

## GOING TO SCALE

Education reforms must not only be strong in theory, but in practice, and a great challenge lies in bringing educational innovations from the point of origin to widespread adoption. Over the past decade there has been a growing focus on education reform, with an extraordinary increase in private and federal investment in comprehensive school change initiatives, as well as a rise in prominent education reform organizations and networks. But many stakeholders are still challenged by the task of how to bring such reforms to scale in a comprehensive, sustainable and meaningful way.

Improving outcomes for students throughout the U.S. requires that educators learn how to adapt innovations that are successful under ideal conditions to the varied and potentially adverse environments of other schools<sup>i</sup>. Recent research and articles about how to bring education reform to scale agree that successful efforts have four key properties – widespread implementation, or spread, depth of change, sustainability and shift, or ownership<sup>ii, iii</sup>. Spread involves bringing the reform or innovation to larger numbers. Depth refers to meaningful, impactful change in classroom practice. Sustainability involves maintaining these changes over substantial periods of time. Shift requires districts, schools, and teachers to assume ownership of the innovation, which in turn underscores and strengthens the potential for success of these other three properties.

To these four standards of fostering scalability, a fifth has been offered for consideration: evolution, in which the innovation, as revised by its adapters, helps to shape further work by those who created the reforms, fostering a “community of practice that evolves the innovation<sup>iv</sup>.” The process of scaling up must be both interactive and iterative, involving a back-and-forth engagement of key stakeholders, and continuous feedback and support<sup>v</sup>.

Beyond these accepted components of successfully bringing reforms to scale, some researchers are looking to private sector models for best practices of enhancing scalability. While school reform cannot be scaled as simply as a retail or restaurant franchise, there are lessons to be learned from integrating the benefits of automation with individualization<sup>vi</sup>.

There are many challenges to scaling up, whether from institutional resistance to change, a lack of vision to excite and empower teachers and administrators, or a lack of feedback<sup>vii</sup>. With scalability, the great can be the enemy of the good. A perfect outcome is not required for success (although at the same time, the innovation should not be changed so much that it undermines the original goals). A further extension of this is that a somewhat less impactful reform that reaches more participants is still a step forward. And those who create the initial reform must be willing not only to let it evolve but also to encourage that evolution.

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<sup>i</sup> Threshold Magazine: Spring 2007, *Threshold: Exploring the Future of Education* (Features articles focused on taking educational innovation to scale, produced in partnership with NCTAF)

<sup>ii</sup> Cynthia E. Coburn. (2003) *Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change*. Educational Researcher, Vol. 32, No. 6, pp. 3–12

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<sup>iii</sup> Rand Research Report. (2004) Expanding the Reach of Education Reforms: What Have We Learned About Scaling Up Educational Interventions?

<sup>iv</sup> Threshold Magazine: Spring 2007, *Threshold: Exploring the Future of Education* (Features articles focused on taking educational innovation to scale, produced in partnership with NCTAF)

<sup>v</sup> Rand Research Report. (2004) Expanding the Reach of Education Reforms: What Have We Learned About Scaling Up Educational Interventions?

<sup>vi</sup> Threshold Magazine: Spring 2007, *Threshold: Exploring the Future of Education* (Features articles focused on taking educational innovation to scale, produced in partnership with NCTAF)

<sup>vii</sup> Threshold Magazine: Spring 2007, *Threshold: Exploring the Future of Education* (Features articles focused on taking educational innovation to scale, produced in partnership with NCTAF)