Pathways to Extending Charter Impact

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Introduction

Many charter schools and networks have demonstrated game-changing results for low-income students and students of color. To extend their impact, many have expanded their enrollment to serve more students or replicated their model by opening new schools. However, expansion and replication are just some ways in which schools/networks have sought to extend their impact. Other charter schools and networks have leveraged their strengths to fill unmet needs in the sector, such as teacher training or community engagement.

There is no "right" way for schools and networks to extend their impact. Instead, how an organization chooses to grow should reflect the organization's particular strengths, the unmet needs they see in the communities they serve, and their capacity to build offerings to meet those needs. Bellwether has developed a suite of resources to support schools and network leaders in exploring multiple pathways to growth.

For charter schools/networks extending their impact by serving more students:
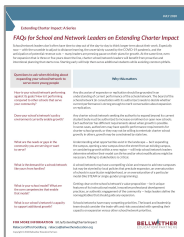
[FAQs for School and Network Leaders on Extending Charter Impact](#)
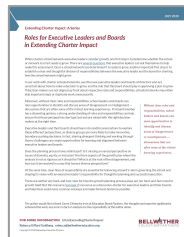
[Roles for Executive Leaders and Boards in Extending Charter Impact](#)

For charter schools/networks extending their impact in other ways:

This deck provides examples of how charter schools/networks have pursued impact beyond the walls of their schools. While sometimes less direct in their impact on student outcomes, these strategies can fill important gaps in the field.

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As an organization considers whether and how to grow, it first must articulate the current state and needs to address

Current situation

FIRST, you define the situation today and problem you seek to solve.

Intended impact

SECOND, you define the role your organization will play in solving the problem and the impact it will have.

Theory of Action

THIRD, you determine *how* you will achieve that impact — the specific levers you will pull as an organization to get there.

Answer key questions relevant to your organization:

Why does the organization exist? What unmet need are you addressing? *This should be sufficiently narrow and specific where the organization could truly be addressing that problem (e.g., too few high-quality seats in X city, new teachers are entering schools underprepared to be effective in the classroom).*

What factors are contributing to that problem? *These are things an organization would try to fix or provide an alternative to.*

What assets does the organization bring to the table?

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Once the need is established, an organization should define the impact it will have in addressing that need

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WHO are the **beneficiaries** of the work (organization type or individuals)?

WHAT are the **outcomes** you seek for your beneficiaries (i.e., what will the organization hold itself accountable for?)?

WHERE/in which **geographies** will the organization focus?

WHEN/over what **time frame** will benefits be achieved?

HOW MUCH impact will the organization have? How will it be **measured**?

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A CMO's Theory of Action can lead to the direct impact of operating schools as well as additional avenues for impact

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Examples

Lever for direct impact

Operate schools
(with specific model elements that achieve your impact goals)

Levers for broader impact:

Codify and share model for other school operators to implement

Activate the community as advocates for high-quality schools

Develop teacher and leader training programs

Create tools and resources for schools

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Many high-quality charter schools and networks extend their impact through local, regional, and national expansion

Within a City	Within a Region	Multi-Region

> **Some CMOs across the country have replicated unique school models to educate more students directly within their school buildings.**

Some schools and networks have extended their impact beyond the walls of their schools

Codify and share model for other school operators to implement

Description: Codify all or part of a school's model to share it with other operators who want to implement it (sometimes includes training to support implementation).

Examples: Summit Learning, Valor Collegiate

Activate the community as advocates for high-quality schools

Description: Participate in and prepare others to engage in advocacy and/or community-building activities.

Examples: United Parents and Students (Green Dot), Democracy Builders (Democracy Prep), Success Academies

Develop teacher and leader training programs

Description: Develop a teacher and/or leader training program to prepare educators for success in your own and/or other schools.

Examples: Match, Alder

Create tools and resources for schools

Description: Create tools and resources (e.g., curriculum, data platforms) that other schools can leverage.

Examples: Achievement First (open-source curriculum), Schoolzilla

CMOs have taken a variety of approaches to expanding their impact, including those above. The following pages provide a deeper dive into specific examples.

Some schools and networks codify elements of their models to share with others

Description: Codify all or part of a school's model to share with other operators who want to implement it.

Impact rationale: Many schools and networks have built successful school models, elements of which others could adopt and implement without having to reinvent the wheel. This approach allows a network to accelerate the growth of the model to reach many more students.

Potential impact challenges: Because model providers do not have control over how schools implement their model, quality and impact may be lower than at their own schools.

Spotlight: Summit Learning Program

SUMMIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS   SUMMIT LEARNING™

During its growth into an 11-school network, Summit Public Schools developed an innovative and effective personalized learning approach and curriculum. Summit codified the model, Summit Learning Program, and built a robust platform and training approach so that other schools could access and implement it.

Today, over 400 schools in 38 states and D.C. are now part of Summit's network, leveraging its model as well as its suite of resources and trainings.

Supporting community engagement efforts allows schools and networks to drive impact beyond schools

Description: Participating in and activating others to engage in advocacy and/or community-building activities.

Impact rationale: There are many factors that impact students' lives and ability to thrive. Some schools and networks have taken an active role in connecting with and empowering communities to advocate for and drive changes that will improve schools and communities where their students live, including but not limited to high-quality schools.

Potential impact challenges: Effective community organizing has to come from the ground. Schools and networks face the risk of approaching the work top-down and not building authentic community voice.

Spotlight: Green Dot's United Parents and Students

Green Dot operates schools in Los Angeles, Memphis, and Seattle. The national organization founded United Parents and Students to "help families address the factors outside school boundaries that not only pose barriers to learning, but also inhibit local quality of life as a whole." Low-income communities lack power, so United Parents and Students strives to organize low-income and working-class parents to bring the power of collective action and voice.

For example, in 2016, United Parents and Students registered over 2,000 people in their community to vote.

Some schools and networks leverage their expertise to build teacher and/or leader training programs

Develop teacher and leader training programs

Description: Develop a teacher and/or leader training program to prepare educators for your own and/or other schools.

Impact rationale: Teacher preparation programs are highly varied in quality and many new teachers enter classrooms underprepared.* There is an opportunity for schools and networks that have developed effective approaches to training teachers and leaders to use that expertise to deliver high-quality preparation.

Potential impact challenges: Running a training program requires different skills and competencies from running a school.

Spotlight: Match Education

match EDUCATION **Sposato | Graduate School of Education**

Match Schools are elementary, middle, and high schools serving 1,250 K-12 students in Boston. In 2008, Match started a teacher residency program to train novice teachers for their schools and in 2012 started the Sposato Graduate School of Education "to prepare unusually effective novice teachers for schools serving low-income populations, and to develop, validate and disseminate innovative approaches to teacher preparation." Today, Sposato trains teachers for high-performing public schools across the country.

*See the results from this survey conducted by Educators for Excellence.

Schools and networks can share tools or resources that allow schools to function more effectively and efficiently

Create tools and resources for schools

Description: Create tools and resources (e.g., curriculum, data platforms) that other schools can leverage.

Impact rationale: Charter schools often find themselves reinventing the wheel, developing their own tools and resources. Sharing high-quality tools and resources, *created by schools and for schools*, allows other operators to focus on educating students.

Potential impact challenges: Developing tools and resources that can be used in a variety of settings and work with different systems and approaches can be a challenge.

Spotlight: Aspire and Schoolzilla

Aspire Public Schools, a network of schools in California, Tennessee, and Washington state, developed technology and practices that allowed schools to use data much more effectively to address student needs. Other charter schools began requesting to use its tools, so Aspire created Schoolzilla, a cloud-based data management and visualization platform for education practitioners currently used across 100 school districts and charter management organizations in more than 30 states. Schoolzilla became its own mission-driven organization in 2013 and was recently acquired.

Schools can pursue more than one option: City Garden Montessori School in St. Louis identified three levers for impact

City Garden aligned its impact goals to the Montessori framework that recognizes the importance of the child, the adult, and the environment

Following the child

School Operation:
Expand the flagship school and open additional schools to serve more students in St. Louis

Teacher and Leader Training:
Launch a training institute to create a pipeline of Montessori-trained, state-certified, culturally competent teachers from diverse backgrounds for City Garden and other Montessori schools

Community Activation and Advocacy:
Working from within the community, create a center to build capacity and knowledge to organize and advocate for the community

Schools

Student Success

Institute

Center for Equity

Preparing the adult

Preparing the environment

Recommendations for exploring new avenues for impact

While there are many ways charter schools and networks can have an impact, it is important to remember that their primary role is running schools. We have a few recommendations for schools and networks as they consider how to extend their impact:

❖ Explore new avenues for impact only when your schools are on solid footing. Expanding beyond the core work of running schools can be challenging even for the strongest organizations.

❖ Allocate staff to impact expansion strategies appropriately, to ensure schools are not negatively affected by growth. Ensure enough leadership time is dedicated to running the schools and additional staff is hired to focus on new offerings.

❖ If the new avenue for impact requires significantly new competencies and does not achieve synergies with the school or networks activities, consider incubating the new idea with a plan to spin it off into a separate organization. Charter schools and networks can play an important role in innovation but should carefully consider the role the organization plays in the ongoing management of the work.

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Authors and Acknowledgments

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Disclosure: Most of the organizations described in this resource have been clients of Bellwether Education Partners; the authors maintained editorial control of the content. A full list of Bellwether clients is available on our website.

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