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K–12 VALUE NETWORKS:

The hidden forces that help or hinder learner-centered education

BY THOMAS ARNETT, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH EDUCATION REIMAGINED

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Executive Summary

The conventional model of schooling is outdated and overdue for replacement. As learners make their way through high school, survey results show that close to 66% end up disengaged.[1] Those who successfully navigate the system gain a narrow set of academic skills that may or may not align with their individual needs, interests, and strengths. And as a side effect of conventional schooling, learners often form fixed mindsets about their abilities and see their value and identity through the narrow framing of academic ranking systems.

LEARNER-CENTERED EDUCATION is a distinct educational paradigm that offers a more holistic approach to meeting the needs of every learner, with the goal of helping youth thrive and build fulfilling lives. It embraces the unique talents, interests, and potential of every learner and collaborates with learners to design learning experiences and pathways tailored to their interests, needs, and aspirations that help them pursue their potential. Yet, such learning environments are far and few between as learner-centered education struggles to gain traction within the broader public K–12 education landscape.

Despite numerous efforts over the last century to reform and transform conventional education, the hallmarks of the conventional model remain entrenched. This paper offers a theory-based framework for understanding why established schools struggle to change their instructional models, and then offers insights to help learner-centered models take root.

Late Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen's research on disruptive innovation found that mature organizations readily adopt some innovations but fumble or even resist adopting others. Their motivation and ability to innovate hinges on two things: the compatibility of a particular innovation with the organizational model and the demand for innovation from the organization's value network.

An organizational model consists of four key components. **Value propositions** represent what an organization offers its stakeholders, such as goods and services or instruction and experiences. **Resources** include people, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and cash. **Processes** are habitual ways of working together—both formal and informal—that emerge as people address recurrent tasks repeatedly and successfully. Lastly, an organization's **financial formula** defines how it sustainably supports the costs of its operations. Together, these components of an organizational model define an organization's capabilities.

Organizations do not live in isolation. An organization's **value network** represents the context of individuals, other organizations, institutions, and regulations it interfaces with to establish and maintain its model. Schools' value networks often include local, state, and federal education agencies and policymakers; learners and their families; employee unions; voters and taxpayers; the postsecondary education system; community organizations; vendors; teacher preparation pipelines; and philanthropic donors. An organization's value network is the dominant influence on its priorities.

This framework reveals why many learner-centered practices and priorities are incompatible with the organizational model of conventional schooling. Processes such as age-based cohorts, separation of classes by academic discipline, teacher-led and single-paced instruction, teaching as transmission, leveling and tracking, and the school calendar don't play well with many of the practices that go hand-in-hand with learner-centered education such as competency-based learning, interdisciplinary projects, off-campus learning, flexible learning schedules, and collaborating with learners as they develop their own learning pathways.

But the disconnects come from more than just practices. Whereas conventional schooling prioritizes covering content during a fixed schedule of instructional minutes and anchors its measures of success on standardized tests, learner-centered models prioritize learner's agency, intrinsic motivation, and wellbeing in addition to content and skills mastery. These models also measure success in terms of life outcomes, such as gainful and meaningful employment and success in postsecondary educational pursuits.

Unfortunately, even when education leaders recognize the need for a new model of education, learner-centered reform efforts in conventional schools consistently get nullified by the powerful, yet underappreciated, collective force of a schools' value network. Different value networks embody different priorities, and new models of learner-centered education can only take root successfully within value networks that align with their distinctive priorities.

This report describes how five different learner-centered models—The Met, Virtual Learning Academy Charter School, Iowa BIG, Village High School, and Embark Education—were able to launch and grow their models by assembling value networks congruent with their vision for learner-centered education.

These examples illustrate a useful set of insights into what it will take to successfully launch learner-centered options in more locations.[2] In short, leaders of learner-centered models need to consider carefully where and how they assemble the various elements of their value networks.

INTRODUCTION:

Why the US needs a new education system

For much of Jemar Lee's life, "education" meant feeling trapped. He recalls that "as early as elementary school, I would shut down, refuse to do my work, and lash out at my teachers." Naturally, all these actions led to consequences.

"IT STARTED SMALL WITH HAVING MY RECESS TAKEN AWAY or my mother having to pick me up from school. Then, as I grew older, the punishments turned into detentions and suspensions. I found myself being escorted out of my middle and high school being told, 'Jemar, don't come back until you get your act together.'" This message played on repeat for years.[3] The system of schooling enforced its typical standard that in order for Jemar to be successful, he had to learn to be compliant as teachers directed him through learning experiences that didn't spark his passions or accommodate his needs, personality, and interests. When he pushed back, the system responded with disciplinary action.

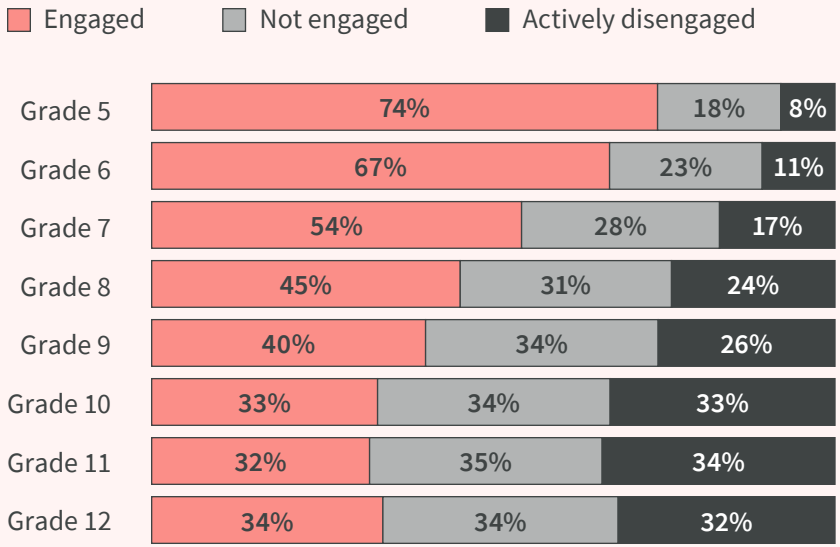
Jemar's dysfunctional relationship with schooling showed no signs of change until something unexpected happened during high school. His sophomore year, he discovered Iowa BIG, a public school program in Cedar Rapids that gave learners from across a handful of school districts in the region an opportunity to leave their school buildings for part of the day. Through projects for local businesses or initiatives in their communities, learners could develop valuable life experiences and skills while also earning credits in English, Social Studies, Science, Math, and Business. Jemar jumped at the opportunity to try something different.

Partnering with a local architecture firm, Jemar worked for two years to co-design a bridge to bring more attractions and life to the downtown area of Cedar Rapids. In addition to discovering a passion for architecture, the project gave him a purpose for learning core content. He developed his writing and leadership skills in the effort to contribute to his community. As of the writing of this paper, Jemar has graduated from college and started work in Minneapolis in the innovation department of a utility company.

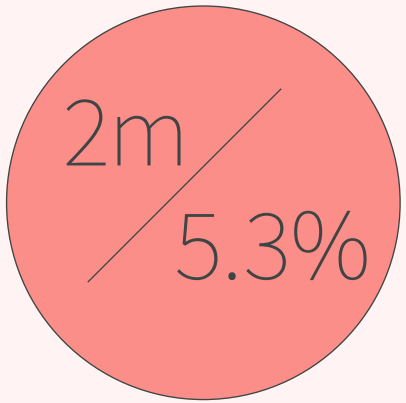
Unfortunately, few learners experience what Jemar found at Iowa BIG through formal education. Instead of learning that is personalized

Figure 1

Student engagement and dropout rates



2016 Gallup Student Poll



K-12 students who dropped out of school in 2020

to their interests, relevant to their ambitions, and embedded in their communities, they experience a conventional model—common across most district, charter, and private schools—designed to batch process learners through classroom-based learning activities largely detached from the real world. Instead of providing individualized paths to master valuable knowledge and develop the self-awareness and agency to take ownership of their goals, the dominant model of education marginalizes learner differences as it requires conformity for efficiency, then sorts them for high school completion and ranks them in the zero-sum competition for assorted universities.

Gallup has found that close to two-thirds of learners end up disengaged as they go through high school. Those who are disengaged are far more likely to report earning poor grades, missing school, and feeling discouraged about the future.[4] Most still pass their courses and make it to graduation, but their formal education does little to spark their passions, develop their potential, or launch them down clear pathways to postsecondary success.[5] The conventional model of education—practiced across most schools in the US, regardless of whether they are publicly or privately managed—works well enough to avoid public revolt. The school systems we have now are far better than no system at all. But too many make it through the system with attitudes such as "I can't wait to get this over with," or "school is a joke;" and a small but alarming portion of those who disengage drop out altogether.[6] Meanwhile, others get sucked into the stressful rat race for straight A's and AP classes. Their schools may put them on pedestals as models of success, but that success often comes with unhealthy mindsets about their identity, purpose, and ability to cope with failure.[7]

Prominent thinkers and leaders in K–12 education have long argued for alternatives to the conventional model of schooling: from John Dewey and Maria Montessori in the early 20th Century, to Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools starting in the 1980s, to the XQ Institute

in the 2010s. Yet, none of these efforts to date have made experiences like Jemar's widely available.

As education historians Larry Cuban, David Tyack, and William Tobin have detailed, the core features of conventional schooling—such as age-based cohorts, separation of classes by academic discipline, teacher-led, single-paced instruction, teaching as transmission, leveling and tracking, and the school calendar—which they called the "grammar of schooling," trace back to the age-graded primary school models that took root starting in the late 1800s, and the comprehensive high schools that became widespread from the early 1900s through the 1950s.[8] The conventional model, once replicated across the country and entrenched in local communities, became the status quo despite noteworthy attempts across the years to reimagine that model. In some schools, learner-centered ideas have been layered on top of the conventional model—such as organizing learners in table groups instead of rows and interspersing prescriptive projects into conventional curriculum. But co-opting these ideas into the conventional model still leaves single-paced, teacher-directed, testing-focused instruction intact—to the detriment of many learners.

Learner-centered education is not just a set of "plug-and-play" practices. It's a different paradigm—a distinct mindset—that prioritizes youth owning their learning and honing what it takes to thrive in a complex, fast-changing world. Rather than delivering whole-class, single-paced instruction on standardized content, learner-centered education prizes the unique talents, interests, and potential of every learner and collaborates with learners to design learning pathways that ignite curiosity and a passion for learning. And rather than ranking and sorting students based on narrow metrics of success, it focuses on holistic learner outcomes—such as mastery of real-world competencies, the ability to exercise agency and self-advocate, sparking lifelong learning, developing learner's overall

What is learner-centered education?

Learner-centered education is a distinct paradigm for seeing, thinking about, and acting on education. It focuses on three key aspects about the learner. First, **each learner is seen as being unique in meaningful ways.** They have unique backgrounds, circumstances, and starting points with unique strengths, challenges, interests, and aspirations. These unique attributes call for unique responses from the education system where they learn. Second, **each learner is seen as having unbounded potential**—potential that will unfold at its own pace and in its own way. And, finally, **each learner is seen as having an innate desire to learn.** Therefore, when learning is not happening, the conclusion is not that the child doesn't want to learn; it is that the system is not creating the conditions for learning.[9]

social and psychological wellbeing, and setting up learners for post-schooling opportunities that align with their goals and aspirations.

A major barrier to the growth of learning-centered education stems from the fact that most efforts to build models in this paradigm focus on ***what*** learner-centered models do differently, not ***how*** they come into existence. By drawing on Education Reimagined's expertise documenting and advancing learner-centered education and the Christensen Institute's theories for explaining the dynamics that drive innovation in different organizational models, this report offers a new lens for understanding what it takes to foster learner-centered education within a community.

Part I introduces a framework to explain how an organization's capabilities emerge and evolve in response to its ***value network***—the context within which it establishes and maintains its model.[10] Understanding this framework and the influence of value networks illuminates the report's key insights: First, learner-centered education requires a different organizational model that is distinct from the conventional model of schooling. Second, creating new learner-centered models isn't just about getting the features of the models right. Learner-centered models must emerge within value networks that can truly prioritize their distinctiveness. Part II takes a close look at five different models—The Met, Virtual Learning Academy Charter School, Iowa BIG, Village High School, and Embark Education—to show how their value networks enable them to build and maintain learner-centered models. Lastly, Part III identifies some of the key value network elements common in K–12 education and then discusses important considerations for assembling value networks that can support learner-centered education.

This paper will help entrepreneurial leaders consider important strategic decisions as they create learner-centered options.[11]

Additionally, it can help people who participate in the value networks of learner-centered models—such as families, policymakers, sponsors, and philanthropists—to see more clearly how their actions help or hinder those models.

In sum, this report tackles a timely question for modern K–12 education: What does it take to break the chains that bind the sector to the conventional grammar of schooling? The answer lies in understanding how the priorities—and hence capabilities—of any organization are shaped by its value network.

"What does it take to break the chains that bind K–12 education to the conventional grammar of schooling? The answer lies in understanding how the priorities of any organization are shaped by its value network."

PART I:

Organizational capabilities and priorities

What determines the capabilities of an organization? And why do established organizations readily adopt some changes and innovations but resist others? Is it the people, norms, and culture? The technology, equipment, and facilities? Policies, practices, regulations, and chains of authority? It's self-evident that each of these—and many other elements that haven't been named—shape an organization's behavior. But taken together, how do they determine an organization's capabilities (what it can or can't do) and its priorities (what it will or won't do)?

What determines an organization's capabilities and priorities?

ALL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE MODELS, and these models consist of four components that define an organization's capabilities.[12] Additionally, all organizations operate within a value network—the context of external individuals, organizations, institutions, and regulations that it interfaces with to establish and maintain its model (see Figure 2).

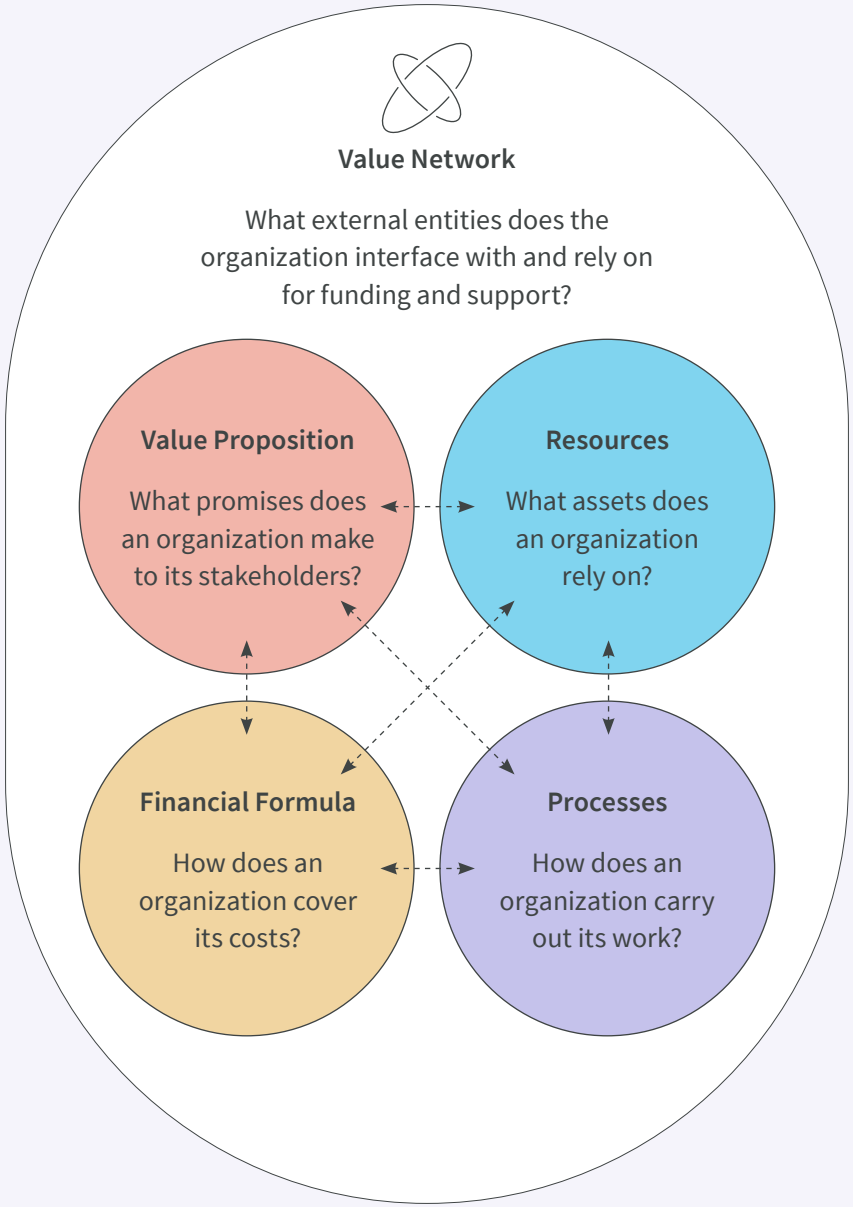
First, ***value propositions*** represent what an organization offers its stakeholders. For example, restaurants provide meals and dining, hospitals treat patient's medical conditions, and schools provide educational experiences and credentials. Organizations often serve multiple interrelated value propositions, and they articulate these through mission statements, advertising, graduate portraits, and the like. But all organizations' models have, at their core, a set of value propositions that represent the goods, services, and experiences they offer their stakeholders, and that define their explicit reason for existence.

Second, to deliver their value propositions, organizations need ***resources***. These are the most tangible part of an organizational model and include people, technology, equipment, supplies, facilities, and cash. Most resources are visible and often measurable, so organizations can readily assess their value. Nonetheless, some resources don't show up in financial statements, such as reputation, relationships with partner organizations, or access to community volunteers.

Third, as organizations repeatedly work to deliver their value propositions, they develop ***processes***. Processes are habitual ways of working together that emerge as people address recurrent tasks repeatedly

Figure 2

The components of an organizational model



and successfully. Some processes—such as curriculum adoption—are explicitly defined, carefully documented, and consciously followed. Others are unstated parts of an organization's culture, and people adhere to them simply because "that's the way we do things around here."

An organization's initial processes descend from the experiences, intuitions, and cultural backgrounds of the founding leaders and early members. Later, new processes emerge and evolve to address new challenges. Over time, departments, teams, reporting chains, and hierarchies all come to embody learned processes. In all cases, the processes an organization learns, develops, and repeats help members of the organization perform commonly recurring tasks reliably and efficiently without needing intensive support and supervision from their managers.

As an organization's value propositions, resources, and processes coalesce, a ***financial formula*** emerges.[13] This formula defines how the organization sustainably supports the costs of its operations. For example, most public schools get their funding primarily through per-pupil revenue provided by their states, with some additional funding from local property taxes, state and federal grants, bonds, and philanthropy.[14] Those combined revenue sources must cover all of a school's costs—including staff salaries, materials, technology, and facilities.

Finally, an organizational model doesn't exist in isolation. Every organization lives within a ***value network***—the collection of external entities that it interfaces with to establish and maintain its organizational model.

A business's value network might consist of customers, suppliers, distributors, investors, competitors, and regulators. The value network of a public school often includes local, state, and federal education agencies; learners and their families; employee unions; voters and taxpayers; the postsecondary education system; community organizations; vendors; teacher preparation pipelines; and philanthropic donors.

Figure 3

Some of the common components in the organizational model of a conventional school

Value Propositions	Resources	Financial Formula	Processes
▸ Provide universal access to a standardized, common body of knowledge that every child will be taught in predetermined subjects ▸ Provide instruction focused on preparing students for standardized assessments ▸ Provide a reliable mechanism to rank and sort learners for college and career opportunities ▸ Provide access to electives and extracurriculars (sports, photography, yearbook, band, theater, journalism) to keep learners engaged in school ▸ Provide opportunities for youth to make friends ▸ Train children and youth to comply with the norms of schooling ▸ Provide custodial care for a portion of the day	▸ Conventionally trained and certified teachers who are experts in providing direct instruction for specific grade levels or content areas ▸ Curriculum that divides content into courses, units, and lessons ▸ Campuses designed for hundreds of students, with classrooms arrayed along hallways ▸ Classrooms each with a whiteboard, a projector screen, a teacher desk and individual desks and chairs for students ▸ Multi-purpose rooms for assemblies ▸ Spaces for sports and play	▸ Per-pupil state funding based on attendance counts on designated days ▸ Local property tax revenue ▸ Federal, state, and philanthropic grants ▸ Public bonds to fund facilities ▸ Fees and fundraising for extracurriculars	▸ Direct instruction provided for a class of 20-35 students by one teacher ▸ Classroom management and student discipline strategies for ensuring student compliance during teacher-led instruction and activities ▸ Hiring and job assignment based on certifications ▸ Uniform school schedules with blocks of time for each subject controlled by master scheduling ▸ Individualized education plans (IEPs) for students diagnosed with disabilities ▸ Assigning credit for a course based on seat-time requirements ▸ Advancing students who earn passing grades (A through D) ▸ Assessing college readiness using standardized test results and ranking students by GPAs

Figure 4

Typical stakeholders in a conventional school's value network

Each organization's particular value network shapes the organization's behavior by providing it access to resources, regulating and interfacing with its processes, providing its sources of revenue, and being the source of demand for its value propositions. In short, an organization's value network is the dominant influence on its priorities. Thus, as leaders of an organization make choices about whom they will serve, with whom they will partner, and how they will get funding, those choices ultimately come to shape what the organization must prioritize as it continues to operate.

When do capabilities become constraints?

ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS ARE NOT STATIC. They constantly evolve as an organization solves day-to-day problems and seeks ways to improve. Schools regularly update their curriculum, revise their educator professional development programs, offer new elective courses, and implement new technologies for applications like streamlining master scheduling or managing student records.

But notice that changes like these enhance the established organizational model. They help the organization improve its existing value propositions without endangering its financial formula or upsetting the stakeholders in its current value network. Meanwhile, other types of innovations—such as competency-based learning, flexible learning pathways, or other hallmarks of learner-centered education—prove perennially difficult for established schools to adopt because they don't fit well with the capabilities of the conventional model or the priorities of its value network.

With an initial understanding of the organizational framework described above, it may seem that changing the organizational model of a school comes down to deliberately dismantling and rebuilding new resources and processes in order to deliver learner-centered value propositions. But the history of school reform, as well as the broader research on transforming organizational models, demonstrates that even when leaders and other stakeholders recognize a need for change, the inertia of the conventional model of schooling proves stubbornly persistent and resilient.

Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen's research on disruptive innovation found that even when leaders recognize a need for change, the mature organizations they lead will readily adopt some innovations but fumble or even resist adopting others. What determines which innovations an established organization will successfully adopt and which will stall or get ignored? To answer this question, look first to the organizational model—the current value propositions, existing resources, established processes, and the financial formula.

Resources are usually the most flexible component of an organizational model because they can be bought and sold, hired and laid off. But when new challenges or opportunities arise, organizations instinctively turn first to the resources they have on hand rather than imagine solutions that require radically different resources. Consider how during the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts tapped their existing staff to offer tutoring services and virtual schooling options rather than hire new staff or partner with external organizations.[15]

Processes, by their very nature, are not meant to change. As processes meet a need or solve a problem, they get replicated, repeated, improved, standardized, and ensconced in the organization's culture. To see the staying power of ensconced processes, consider how difficult it would be for a conventional high school to shift from a calendar and schedule based on semesters and class periods to a flexible calendar

> "The value propositions of conventional schools center on efficient and effective delivery of instruction, rather than on creating the optimal conditions for each learner to grow and thrive."

and schedule where learners and educators decide individually and collaboratively how to spend their time.

Lastly, a financial formula is the lifeblood of an organizational model. As such, mature organizations resist changes that might hurt their reliable sources of funding or increase their operating costs beyond what their revenue sources can cover. This is why schools put so much time and effort into compliance with the requirements for state and federal grant programs.

Thus, as organizations mature, their resources, processes, and revenue formulas become their engine of success—but they also become barriers to change. They define which value propositions the organization is built to deliver and improve upon, but also what it is incapable of delivering.

Robust learner-centered education is incompatible with the organizational models of conventional schools. Processes such as whole-class, teacher-led instruction don't allow for learner agency in developing individualized

learning pathways. School schedules and behavior management practices restrict learners from moving independently and flexibly between learning experiences both on and off campus. Conventional hiring practices don't produce staff with learner-centered paradigms. Conventional funding prioritizes instructional minutes over mastery. Even the core value propositions of conventional and learner-centered models differ in significant ways. Whereas conventional schooling prioritizes content coverage of standardized and tested material toward a narrowly defined notion of "college and career readiness," learner-centered models prioritize learner agency, motivation, and wellbeing along a variety of pathways to postsecondary success. In other words, the value propositions of conventional schools center on efficient and effective delivery of instruction, rather than on creating the optimal conditions for each learner to grow and thrive.

The incompatibility of learner-centered education with the conventional model of schooling is increasingly apparent, and there are numerous efforts in the field attempting to shift the organizational models of schools from the conventional models to more learner-centered models. But most of these efforts overlook an important reality that shapes how new organizational models come about: the influence of their value networks.

"The pressures that come from an established value network consistently skuttle efforts to shift conventional schools to learner-centered models."

To illustrate, consider the examples of a few organizations outside of K–12 education, that at one time, were the leaders in their fields but tried and failed to adopt game-changing innovations. In all of these cases, leaders could see that these innovations were important to their organizations' future success. But their vision and plans routinely succumbed to both the inertia of their established models and the countervailing influences from their value networks.

In the 1950s, shortly after the invention of the transistor, companies like RCA and Zenith—the leading producers of high-end TVs and radios—invested hundreds of millions of dollars into developing transistor-based consumer electronics. But these industry giants ultimately abandoned their projects. Early transistor-based devices just couldn't handle high-power applications or deliver the high-fidelity TV and radio programming that RCA and Zenith's established customers expected. Additionally, the department stores that sold high-end TVs and radios weren't interested in selling transistor-based devices because these devices sold at lower price points with lower profit margins and didn't require recurring repair services—another major source of revenue for department stores. Thus, RCA and Zenith failed to adopt transistor-based electronics because they couldn't create a transistor-based device that their customers would want and that their retail distributors would want to sell. Eventually, transistor-based electronics from other companies came to dominate the industry, but RCA and Zenith missed the boat because their value networks didn't align with their efforts to prioritize transistor-based devices.

Similarly, in the 1970s, Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), one of the leading computer companies of its era, saw early signs of the burgeoning desktop computer trend and responded by developing some of the earliest desktop prototypes. But DEC found that its best customers—large

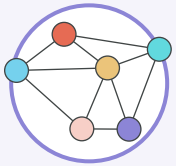
corporations, government agencies, and research institutions—wanted more computing power, not affordable compact devices with limited capabilities. Meanwhile, DEC's investors pushed the company to ignore the desktop market. Using historical sales data, they projected large future profits from DECs state-of-the-art machines. But they had no reasonable way to gauge the potential market for desktop computers because data on that market didn't yet exist. DEC's choice to ignore the PC market was a perfectly rational response to the priorities within its value network. But desktop computers proved to be the wave of the future, and DEC's decisions ultimately relegated it to the dustbin of history.

Likewise, many education leaders see the shortcomings of the conventional model of schooling and want to move to something better. Yet, they find their wings clipped when they try to push significant changes within their existing schools. Some parents push back when schools start to look less and less like the model they grew up with, leading them to worry that their children will fall off the well-worn conventional path to college. Some staff and teachers resist when asked to replace the conventional practices they've honed through years of experience with new practices that are not as familiar. Some state agencies become roadblocks when learner-centered models don't align with regulations about learner-to-teacher ratios, certified teachers of record, course credits, transcripts, instructional minutes, and attendance-counting methods. School board members push back when learner-centered efforts draw resources away from their priority initiatives—such as renovating school buildings or improving test scores for marginalized students. College admissions offices create pressure to maintain conventional transcripts, credit hours, and college prep courses.

Effective and dedicated leaders might find ways to work through some of these competing priorities. But as a combined force, the pressures that come from an established value network consistently skuttle efforts to shift conventional schools to learner-centered models.

Insights for school systems

UNDERSTANDING HOW organizational models and value networks inhibit change dispels a few major misconceptions about why learner-centered education models often struggle to take root.



THE PROBLEM ISN'T A LACK OF MODELS

The lack of widespread access to learner-centered education isn't due to a lack of compelling examples. Across our nation of roughly 13,000 school systems and 100,000 schools, there are numerous noteworthy instances of learner-centered education, many of which are documented throughout Education Reimagined's work.[16] The sector knows what learner-centered education looks like. Leading organizations and thought leaders in the field have clearly documented its resources and processes.[17]

THE PROBLEM ISN'T A LACK OF RESOURCES OR TRAINING

All too often, leaders assume that moving to learner-centered education is just a matter of changing resources and processes. But enacting learner-centered education requires more than new curriculum, new technologies, new partnerships, or new professional development.

Just as you can't build a jet airplane by merely putting wings and a jet engine on an automobile, school systems can't make the shift to learner-centered education by merely swapping conventional curricula and schedules for learner-centered alternatives and training their staff on learner-centered practices. They need to build new learner-centered models from the ground up with distinctly learner-

"Learner-centered models need to be built from the ground up with staff, learners, families, and regulatory bodies whose priorities align from the start with learner-centered education."

centered organizational models. And they need value networks of staff, learners, families, and regulatory bodies whose priorities align from the start with learner-centered education.

THE PROBLEM ISN'T INEFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP OR COMMUNICATION

Many experts in change management suggest that major organizational change is a matter of learning how to employ the right leadership and communication strategies in the right sequence to rally key stakeholders around a shared vision and then mobilize action.[18] These approaches aren't without merit—some important organizational changes can and do come about in this way. But when society needs new models of schooling—not just upgrades to the conventional model—aligning a conventional school's established value network to support learner-centered education goes beyond the scope of good leadership. Few conventional schools have the right conditions in their value networks to change their core models.[19]

Effective leaders exert their influence to both insist on and inspire a vision for the future of their schools. But they also know that changing an existing organization doesn't happen without the buy-in of at least a critical mass of the key influencers in the organization's value network. Except in rare circumstances, getting that buy-in inevitably involves compromising with established stakeholders to one degree or another, which puts significant constraints on the extent to which change is possible.

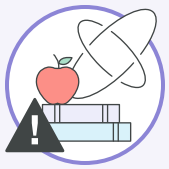
Districts' value networks—their parent groups, employee unions, and state regulators—often pull them in many competing directions, which means leaders must engage regularly in politics and persuasion to ensure that this wide range of stakeholders is satisfied with how schools deliver on their promises. Most school leaders got into the profession to serve learners, not follow rules or engage in politics. But to keep their jobs, superintendents are strongly motivated to comply with regulations, avoid liabilities, and maintain a good public image with their constituents. This often leads to strong status quo inertia because the status quo is a stable equilibrium that balances competing value network interests.

Contrary to some popular approaches to change management, new models of education that depart dramatically from the status quo won't emerge by working to collaborate and build consensus among the diverse array of stakeholders most school districts serve. By design, democracy involves debate and compromise. These practices are good and helpful when stakeholders need a way to weigh the tradeoffs inherent in modifying an existing model. But when the aim is to shift from an old model to a new model with different priorities and capabilities, shared decision-making among stakeholders with diverse interests dilutes and undermines the will to change. New models need value networks that align with their priorities and that value the capabilities they're trying to build.

THE PROBLEM ISN'T A LACK OF DESIRE

Our society increasingly wants public education to rethink its value propositions. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 embodied the ideal that public education should help all learners succeed regardless of their backgrounds. Today, school communities regularly talk of equitable outcomes for all learners as an imperative. Business leaders raise concerns that many conventional school graduates lack the skills that industry needs.[20] Recent parent surveys indicate that parents want bold changes in education such as more experiential learning, personalized learning, and attention to learners' emotional wellbeing.[21] And in 2015, influencers from across the K–12 education landscape—including union leaders, district leaders, charter school leaders, and education reform leaders—put out a joint statement describing a common vision for learner-centered education that they all wanted to see come about in US education.[22] There's growing demand for change.

Today there's a growing disconnect between what people want from K–12 education and what the conventional model of schooling was designed to deliver. But calling out the disconnect and organizing to advocate for change isn't enough to actually create change. Despite demand for change, most change efforts amount to naming new value propositions—like personalization, social-emotional learning, or equity—and then expecting schools to just layer those on top of the existing model; adding to the list of things schools are already on the hook to deliver.



THE PROBLEM IS THE VALUE NETWORKS THAT SUPPORT CONVENTIONAL SCHOOLING

Learner-centered education requires new organizational models for schooling, not just reformed practices. And new models must emerge from different value networks than those created to support conventional schools. Trying to create learner-centered models by reforming schools that sit in conventional value networks amounts to the colloquial definition of insanity: doing more of the same thing and expecting different results. Education leaders that try to reproduce learner-centered models within the value networks of an established school system will see their efforts fall flat or get morphed into hybrids that compromise the hallmarks of learner-centered education. Learner-centered education requires value networks that are congruent with learner-centered organizational models. Additional details from the non-education examples mentioned earlier illustrate why new value networks are essential for forming new organizational models.

Sony didn't bring transistor-based electronics mainstream in the 1960s by trying to compete for RCA and Zenith's customers. Rather, it sold low-quality pocket radios to teenagers who couldn't afford the high-end living room appliances marketed to their parents. Additionally, it sold its devices not through department stores, but through emerging discount retailers like Kmart and Walmart that were set up to sell low-cost products and didn't want to get into the business of repairing high-end electronics.

Likewise, Apple and other successful desktop computer companies in the 1980s didn't try to build their businesses within the mini-computer value network that DEC operated in. They marketed their computers as novelties for computer hobbyists and as educational toys—targeting individuals who were interested in computers but who could never afford a minicomputer from DEC. They sold their computers through retail outlets, rather than through a corporate salesforce. And Apple's early investors were angel investors who were willing to bet on small, new enterprises without expecting immediate quarterly growth in profits.

In essence, for organizations to develop new models for offering distinctive value propositions, they need to sit within value networks that can truly prioritize what those models are trying to offer.

PART II:

Assembling value networks for learner-centered innovation

Learner-centered education models across the country are known for the distinctive practices and philosophies that define their work—competency-based learning, interdisciplinary projects, off-campus learning, flexible learning schedules, and collaborating with learners as they develop their own learning pathways. Less well known, however, are the roles that value networks play in enabling these models to get off the ground and establish themselves. The profiles that follow surface this hidden role of value networks.

THESE EXAMPLES ALSO SHOW that creating new value networks does not require building models outside of public education. School choice policies certainly create opportunities for more easily developing new models in new value networks. But value networks that align with learner-centered models can also be formed under the purview of a school district or within a state's public education system. As the examples below illustrate, whether a model is based in a district, charter, or independent school is not what determines its ability to create learner-centered education.

"Learner-centered models require value networks that are congruent with their learner-centered organizational models."

The Met

THE METROPOLITAN REGIONAL CAREER AND TECHNICAL CENTER, known as The Met, is a network of six small, public high schools located in Providence and Newport, Rhode Island. At The Met's inception, Rhode Island's Commissioner of Education, Peter McWalters, hired The Big Picture Learning company, led by Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor, to design and implement a "school for the 21st century" that would involve "hands and minds." Littky was a long-time leader in innovative school models who had worked with Ted Sizer, the founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, prior to designing The Met.

THE LEARNER-CENTERED MODEL

The hallmark of The Met's learner-centered model is that its learners go out in their communities for two days out of the week to lead real-world projects as interns for partner organizations. For example, learners might work with a local bakery, a law firm, a tech company, or a recording studio.

When learners join the Met, they and their families work with an advisor to identify their strengths, needs, and interests and then develop an individualized learning plan with an internship as its centerpiece. Learners are responsible for researching potential internship opportunities and communicating with partner sites to arrange their internships. Advisors coach them as they do their research and outreach to ensure that internships match their needs and interests. Once learners arrange their internships, they coordinate with their advisors to map out the learning standards that they will work to master through their internship project. Learners then complete their projects over the course of a semester or a school year.

When the learner is not at the partner site, her time at the school centers on classwork designed to help her master the learning content required for graduation and for success in her internships. With this arrangement, learners learn content as a means to achieving their goals, rather than going through courses merely for the sake of learning content.

How does the Met's value network enable and support its learner-centered organizational model?

Sponsor

The Met came into existence through a successful 1994 state voter referendum that asked voters to approve a new innovative high school and an accompanying bond to fund its creation. As a program authorized directly by the state, The Met has complete organizational autonomy from the conventional schools and districts in its region.

Learners and families

Unlike a local school district, The Met is not charged with serving all learners within a geographic region. Instead, it can enroll learners from anywhere in the state of Rhode Island. This means that instead of designing its models for every family in a given geography regardless of their interest in this type of learning, The Met's learners and families self-select into the school because they value its particular philosophy, approach, and outcomes.

Staff

The Met has partnerships, programs, and practices that help it hire practitioners whose skills and values align with its learning model. These include partnerships with local postsecondary institutions that allow for extended learner-teacher placement, paraprofessional-to-teacher pathways, and a rigorous hiring and onboarding process.

Partners

The Met's unique value proposition hinges on having community partners that are willing to work with its learners as interns. As such, a significant priority for the Met is ensuring that it can coordinate effectively with its partner organizations and that the projects that its learner-interns complete are of real value to its partners.

Funders

The Met has its own line item in the Rhode Island state budget, giving it a reliable source of funding and financial independence from other established school systems in the state.

Competitive Landscape

At times, state influencers have tried to cut The Met's direct state funding and place The Met under the control of a school district. The Met has been able to effectively resist these efforts by mobilizing its parents, learners, and partners to advocate for it.

Virtual Learning Academy Charter School

THE VIRTUAL LEARNING ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL (VLACS) is a statewide virtual school created in 2007 that serves K–12 learners throughout New Hampshire. The concept for the school came from the superintendent of the Exeter Region Cooperative School District, who saw an opportunity to take advantage of a new charter school law to apply for a statewide charter. Rather than create another conventional school, however, the superintendent recognized the distinctive value of using a virtual school model to offer a wide array of flexible, part-time and full-time learning options unavailable through brick-and-mortar campuses. Steve Kossakoski, an assistant superintendent in the district, led the charge in getting the school authorized, and has served as its CEO since its founding. Today, the school serves roughly 9,000 part-time and 1,000 full-time learners across the state.

THE LEARNER-CENTERED MODEL

VLACS's competency-based model is highly adaptable to learners' needs and interests. It offers a range of options for learners to earn credits: through online courses, learner-designed projects, and out-of-school learning experiences such as internships and travel. Learners who take online courses move through those courses at their own pace and earn credit whenever they're able to demonstrate mastery of designated competencies. For projects and other learning experiences, VLACS aligns these experiences with state learning standards and then measures learners' mastery of standards using performance-based assessments. Learners work with an advisor who supports their learning in whichever path they choose.

VLACS's model also entails a substantial shift in the roles of teachers. By relying on a catalog of self-directed online courses, VLACS relieves its teachers from spending their time designing curriculum and delivering lessons. Instead, they focus on tailoring support to the individual needs of their learners. VLACS also assigns every learner an advisor who gets to know learners and their families, and coaches them on how to manage their learning.

How does VLACS's value network enable and support its learner-centered organizational model?

Sponsor

To get up and running, VLACS relied on the leadership of the Exeter superintendent. Then, with its initial charter approved by the state, VLACS has benefited from the separation of its governance, administration, and finances from those of Exeter. This separation protects VLACS from having its priorities molded by vicissitudes in the districts' priorities. Direct authorization by the state also helps VLACS avoid imposed conventional practices.

Learners and families

Unlike a district, VLACS is not responsible for educating all the school-aged children and youth within a given geographic region. Accordingly, VLACS doesn't have to offer all the features of school-based conventional education that many learners and families expect. Instead, it can focus on attracting and serving learners and families interested in the flexibility and customizability available through its models. Additionally, because most VLACS learners attend only part-time, learners and families who value aspects of conventional education can get what they want from other schools without feeling a need to pressure VLACS to adopt conventional practices.

Funders

VLACS is funded directly by the state of New Hampshire. Direct state funding means that state policymakers, not district administrators, are the stakeholders that VLACS must negotiate with to maintain its financial formula. VLACS also has a unique funding model that helps focus its priorities on learners' academic success. Rather than defaulting to a funding formula based on enrollments or attendance, VLACS receives state funding based on the competencies its learners master.

Regulatory context

VLACS benefits from operating in one of the only states to make competency-based education a state-wide policy. Accordingly, its competency-based model interfaces smoothly with state graduation requirements and it doesn't have to develop complicated methods for translating between competencies and conventional course credits.

Competitive landscape

The funding arrangement VLACS has with the state also protects it from competitive pressures. VLACS's state funding comes through a line item in the state budget that is separate from other state education spending. As such, district schools who enroll their learners part-time in VLACS don't lose any of their state and local funding. And because VLACS's full-time learners come from all over the state, any given district has only a few learners within their geographic boundaries who enroll full-time in VLACS. This non-competitive arrangement means districts don't pressure the state to regulate how VLACS serves its learners.

Iowa BIG

IN 2008, A LOCAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHER IN CEDAR RAPIDS commissioned Dr. Trace Pickering, an executive administrator at one of the state's regional education agencies, to lead a community conversation about the knowledge and skills young people need to become engaged and successful members of the community as adults. To spark that conversation, Pickering and his colleague, Shawn Cornally, launched what they (unofficially) called the "Billy Madison project," an initiative—based on a popular 90s film that saw an adult re-enter elementary, middle, and high school—to send 60 community leaders back to school alongside learners over a four-month period.

Through this experience, the community leaders realized that most learners were disengaged in school. Partitioning content into discrete subjects and courses made the learning boring and the teaching hard. Meanwhile, the work learners did in school had little connection to real-world problems, careers, and citizenship. Pickering and Cornally then went on to co-found Iowa BIG, a high school learning experience sponsored by four local districts that enables learners to earn core credits by doing authentic projects.

THE LEARNER-CENTERED MODEL

The typical day of an Iowa BIG learner is half conventional and half learner-centered. For part of the day—either the morning or the afternoon—learners attend their local high schools. Then for the other half of the day, they go to an Iowa BIG site for real-world learning experiences. The model works with partner companies and organizations across Cedar Rapids to conceptualize projects learners might complete. Learners then work with partners to co-design interdisciplinary projects that both align with the academic and life

goals of the learner, as well as the business or nonprofit needs of the partner. Projects might include creating museum exhibits, helping optimize processes at a hospital, hydroponic farming, or developing a messaging campaign for an animal shelter.

To ensure that learners master discipline-specific content, Iowa BIG also provides seminar-style classes on content—such as literature or chemistry—that isn't adequately covered through their projects. Learners meet with teachers one to three times a week to discuss the big ideas in the state learning standards and then complete independent assignments focused on the seminar's big ideas.

When learners are at Iowa BIG, their time is not structured by class periods. Instead, they plan their own time based on the work they need to do to complete their projects and their seminar assignments. Activities during a typical day might include meeting with teachers for seminars, visiting partner sites to collaborate with their community partners, or meeting with their community project teams to plan and execute work on their projects. When learners start at Iowa BIG, teachers provide coaching and teach them "agile" practices to help learners learn how to plan and use their time effectively.[23]

Learners earn credit for their learning by assembling work portfolios that demonstrate mastery of the learning standards. Their portfolio can include evidence of learning that they develop through their projects with community partners, through their seminars, or through any other activities at school or on their own that demonstrate the learning standards they are working on mastering. Portfolios are graded in a competency-based format: rather than earning points that count toward a letter grade, learners work toward demonstrating mastery of each learning standard and then receive grades based on the portion of assigned competencies they've mastered.

How does Iowa BIG's value network enable its non-conventional organizational model?

Sponsor

Iowa BIG was launched with support from local school districts; the business, government, and non-profit sectors; and the broader Cedar Rapids community. The aligned support of these stakeholders has been key to BIG's inception and ongoing operation.

Learners and families

Learners choose Iowa BIG as an optional elective, which means it only serves learners and families who value the learner-centered experiences it offers. Iowa BIG finds its model attracts three categories of learners: high-achieving learners who want to focus their education on passions beyond academics; learners who are bored or frustrated by their experiences at conventional schools; and learners who have disengaged from school because the expectations, norms, and/or culture of conventional schooling don't work for them. Because they come to Iowa BIG wanting something different from conventional instruction, they don't pressure it to be conventional. Additionally, learners who still want some of the value propositions that conventional schools excel at—such as AP courses, sports, band, theater, clubs, and large social events—can get those experiences during the part of the day in which they attend their conventional high schools.

High schools and colleges

In order to meet the expectations of the traditional high schools that learners attend and the colleges they go on to apply to, BIG translates the competency-based learning experiences back into course grades for transcript purposes. This need to translate between learner-centered and conventional grading imposes a small but noteworthy cost on Iowa BIG that is incongruent with the ultimate aims of its learner-centered model.

Staff

Staff have a strong voice in the direction and work of Iowa BIG. The teachers and Pickering make decisions about the direction of the model together and teachers have tremendous autonomy to determine what happens at Iowa BIG sites day-to-day. The staff, and not just the formal leadership, fully own the decisions made and the outcomes—both desired and undesired—that come from those decisions. The strong influence of the staff on Iowa BIG's model means that Iowa BIG must be very selective of the staff it hires—vetting them for alignment with its model—so that it doesn't end up with staff who have internalized conventional practices and values and will, therefore, steer the model away from learner-centered practices.

Partners

Iowa BIG's model depends on community partners to provide projects and coaching for its learners. Accordingly, community partners are a major influence in BIG's value network. Developing reliable processes for interfacing effectively with community partners takes top billing among the various priorities that shape the Iowa BIG organizational model.

Funders

Iowa BIG is funded on an equal-share basis by the districts it partners with. Its funding, therefore, depends on the value it offers districts and its relationships with districts. Unfortunately, as district leaders and board members have shifted over time, some partner districts have chosen to end their partnerships with the model and pursue their own strategies for supporting their learners.

Regulatory context

Iowa's 2012 Competency-Based Education law cleared the way for a model like BIG to exist. The law allows schools to ignore Carnegie units and seat time in favor of a competency-based model. Under this law, Iowa BIG has been able to create a learner-centered organizational model without pressure to follow the practices of conventional schooling.

Village High School

IN 2010, NATHAN GORSCH WAS AN ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL at a comprehensive high school in Northeast Colorado Springs, CO. By most conventional metrics—academics, graduation rates, athletics, etc.—the school where he worked was successful. But he'd noticed that many learners were disengaged going through the day-to-day of school. Eager for an opportunity to create something different, in 2014 Gorsch became the principal of the district's online school and pitched to his superintendent the idea of growing the school into a blended-learning program focused on learner engagement.[24] With the district's support, Gorsch and a small team of teachers created a pilot in 2015 that grew and evolved to become Village High School.

THE LEARNER-CENTERED MODEL

The Village diverges markedly from standard approaches to high school education. Its learners receive all of their core academic content—English, history, social studies, and math—through mastery-based online courses. This format eliminates the need for scheduled class times and allows learners to progress at their own pace and test out of modules that they already have expertise in.

Online courses at Village High School create time and capacity for the most learner-centered features of its model: its array of in-person electives. Often team-taught and generally in-person, these courses are inspired by teachers' and learners' own passions. They cover a myriad of different topics, often in an interdisciplinary format: from Adulting 101, Renewable Energy, and Beekeeping to Comparative Religions and International Relations. Many electives take advantage of the Village's flexible format. For an elective on ceramics, learners spend an entire day every week working on ceramics projects; and

one physical education elective takes learners out into the Colorado Rockies for hiking and rock climbing.

The grading model in electives is also different—closer to a workplace evaluation than to conventional points earned on assignments and tests. Learners and teachers sit down together to discuss learners' progress and work, and decide on a grade together. This conversation could also include plans for improvement, or new ways to demonstrate mastery.

The Village allows learners to build a school day that works best for them. Learners determine the pacing for their online courses, they choose elective courses that are of interest, and they decide where and how to spend their time over the course of a school day. Although The Village tracks attendance as required by the state, it doesn't enforce strict in-person attendance requirements. Learners are encouraged to attend in-person classes regularly, but there are no external consequences for not attending other than falling behind in the course content. This flexibility allows learners greater opportunities to engage in worthwhile activities outside of school, such as training for competitive sports or family travel.

The guardrails that keep learners from falling off track are the Village's teacher-mentors. Every learner at the Village has a mentor who serves as an academic coach and helps them keep on track with their in-person and online courses. The teacher-mentors forge deep relationships not only with learners but also with their families. Mentors coach learners on exploring their interests, staying on top of their online coursework, managing elective projects, and sometimes even navigating life outside of school.

How does the Village's value network enable its non-conventional organizational model?

Sponsor

The Village couldn't have evolved into its current model without the support of the district's superintendent along with the assistant superintendent who oversees the district's high schools. The district placed Gorsch at the school's helm and gave him permission to develop a model with significant departures from conventional instruction. It has also been responsive to Gorsch's efforts to push back against district policies designed for conventional schools that would encumber the Village High School model.

Learners and families

Learners at the Village are not assigned to the school; rather, they choose to enroll because they find it fulfills their needs and interests. Some excel academically and want a model that allows them to move through content at their own pace. Some struggle to be engaged in conventional schools and choose the Village because they are attracted to its electives and its flexibility. Some are deeply involved in extracurriculars outside of school, such as highly competitive sports, and are drawn to the Village's model because it can accommodate their interests. Some feel unsupported, unseen, or marginalized in a large high school and are drawn to the support the Village offers through its assigned mentors and strong community. Across the board, learners choose the Village because it offers something different from conventional schooling and, therefore, don't expect it to mirror all the value propositions of a conventional high school.

Staff

The Village doesn't have its staff assigned to it by the district. It finds staff who are enthusiastic about its model mainly through current teachers who recruit former colleagues and friends to work at the school. Recruiting staff whose practices and values align with The Village's model ensures that staff don't pressure the school to move away from learner-centered practices.

Partners

Early in the history of the school, a board of advisors was developed, including folks from the Chamber of Commerce, an attorney, several business owners and executives, and retired educators. The school has also partnered with several community organizations including Junior Achievement, the Space Foundation, and local sports facilities/organizations.

Funders

In Colorado, online and virtual schools receive a few hundred dollars less per learner than traditional in-person learners. This lower funding level forces The Village to come up with creative ways to deliver its model, such as developing partnerships with other organizations in the community to provide some of its learning experiences.

Regulatory context

Although The Village operates in a brick-and-mortar school site, it's officially designated as a virtual school with the state of Colorado. This classification is what gives The Village flexibility in how it tracks attendance, thereby affording learners much greater freedom to determine where and how they spend their time. Additionally, teachers can focus on mentoring learners and designing engaging learning experiences in elective courses instead of making plans for fulfilling instructional minutes.

Competitive landscape

The Village has been able to grow without impacting enrollments at other schools in its district. It's benefited from the growth of the overall population in Colorado Springs boosting enrollment across all schools in the district. Additionally, a substantial portion of Village High School's learners come from beyond the boundaries of the district thanks to Colorado's open enrollment policy. This lack of competition has reduced the amount of political pressure Village High School faces from other schools in its district.

Embark Education

MIGUEL GONZALEZ, A CAREER EDUCATOR, launched Embark Education in 2019 out of a coffee shop and a bike shop in North Denver, CO. His goal was to create a learner-centered model at the intersection of authentic experiences and relationships. That goal translated into a private, tuition-free micro-school serving approximately 50 sixth- through eighth-grade learners.

THE LEARNER-CENTERED MODEL

Embark's two businesses, Pinwheel Coffee and Framework Cycles, enable learners to engage in projects that integrate academics with real-world questions. For example, while working on the practical skill of crafting the perfect cappuccino under the guidance of adult baristas, learners investigate the differing mathematical ratios of ingredients present in a latte versus a cappuccino, and the chemistry behind the extraction of caffeine from coffee beans. These integrated "shop projects" include a combination of direct instruction within the three core academic disciplines (math, science, and humanities); personalized learner exploration; and practical work within the bike and coffee shops. They enable learners to master foundational academic skills while simultaneously experiencing the application of these skills in the world beyond the classroom.

Learners' projects for the businesses must contribute to the success of the businesses. For example, learners don't work on problems that the businesses have already solved, such as having learners apply math and science to reinvent the latte. Instead, Embark's leaders look for opportunities that leverage the unique advantage of having learners' on site to make the businesses better than what they could do alone. For example, when one of the coffee shop's coffee bean suppliers went out of

business during the pandemic, Embark put learners in charge of finding a new coffee bean supplier. Learners worked with 14 different coffee roasters in the Denver metro area—interviewing them, checking references with other coffee shops, and researching ethical sourcing practices—and then selected a new coffee bean supplier. Learners then tracked customer feedback and demand to gauge the business impact of their decision.

How does Embark's value network enable its non-conventional organizational model?

Sponsor

Embark is owned by Great Work Inc., a nonprofit with roots in Montessori education. Prior to founding Embark, Great Work owned Pinwheel Coffee and hosted learning experiences at the coffee shop for two local Montessori charter schools. When the executive director of Great Work Inc., Brian Sense, concluded in 2017 that learners' visits to the coffee shop weren't generating the authentic learning experiences that Great Work envisioned, it pivoted its strategy and created Embark.

Learners and families

The Embark model attracts two categories of learners. First are learners who may have been successful in traditional schools, but value real-world learning experiences over content. The second are learners who weren't successful in traditional schools but are still curious and love learning. As a private school, Embark can focus on providing a model with a particular vision that is attractive to particular families without facing pressure to serve learners and families whose needs and interests don't align with its value propositions.

High schools and colleges

Embark has found clever ways to side-step pressures that come from other tiers of the education system. The high schools that Embark learners will go on to attend typically want middle school learners to take prerequisite courses for high-school math. But, in practice, high schools use assessments to place incoming learners in math classes. Embark uses this fact to its advantage: it teaches math through authentic projects that develop the competencies learners need for the math placement tests rather than enrolling learners in math courses. Additionally, by focusing on middle-school-aged learners rather than high school learners, Embark has more freedom for its instructional programs. It doesn't face pressure to offer the courses that colleges expect to see on the transcripts of their applicants and can, instead, focus on providing real-world learning experiences.

Partners

Pinwheel Coffee and Framework Cycles influence Embark's organizational model in a manner similar to the external partners of other learner-centered models. The shops are fully functioning businesses that don't need the school to exist. Meanwhile, a substantial portion of Embark's costs are funded by the revenues of the businesses. That structure forces Embark to prioritize the financial success of the businesses over their educational function. To ensure their success, the businesses are run by adults and their schooling functions are kept discrete. Embark wants customers to see the businesses as great businesses, not as places where 12-year-olds are running around doing school. In Embark's view, prioritizing the success of the businesses makes the learning experiences they offer more valuable and authentic.

Funders

Embark's model is partially funded by the revenue of the Pinwheel Coffee and Framework Cycles, but it also depends on private philanthropy to sustain its operations. Fortunately, it has donors who are aligned with its vision of prototyping a novel approach to learner-centered education. This financial formula, however, doesn't provide a clear path for long-term sustainability, replicability, or scale.

Regulatory context

Regulators are not a major influence within Embark's value network, and this fact helps Embark focus on serving its learners' needs in line with its educational philosophy. Private schools in Colorado have only a few basic requirements they must meet, such as having at least 172 days of instruction per year, covering "reading, writing, and speaking, mathematics, history, civics, literature, and science," teaching about the U.S. Constitution, proper use of the US flag, and obtaining a small business license.[25] Most of the regulations that impact Embark's organizational model are those associated with its small business license—such as ensuring that its buildings meet safety codes. It's unlikely that Embark could exist with its current organizational model if it had to follow regulations imposed on most public schools.

PART III:

Key influencers in learner-centered value networks

The examples above highlight how five different models created value networks in line with their visions for learner-centered education. For anyone interested in building learner-centered models, it should be clear from these examples that the value network you build around your model will shape the evolution of your model.

FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERS eager to build learner-centered models, this section will help you consider strategic decisions as you navigate assembling a value network to support your model. And for readers who are already part of a learner-centered model's value network—such as families, policymakers, authorizers, and philanthropists—you might want to skip to the subsection below that discusses your particular role to understand how your influence can support or hinder the innovations that get prioritized in the learner-centered models you engage with.

This section is by no means an exhaustive checklist of all the considerations required for getting a value network to align with learner-centered innovation. It's also not a playbook for taking learner-centered models to scale. Surely, there are other ideas not named or imagined. However, these are the key strategic considerations observed so far, and readers are invited to expand on these insights.

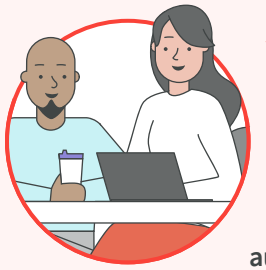
Program leaders

IN OUR FRAMEWORK, leaders are a resource within an organization's model—they aren't part of the value network. However, they often play a significant role as they shape an emerging organizational model and assemble the value network that a model sits within.

At their inception, organizational models are highly malleable. Value propositions are just concepts for fulfilling a need or satisfying demand, resources haven't been acquired or developed, operating processes and norms haven't yet coalesced, a sustainable financial formula is often yet to be determined, and value network relationships are still in development. In this early context, leadership matters.

The first iteration of an organizational model will be based largely on the vision, experience, and intuition of its founding leaders. Likewise, leaders decide which regulatory context to operate in, how to get key sources of funding, and which types of students and families to attract. Leadership is key to assembling a value network that can align around learner-centered education.

Those responsible for selecting the leaders of a new model must give careful attention to finding leaders with a clear vision of the learner-centered model they want to create, along with the skills and experience to iterate that vision into reality. Effective learner-centered leaders do more than speak the lingo of learner-centered education. They need to think with a learner-centered mindset and then be uncompromising in their efforts to build models and assemble value networks aligned with learner-centered values.



Sponsors

IF LEARNER-CENTERED MODELS intend to operate using public funding, their value networks invariably include a sponsor or authorizer that gives them permission to operate and access that funding. Iowa Big was sponsored by two school districts in Cedar Rapids, Village High School was developed within Academy District 20 in Colorado Springs, VLACS was conceived by the Exeter school district and authorized by the State of New Hampshire, and The Met was authorized by the State of Rhode Island. Even learner-centered models that operate outside of public education often have sponsors that influence their models. For example, Embark is a subsidiary of Great Work Inc.

Sponsors have a substantial influence in shaping a model's organizational model. They set the terms under which a model can stay in operation, they act as a gatekeeper to key resources, and they create policies and requirements that shape a model's processes. Accordingly, the value propositions a model aims to deliver, the resources it has access to, and the processes it follows will be heavily influenced by the sponsor.

What are some of the characteristics of sponsors that effectively enable learner-centered models?

First, learner-centered models need sponsors that **understand and champion the model's learner-centered vision**. Nathan Gorsch, the principal of Village High School, notes that having the support of one of his districts' assistant superintendents was instrumental in securing waivers from many of the districts' policies for conventional high schools and getting approval to relocate his school from modular classroom structures to a renovated bank. Likewise, Rhode Island's Commissioner of Education, Peter McWalters, was instrumental in helping The Met get the resources and approvals it needed from the state of Rhode Island.

Second, learner-centered models need sponsoring entities that will **gauge their success using metrics aligned with their distinctive value propositions**—such as learner engagement and learner success in postsecondary pathways—rather than success being measured primarily on conventional metrics, such as daily in-person attendance and standardized test scores. And at times when resources are tight, a sponsor will defend the learner-centered model rather than seeing it as redundant or superfluous and then folding it into other programs or shutting it down.

Third, learner-centered models need sponsors that **allow them to operate with autonomy**. State-level sponsors need to give learner-

centered models access to state funding without being overly prescriptive of how they operate. When districts sponsor learner-centered models, they need to be mindful not to place them under the management of an existing school or to make them accountable to the district-level departments built to manage and support conventional schools.[26] They should report directly to senior district leaders who share their vision, and should only interface with the conventional system at points the learner-centered models deem consistent with their vision. In practical terms, learner-centered models should be given freedom to set their own calendars and schedules, make their own curriculum and staffing choices, and negotiate performance and accountability expectations unique to the value propositions they aim to deliver. They shouldn't be expected to follow the same policies and procedures as conventional schools or to interface with the same administrative offices as conventional schools. When autonomy is lacking, learner-centered models are inevitably forced to adopt components of the conventional model of schooling that compromise their ability to develop a new organizational model for delivering learner-centered education.

Lastly, learner-centered models need to do what they can to **ensure that support from their sponsors lasts beyond the tenure of whoever champions their model**. Leadership changes happen, political currents shift, and many learner-centered models have struggled when these changes flip a source of support into a point of friction. Leaders should work with their sponsors to set up policies, contracts, memorandums of understanding, and other mechanisms that will help ensure support for the long-term. Additionally, learner-centered model leaders should be mindful that when they grow the number of families, community partners, and staff in their value networks, they also grow their ability to advocate for their model within the district or state that sponsors their model.

Learners and families

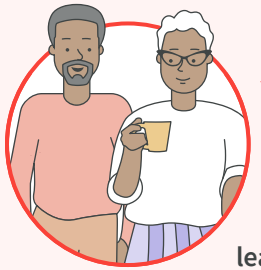
THE LEARNERS AND FAMILIES WHO PARTICIPATE in a learner-centered model become key stakeholders in the model's value network. Their feedback shapes the value propositions, resources and processes of the model. Furthermore, when a model's funding is based on enrollment, its financial formula is coupled with learners and families' enrollment decisions.

To stay true to a learner-centered vision, sponsors and model leaders need to be strategic about whom they set the model up to serve. If families come to the model because they want a better version of conventional schooling, they will steer the model away from learner-centered aims. Often, these families want some of the features of learner-centered education, such as projects in place of lectures, but they want these as add-ons to the conventional model. They aren't willing to choose a learner-centered model at the expense of some of the strengths of the conventional model.

Learners and families who will help steer a model toward learner-centered value propositions often represent one of the following categories. The first category are **learners who have dropped out of school or are disengaged and foundering because conventional education isn't working for them**. These might be learners who need more flexibility than what conventional schooling can provide due to major health challenges, housing insecurity, or the demands of supporting a family. Alternatively, they might be learners who struggle to function in conventional settings due to anxiety, depression, bullying, dyslexia, ADHD, autism, or other learning differences.

The other category are **learners and families who are willing to forego conventional education to get a different type of learning experience**.

For example, these might be families that want a flexible daily schedule that can accommodate training for Olympic-level sports, careers in acting, music production, internships, entrepreneurship, community advocacy, technical trades, or other passion projects. They might also be learners who are interested in moving through required courses and content at a faster pace than that offered by conventional schools, so that they can graduate early to start a career or attend college. They could also be learners who want an education that focuses more on project-based learning or community-based learning rather than classroom-based academic instruction. Importantly, learners and families in this category are willing to make tradeoffs—giving up some of the value propositions of conventional education for learner-centered value propositions.



Staff

A MODEL'S STAFF ARE OFTEN THE MOST IMPORTANT RESOURCE it uses to deliver its learner-centered value propositions. But staff are more than just resources. They also constitute a major stakeholder group that has significant influence over how a model operates. Their prior experiences inform the processes they use to do their work. Their mindsets influence which value propositions get their best efforts and which get deprioritized. They own many of the organization's day-to-day resource allocation decisions. And as in the case of Iowa BIG, they have formal power in a model's governance structure.

Rather than mirror the staffing roles and ratios of conventional schools, learner-centered models need to **hire staff whose experiences and motivations align with the vision of the model**. In many cases, this means that models employ many staff who are not credentialed teachers—such as local industry experts, counselors, tutors, psychologists, or community liaisons. And when recruiting staff with conventional backgrounds, model leaders need to make sure to hire people with a learner-centered mindset. These are often people who have become deeply dissatisfied with conventional schooling and are therefore deeply committed to the model's vision for learner-centered education.[27] Learner-centered models also need to **create deliberate staff-development processes to ensure that staff know how to execute their roles in alignment with the model's learner-centered vision**.

Community partners

WHEN A MODEL RELIES ON COMMUNITY PARTNERS to provide funding or learning experiences for its learners, the resources and processes of the model are invariably shaped by those partners. For example, one reason why Iowa BIG and The Met don't use bell schedules is because their learners' projects with partner organizations don't fit within class periods. Likewise, the competency-based processes that Iowa BIG and The Met use for awarding learners credit evolved from their collaborative work with their community partners. In a similar vein, Embark's processes are closely intertwined with those of Pinwheel Coffee and Framework Cycles.

Partners might also shape how learner-centered models approach staffing roles. For example, when models like The Met and Iowa BIG source real-world projects from partners, the projects shift a major part of the burden of designing and managing learning experiences off staff's shoulders, thereby enabling staff to focus more on other important roles—such as assessing learners' learning and coaching learners on how to manage their projects.

Partners not only shape a model's processes but can also be an important counterbalance against countervailing influences in a model's value network. For example, if the district or agency that sponsors a model tries to close the model, fold it into a conventional school, or pressure it to adopt conventional priorities and practices, partner organizations from the community can help push back to protect the model's learner-centered vision.

Funders

CLEARLY, EDUCATION MODELS NEED FUNDING TO OPERATE. What's often less clear, however, are the ways in which funding sources shape organizational models. States, districts, learners and families, businesses, and philanthropic foundations can all act as funders depending on how the model is structured—and when they do, they have power to unilaterally push their priorities on the models they fund. Because every learner-centered model needs a sustainable financial formula in order to survive, the funding sources that a model chooses to build its financial formula around inevitably shape its priorities.

Learner-centered model leaders need to be shrewd about building their models with funding sources that will support rather than undermine their value propositions. For example, VLACS, as mentioned above, arranged with the state of New Hampshire to receive its funding based on learners' mastery of competencies, not enrollments or instructional minutes—a smart choice for helping it keep its focus on learning outcomes rather than just keeping learners enrolled and covering content. Similarly, by developing Village High School within the context of a state-recognized virtual school, Nathan Gorsch avoided having his school's funding tied to seat time.

Meanwhile, some learner-centered models, such as Embark, choose to operate without public funding to avoid the strings that come attached with that funding. States and districts that want to see models like these become widely accessible need to carefully consider ways to publicly fund such models without undermining their distinctiveness. Unfortunately, **if public funding is only available for models that carry the hallmarks of conventional schooling, learner-centered options will be largely limited to families with the time and means to build or pay for private learner-centered options.** Equitable access to learner-centered education hinges on whether state and federal policymakers create new funding streams for learner-centered education.

> "If public funding is only available for models that carry the hallmarks of conventional schooling, learner-centered options will be largely limited to families with the time and means to build or pay for private learner-centered options."

Regulatory context

TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER, LEARNER-CENTERED MODELS operate within requirements set by federal, state, and local regulation. That regulatory context constitutes another major value network influence on an organizational model.

Unfortunately, well-intended regulators often impede learner-centered models because most regulations were designed with conventional schools' organizational models in mind. For example, education policies often dictate how schools count attendance, how they award credit, the activities they spend time on during the school day, who they can hire as educators, and what curriculum they can use—effectively mandating the conventional model by dictating its resources and processes. Additionally, state assessment and accountability regimes shape the value propositions a model must prioritize. Hence, efforts to increase standardized test scores get top billing while learner engagement, wellbeing, and career preparation often take a back seat.

The recommendation here is not that regulators must give learner-centered models the freedom to do whatever they see fit. Rather, when regulators play a role in a learner-centered model's value network, they inevitably shape its organizational model—its value propositions, resources, and processes.

This influence is a double-edged sword. On one hand, regulators might help learner-centered models prioritize important features of their organizational models that don't get as much weight from other parts of its value network. For example, learners, families, staff, and community partners may have a hard time prioritizing the evolution of processes that protect against unlikely or hard-to-detect hazards (e.g., exposure to lead or asbestos, safeguards against child abuse, etc.). Similarly, these stakeholders may put less emphasis on outcomes that are of public interest but that may have less benefit for existing stakeholders (e.g., ensuring that a model is accessible and effective for low-income learners, historically marginalized learners, or learners with disabilities). On the other hand, regulators can severely hamper or even undermine a learner-centered model when they mandate processes created for conventional schooling or when they impose accountability systems that are blind to the learner-centered value propositions that give a model its differentiated purpose for existence.

Learner-centered models need regulators to create pockets of freedom and flexibility from the education codes designed for conventional schools. Regulators might consider making their policies less prescriptive of the particular resources and processes school must use. They should also **give learner-centered schools the ability to work out accountability metrics aligned to their particular value propositions**. Alternatively, we've seen learner-centered models take root under regulations designed for alternative education, career and technical education (e.g., The Met), independent study, and virtual schooling (e.g., Village High School). In some cases, such as The Met in Rhode Island and VLACS in New Hampshire, states' legislatures may even pass policies for the explicit purpose of authorizing, funding, and regulating learner-centered models.

Meanwhile, leaders of learner-centered models that operate on public dollars need to find and take full advantage of the policy flexibilities afforded in their states and regions. Alternatively, some learner-centered models may decide to forgo public funding in order to avoid the influence of conventional regulations within their value networks.

Competitive landscape

MOST LEADERS AND COMMUNITIES of learner-centered models aren't trying to outcompete conventional schools. Rather, they typically just want to meet the needs of their learners and families. But if a learner-centered model affects the enrollment and funding of other schools in its region, it indirectly impacts other schools' and programs' financial formulae. When a model is seen as a competitive threat within its region, other regional players will often take action to create barriers for the model. Sometimes this means lobbying a learner-centered model's district or state to require it to follow regulations designed for conventional schools in order to "level the playing field." In other cases, it can mean pressures to have learner-centered models put under district control or shut down.

One effective way to avoid competition is to **serve learners who are currently not served by conventional schools**—such as homeschool learners or dropouts. Another option is to **arrange with local schools to be a partner rather than a competitor**—similar to the partnerships formed by VLACS and Iowa BIG.

"An organization's value network is the dominant influence on its priorities. As leaders of an organization decide whom they will serve, with whom they will partner, and how they will get funding, those choices ultimately come to shape what the organization must prioritize as it continues to operate."

Recommendations for specific value network stakeholders

Education leaders aiming to start new learner-centered models

Be mindful of the value network you situate your model within. Don't make your model reliant on stakeholders who will steer you away from your learner-centered paradigm.

Established school system administrators

Recognize that you can't build radically different models within existing models and value networks. You need to assemble new value networks where new models can emerge. You also need to be mindful that as learner-centered models take root and prove successful, you'll need to find politically and financially tenable ways to let these models draw stakeholders out of old value networks and into new ones.

State regulators

You are one of the most influential value network players in the K–12 education landscape. If you want to see learner-centered innovation, deliberately create spaces and funding streams within state policy where new value networks can be assembled.

Teachers

If your personal educational philosophies align with a learner-centered paradigm, recognize that your ability to enact learner-centered practices will be limited if you work within a conventional school. Seek to join a school or program that operates with a different model in a different value network. Alternatively, build your own model, but be mindful that you'll need to set it up without mirroring the organizational models and value networks of conventional schools.

Philanthropy

Recognize the limitations of focusing your work on innovation within existing schools. You'll see incremental improvements, but not an overhaul of the organizational model. If you want to see transformational change, you'll need to invest in models that have situated themselves in new value networks. Your decision to only invest in new value networks can incentivize districts and states to create the conditions where these value networks can emerge. When you invest in models with new value networks, be careful not to impose conventional expectations on these models.

Families

Don't expect that you can steer your established school to become learner-centered. If learner-centered models don't exist in your area, advocate in your district or state for policies that will incubate new learner-centered models and allow them to assemble value networks aligned with a learner-centered vision. If your state or district is unwilling to create the conditions for fostering learner-centered models, consider working with other families who want learner-centered options to start your own model as a homeschool co-op, learning pod, micro-school, or private school.

Conclusion

Learner-centered education isn't a newcomer to the US K–12 schooling landscape. But so far, learner-centered education hasn't taken root in our K–12 public education systems because the bedrock of the status quo greatly thwarts the growth of such learning environments. Educators, school and district leaders, and communities have known school to operate as it does for so long that reconceiving what's possible through a learner-centered lens becomes anathema to the structures and practices they know.

YET, THERE ARE SOME EDUCATORS ACROSS THE COUNTRY who have been able to grow new learner-centered schools and models. Their success has hinged on finding ways to assemble value networks that align with the priorities of their learner-centered models.

There are still many unanswered questions about the path forward for learner-centered education. What will it take to build a more robust ecosystem of educator preparation, instructional materials, and technologies to support learner-centered education? What types of improvements will learner-centered models need to make to become more attractive as a mainstream alternative to conventional education? And what does the path to scale look like for learner-centered education?

We hope that the insights in this paper provide a stepping stone to help supporters of learner-centered education create and advocate for the conditions under which they can assemble value networks where more learner-centered models can emerge and flourish.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2 ft tall
4x4
max 10x10
min 5x5

ENDNOTES

1 Gallup defines student engagement as "students' involvement and enthusiasm with school" and measures student engagement through students' responses to a collection of survey items. See Valerie J. Calderon and Daniela Yu, "Student Enthusiasm Falls as High School Graduation Nears," Gallup, June 1, 2017, https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/211631/student-enthusiasm-falls-high-school-graduation-nears.aspx.

2 By "learner-centered options" we are referring not only to the learner-centered models offered by single-site schools, but also to broader community-based enabling systems that make up a learner-centered ecosystem as Education Reimagined depicts in The Big Idea.

3 Jemar Lee shared his story in Jemar Lee, "Unlocking the Door to My Future," Education Reimagined, January 5, 2017, https://education-reimagined.org/unlocking-door-future/, and "Learner-Centered Iowa BIG Propels Jemar Lee," Getting Smart Podcast, February 20, 2019, https://www.gettingsmart.com/podcast/learner-centered-iowa-big-propels-jemar-lee/.

4 Calderon and Yu, "Student Enthusiasm Falls."

5 See Elliot Washor and Charles Mojkowski, "Student Disengagement: It's Deeper than You Think," *Education Week*, April 25, 2014, https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-student-disengagement-its-deeper-than-you-think/2014/04.

6 "Dropout rates," Fast Facts, National Center for Education Statistics, https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16 .

7 See Alexandra Robbins, *The Overachievers: The Secret Lives of Driven Kids* (New York: Hyperion, 2007).

8 David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Tyack, David, and William Tobin, "The 'Grammar' of Schooling: Why Has It Been So Hard to Change?" American Educational Research Journal, 1994, 31 (3): 453–79.

9 "What is learner-centered education?" Education Reimagined, https://education-reimagined.org/collections/what-is-learner-centered-education/.

10 This paper builds on ideas developed in Chelsea Waite and Thomas Arnett's, "Will schools change forever? Predicting how two pandemics could catalyze lasting innovation in public schools," Clayton Christensen Institute, October 20, 2020, https://www.christenseninstitute.org/publications/school-change/.

11 By "learner-centered options" we are referring not only to the learner-centered models offered by single-site schools, but also to broader community-based enabling systems that make up a learner-centered ecosystem as Education Reimagined depicts in The Big Idea.

12 The organizational model framework presented here comes from research by the former Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen on the phenomenon of disruptive innovation. See Mark W. Johnson, Clayton M. Christensen, and Henning Kagermann, "Reinventing Your Business Model," *Harvard Business Review*, December 2008, https://hbr.org/2008/12/reinventing-your-business-model.

13 Because schools are not expected to generate profits like companies are, we use "financial formula" in this paper in lieu of the term currently used in management literature about the four-box model, which is "profit formula."

14 "How do school funding formulas work?" Urban Institute, November 29, 2017, https://apps.urban.org/features/funding-formulas/.

15 Thomas Arnett and Jonathan Cooney, "What programs have school systems created to support their students?" Christensen Institute, June 2022. https://www.christenseninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Spring-2022-Factsheets-programs.pdf.

16 See "Explore and discover learner-centered spaces," Education Reimagined, https://education-reimagined.org/map/.

17 See for example, "A transformational vision for education in the US," Education Reimagined, September 2015, https://education-reimagined.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/A-Transformational-Vision-for-Education-in-the-US.pdf. Mehta, Jal, "Possible futures: Toward a new grammar of schooling," Kappan, January 24, 2022, https://kappanonline.org/possible-futures-new-grammar-0f-schooling-mehta/. Transcend, "Leaps for Equitable, 21st Century Learning," https://www.transcendeducation.org/leaps-for-equitable-21st-century-learning.

18 See, for example, Kotter's 8 Steps, https://www.kotterinc.com/8-step-process-for-leading-change/.

19 Case studies on innovation show that established organizations will, at times, make major changes to their models under the right value network conditions. For example, the Lindsay Unified School District and the Chugach School District have both made significant shifts toward learner-centered practices (see Lindsay Unified School District, *Beyond reform: Systemic shifts toward personalized learning*, Marzano Research, 2017, Bloomington, IN and Richard DeLorenzo, Wendy Battino, Rick Schreiber, Barbara Gaddy Carrio, *Delivering on the Promise: The Education Revolution*, 2009, Solution Tree, Bloomington, IN). It's important to note, however, that the changes to these districts' organizational models hinged on major shifts in the priorities of their value networks; they were not the pure product of internal leadership and change management. In both districts, changes were preceded by a near universal sense among value network stakeholders that the districts were failing their students. In that context, district leaders then engaged their families, communities, and boards to build agreement that the conventional model of schooling was the reason the districts were failing. Leaders then leveraged that consensus to undertake the work of changing their models. Unfortunately, even cases like these struggle to produce the same degree of model reinvention as what comes from assembling new value networks and then building new models from the ground up. This is because it's hard to build 100% agreement across an existing value network on both the need for change and the key details of a new model.

20 Michael Hansen, "The U.S. Education System Isn't Giving Students What Employers Need," *Harvard Business Review*, May 18, 2021, https://hbr.org/2021/05/the-u-s-education-system-isnt-giving-students-what-employers-need.

21 See for example, Karen Pittman and Linda Darling-Hammond, "Analysis: Surveys find parents want bold changes in schools — with more learning inside and outside the classroom," LA School Report, July 22, 2021, https://www.laschoolreport.com/analysis-surveys-find-parents-want-bold-changes-in-schools-with-more-learning-inside-and-outside-the-classroom/, and Hart Research Associates memo from May 11, 2021 on its "National Survey of Public School Parents," https://www.dropbox.com/s/uz87wwp4qlfrzge/AFT_NationalParentsPoll_Memo_5_2021.pdf?dl=0.

22 "A transformational vision for education in the US," Education Reimagined, September 2015, https://education-reimagined.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/A-Transformational-Vision-for-Education-in-the-US.pdf.

23 "Agile" refers to a set of project management practices created by software developers in the early 2000s. For more information, see "Agile software development," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agile_software_development.

24 Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns: In part online, with some element of control over the time, place, path, or pace of their learning; and, in part, in a brick-and-mortar location away from home. Lastly, the modalities along a student's learning path are connected to provide an integrated learning experience. See "What is blended learning?" Blended Learning Universe, https://www.blendedlearning.org/basics/.

25 See "Legal Requirements for Non-Public Schools," Colorado Department of Education, https://www.cde.state.co.us/choice/nonpublic_law .

26 Co-locating a new program at the physical site of a conventional school, also known as a "school within a school" approach, makes it challenging for the new model to develop a truly learner-centered model. For this arrangement to work, the new program needs to have a high degree of autonomy in making decisions about how to operate.

27 Through research on why teachers change their instructional practices, the Christensen Institute found that teachers were willing to overhaul their practices only after first having experienced major failures that led them to a personal conclusion that their prior practices were inadequate. See Thomas Arnett, Bob Moesta, Michael B. Horn, "The teacher's quest for progress: How school leaders can motivate instructional innovation," Christensen Institute, September 12, 2018, https://www.christenseninstitute.org/publications/teachers-jobs-to-be-done/

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ABOUT

Education Reimagined is catalyzing the invention of a new public education system, one that honors and respects the uniqueness of each child. We do this by leveraging the expertise and learnings from our community of thousands of cutting-edge education leaders who are working to invent and spread structures to make relevant, engaging learning available for youth across the country.

The **Clayton Christensen Institute** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to improving the world through Disruptive Innovation. Founded on the theories of late Harvard professor Clayton M. Christensen, the Institute offers a unique framework for understanding many of society's most pressing problems. Its mission is ambitious but clear: work to shape and elevate the conversation surrounding these issues through rigorous research and public outreach.

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