

Find yourself asking *what makes ReSchool Colorado different?*

As Jason Weeby from Bellwether Education Partners [pointed out](#), “everything you know about teaching, schools, governance, funding, accountability, advocacy, and credentialing” is now under examination. And [ReSchool Colorado](#) is one of the first to focus the microscope. The project, birthed through a belief that we cannot dramatically improve the current system through incremental changes or added mandates, is well under way for starting a new statewide system from scratch.

In this drive to create a new system it’s easy to backslide to the usual strategies of educational reform. We contend that no amount of research-dependent solutions will guarantee we can match the needs of learners today. Below are **three things we are doing differently** to stay focused on creating a system that holds the learner and their needs firmly in the center.

1- Engaging the Learner in the Design

Experience and expertise can only take you so far when you’re trying to go beyond the current paradigm. Our early work with The Clayton Christensen Institute highlighted [potential areas](#) to launch this new system and helped us identify some of our first partners in shaping the design: families and young learners leveraging a Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) network of care and learning. In collaboration with [Greater Good Studio](#) and [Boulder Housing Partners](#), we spent time with families and their caregivers focusing on the child as our center point. The unique experience of these users has inspired new insights around the role a system serves in supporting their learning.

As part of our experience, we shadowed families for the time their child(ren) were with care providers. Throughout the course of the day, we moved with the child to observe the systems surrounding their care, from morning routines to transportation, to their care providers and back home again. Our goal was to seed ReSchool’s design with openness and humility through observations, conversations, and shadowing and to get beyond typical research and engagement strategies like focus groups, surveys, and polls. We discovered that by spending time with families, care providers, and learners, we were able to access the successful work-arounds, routines and behaviors they may not recognize as “different or important.” By approaching their personal system through the lens of positive deviance we were able to uncover strategies that may serve as better solutions while having access to the same resources as those facing similar challenges.

We will release our research and ideas for prototypes in next month’s ReSchool newsletter.

2- Maintaining a growth-mindset with an eye towards a long-term vision.

The ultimate goal of ReSchool Colorado is to create a new, parallel education system. So, much of our work continues to focus on the longer-term vision, system and policy components required to make it a reality, such as partnering with researchers at the Buechner Institute at the University of Colorado to create financing models for a new system, which we plan to share with you in early 2015.

When we set out to tackle the topic of governance for ReSchool, we brought together a diverse group of thinkers from education, health, political and business backgrounds to help us reimagine governance of a new system. Interestingly, we found that it was much more difficult than we had anticipated to come up with radically different models of governance.

Despite our best efforts to think outside the box, we created fairly hierarchical models of governance that had some interesting new twists but were relatively traditional. This isn't necessarily a bad thing--we are talking about creating a public education system where we need appropriate checks and balances; however, we also don't want to lock ourselves into something that, ultimately, might not be the right fit nor did we think that at this stage we had designed THE model for governance for ReSchool.

Current work is focusing on how to launch some initial pilots in the short term, designed around the potential learner entry points we have been exploring, that will also allow us to test and develop systems to support emerging design components of ReSchool, including things like financing and governance. Stay tuned in the coming months for more on these emergent ideas for piloting.

3- Seeking Inspiration from Entrepreneurs who are Jumping-In to Create New Solutions

What do Badge Alliance, SkillStore and Fidelis Education have in common? They are run by entrepreneurs who have identified unique footholds in education and are getting after them with a refreshing sense of urgency and authenticity. These three organizations are informing our strategy in such areas as: launching and growing a new start-up; interoperability in an expanded ecosystem of providers and learners; management of a competency-based system of learning; and the cultivation of advocates to manage relationships and supports for learners through an integrated high touch and high tech approach.

First on the list is the team from [Badge Alliance](#). Many of you may have caught Erin Knight, Executive Director of Badge Alliance during [September's Hot Lunch](#) series. Her presentation unveiled the potential badges hold for an expanded ecosystem of learning. Through our research and participation in a number of working groups, we've been exploring ways to connect badges to competencies, jobs, internships and other opportunities within the workforce as a means to broaden young adult pathways.

The pursuit of clarifying a school to workforce pipeline that sets in motion a continuous journey of learning led us to the compelling work of [SkillStore](#). In terms of providing fast in-roads to industry, most seem to be going after the high needs of [coding](#). Srikant Vasan, however, has bucked the competition and is playing into the power of "upskilling" through a mechanism of on-demand training dropped into a community of one's peers. Although Vasan uses sales as the backdrop based on market need, the backwards design around critical skills feeds into a system that assesses candidate quality and provides personalized training pathways to ensure greater success. This analogous illustration unveils the dynamics of competency-based pathways in an entirely different context that is proving helpful in our design.

Another seed of inspiration? [Fidelis Education](#). Gunnar Counselman, Co-Founder and CEO, heads up the most robust Software As A Service we've come across in our scans for infrastructures to support learning in a new environment. The power not only resides in the technology, but in the [goal of the technology](#). Counselman contends, "We've stripped relationships out of schools for the sake of efficiency, making them cold, transactional and unmotivating. People just don't learn like that. To ensure that every student has the mentors, coaches, and communities that they need, we need Learning Relationship Management (LRM)." Fidelis Education seeks to fill this learning tool gap and provide learners with the end to end resources to successfully travel their learning pathway.

Join us for our January Hot Lunch and hear for yourself the impact of Fidelis' Learning Relationship Management tool.