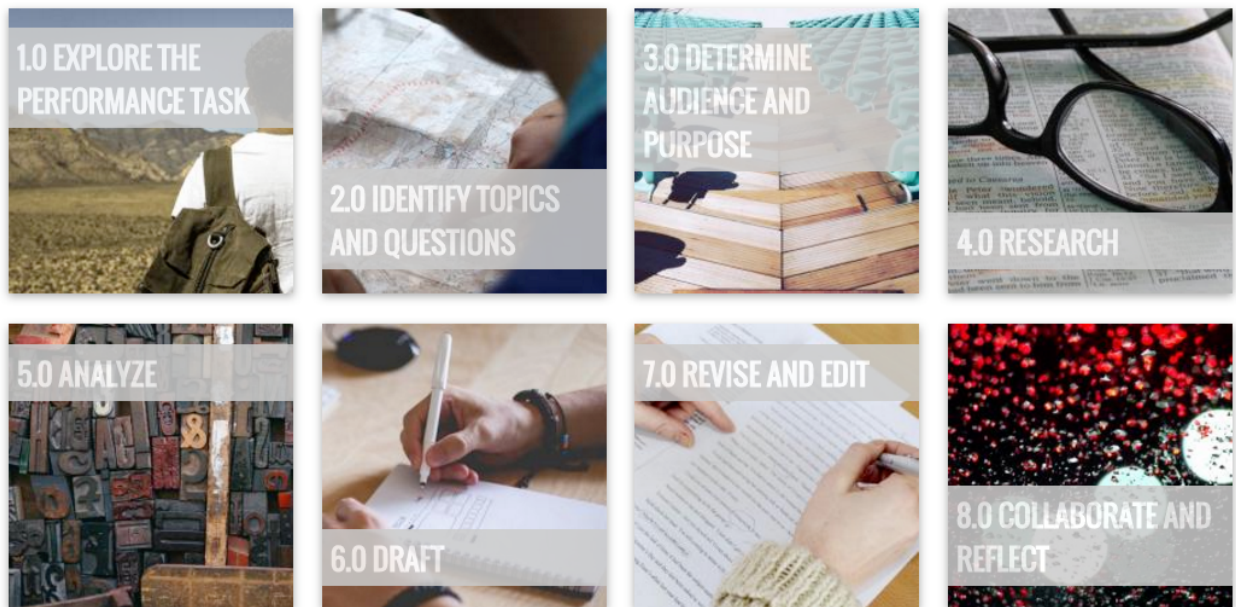
WHY IS IT ALL FREE? you might ask.

The Design Lab is a knowledge-building project developed by reDesign to help connect practitioners to stellar instructional resources that enable students to build college and career readiness skills. The Mastery Learning section of the Lab was developed in partnership with Springpoint Schools with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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Let's now take a look at our last set of challenges and opportunities to explore, organized around costs and external factors.
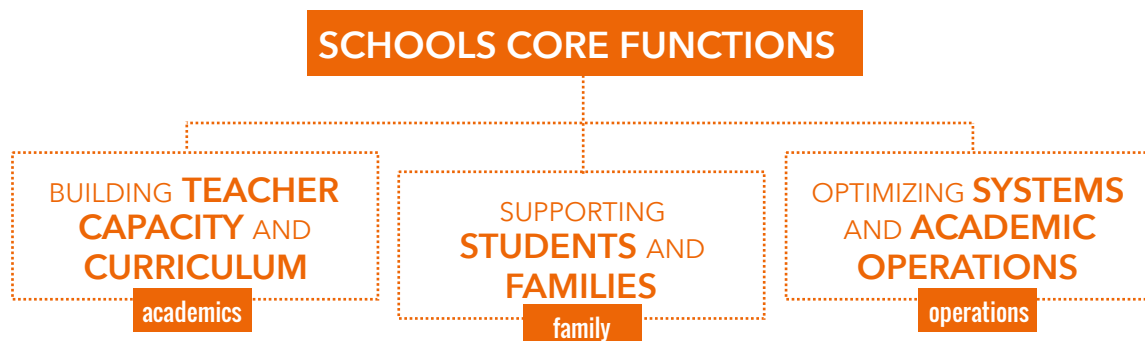
#4 COSTS AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

4.1 Economies of scale with operating and administration costs allows for more effective resource allocation

Schools that begin with 100 or more students struggle with incredibly lean staffing plans: teachers wear many hats and the administration typically consists of one or two people only. As a result, academic coherence and quality are often sacrificed as the school works to create smooth operations and a strong culture. In schools with 200 or more students, there is more financial flexibility that will allow for hiring a full-time instructional leader and/or coaches who can work closely with teachers as they develop the program. This doesn't mean that academics won't necessarily suffer in single-grade level start-ups—they often do—but the opportunity here is in thinking about strategic allocations of personnel across core school functions when you have the benefit of launching with a larger team.

STRATEGY #10: ALLOCATE LEADERSHIP ROLES BY FUNCTION

One way to think about the allocation of human capital resources in the context of your new school model is to distribute your leadership roles and responsibilities along the following three core functions of schools:

SCHOOLS CORE FUNCTIONS

BUILDING **TEACHER CAPACITY** AND **CURRICULUM**	SUPPORTING **STUDENTS** AND **FAMILIES**	OPTIMIZING **SYSTEMS** AND **ACADEMIC OPERATIONS**
academics	family	operations

DESIGN CULTURE ACADEMICS **COSTS/EXT**

In a multi-grade school launch, you have a greater opportunity to hire people who can each focus their time, energy, and skills on of these core functions.

The first step to making strategic human resource allocations is to take inventory of your leadership team's strengths, talents, experience, and interests. Because you will likely have more than one administrator in a multi-grade-level start-up, consider one of the following ways to organize your administration around core school functions. The principal does not necessarily need to fulfill the role of instructional leader, as long as another full-time administrator or faculty member is available to fulfill the role. If you only have two administrators, then you'll need to collapse two of these functions into one role, or distribute the responsibilities between the two administrators.

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        Principal                              Principal
        *Academics                             Operations
            |                                      |
      +-----+-----+                          +-----+-----+
      |           |                          |           |
    Family     Operations                *Academics    Family
```

*When it comes down to it, your efforts should always prioritize support for teachers and curriculum, as these have the greatest impact on both student learning and the long-term viability of the school.

4.2 High-stakes tests, "success measures" and the opinions of key stakeholders when older students are slow to make adequate progress

It is often the case that new school models are given three to five years to show proof of concept. However, in multi-grade-level high school launches, you have older students who are one year closer to high-stakes examinations, and one year closer to graduation—and these factors don't go away.

This becomes a critical communication issue with the district, staff, parents and students. In a school's first year or two, it is common for students to make less progress than they will later, as everyone learns to participate in a new culture, with new approaches to community, teaching and learning. In multi-grade high school launches, tenth graders are much closer to the crosshairs of high-stakes examinations, with less time to close the existing achievement gaps.

The district will need to take a proactively protective stance with the school, and the school will need to take on very transparent, frequent, and supportive conversations with key stakeholders. This is particularly true with schools serving special education students and emergent bilinguals, as writing is typically one of the last skills they will develop.

STRATEGY #11: EXECUTE STRONG COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT PLANS

Well before the school launch, get to the drawing board to create a robust stakeholder communications and engagement plan. Your goals in building and executing on these plans are significant: to build relationships with your stakeholders, cultivate understanding about your school model, create onramps for meaningful community involvement, and foster a sense of shared purpose in your new and emerging school community. We recommend approaching this effort in the following way:

Step 1: Develop a Stakeholder Map
Step 2: Create an Engagement Plan
Step 3: Create a Strategic Communications Plan
Step 4: Define and distribute roles and responsibilities among the team
Step 5: Create a Communications & Engagement Calendar

Here's the reality: Your engagement and communication strategy will either fall by the wayside amidst your competing priorities in year 1—understandable, and not uncommon—or it can be a powerful vehicle for building trust and expanding your network of support.

This particular aspect of your work also has the potential to be a major boost to yours and your stakeholders' morale, energy, and optimism about the work ahead. Every bit of time and energy you invest in engagement and communications will come back to you multiplied.

Action	Key Questions	Tips
Stakeholder mapping **Building a contact list**	Who are all the key stakeholder groups with whom you'll need to engage throughout the year? Who are the key contacts in each of your stakeholder groups, and what is the best way to reach them?	Use Google Sheets for your contact list so the contact list is easily accessible across your team and you won't have to struggle with version control as you keep your list updated over time. IMPORTANT: For parents/guardians, go to great lengths to gather e-mail addresses and at least two phone numbers. Make sure your first attempt at contact is not for a negative reason. Don't forget that social media can be a powerful communication tool; if your stakeholders are active on SM platforms, you may want to capture that information as well.

Action	Key Questions	Tips
Engagement Planning	How will you foster regular person-to-person interactions with your stakeholders? What kind of organized events will you host? When should key stakeholders be invited for a well-time school visit? When should those open house events for parents and families be scheduled, and what needs to happen in order to maximize turn out?	Think of engagement along these three dimensions: 1) **Two-way communication** (building awareness) 2) **In-person interactions and events** (building relationships) 3) **Information and resource-sharing** (delivering value). Be creative. **Consider dedicating a design day with your team to address this specific question: how will we build meaningful relationships with parents and families, and how will we communicate our school model in a way that ensures understanding and generates buy-in?**
Defining Key Messages	What are you high-impact messages across your different stakeholder groups?	An example of framing key messages to parents could be: 1. How your student is doing 2. The steps we're taking to better meet her or his learning needs and goals 3. How you can help
Determining frequency & type of communication outreach	How often will you need to initiate each of the above messages with your stakeholder groups, and what different communication channels will you use for each?	Consider how you might engage students in this process. How can they play a leadership role in how you engage and communicate with stakeholders?
Defining impact metrics for engagement and communication	How will you know you are successful in achieving two-way communication with parents/families? What is your target level of "reach" among your parents/families for school events?	Make it fun, and make it meaningful: family potlucks, student work exhibitions, student-led teacher-parent/guardian conferences, and so forth. Set goals for parent/family participation and engagement, and celebrate progress toward them. Make sure this doesn't just live in the mind of the school leader, but is something that the entire team feels ownership over.
Building templates	What documents (templates, brochures, flyers, letters) are needed to support our communications and engagement plans?	Create the document templates you'll need for communication. This can be as simple as school letterhead with some static text, or as complex as a competency-based progress report. Get these templates created, fine-tuned with feedback, and well organized in Google Drive or another convenient location for you and your team.

Action	Key Questions	Tips
Calendaring events with alerts & owners	Who will take responsibility for each of these one-time and recurring actions? How will we stay ahead of our effort and ensure that we execute on our plans?	Set up a team calendar that not only marks key communication events and engagement events, but that also establishes deadlines for draft materials, event preparation activities, and so forth. Add calendar alerts so the deadlines don't get overlooked. Make sure that communication roles are distributed appropriately among your team.