



ERS partnership in Louisiana:

Helping to transform the state's low-performing schools to ensure that all students—regardless of where they live—have access to schools that prepare them for college and career.

Partner Background

Education Resource Strategies (ERS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to transforming how school systems organize resources—people, time, and money—so that every school succeeds for every student.

We are very excited for the opportunity to support Louisiana's struggling schools by helping them create a clear of vision of what it will take for students and teachers to be successful, reorganizing resources around that vision, and supporting the school district to create the enabling conditions to sustain that vision over time. We call this *Strategic School Design*. Since 2004, we have worked hand-in-hand with the leaders of over 30 school systems and several states on topics such as funding equity, budget development, teacher career path, and strategic school design.

In all of our work, we focus on the larger picture—how resources work together to create high-performing systems. Our non-profit status enables a different kind of partnership with districts and states: one where we participate in the transformation struggle, create insights together, and share lessons with others.

Evidence of Track Record of Student and School Outcomes

ERS has a strong record of impacting student achievement through strategic school design work. In particular, ERS' partnership with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools strengthened and improved CMS' Strategic Staffing Initiative, which placed strong principals with highly effective teams at select low-performing schools (27 out of 150+ schools in the district) from 2008-2011. ERS provided principals with data analysis, research, case studies, and trainings to support the development of strategic school designs. Students attending those 27 schools made double-digit gains in math, literacy, and science.

Table 1: Percent CMS Cohort 1 Students at/above Proficient in EOG Testing, 2008 vs 2009

Cohort 1 Strategic Staffing Schools	Reading 2008	Reading 2009	Reading Gains (08-09)	Math 2008	Math 2009	Math Gains (08-09)	Science 2008	Science 2009	Science Gains (08-09)
Sterling Elementary	34.6	48.3	13.7	52.4	75.6	23.2	19.6	22.7	3.1
Bruns Avenue Elementary	18.8	28.8	10	43.8	48.7	4.9	1.1	15.3	14.2
Devonshire Elementary	33.9	43.1	9.2	54.2	69.8	15.6	24.6	46.1	21.5
Ranson Middle	32	37	5	39	56.1	17.1	21.1	24.9	3.8
Briarwood Elementary	31.8	33.5	1.7	45.7	42.6	-3.1	9.8	25.3	15.5
Reid Park	22.8	24.7	1.9	30.8	36.7	5.9	2.2	14	11.8
Westerly Hills Elementary	32.4	33.5	1.1	41.7	47	5.3	12.1	7.5	-4.6



To deepen the work in Charlotte, in 2013, ERS partnered with Public Impact to support the Student Success by Design Collaborative. Seventeen school leaders were trained to identify school priorities and create school resource plans. Among ERS-partner schools in the collaborative: 100 percent of schools planned to extend the reach of excellent teachers either as coaches to other teachers or by working with the most challenging students, 80 percent of schools created new schedules that enabled 90+ minutes of weekly collaborative time for teams, 70 percent of schools organized to increase time and/or attention for highest need students.

These strategies showed results: Scores on TNTP's Instructional Culture Insight Survey (excluding those with principal turnover) improved by a remarkable 0.6 from 2013 to 2014, vs. 0.1 across the rest of the district, on a scale of 1-10. And all schools met or exceeded student-level growth expectations in the 2014-15 school year.

In addition, ERS made great strides in partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to create system-level conditions for ongoing school improvement. Starting in 2013, ERS worked closely with Cleveland to design and implement a student-based budgeting system to place more resources at the school level, provide more flexibility in decision making and provide more integrated, coherent and customized support to schools. School leaders now control 71 percent of their school budgets, vs. 2 percent previously. The school planning process was reorganized to begin before schools received their budgets, giving principals time to identify needs and goals, and budgets were finalized early so the district could begin the recruiting process in March instead of May or June. Central office departments were reorganized into cross-functional teams that served as strategic partners with schools instead of monitoring compliance. Ninety percent of school leaders now report that meetings with their central office are helpful. In 2015, student enrollment increased for the first time in 30 years and Cleveland was one of three urban districts to improve on all four sections of NAEP.

Our Model

Rooted in an examination of schools that have achieved dramatic outcomes for students, ERS has created an evidence-based strategy for helping redesign schools. We support cohorts of schools within a district seeking to achieve transformational results to address six key, interrelated resource strategies:

1. **Get the right people doing the right things:** Attract and retain the best teachers and design and assign roles and responsibilities to match skills to school and student need
2. **Grow capacity through collaboration:** Organize teacher teams to maximize student and teacher learning
3. **Create a culture of high expectations and shared accountability:** Create shared ownership among teachers and leaders of an instructional vision and student learning
4. **Adopt curriculum and instructional practices aligned to high standards:** Uphold college-and-career-ready standards and use effective curricula, instructional strategies, and assessments to achieve them
5. **Forge targeted and dynamic learning environments for students:** Match student grouping, learning time, technology and program to individual student needs
6. **Support students' social and emotional needs:** Ensure students are deeply known and integrate more intensive social and emotional support where necessary

School Support - We support school leaders directly, helping them create:

- **A multi-year school redesign plan** based on a needs assessment and exploration of best practices of high-performing schools.
- **Schedules that align resources** to student needs and that adjust as needs change.
- **Hiring plans** that are based on a rigorous assessment of gaps in staff expertise.
- **Annual professional learning plans** that are differentiated and linked to teacher performance standards, student data, and school needs.

- **Job and teacher assignment strategies** that assign teachers to roles that apply their time and individual assets to meet diverse student needs, extend the reach of strong performers, and advance school goals.

District Support - We also work with district leadership teams to identify and help them make the fundamental systemic changes necessary to enable successful school designs to be sustained and improved over time. To create and sustain whole systems of excellent schools, school systems must:

- Create a **shared vision** and understanding of what high-quality, rigorous instruction looks like
- Build **human capital systems** that attract, develop and retain high quality teachers and leaders
- Ensure **school leader flexibility** to match resources to school design
- Adopt clear and effective **accountability systems**
- **Distribute resources** equitably

We customize and approach each school and district holistically, empowering the unique vision of the school and district rather than championing a specific research-based program or agenda (such as blended learning, teacher leader roles, or extended learning time). Once school leaders have clarified or discovered their own visions for meeting their unique student and faculty needs, we roll up our sleeves and provide technical support to think through every possible scheduling or budgeting configuration to help them achieve it, taking as much time as required to move schools from where they are to where they want to be.

Our work lasts beyond the length of the initial engagement and can be scaled across additional schools. We have created a nationally recognized suite of tools and materials to guide school and district leadership teams through the process of creating an impactful, customized school design. Our *School Designer* tool, for instance, is an online platform that coaches users through the major decision milestones of a strategic school design process. Similarly, our Talent Decision Planner helps districts design the reports, metrics and processes to measure and track progress against human capital goals. These and other tools are a vital part of our efforts to build the capacity of school and district leadership teams to sustain and scale this school redesign work.

For this work to succeed, there are several necessary conditions:

- **Deep central partnership:** District leaders, particularly school supervisors, are actively engaged throughout to ensure the design (including interim deliverables and ultimate objectives) is high quality and connected to other ongoing planning, improvement, and accountability efforts.
- **Integration:** ERS and district leadership team members collaborate to ensure trainings and deliverables are thoroughly aligned with the district's strategic planning and budgeting timeline and process.
- **Real flexibility:** The district empowers school leaders with meaningful flexibility/discretion over resources.
- **Will and skill:** Principals bring the desire, skills and perseverance needed.
- **Ongoing feedback:** All involved commit to providing timely, direct feedback at every stage.