

Louisiana's Request for Information

1. Partner Background

Summarize your organization's mission and its connection to Louisiana's plan for struggling schools

School Empowerment Network (SEN) is a national 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to helping underserved students gain access to top quality education by building principal pipelines, developing great teachers, and creating new schools. SEN collaborates with school districts to identify and develop transformational school leaders and new school models.

At SEN we believe that even the most struggling districts are home to talented educators who, when properly recognized and developed, have great potential to lead transformative change in their schools. We employ a rigorous search process aimed at selecting for the competencies and mindsets we believe to be prerequisites for success. Once we have identified the most promising individuals, our development program provides direction and support to help them formulate and stay focused on their school vision, and to maintain positive momentum in the face of the inevitable challenges they will encounter in their new roles. We also work with districts to re-design school structures to maximize the impact that new leaders can have on their communities. We advocate for small schools, small learning communities within a school, and/or the phase-in of a renewed school culture one grade at a time whenever possible. Limiting the size of the school helps leaders dramatically raise the bar for quality and hold community members to renewed standards.

SEN's approach will provide the Louisiana Department of Education a sustainable leadership pipeline in districts that typically struggle to attract external talent. New approaches to selecting and coaching instructional leaders, as well as improved structural designs that support impact, will transform larger, struggling schools into thriving campuses with welcoming, rigorous and supportive communities.

2. Evidence of Track Record of Student and School Outcomes

SEN was founded in 2015 by a group of experienced principals and operational leaders. Core members of our team previously selected and trained leaders for over 120 new schools as part of the Bloomberg/Klein administration's efforts to improve New York City schools, replacing large failing high schools, developing smaller schools in their place, and providing quality charter school options for families. An MDRC report (which meets ESSA's Tier 1 evidence-based provisions¹) found that "SSCs [small schools in NYC] *continue to markedly increase high school graduation rates for large numbers of disadvantaged students of color, even as graduation rates are rising at the schools with which SSCs are compared*"².

The SEN team is currently implementing a similar body of work with the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan (EAA), a district designed to turnaround the lowest performing public schools in the state. After conducting a rigorous, multi-phase selection process, SEN identified talented educators from within the district's existing staff and developed them into cohorts of new Principals, Small Learning Community (SLC) leaders, and Lead/Master Teachers prepared to revitalize their schools and provide students the educational experience they deserve.

In 2015-2016, SEN rolled out the first Small Learning Community at the EAA - Mumford Academy - to allow for an effective school reset in which a new set of expectations was established for all community members. This SLC started last year with

¹ <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Study/78538>

² Bloom and Unterman. "New Findings About the Effectiveness and Operation of Small Public High Schools of Choice in New York City" MDRC, Aug '13

a single grade (9th) and will continue to grow one grade at a time. This gradual development is designed to give the new leader a chance to establish a radically improved school culture, while managing a small group of teachers and a limited scope of challenges. Since its inception, Mumford Academy has outperformed all schools in the District:

Standardized Test Results: Per Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Fall-to-Spring data, the percentage of students at Mumford Academy that met or exceeded projected growth in Math and Reading (75% and 81% respectively) was significantly higher than the district's average (43% and 44% respectively).

School Quality Review Results: Per 2016 School Quality Review (SQR) data reported by Class Measures, Mumford Academy's average performance across the nine SQR Standards was approximately twice the average of all other EAA schools (3.44 vs 1.76). Mumford Academy received a "Transformational" rating (score of 4/4) in Vision for Improvement, Teacher Evaluation/Development, Organizational Strategy and School Environment, in which the district average was 1.82, 2.09, 1.82 and 2.00 respectively. Especially important given the slow pace at which struggling schools typically improve instructional practices, Mumford Academy received a score of 3.00 in Instructional Strategy, compared to the district average of 1.55.

These results demonstrate the significant and rapid improvements that can be achieved in schools that embrace a small learning community or new school model under the guidance of high-quality leadership. Building on these promising results, SEN worked with the EAA to open 11 additional Small Learning Communities this past September. Early assessments -- including a Fall 2016 mock SQR-- show that the new SLCs attracted teacher talent back to the district, increased attendance, reduced suspensions, and performed better than the larger schools they are replacing in the majority of the cases. Based on these positive early indicators, we anticipate increases in student performance and school quality similar to what we have seen in Mumford Academy, when formal assessments are conducted at the end of the school year.

3. Your Organization's Model

a. How will you differentiate your services to meet the unique needs of schools and districts in Louisiana?

SEN will apply a model of new school start-up similar to the one used to revitalize NYC schools. We will tailor recruitment and selection efforts to reflect the district's priorities and attract its most talented educators into leadership pathways. In addition, we will adapt our model to allow for a culture reset in alignment with the talent available and the district appetite for disruption. For example, in our work with the EAA, many future leaders required a year of development in intermediate coaching roles, before being ready to initiate an SLC. During that year, the future leaders developed their adult management skills, refined their school visions and prepared in detail for the launch of the SLC. Furthermore, given the political climate, the EAA was not prepared to formally close schools. In order to be successful in that context, we designed the concept of the Small Learning Community, which allows for a reset of culture within an existing school, one grade at a time. We make it a priority to create turnaround plans that give talent the best chance to impact results while respecting the political needs and sensitivities in the community.

Stability and continuity are essential to the long-term effectiveness of SEN leadership programs. To this end, we will build a multi-tiered career ladder that recognizes and nurtures early-career talent, preparing the next cohort of leaders who can both support the current administration's efforts and serve as a back-fill pipeline when/if the principal moves on. Additionally, SEN will work closely with district administrators who have the capacity to lead the program in the future. Our goal is for the district to be running the process completely in 5 years time, and for SEN's services to no longer be needed.

b. What are the attributes of your ideal partner school or district?

SEN works well with districts that value school leadership as a lever for change. It is crucial that our partners understand the importance of supporting a school leader's vision and are willing to provide him or her with autonomy to make necessary school-based decisions. We believe that if the district forces priorities that are not aligned with those dictated by the leader's turnaround vision, the school is unlikely to progress. School leaders should be free to manage their budgets, establish best instructional practices, and, most importantly, manage talent in their buildings. Ideally, SEN leaders will have the freedom to make personnel decisions based on a rubric-normed observation and feedback cycle, as well as on student outcomes on assessments.

c. Describe experience working with other third party providers to support coherent school/district improvement.

SEN is experienced in collaborating with multiple third party providers to ensure that partner schools and districts receive coherent support in advancing district priorities and driving student outcomes. Throughout our work in the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan (EAA), we have collaborated with The New Teacher Project (TNTP) to support the implementation of the teacher evaluation system they brought to the district. By providing complementary training on the system in our Principal and Teacher Leader development programs, we helped leaders gain a clear understanding of how to utilize the evaluation tool in assessing and coaching teachers towards more effective practice. SEN has also partnered with the Institute of Student Achievement (ISA) in several EAA high schools, aligning our instructional coaching in support of their school model. At the K-8 level, we have partnered with Achievement Network (ANet) to provide schools with a comprehensive, common core-aligned interim assessment system. In New York City we are partnering with the Walton Family Foundation to recruit, select, and prepare transformational educators to open top-notch charter schools in NYC's high-need areas. As part of this project we collaborate with the NYC Charter Center, Civic Builders, and Charter School Business Managers, among others.

d. What support from the state, district or school partners would enhance your success in Louisiana?

SEN seeks partnerships with schools and districts able to demonstrate a willingness to meet the below partnership criteria:

Overall School Leadership Development Plan: a clear and systematized action plan to implement leadership programs aligned with district/school priorities, developed in partnership between SEN, state, and district leadership.

Career Ladder: a commitment on the part of the district and/or state to support the creation of leadership positions, such as Lead Teacher, Master Teacher and Small Learning Community Leader, which constitute rungs on a career ladder and, when taken together, represent a leadership team prepared to institute effective turnaround efforts.

Recruitment and Selection: a commitment to collaborating with SEN in encouraging talented educators to apply for newly established leadership opportunities.

Development Program: a district directive making attendance at afterschool training sessions mandatory during the pre-opening development program and in the first year of implementation.

School Placement: a commitment to place participants in schools with site-based decision-making, such as budget management, teacher supervision, as well as hiring and firing of personnel.

Program Sustainability: a commitment to involve district personnel in program implementation, such that responsibility for selection/coaching is gradually released to the district, and the job of talent development is relocated within schools and driven by the best principals. Districts should be able to sustainably run the program without SEN within 5 years.

Evaluation: a commitment to develop and implement measurable program and school achievement goals.