

Characteristics of Effective Scale-Up & A Process for Building a 6-Stage Scaled-Up System



Research suggests that an effectively scaled-up system of community schools exhibits four characteristics: shared ownership, spread, depth, and sustainability (Adapted from Cynthia E. Coburn. “Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change.” In *Educational Researcher*, vol. 32, no.6, pp 1-12.).

- **Shared ownership.** Responsibility for a community schools initiative rests with school systems and their community partners—local government, community-based organizations, public and private agencies, institutions of higher education, parent and neighborhood groups, business and civic entities, and others with an interest in the development and well-being of children, families, schools, and communities. Together, these partners engage in collaborative decision making and take ownership of their efforts to help all students succeed. School and community partners share resources, information, and accountability for results with the intention of fundamentally transforming the current education system. Because they command different resources, expertise, and connections, they develop a balance of power and equal voice among partners, even though their resources may not all carry the same dollar value.

Shared ownership evolves and shifts to a broader group as stakeholders negotiate a shared vision, develop an operating framework, distribute leadership, clarify their respective roles and responsibilities, and do the hard work involved in scaling up a system of community schools.

- **Spread.** In effective scale-up, innovations *spread* into structures, processes, materials, beliefs, norms, and principles. The spread is vertical and horizontal—both *up and out*. Vertical spread requires a scaled-up system to instill community schools principles throughout a community’s educational pathways, from early childhood programs to higher education and career training, the district office, the school, and the classroom. Horizontal spread reaches out geographically to encompass more and more schools and neighborhoods across the jurisdiction. A rollout strategy identifies sites and links them in clusters or feeder patterns that make sense given community needs and readiness.

Spread also refers to systematic growth in the public’s favorable perception of community schools across various sectors of the community. Such spread occurs as initiatives release data showing measurable progress toward results and provide opportunities for the public to participate in discussions about the expansion of a community schools initiative.

- **Depth.** Effective scale-up requires *deep change* that alters attitudes, behaviors, assumptions, and expectations about teaching and learning and child and youth development practices— within classrooms, school buildings, and districts as well as among community partners. Top-down innovation is sometimes required, but the adoption of such innovation can often be mechanical, superficial, and fleeting. To create systems that support community schools and educate our most vulnerable children, people at all levels—from teachers and social workers to principals and agency managers and on to institutional leaders—need the opportunity to “dig deep” and explore the core principles of community schools. Participants need to change attitudes and assumptions, policies and practices that may conflict with or water down what community schools hope to accomplish.

Depth is achieved by efforts at the community and school-site levels to embed community school principles in the strategic planning of school districts and community partners. Professional development for school staff and partners helps translate these principles into everyday practice while technical assistance builds the capacity of initiatives at the community and school-site levels to promote alignment and stay focused on the long-term vision.

- Sustainability.** Implementation is the beginning, not the end, of successful scale-up. Effective scale-up creates an enduring system of community schools that survives leadership changes and other “rough weather.” Durability grows out of an infrastructure that supports a collaborative system based on a long-term vision, continually measures progress against a clear set of benchmarks, and develops the ability to finance the functions of community schools. Moreover, to ensure continuation and expansion, community schools must marshal the capacity to capture and retain the political support of key sectors of the community—parents and residents, voters, taxpayers, and policymakers.

