

## **Transcend Education School Design RFI: Louisiana**

### **1. Partner Background**

*a. Organization name:* Transcend Education

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

Transcend partners with educators to create, codify, and spread breakthrough school models. We do not believe in just one single, new model of "school." Rather, we advocate for eight great leaps from the past to new models. Within the next five years, Transcend aims to partner with visionary school operators to build and codify 10-15 new breakthrough school model designs, that can scale to 250 schools by 2026.

Three components of our R&D Platform work together to power lasting innovation in school design. We:

1. Build Breakthrough school models to achieve radically better outcomes for students
2. Build An R&D talent force to design and spread innovative school models
3. Build Knowledge and tools to inform, codify, and help spread the adoption of new models

In Louisiana we see a unique opportunity to partner with struggling schools to either innovate on new models unique to their contexts or to bring codified models to customize/adapt into local contexts in ways that align with values, needs, and capacity.

### **2. Evidence of Track Record of Student and School Outcomes**

*a. In any format, please illustrate your organization's track record in dramatically improving schools or systems of schools and/or radically increasing outcomes for targeted subgroups of students.*

In our start-up year we set out to accomplish three priorities, and have noted our progress toward each:

#### **1. Stand-up the organization**

- We feel proud of the strong and diverse [founding team](#) we have created, the caliber and diversity of our [Board](#) and [Advisory Council](#), the diverse set of funders (8 foundations and 3 individuals), and the foundational systems we have put in place to manage a lean and efficient organization.

#### **2. Source, select, and prime our first school operators for partnership**

- We have vetted over 100 potential school operators, created our selection criteria and vetting process, and secured multiple contracts for R&D projects for the upcoming year.
- Transcend's co-founders continued to play a significant role in leading a school redesign project with [Achievement First](#) - a nonprofit network of high performing charter schools in NY and CT - which will continue into year 3 of its development in direct partnership with Transcend. The [Achievement First:Greenfield Model](#) is an early prototype with some promising bright spots of results for kids, despite early implementation challenges. Some early results are noted below, and a [Case Study](#) will be released later this summer to share early learnings with the field at large.
  - Kindergarten reading 93% proficient +, 27% advanced
  - 5th Grade ELA and Math often top Achievement First's CT Middle Schools

- Students embodying habits - especially empathy, gratitude, and curiosity - in ways that are more intentional and meta-cognitive (e.g., student's saying "I'm showing empathy when I help my friend feel less frustrated.")
  - 100% teacher retention in Kinder, and 90% retention of teachers invited to return in middle school
  - Very low student attrition and high attendance (97% in Kindergarten)
  - 95% "dream team" (parent engagement) in K
- We will be working with 11 charter and district school operators through the *New Schools + Transcend Collaborative* -- a year-long program designed for participants to develop a vision for a new school model and build a plan to realize it-- as well as 1-2 more school operators who are deepening and codifying their models. This portfolio of projects far surpasses our original goal of securing 1-2 new projects to commence in Fall 2016, and we are regularly being asked to consider new projects.

### 3. Forge Partnerships and Contribute to the Field

- We have participated in over 10 speaking engagements and convenings to articulate our vision and plans to the field at large, and have published four pieces this year, including, [Dissatisfied Yet Optimistic](#), a widely circulated white paper that makes the case for Transcend and articulates our theory of change. We are also actively exploring partnerships with key allies in the field, including EdLoC, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and others.

## 3. Your Organization's Model

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

- Our entire approach relies on deep, customized partnership with each school/district. While we have processes, protocols, and a growing knowledge base that we bring to bear, we work with school leaders and communities to shape a scope and process that meets their needs/values, etc. Our orientation to the design process is intensely user-centered and, thus, no two partnerships are ever the same.

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

We consider the following dimensions in determining partnerships with schools and districts:

#### 1. **Leadership:** The leadership at the school- and district-/network-levels:

- a. Has clear and bold vision, reflecting many of the [8 great leaps](#)
- b. Has strong conviction and demonstrates willingness and ability to prioritize the work
- c. Is courageous, willing to take smart risks and to "unlearn" previous ways of thinking and doing
- d. Is capable, with relevant skills, knowledge, and a track record of success (especially in change management)

#### 2. **Organization:**

- a. Has the capacity to take this on: strong leadership with capacity to dedicate to the project, buy in from top-level leadership
- b. Culture and systems conducive to innovation:
  - i. Appreciates the discovery and iteration process; willing to engage in build-test-learn cycle
  - ii. Structures in place to allow for testing/piloting
  - iii. Strong and trusting relationships in place with leaders, staff, students, and families

- c. Willing to contribute to / collaborate on our learning agenda
3. **Environment:** The organization exists in an ecosystem that is conducive to innovative design work:
  - a. a political landscape open to PK-12 innovation;
  - b. a prevalence of potential funders, partner organizations, and talent
  - c. and the necessary decision-making authority.
4. **Core Values Alignment:** The organization and its individual leaders are aligned to Transcend's core values and culture:
  - a. They see **Results for Kids** as the as the primary goal of innovation.
  - b. They value **Diverse Voices** and share our deep belief in diversity, inclusiveness, and the key role of community, families, and students in a truly user-centered design process
  - c. They **Play Big**, imagining bold possibilities and demonstrating courage and systems-thinking.
  - d. They love and embrace **Perpetual Beta**, striving to be constant learners.
  - e. They demonstrate a commitment to **Long-Term**, both in their goals for kids and their strategies.
  - f. They do this work with genuine **Love** and value the importance of relationships.
5. **Resource-ability:** The organization will be able to assemble the human capital and financial resources needed for the project -- either unilaterally or through joint efforts with Transcend.

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

- Since we work to bring cross-functional expertise into each project, working with third party individuals and organizations are baked into our ethos and process. We have successfully partnered with NSVF, IDEO, and EquityXDesign

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

Three kinds of support would be most helpful

1. Identifying school operators and communities with best conditions/capacity for this kind of innovation work (see our criteria above)
2. Providing funding or access to funders who would be willing to help us bring on the necessary capacity
3. Providing any necessary regulatory changes/exceptions to allow for innovation work to take root and flourish