"So hard, but so rewarding:" How school system leaders are scaling up strategic school staffing models

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Introduction

"We have got to stop thinking that the [teacher] workforce of 20 and 30 years ago is going to magically reappear. Math, science, special ed, bilingual, computer science, Spanish, you name it. Those vacancies are open all year long." As this system leader expressed, teacher workforce challenges continue to test leaders nationwide. Year after year, they are dealing with persistent shortages of teacher candidates and the resulting long-term vacancies, increasing reports of teacher burnout, historically high levels of job dissatisfaction, and attrition, especially among teachers of color

Increasingly, leaders are realizing that the scale of the challenge requires radically rethinking who they hire to educate students, how they design the job, and how they support educators to stay in the profession. Such "strategic school staffing" initiatives support new pathways into the teaching profession, new structures for differentiated teacher development, and entirely new teaching roles (see research methods on next page).

Early results from districts adopting these strategies are promising. District leaders report fewer vacancies, teachers report higher satisfaction levels, and some schools are seeing improvements in student learning. However, the work is challenging, especially when leaders try to scale new models from one or two classrooms or schools to the entire system. We asked over 40 principals, superintendents, and other administrators, as well as technical assistance experts (hereafter, leaders), who have been scaling up a range of strategic school staffing models for several years: What is the role of leaders in scaling these models from single classrooms or schools to entire systems? What are the key challenges? Which supports work best? How can states, technical assistance providers, funders, and others support this work? This report begins to answer these questions.

We learned that the leaders saw their efforts to scale strategic staffing models system-wide as both rewarding and riddled with challenges, including:

- Navigating both "big P" policies, such as state regulations and school board mandates, and "little p" policies, such as the informal but deeply rooted school and district-level procedures and practices.
- Adapting a model that worked in one or two pilot classrooms or schools to a much wider range of realities throughout the system.
- Navigating mistrust about what the new models imply for teachers and building open lines of communication up and down the system.
- Uprooting old assumptions about what the teaching role can be and breaking rule-following mindsets.

These findings suggest that these initiatives remain fragile despite being several years past the pilot stage and showing promising results. Scaling strategic school staffing initiatives requires leaders' near-constant attention–and if leaders let up for too long, new challenges can arise. This is a recipe for leader burnout and stalled or failed scale-up, leaving leaders with the same persistent challenges staffing their classrooms. There are several ways that policymakers, advocates, philanthropy, researchers, and communities can chip in and support efforts to scale up—primarily by working to change the policies currently taking leaders' time and capacity and by providing ongoing funding for these efforts.

Research design and methods

For this study, we conducted 42 interviews with leaders and technical assistance providers working in six systems.[1] Our sample included principals, superintendents, school system leaders and administrators, technical assistance providers, and school staffing advocates. In all cases, they were not hired solely for the purpose of scaling up strategic staffing; rather, they led these strategies in addition to their daily responsibilities.

These leaders worked in various governance and policy contexts (e.g., both traditional school districts and charter management organizations, in both right-to-work states and collective-bargaining states). With the exception of one, the systems had been implementing a strategic school staffing model for more than three years. Almost all of these systems were engaged in "strategy braiding," in which they adopted multiple, coordinated strategies and implemented them in an interconnected way. The table below shows the six systems and the strategies they are implementing.

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F
Redesigned schedules and workload School system allows schools to flex time, scheduling, and responsibilities.		X	X		X	
Redefined teacher requirements School system removes barriers so that a broader range of individuals can staff or support classes, ensuring students have access to diverse, effective teachers.	X			X		
Collaborative teaching structures School system redesigns the role of the educator from individual contributor to member of a teaching team, often with teachers, paraprofessionals, and specialized teachers sharing responsibility for a larger roster of students.		X			X	
Intentional teacher recruitment program(s) School system intentionally recruits a broad range of teachers and other educator candidates (e.g., candidates of color or bilingual candidates) and/or trains educators in new ways of teaching.	X			X		X
New teacher leadership roles School system provides system-wide educator leadership opportunities that allow teachers to grow in their careers without leaving instruction.	X	X	X		X	
Differentiated and personalized teacher development School system provides system-wide differentiated teacher and educator development opportunities and programs that support leadership development and teachers' daily work and personal growth.	X			X	X	X
Compensation School system offers more money to current and new staff for taking additional responsibilities or high performance.	X		X			X

Leaders took part in 45-60 minute interviews. We asked about the origins and growth of their strategic staffing model, implementation of the model, stakeholder support and opposition, barriers and enabling factors, and outcomes. We coded the data based on key themes and research on systems change. We then arrayed these data in matrices, using codes on how systemic change can take hold.[2]

This exploratory study intends to describe leaders' work in systems scaling up strategic school staffing. Because of sampling limitations and our reliance on leaders' recollections and self-reports, the findings do not represent the full breadth of leaders' experiences, nor the chances that other leaders may encounter similar experiences. Further, we do not claim a causal relationship between the strategic school staffing initiatives and the leaders' reported efficacy.

The work of scaling up strategic staffing: "So hard, but also so rewarding"

All the leaders we spoke with strongly supported their strategic staffing initiatives—many cited multiple benefits. One leader reported that their intentional teacher pipeline program led to fewer vacancies in his system. Another felt that her system's teacher empowerment model led to lower stress and burnout among staff, as they were "more comfortable to voice their concerns." Several leaders said their system's team teaching model helped build a stronger community among staff, which led to more robust collaboration and more effective teaching. "I think [team teaching] will save education because it is so isolating being a teacher," one leader said.[3] One leader summarized the sentiment we heard repeatedly: "It's so different and so unique and so hard, but also so rewarding."

Leaders scaling up strategic staffing strategies face several tasks and barriers that are different from the everyday challenges of their jobs. Across the systems we studied, leaders attributed these challenges to the fact that their models are trying to do things that their systems had never done before—and addressing these challenges is a sign they are moving in the right direction. Overall, their work tended to fall into three broad categories: 1) changing policies, 2) building relationships, and 3) shifting mindsets.

Changing where possible, navigating when necessary: "Big P" and "little p" policy

To scale up strategic staffing models, leaders reported spending significant time trying to change or navigate both "big P" and "little p" policies. While "big P" policies are typically set by the state or local school boards, "little p" policies are the various processes, guidelines, and "the way we do things" that shape daily work and are often within leaders' purview. One leader described the difference: "The 'big P' is where legislation is necessary. … And 'little p' is … just some rules y'all came up with that were written into the handbook that y'all just keep doing."

"Big P" policies blocked key aspects. No single "big P" policy blocks leaders from implementing various models, but "teacher of record" rules come up most frequently. These rules dictate who is responsible for which students—for example, who gives students grades, who determines promotion to the next grade level, and who receives credit for student performance. These rules pose challenges because they hamper a culture of shared responsibility for students among adults—an element considered critical to several

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[2] See for example, Kania, Kramer, & Senge, 2018.

models, particularly collaborative teaching.

In general, the most challenging "big P" policies prohibit key aspects—or "non-negotiables"—of the strategic staffing model. Because the non-negotiables vary by model, so does the "big P" policy each leader is confronting. To illustrate, a leader in a system adopting a team teaching model described how the current evaluation policies overemphasize the individual performance of both students and teachers. "When you think about the accountability policies for teachers, many of them talk and refer to individual teacher evaluations … And so [in our state] 25 to 33% of your teacher evaluation rating is based on student achievement. The remaining is based on the evaluation that you get from your administrator … We're actually not incentivizing teachers to collaborate because we are thinking about and following the law, which essentially says every individual teacher will need their own evaluation."

Leaders described the following "big P" policies as obstacles:

- **State teacher licensure requirements:** For systems aiming to diversify their workforce through hiring community educators, navigating various state-approved accreditation programs can be onerous and time-consuming.
- **Class size requirements:** Policies like class size requirements can be challenging for systems implementing team teaching or other strategies that affect the student-to-teacher ratio. Team teaching and similar strategies require systems to group students across grade-level classrooms and subjects.
- **State-mandated pay scales:** Such pay scales can create barriers for systems trying to build new career ladders for teacher advancement. Systems that provide stipends for teachers who take on increasing leadership roles can find navigating budgets set by state mandates challenging.
- **Collective bargaining agreements (CBAs):** In addition to affecting class size requirements and pay scales, CBAs also can impede the scale-up of strategic staffing models by requiring identical work rules for all teachers, while several strategic school staffing models rely on differentiating the teacher role.

Few paths to change "big P" policies. Leaders talked about changing "big P" policies to scale their strategic school staffing models—but few have succeeded. Instead, they are relying on workarounds. For example, in the teacher evaluation example above, leaders did not mention lobbying state policymakers to change the policy as a potential path forward. Instead, they are looking at how other school systems have created more collaborative evaluations, such as redesigning teacher evaluation scoring to include the entire district's average student achievement score rather than an individual classroom's.

In at least one case, leaders discovered that a policy they wanted to change did not actually exist. A leader wanted to support community members to become paraprofessionals and eventually classroom teachers, but district policy did not allow part-time employment. Since many community members need this flexibility, he worked with HR staff to identify the specific prohibition. However, when he and the HR staff couldn't find any "black letter law" policy, they suspected it developed as a bureaucratic convenience that became accepted as a norm.

In a few cases, existing state policies actually supported leaders' efforts to adopt strategic staffing models. In a Texas district, for example, leaders took advantage of the state's "District of Innovation" policy to exempt them from various teacher licensure requirements, such as hiring teachers who are still pursuing certification, so that they could scale new teacher apprenticeship and pipeline programs.[4] Similarly, leaders relied on state policies that create new pathways into the teacher workforce or relax existing requirements for teacher certification. Leaders also reported leveraging state takeover and accountability policies, various funding

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[3] We heard similar responses from teachers in the three systems with the most mature strategic staffing initiatives as part of a related study. Further we reviewed data and reports from each of these systems documenting, albeit using non-causal methods, improved teacher recruitment, retention, and satisfaction.

sources, and state rules around instructional minutes/days.

"Little p" policies take more of leaders' time. Leaders reported spending as much or more time working to shift entrenched but not compulsory processes and practices—"little p" policies —as they spend on the state- and district-level policies. School systems' bureaucratic rules, internal processes, and red tape take up valuable time. One leader reported, "It's always the barriers in practice, and we have to push and change the practice." He then described several barriers and concluded, "It almost feels overwhelming. … [We have to] figure something out." Common "little p" policies that take leaders' time include:

- **District data systems:** Leaders say that their technology infrastructure, like data and learning management systems, is too inflexible to accommodate the emerging needs of strategic staffing initiatives because they are typically built to track student outcome data (e.g., test scores and attendance) for a single-teacher classroom structure. They need systems that can track a broader array of data and map students to different or multiple adults.

- **Creating a master schedule:** Leaders struggle to create school-level—and in some cases, cross-school—master schedules that can accommodate teacher collaboration time or different groupings of students and teachers.

- **Central office hiring and training processes:** Leaders report that they have had to change district hiring practices to identify and recruit a wider variety of teacher candidates and/or train and mentor new teachers on their model. Depending on the system, HR staff can be more or less agreeable to these changes.

- **School-level processes to support teaching:** Leaders report that longstanding practices like how students are assigned to teachers and determining school improvement priorities can create challenges for scaling up various strategic staffing models. School-level leaders report having to develop entirely new processes to accommodate new practices.

- **Collective bargaining agreements:** In the systems with collective bargaining agreements, leaders talked about confusion around whether teachers should raise grievances with their school union representative or other teacher leaders. In systems with significant changes to working conditions, teachers were also confused if issues were even violations.

Unlike "big P" policies, leaders are able to address and change most of the little p barriers they have encountered. The exception is data systems, since no leader has yet identified a vendor with a system that met their needs. For example, one administrator talked in detail about how teacher and leader hiring processes have changed throughout the district in order to select candidates who are aligned with the district's new staffing model but are also more open to innovation and experimentation. Interview questions now probe for a number of new characteristics, such as "inclusive thinking, … how they've been resilient, problem-solving in an ethical way… if [they] believe in being a teammate, believe in being a systems thinker." The administrator went on to underscore the shift from prior hiring priorities: "I tell people, Stop asking the five elements of a lesson plan. It's just ridiculous. You can teach that, right? But let's try and find people that have character, people that believe in a team working together, and believe in trust."

One reason leaders are much more able to change these "little p" policies is that these initiatives enjoy full endorsement by their superintendents. In the systems where the superintendent was not the main lead for the initiative, they made frequent public proclamations about the importance of the initiatives to their systems' overall improvement. This support means that creating new processes that accommodate strategic staffing

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[4] Texas's District of Innovation policy allows designated districts to be exempt from certain state laws, such as policies around the school calendar, class-size ratios, and student attendance. Innovation Districts are districts that have met performance requirements and adopted outlined procedures. As of 2023, about 80% of districts in Texas are Innovation Districts. Other states, like Massachusetts, Colorado, New Hampshire, and North Dakota, have adopted similar policies for either individual schools or districts.

initiatives was a priority, and the leaders we interviewed could pull rank to change most "little p" policies.

Design work is ongoing and expensive. Several years into the work, leaders report that in order to continue scaling, they still must spend significant time designing their strategic staffing model. In the early days, leaders started with a basic idea or model in a few classrooms or schools. But as they scaled up, they needed to further develop the model or find ways for it to flex as it spread to additional classrooms and schools.

Leaders discussed identifying an appropriate "tight and loose" balance for their model—that is, holding tightly to some key ideas while being much more flexible about other practices. Another leader described defining design principles for adoption across schools, "that we think represent the shifts that need to take place within the teaching profession." Another leader described the shift from early to later design work as:

> "It's like systems and structures first ... you have to have meeting norms, you should be meeting [regularly], blah, blah, blah. Like all those technical things. And now we're in the work of, 'How do you actually work as a high-functioning team, analyzing data and making decisions for your school?' So, that's where we're at right now and doing that work very deeply."

Leaders said the bulk of the work must be done in-house. While consultants or technical assistance providers can support model adaptation and develop related training, district staff must remain heavily involved because they are the ones who know their school system. And because contracted technical assistance is an ongoing cost, leaders must spend time securing additional funding. Nearly all leaders reported relying on federal pandemic-recovery funds (e.g. ESSER, ARP) to pay for the ongoing development work, but many also secure grant funds. One leader noted that working with consultants or technical assistance providers is "very expensive," to the extent that some are not a viable option for smaller systems with smaller budgets.

Critical for scale: Relationships built on trust and communication

To scale their strategic staffing models, all leaders discussed needing to build interpersonal relationships throughout their system—and that these relationships rely on trust and open communication. One leader described how their relationships enabled the work of scaling up a new model: "So we are able to just walk into schools and [say], 'I think you might want to consider this.' And people respond, 'Oh, I might actually consider that.' That allows us to get the work started much faster and for them to go on the journey with us."

How to build trust. Leaders talked about building trust in different ways—ensuring buy-in and developing psychological safety—but the sentiment was present in nearly every one of our interviews. They talked about how people on both sides of the relationship need to believe that the other understands and has their interests in mind. Otherwise, suspicion grows. One leader described talking with both school and central office staff:

"... The teachers are like, 'I don't think my will is gonna be honored in this.' And the central office is like, 'Well, if we give the teachers all the power, they're gonna do all these things that can't scale and that don't make sense.' There is no trust within these systems. And a prerequisite for all of this work is actually the different partners trust each other."

This leader went on to describe how bringing different groups together to talk about their interests helped build this trust—which, in turn, helped to "remove the barriers that come with the implementation of something new and transformative."

Trust also is built by "norming" the meaning of key terms. One leader described the importance of such discussions: "We are using very common language that people have drastically different interpretations of what the words mean. … We have actually gotten to norm with stakeholders on 'When we say this, we mean this. And when you say this, you mean this.' … I think the resistance fundamentally comes down to using different terms that have drastically different mental models associated with them. And then you end up talking in circles if you don't get at the root of that."

This leader identified "flexibility" and "power" as two examples. Leaders in another system similarly worked to develop a shared understanding of "power" with people across their system. In one system adopting new teacher leadership roles, they moved from an understanding of the principal as holding all school-level decision-making power towards a much more expansive definition where not only principals but also teachers could hold authority.

Communication identifies "bumps in the road." Similarly, leaders talked about needing to be able to speak and listen openly about their day-to-day work. Building relationships with open communication facilitates new ways of working and sharing critical information about progress—what one described as "bumps in the road"—which in turn facilitates the ongoing design work described in the previous section. One leader said that district- and school-level staff "had to be thought partners because I knew things that they didn't know, and they knew things that I didn't know."

Another leader described how she regularly meets with a panel of 16 teachers to help her stay up to date about scale-up: "It's building that trust with them so that they can say things … to tell me honestly what's happening so that I can support them in growing." And teachers, she said, told her, "These are the conversations we need to be having—and we want to be having."

Finding people who "get it." Building relationships with staff also helps leaders identify the right people, or people who "get it," to fill specific roles. One leader discussed how relationship-building is often nested: "We've discovered that as we start the first innovation move, you have to find the right leader. And that right leader has to find the right teacher because they're not all created equal."

Early in the scale-up process, all leaders reported spending significant time introducing their particular strategic staffing model to teachers and other administrators, educating them on its purpose, and getting them interested in the vision. This often involved tactical outreach, with invitations going out to specific teachers. One school-level leader explained, "We presented [this model] to teachers of freshmen because we knew our freshman kids need the most support. … And [with] the teachers who right away bought in … we kept the discussion going."

The work of shifting mindsets does not end

Leaders said they must also help others shift their mindsets—beliefs and assumptions about the teaching profession, how schools or districts should run, and the nature of education itself. One leader who is early in scaling up changes wondered how to speed up the process. Spoiler alert: it doesn't work.

There are so many mindsets to shift. Shifting mindsets came up in nearly every interview we conducted, in part because there are so many narratives around the teaching role that need to shift. And they are layered; when one mindset is challenged or changed, a new mindset reveals itself as a challenge. For example, in a system working to bring community members into educator roles, leaders reported tackling several different mindsets about who can be a teacher and which assets are valuable in a school community, among others. One leader described the multi-layered mindsets to uplift the community educator role, show the connection between the role and teachers, explain the role within the larger context, and help principals understand why

retaining community educators is essential.

Other examples included: when focused on teacher empowerment, leaders worked to help change people's minds about whether a principal should be the sole decision-maker in a school and what counts as "school leadership." In a system moving toward apprenticeships and job-embedded teacher training, leaders are working to reimagine how teachers receive training and who can deliver that training. In a system scaling a team teaching model, leaders are challenging ideas around teachers' (in)ability to collaborate, plan, and teach together in ways that are beneficial to students.

Aside from the sheer number of mindsets to shift, leaders also have to contend with the constant influx of new teachers and leaders into their systems; many are new to the models and have not yet shifted their vision about what teaching could be. In the words of one leader, "It has taken us this long to get to a place where people actually understand it, and still, people don't really understand" because so many teachers are new. Again, this contributed to the nearly unending work of having to shift mindsets for leaders—even those several years into scaling up their strategic staffing model.

Scale-up requires shifting out of "rule-following" mindsets. Aside from ideas directly related to their strategic school staffing model, leaders also reported needing to shift people out of their "rule-following" mindsets so that they could think creatively about how to implement new models. One leader said, "We've got to get into that mindset of, 'how do we reinvent this?'… People are paralyzed by permission. They've always been told what to do, so having freedom and teaching beyond a compliance-based system towards a creative-based system is difficult." This leader, and others, went on to describe how a creativity mindset was important when adapting the model or when confronting the inevitable barriers encountered during scale-up. Leaders in another system talked about using design-based thinking strategies, like design principles and visioning exercises, to help people break out of their existing paradigm. These leaders described how these techniques helped to open people's minds to the wide range of possibilities: "We realized we needed [the first] step of actually just introducing more radical ideas—before saying 'What appeals to you?' Because otherwise, the design process is just gonna be pretty lackluster."

Seeing is believing. Leaders reported that the most effective way to shift mindsets is for people to see the model in action. While it can be challenging to scale a new model at first, one leader found that "to make that change, people need to see it's different to believe it. And then it's awesome." Another leader working in a district scaling up team teaching described, "If you get that first team right, it just sings to people working in the environment."

While the earliest adopters needed relatively little support to shift their mindset, they helped shift the mindsets of others by bringing the model to life in schools and creating a proof of concept. "So, seeing is believing. … It was the differentiator in getting [leaders in our system] on board," one leader recalled. The proof of concept is particularly valuable since some leaders reported difficulty articulating all of the changes a model implied; for them, showing was easier. In places where their own system did not have a model, leaders brought principals and teachers to visit other school systems or consulted with technical assistance groups who provided access to similar experiences.

Leaders in systems that were several years into their scaling process noted that eventually, outcome or impact data—often in the form of teacher satisfaction surveys or student test scores—were helpful in shifting mindsets. One district leader said, "They're going to be like, 'Where are the data? This doesn't feel like I can do this based on [whether] this feels good. Just tell me that this is going to improve reading growth for kids… in a way that traditional teaching isn't.'"

"All at the same time:" Leaders need to simultaneously attend to all of the above

To reimagine the teaching role, leaders found that they had to simultaneously engage in all of the work described above: navigate policies at different levels, continue to build out their models, build trust and communication with staff, and change mindsets about the teaching role. One leader said, "We worked at it all at the same time." Another remarked that they were trying to build a whole new system "from scratch, backwards."

Problems emerge if any one area is unattended for too long. We heard that when leaders do not attend to any one area of work for too long, problems emerge. For example, in a district where leaders focused on building deep relationships with school leaders and teachers, we heard the same people asking for new systems, rules, and practices—"little p" policies—to support their model. One teacher remarked, "When we ask for support, we want it and need it. And we don't get it." In another system, leaders spent significant time designing and refining elements of their model, only to find that they needed to align on how teachers defined key ideas related to their model. One teacher told us, "I think some teachers are still confused about what the [model] is." In another example, a leader devoted significant effort to finding and developing school-level leaders but failed to develop support with their central office colleagues. The lack of relationships with other central office administrators made shifting "little p" policies more challenging.

This level of attention is difficult to maintain. While no leaders complained outright, at the end of several interviews, their tone hinted at their fatigue, and several wondered how long they could stay in their roles. One leader worried about how the redesign work could continue if he were to leave, "My biggest concern is sustainability. This has to outlive me. This is bigger than me. I'm just one guy that has one idea. How do you build sustainability? Because I don't think [we] want to do all this work and then this just goes away."

Little support from the broader ecosystem. While all enjoyed support from inside their system, some leaders also lamented the relative lack of support from outside organizations. They were particularly critical of "regular" professional development providers and teacher preparation programs. One leader talked about this tension: "The very traditional way is you go to school, you take the teacher's test, you get your license, and then you go do the job. And we're doing that in the reverse: 'This is the job, what do you know and not know about how to do this job? And then how do we fill the gap and get you credentialed?' … And quite frankly, not to throw anybody under the bus, but lots of teacher development programs might globally help, but they don't help [teachers] in the context of [their] job."

Recommendations: Sharing the work of scaling strategic school staffing models

The leaders we spoke with are devoted to helping scale their models. They are working tirelessly to: change or work around a wide variety of state and district policies; figure out how to adapt the model to new classrooms and schools; build trusting relationships with open communication; and challenge deeply held mindsets about what it means to be a teacher—among other priorities. While this list gives the impression that these tasks are sequential, in reality, these leaders are attending to all of them, all at once.

Early results from these and other school systems suggest that strategic staffing models are well worth the effort. Leaders note that investing time and effort into these models is challenging yet rewarding, leading to improved recruitment and retention of staff. But the work can easily lead to burnout—and leaders who are willing to give this much to scale an initiative are likely few and far between. If we hope to see strategic school staffing spread to more school systems, then state policymakers, technical assistance providers, and researchers need to understand what is involved to scale up these initiatives—and be willing to share the work.

Without additional support, strategic school staffing is likely to fall by the wayside and will not realize its potential to create a more sustainable and joyful teaching profession filled with teachers who can support student learning in deep and meaningful ways.

School and system leaders: Successfully scaling up strategic school staffing likely requires support well beyond what one or two system-level leaders can provide. Leaders should share responsibility, with both internal and external people, for ongoing design work as well as key activities such as lobbying for autonomy from state policies, working to change "little p" policies and practices, developing training materials, and facilitating discussions to define key concepts and terms among stakeholders.

Superintendents: Superintendents who do not intend to lead this work should make frequent declarations about the importance and priority of these initiatives. This explicit support can help combat resistance among staff uninterested in changing their "little p" policies. Without this sort of system-wide support, initiative leaders are left working with the early adopters who are naturally drawn to the idea.

Technical assistance providers and advocates: External experts should continue to provide model-specific support, as well as more general support on how to scale innovative initiatives system-wide. Such guidance should include training leaders to identify non-negotiables of their model, develop communication protocols, and spread their early successes. Groups like Empower Schools, Arizona State University's Next Education Workforce, Opportunity Culture, and Teacher-Powered Schools have developed a host of resources and offerings, including teacher professional development, leadership coaching, and school partnerships. Such support is likely most helpful during summer break and other extended breaks with fewer distractions.

State-level leaders: The wide variety of "big P" policies that threaten to block the scale-up of different models warrants the expansion of state-level autonomy policies (like Texas's District of Innovation policy). State administrators should also be ready to clarify policy if and when there is a question about whether a local practice necessitates a waiver.

School boards: School board members should work with state-level leaders and union leadership to change "big P" policies that currently block aspects of the strategic school staffing initiatives underway in their systems. They can also support changing "little p" policies within their own system by clarifying what is part of the "black letter law" policy and encouraging flexibility and openness to new practices.

Foundations: Many school systems have relied on pandemic-recovery funds like ESSER to support this work. With these funds set to run out in 2024, foundations should consider support to systems for costs associated with piloting new staffing models, contracting for technical assistance, and providing direct program support (to cover stipends, etc). Funders may see these grants as risky since few models have yet produced student learning impacts, but most early findings suggest these initiatives improve teacher satisfaction and may lead to improved student learning. To reduce risk, foundations could craft grant timelines, goals, and reporting metrics that incentivize the building of long-term, sustainable structures.

Researchers: Fellow researchers should delve into the connection between these models and student outcomes. These studies are technically challenging but critical to the long-term growth of the models, as many district and school leaders are likely to ask if they will lead to improvements in learning outcomes. While outcomes-focused research on strategic staffing is scant, two studies on Opportunity Culture's model suggest that it contributed to improved reading gains for English learners and better outcomes on standardized math assessments. Similarly, we should continue to track the scale-up process over time to identify the extent to which some scale-up strategies are particularly successful.

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Acknowledgments

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