

Education First’s Core Principles for Innovation in Schools

The more things change, the more they stay the same...especially in our education systems

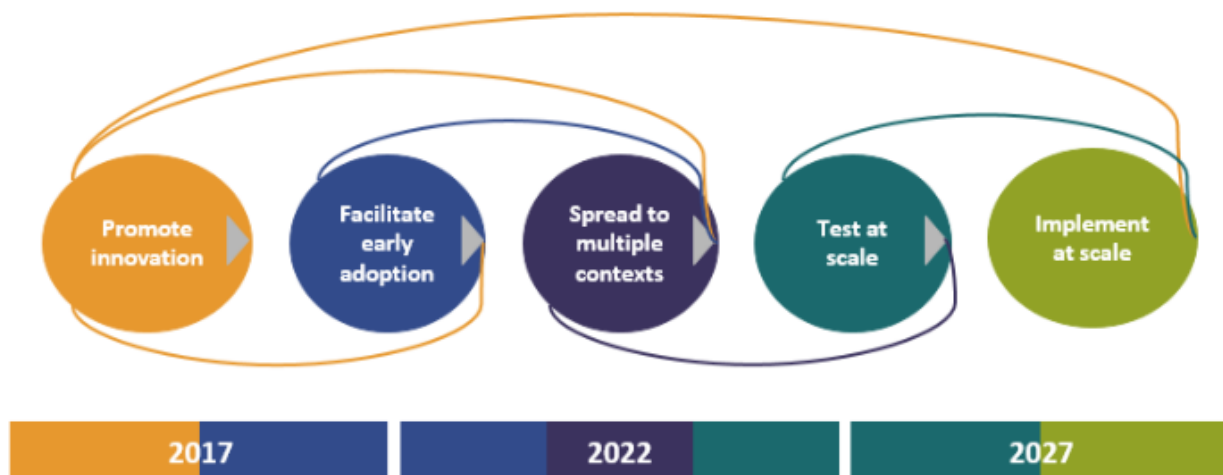
For decades, the US has largely relied on a one-size-fits-all approach to schooling. After over three decades of reform and a growing body of research on the science of learning, we still have too many students attending static schools that rely on traditional modes of schooling to meet the needs of diverse learners. Students continue to advance—or not—after a fixed, but increasingly arbitrary, number of days and years. Teachers are not well-supported to deviate from uniform methods of instruction and assessment. We continue to see that our students aren’t prepared. It isn’t working.

Our static educational institutions are in need of dynamic systemic solutions

Learning science tells us that all kids learn differently and need varied instructional methods and settings in which to engage and be engaged, to acquire and access knowledge and to apply it effectively and fruitfully. This is a basic aspect of being a productive resident in a 21st century community. But too many of our communities are not yet providing the incentives, enabling conditions, and policy changes necessary to create the diverse ways to “do school” our students need. The deep, structural rethinking of the relationships between teachers, students, and learning has yet to be done at scale.

However, as educators increasingly recognize the significant teaching, learning and context shifts required to develop a new generation of thoughtful, productive and engaged citizens, a number of promising models and approaches are beginning to take root. With deep expertise in system strategy, human capital development, research and policy and innovation, Education First designs, implements and influences the systems and enabling conditions (people, time, money, policies and programs) to support these innovative models and approaches so students and educators can thrive. We help practitioners – districts and CMOs – to develop, improve and scale models, tools and frameworks to support and drive innovation in schools and districts. We support the ecosystem by helping non-profits organizations and national funders develop field-building knowledge and implement strategic supports to nurture and support innovation in the field.

Figure 1: Ed First's approach to systems level innovation



How we can help: Facilitating and supporting deep, systems-level change to drive innovation

At Education First we use our expertise to cultivate the conditions for our prospective clients to bring innovative models into their contexts so that they can bring equity and excellence to their educators and students. Here's our take on what it takes to do so.

Our Principles	Priorities for innovation	Our perspective
<p>Student experiences and success are the fundamental purpose of school.</p> <p>Schools and adults deliver not only knowledge, but community values. Schools should be a place where knowledge and values are translated into action.</p> <p>Networks, school systems and states have an imperative to center their efforts on improving student experiences and success and school effectiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To move from didactic instructional models to student-centered deeper learning. ▪ To design student experiences such that students of color and low-income youth have the opportunities to attain the same level of success as their more advantaged peers. ▪ To reimagine schools to attend to the social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning, not just content and pedagogy. ▪ To create a “home base” for more place-based and personalized learning experiences. ▪ To identify the most effective instructional approaches and ready them for scale. ▪ Add variable pathways with no dead ends to the typical student experience. ▪ Codify and understand what works; elevate innovative practices that can work at scale. ▪ Create and support the conditions, policies and strategies to scale what works. ▪ Provide additional capacity through services designed to support students and schools in addressing root causes of challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technology is an integral tool for personalizing learning, but not an end in-and-of itself. ▪ The student experience always has been and always will be about relationships between learners, content, and teachers. ▪ Schools are culturally-responsive where students of color and low-income youth feel safe, supported and seen and prepared to succeed in career and life. ▪ Schools are both their own community and part of their students’ larger communities. ▪ Schools need to fundamentally shift the role of the teacher by introducing new modalities of teaching and learning, breaking down the walls of the traditional classroom and elevating excellent instruction. ▪ Policies should be flexible enough to survive changing economic, political, and social conditions at the district level. ▪ Policies should be designed from the student out, not the state down. ▪ Eliminate policies that cannot scale excellence and replace them with policies that can.