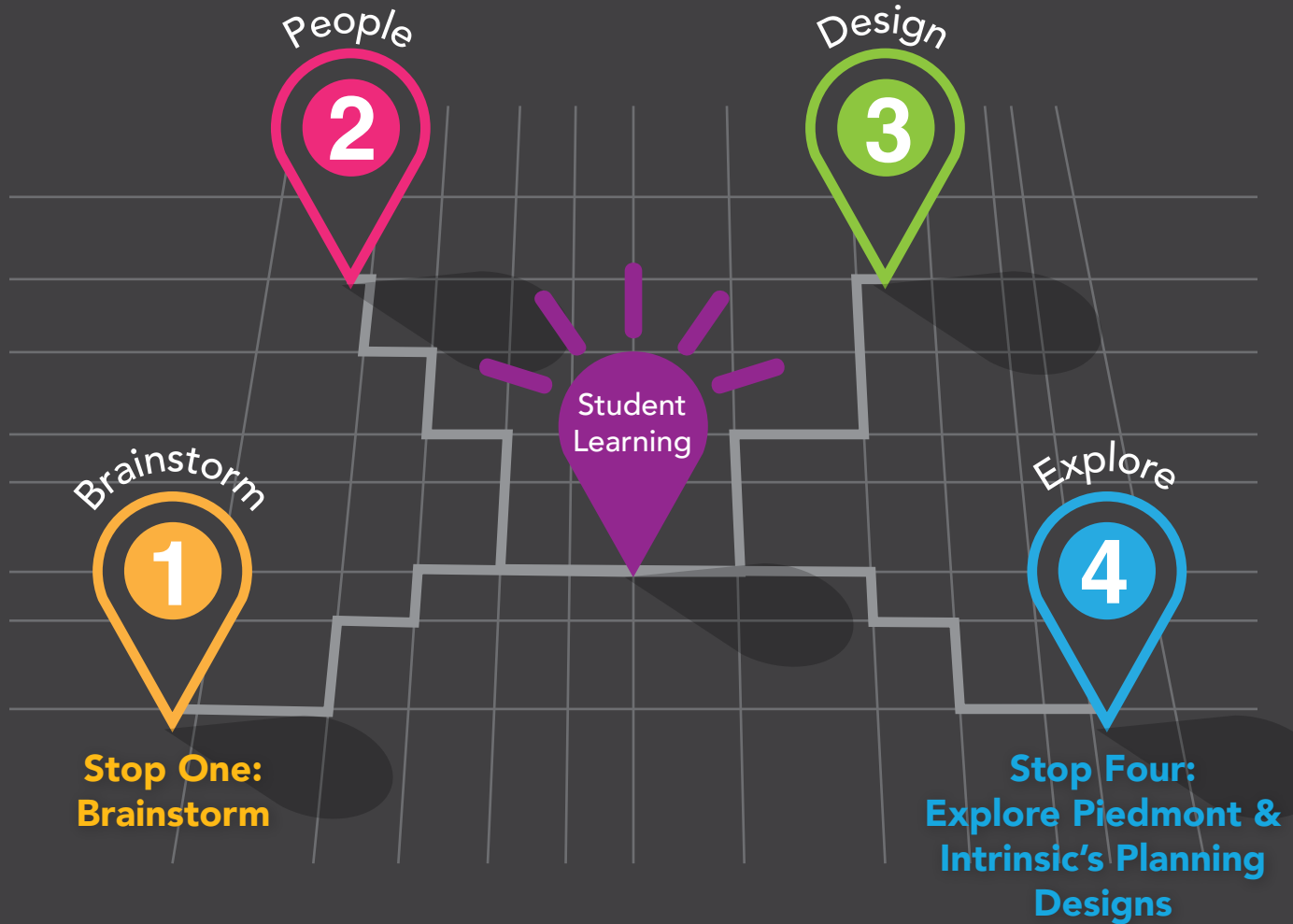
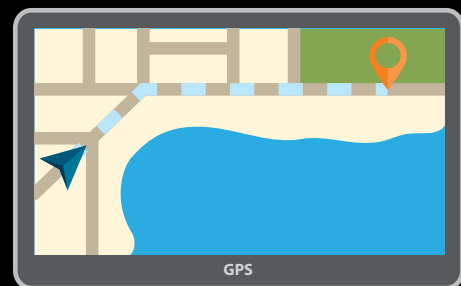


**Stop Two:  
Rally Your People**

**Stop Three:  
Dig Deeper  
into Design**



# A GPS FOR BREAKTHROUGH MODEL DESIGN



Mapping Your Next Gen School with Intrinsic Schools and  
Piedmont School District as Guides



   <http://nextgenlearning.org>



   <http://2revolutions.net>

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# INTRODUCTION

## MEET YOUR GUIDES

Our guides on this next gen learning journey are [Intrinsic Schools](#) in Chicago, and [Piedmont Middle School](#) in Piedmont, Alabama. We thank both schools from the bottom of our hearts and minds for being leaders and walking this journey for the future of our kids.



## INTRODUCTION

What does the future of learning look like in your school, district, or environment? For starters, we believe it needs to be personalized, flexible, competency-based, interactive, and engaging. Gone are the days of one-size-fits-all education. Our schools need to understand the needs of each and every student, and provide the right co-created pathways for each individual young person. Learning should also be collaborative, connected, challenging, responsive, and accessible. It should be FUN! This is no small feat, though. At Next Generation Learning Challenges (NGLC) we are conscious of the challenge of this journey, and riveted by it. Our love for rethinking learning is what led NGLC to fund, catalyze, and support educators as they build their own breakthrough school models that can become game-changers.

With the help of a community of smart and thoughtful partners, organizations, educators, and individuals, we have written, researched, and unpacked extensively the “what, how, and why” of next generation learning. What does it involve, why do it, and how can we get there? This tool is here to offer insights into the process of planning and launching a breakthrough model. Together, we are going to explore the journeys of two rockstar schools that are part of NGLC and are soaring to new heights when it comes to transforming learning for kids.



## INTRINSIC SCHOOLS, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Launched in the fall of 2013, this Windy City school's mission is "to prepare all students for 21st century postsecondary success and to cultivate independent, intellectually curious learners," says founder Melissa Zaikos. As you'll see, they are doing that and more.

### AT A GLANCE

**Start Date:** Fall 2013

**Grades Served:** 7-12

**Location:** Chicago, IL

**Operator:** Intrinsic Schools

**Operator Type:** Charter

**Setting:** Urban

**Students at Start:** 186

**Students at Capacity:** 990

**Blended Model Type:** Flex

#### Key Features:

Flexible learning spaces, next generation staffing model, student goal setting



To reimagine learning at the middle and high school levels, Intrinsic is combining technology-enabled adaptive learning and expert teaching. At Intrinsic, students are grouped into 60-person pods where they move fluidly between individualized adaptive digital content, multimedia content, small-group instruction, seminars, and both group and independent project work. Master teachers design units around essential questions and curate the online curricula. Taking a research and design approach to teaching and learning, teachers and students regularly pilot, analyze, and evaluate different aspects of the model all with the goal of cultivating independent and intellectually curious learners.

[Read more about Intrinsic here.](#)



## PIEDMONT MIDDLE SCHOOL, PIEDMONT, ALABAMA

Piedmont City Schools in Piedmont, Alabama, nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, has been radically rethinking what rural education can be for kids. Often without the connections and resources a big city can offer, Piedmont Middle School (MS) challenged the "status quo of what a successful rural district can look like," says Superintendent Matt Akin, Ed.D. With a focus on relevant, engaging learning opportunities and a unique staffing model, this school is an exemplar for other next gen schools looking to innovate.

### AT A GLANCE

**School:** Piedmont Middle School

**Grades Served:** 6-8

**Location:** Piedmont, AL

**Operator:** Piedmont City School District

**Operator Type:** District

**Setting:** Rural

**Students at Start:** 275

**Students at Capacity:** 290

**Blended Model Type:** Flipped Classroom, Individual Rotation, and Flex

#### Key Features:

Competency-based learning, project-based and experiential learning, flexible learning spaces, college readiness & success

At Piedmont MS, students advance through project-based and adaptive digital learning, unbound by grade level or seat time. The model ensures exposure to careers and higher ed options through career immersions and global project-based learning opportunities. Each student's day at the middle school is divided between "My Time," "Team Time," and "Class Time," giving students varied opportunities to set and achieve goals, solve problems, and develop important non-cognitive skills like grit and tenacity. Teachers spend about half of daily "My Time" analyzing student data with their grade level teams. They also participate in bi-weekly professional development sessions on topics such as small group instruction, one-to-one instruction, project-based learning, and data analysis. In partnership with Jacksonville State University, Piedmont is also developing a corps of blended learning teachers for Piedmont and surrounding districts.

[Read more about Piedmont here.](#)





# MEET NGLC

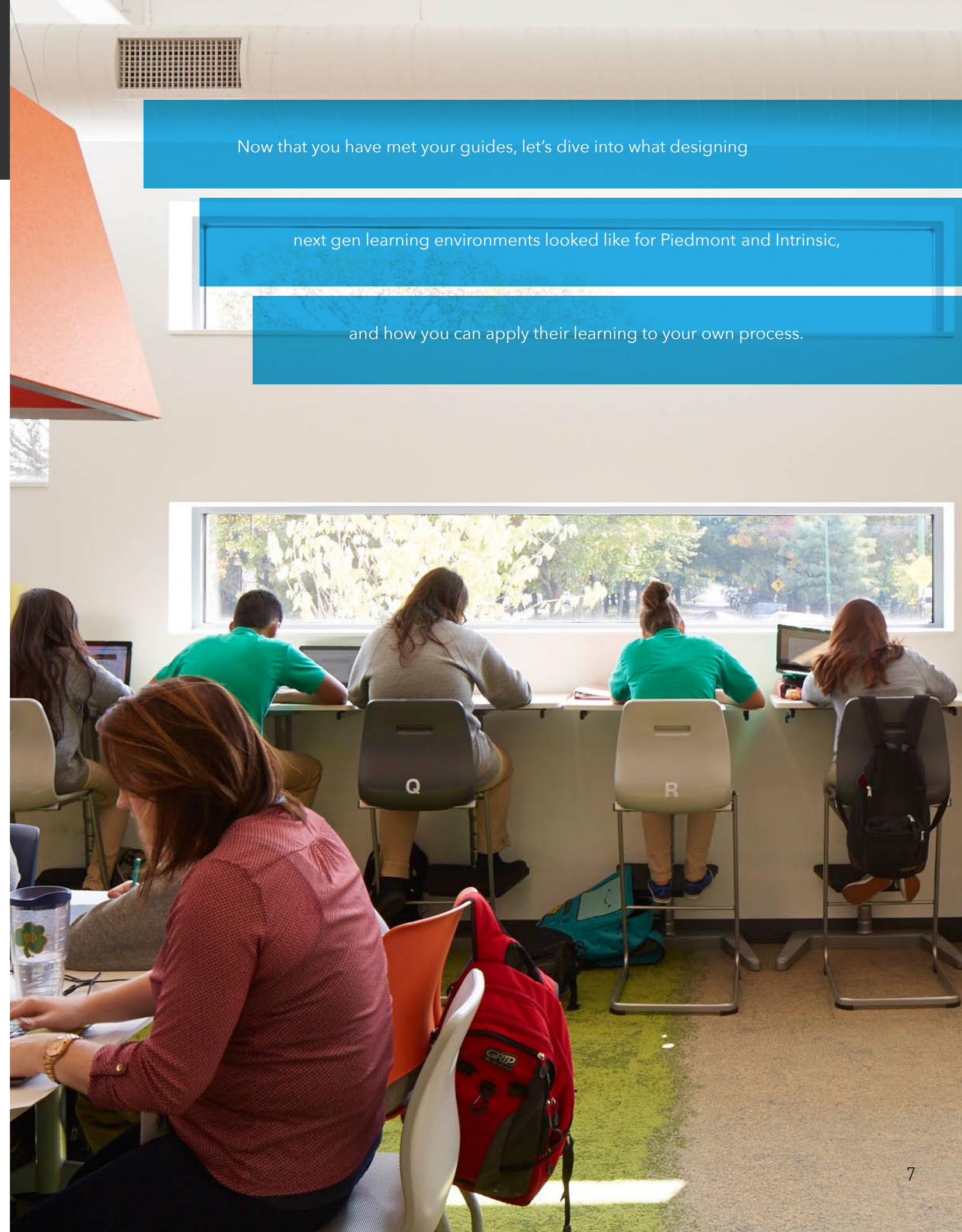
NGLC accelerates educational innovation through applied technology to dramatically improve college readiness and completion in the United States. NGLC is guided by the belief that providing investment capital to expand the use of proven and emerging learning technologies, collecting and sharing evidence of what works, and fostering a community of innovators and adopters will result in a robust pool of solutions and greater institutional adoption which, in turn, will dramatically improve the quality of learning experiences in the United States.

The goal of the NGLC grant programs “Breakthrough Models for College Readiness” and “Breakthrough Models for College Completion” is to dramatically transform student learning, high school graduation, and college persistence and completion — particularly for low-income student and students of color — by supporting schools and colleges that completely redesign how they are organized and how they provide learning opportunities for students. In K-12, these new schools create spaces where learning is personalized (student-centered, competency-based, and blended), delivered on regular public funds, and able to scale. The new higher ed degree programs offer high quality personalized learning, comprehensive student supports, and competency-based programs of study that are accessible and affordable.

Want to learn more about NGLC’s Breakthrough Model grant recipients? View a full listing of K-12 Breakthrough Model grant recipients [here](#), and Higher Education Breakthrough Model grant recipients [here](#).



NEXT GENERATION  
LEARNING CHALLENGES



Now that you have met your guides, let’s dive into what designing

next gen learning environments looked like for Piedmont and Intrinsic,

and how you can apply their learning to your own process.





# STOP ONE



## BRAINSTORM

Grab a blank piece of paper, a margin to scribble in, or open up a Google doc and consider this: What does breakthrough — breaking the mold — mean to you? What do your students need to know and be able to do? What do you WANT kids to learn, understand, do and experience at your school? What needs to be true to get you there? This vision is the island you're headed to, the summit you're climbing. Begin by writing it down and then iterate, again and again, until it's right.

Your guides from Intrinsic and Piedmont shared their initial sketches and ideas for what their visions looked like. Feeling stuck in writing your own vision? Take a look at this [framework](#) of next gen learning as a useful starting point.

### INTRINSIC

Intrinsic started with three questions, *"How to differentiate, how to use technology and how to personalize learning,"* says Solomon Lieberman, Director of Media & Development. After visiting models around the country to gather various answers and ideas, and after numerous iterations, Intrinsic came to five important understandings about how students learn, which they based their vision around:

1. Education is a continuous process that addresses and meets students' intellectual, emotional, physical, and social needs.
2. Learning is a social process where students benefit from a mix of instruction where some is tailored to a student's instructional level, and some is learned collaboratively with peers at a common, rigorous level.
3. Learning experiences at school should be framed around larger essential questions that are relevant to students' lives and interests.
4. If students are taught to set and monitor goals, they will gain awareness and control over their own learning and become more motivated to achieve.
5. Technology can improve the educational experience for students if paired with great teaching.

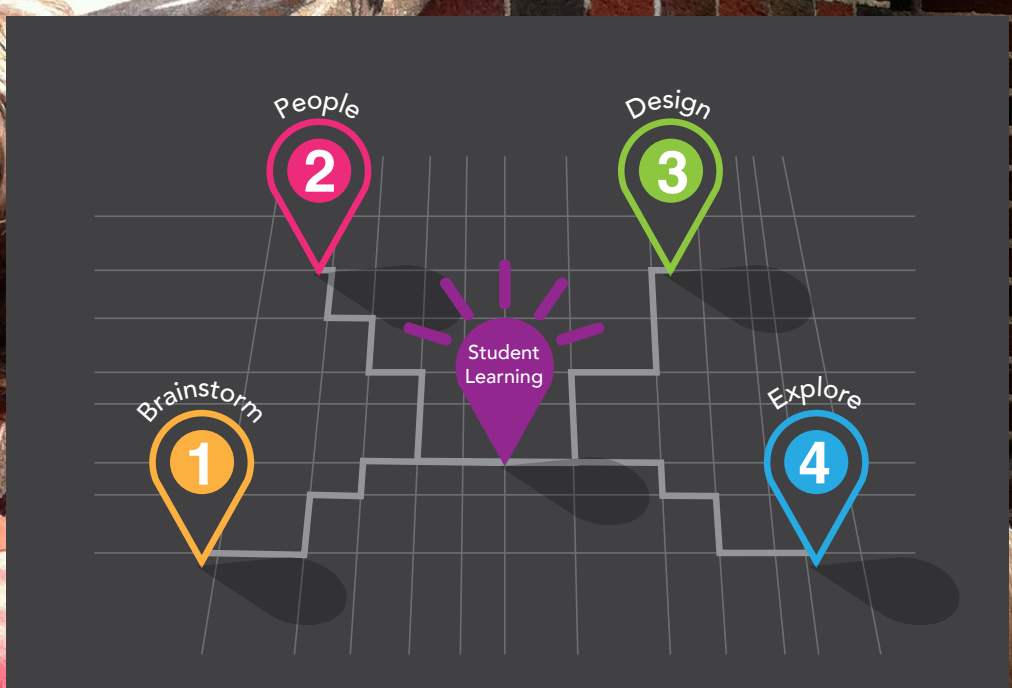
These lessons learned guided Intrinsic's planning and design process and became the basis for the island to which they set sail.

### PIEDMONT

Piedmont's inspiration came from wanting to move the needle on what's possible for their learners. Despite the middle school being high performing, with students doing well on state standardized tests, the rural district faced some challenges. Job opportunities were minimal, and most students graduated without many chances for postsecondary success.

"We knew we needed to be doing more for our kids and the end of the line shouldn't be when they graduate," says Akin. "But how could we change that? I knew from other programs that I had been involved in that technology could impact students." Akin, who had served as technology director before moving into superintendent was well-versed in edtech platforms and tools, and how they could be used to really transform the student learning experience and opportunities. He also was just coming off a few conferences where he heard from schools and districts around the country who had implemented competency-based or mastery-based learning, and he was hooked.

From this knowledge and yearning, their idea was born. The district made a commitment to provide access to technology for all students through a 1:1 initiative, build a robust network and infrastructure, and use the technology to allow for and embrace a self-paced and mastery-based education. Rather than focusing on the ups and downs along the way, Piedmont set their sights on the tallest summit and worked to achieve that vision. To learn more about how Piedmont uses technology for equity and to create student-centered learning, watch this [short documentary by Digital Promise](#).





# STOP TWO







- CONSULTANCY**
- ① Overview and Review
  - ② Clarifying Questions
  - ③ Probing Questions
  - ④ Restate Questions
  - ⑤ Group talks about dilemma
  - ⑥ Presenter Reflects
  - ⑦ Facilitator Wrap Up










## RALLY YOUR PEOPLE

The wheels are churning and you're psyched about what next generation learning could look like in your school, district, or region. Before you go any further on this journey, stop and take a look around you. Who can and should be involved in this process? Gather your table and make sure it's set for all types of people — the learners, the teachers, the administrators, the parents, the community partners, the naysayers, and the celebrators. The more your team can include those who will be living and breathing this new model of learning, the greater your chance of success. Take a look at who Intrinsic and Piedmont had on their planning and launch teams.

### INTRINSIC

-  1 School Founder/Principal
-  1 Academic Director
-  1 Finance Director
-  1 Technology Director
-  3 Teachers
-  Student Voice via Pilots

### PIEDMONT

-  1 Superintendent
-  1 Principal
-  4 Teachers
-  1 Curriculum Coordinator
-  2 Students
-  3 Parents
-  1 School Board Member



# STOP THREE



## DIG DEEPER INTO DESIGN

Planning a new model, whether through a planning grant or on your own, will require you to dig deep into the nuance of what it will look like, how it will work, and why you're making certain decisions. Paraphrasing what Jonathan Hanover, a principal at Roots Elementary, a new charter school in Denver, Colorado has said, once you have the plan, now you have a million "how's" for how to make it happen. Here are some key questions to consider as you design, along with Intrinsic and Piedmont's answers from their applications:

What learning challenge(s) does your community (students/families/educators) face? What do they need?

"The students needed post-secondary success, and the challenge was how to meet the needs of the incredibly diverse group of learners while also addressing their emotional, physical, and social needs," says Lieberman.



"In Piedmont there are not a lot of job opportunities or opportunities for kids. It felt like it didn't mean anything to be from Piedmont or graduate from Piedmont High School. We needed to change that and embolden students to find and make opportunities," says Akin.



What are some key characteristics of your breakthrough learning model? (Use [this framework](#) as a starting place.)

Technology-enabled adaptive learning and expert teaching. Intrinsic cultivates independent, intellectually curious learners who own their learning and much of their schedule. We also use Personalized Learning Plans, dynamic mixed-ability groupings, flexible learning spaces, and a next generation staffing model.



We have a personalized, self-paced, blended, mastery-based model that uses adaptive digital technology, project-based learning, and career immersions in the community.



What were your priorities for achieving transformation?

Using high quality technology platforms and services to differentiate learning; creating a highly personalized learning experience where students have a ton of independence over their learning; and staff it with highly experienced teachers in a flexible learning environment.



The first priority was providing access via laptops for all students and offering citywide wifi connection. This enabled a personalized and blended approach to learning. Then we started to focus on the self-paced, mastery model.





How does your approach plan to support your teachers as they transition through the uncertainty of a newly designed learning environment?

We started with a team of highly experienced teachers, a model of co-teaching, and collaborative planning. Intrinsic creates internal capacity for teacher development, whereby first-year teachers co-teach with a master teacher. Teachers and students regularly pilot, analyze, and evaluate different aspects of the model. In addition to helping refine the model, this process increases student ownership and motivation.



In partnership with Jacksonville State University, Piedmont is creating a corps of blended learning teachers for Piedmont and surrounding districts. Under the guidance of master teachers, student teachers benefit from year-long, hands-on training in the district's blended model. This strategy helps us build a cohort of future teachers for the district and ensures teacher training programs and local schools are working together to prepare educators to teach in next gen schools.



What sort of shift in climate or culture do you envision as your new learning environment takes hold?

The biggest shift is student independence and perseverance. In building a culture of mutual respect we quickly learned that just giving students independence isn't the way to build that. Instead, "you have to start with structure to build independence," says Lieberman.



"Our main focus is on relevance and student ownership. Kids will be more engaged if they understand the relevance of what they are learning. The challenge for us as a small rural school is that [students'] options are often limited with the facilities and opportunities we have locally, so we focused on trying to meet some of the needs virtually, giving access to relevant training online and having conversations with the students early on about what options exist," says Akin.



How will seed money help you? How/when do you hope to achieve financial independence (inclusive of public funds) and sustainability? [Click here](#) to view Intrinsic's financial plan from their application, keeping in mind these were projections before school opened — the budget has changed dramatically now that they in operation. [Click here](#) to view Piedmont's plans.

Seed funds will support our school through the first three years of operation, during which our school will operate at a deficit. After this, our school will be operational without additional funding. By year five, our school plans to have achieved financial independence.



The seed funds allow for planning and development of a mastery-based program. Other funding comes from the district and Title I funds. Being a public school requires that Piedmont operate at financial independence each year, so seed funding supports the development of our additional initiatives and programs.



#### Additional Questions to Ask Yourself

- How will you engage/utilize your stakeholders — students, teachers, community members, etc. — to sustain success, learn from failure, or address changing needs?
- How do you plan to document and reflect — from an existential, qualitative perspective — upon your changing environment?
- How will you monitor, measure, and analyze progress? How will you manage failure?

"IN PIEDMONT THERE ARE NOT A LOT OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES OR OPPORTUNITIES FOR KIDS. IT FELT LIKE IT DIDN'T MEAN

ANYTHING TO BE FROM PIEDMONT OR GRADUATE FROM PIEDMONT HIGH SCHOOL. WE NEEDED TO CHANGE THAT AND EMBOLDEN STUDENTS TO

FIND AND MAKE OPPORTUNITIES."

- MATT AKIN, ED.D., SUPERINTENDENT, PIEDMONT CITY SCHOOLS





# STOP FOUR



## EXPLORE PIEDMONT & INTRINSIC'S PLANNING DESIGNS

As proponents of a culture of innovation, next gen models are technically never finished. That said, here's how Intrinsic and Piedmont have thought about components of next gen learning during their planning phases. After reviewing, we encourage you to take a look at the most updated profiles of [Piedmont](#) and [Intrinsic](#) and explore their websites to get a sense of how their model designs have evolved over time.



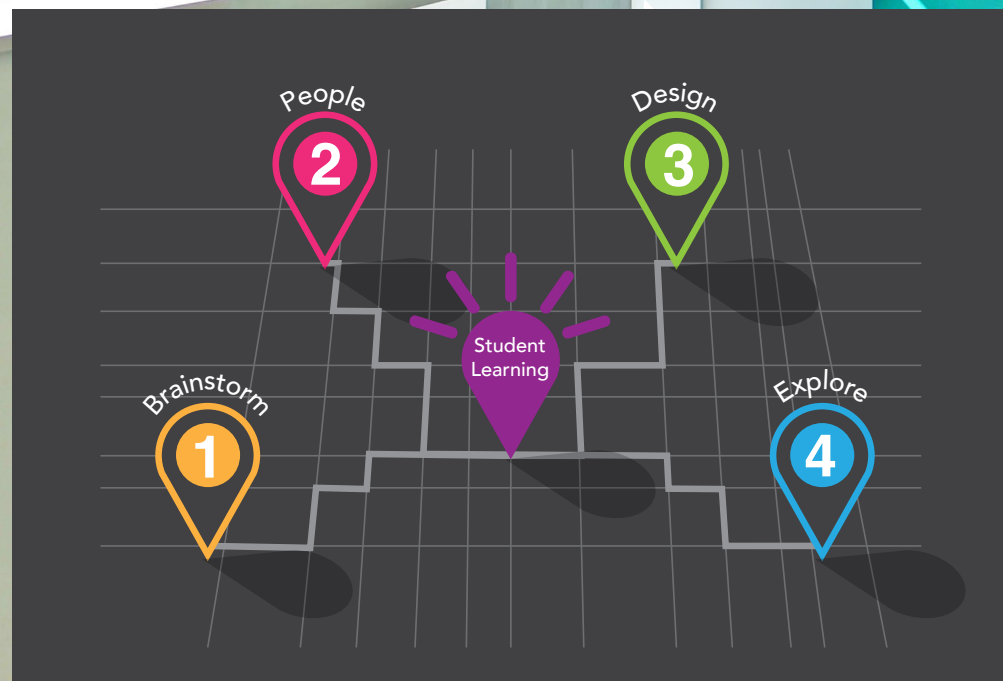
### LEARNING SPACES

The learning environment, or place of learning, can be both physical and virtual for learners. This environment becomes the central space for learning to occur. Just like a thoughtfully curated museum, a learning model needs an environment that speaks to its learners and encourages the behaviors and lessons you want to nurture. Intrinsic's design emphasized the idea of rethinking space as it planned to build its new school:

*"Students will be will be grouped into pods of 90 students, with two large spaces. One space will be devoted to Humanities and the other space will be a dedicated to Math & Science. The physical space for these pods will be open and flexible. There will be areas for quiet individual work, small group instruction, collaborative work, group projects, and large forums... Teachers will work on interdisciplinary teams and float throughout the space when not leading direct instruction. The environment will be a hotbed of activity. Teacher voice in the space will be noticeably small. The majority of interactions will be student to student, both face-to-face and online."* - Intrinsic NGLC Grantee Application, 2012



Intrinsic moved from a "temporary office space in downtown Chicago to a beautiful new-construction building that was carefully designed to meet the needs of the academic model," writes Dalia Hochman, an NGLC program officer, in her [reflection](#) on her visit to Intrinsic in 2015. [Read and watch](#) to learn more about the architectural design and the choices the school made to create a learning environment that best embodies the experience they want for kids.



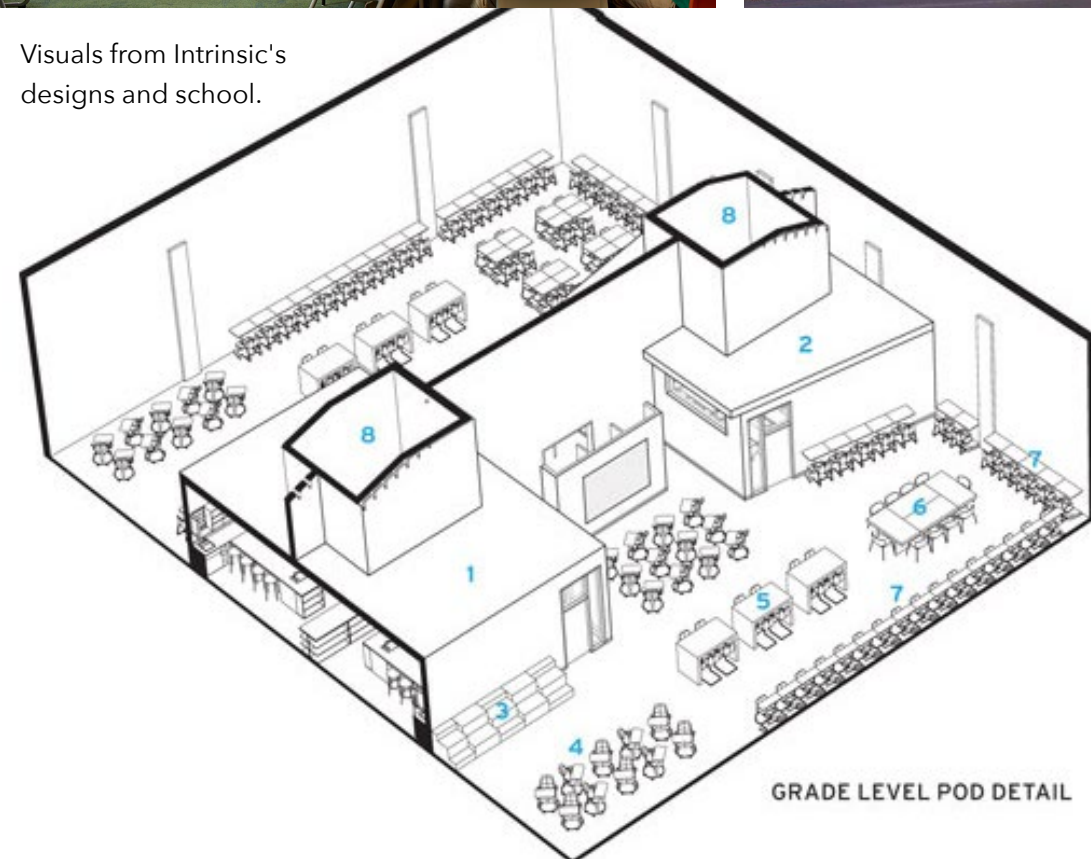


## THINKING ABOUT SPACE

- How do you envision space and place playing out in your model?
- What will it look like? How can you think differently about the space and create an environment that promotes the learning you want?
- How will your teachers and students experience your school?
- What inspires you in other learning environments? Consider taking ideas from other spaces, both natural and commercial. Think about the local library, museums, parks, coffee shops, art galleries, gardens, outdoor shops, waterfront properties — anything and everything. Design is intentional and inspiration can come from anywhere.



Visuals from Intrinsic's designs and school.



1. LAB
2. SEMINAR
3. OCEAN
4. LITTLE BOARD
5. EXCHANGE
6. SHADE
7. COASTLINE
8. SKYLIGHT



## THE ROLE OF TIME

For so long, and still in many places, the schedule rules — and this schedule often doesn't make much sense when it comes to student learning. Most breakthrough model schools focus on creating schedules where time is the variable and student learning is the constant. For Piedmont, that means an anytime/anywhere approach to learning that employs flipped classrooms, direct instruction, collaborative group work, and independent time for learning. "One of the most important aspects of the model will be building a student schedule that allows the flexibility to implement the instructional approaches," wrote Piedmont in its application. This Flex Model, as they call it, keys in on *flexibility* of time as a critical factor in supporting their efforts to transform learning for each student. "At Piedmont, our day begins with **Team Time**, a community-building period in the morning to develop relationships and non-academic skills. **Class Time** focuses on traditional learning in subjects like math and social studies. Lastly, **My Time** provides students flexibility to work on personalized digital content," says Akin.

Intrinsic approached its schedule by designing two big blocks of learning: STEM in the morning and Humanities in the afternoon. Within each subject pod, various time slots are arranged to support — and offer flexible rotation between — individual, group, Socratic seminar, targeted, assessment, online, and "special" learning blocks on the topics/competencies that are being covered.

## THINKING ABOUT TIME

- Taking into consideration the student learning goals within your curriculum, how can the schedule be redesigned? What will a typical day look like for a student? For a teacher?
- How flexibly can you organize instructional time? (A question Intrinsic posed to itself often.)
- Don't feel constrained by the traditional 40-minute periods that exist in many schools. How can you think beyond that?





## PERSONALIZED PACE

How can your model promote and respect each student's individual pace of learning? Piedmont foresaw a transition away from grade levels in its future. Instead, "Students in core classes will learn in areas that provide the resources to help them reach their individual goals at that moment in time. These resources include teachers (district staff and university interns), instructional assistants, peers, and software," they shared in the application. Such an approach, supported by student advisory periods, allows each student to focus on individual mastery rather than arbitrary benchmarks.

Here are some questions Piedmont and Intrinsic asked themselves and worked on designing answers to, throughout the pilot process:

### THINKING ABOUT PACE

- How much can students do independently with limited real-time teacher direction if provided the right supports (goal-setting, real time data, weekly coaching)?
- Is the digital content sufficiently rigorous and interesting to support independent student learning of foundational skills?
- Do the digital assessments provide sufficient data to students and teachers?
- How and when should individual student learning paths be designed collaboratively between adults/students? When is this not the right approach?
- How are students growing as learners? How do we know?

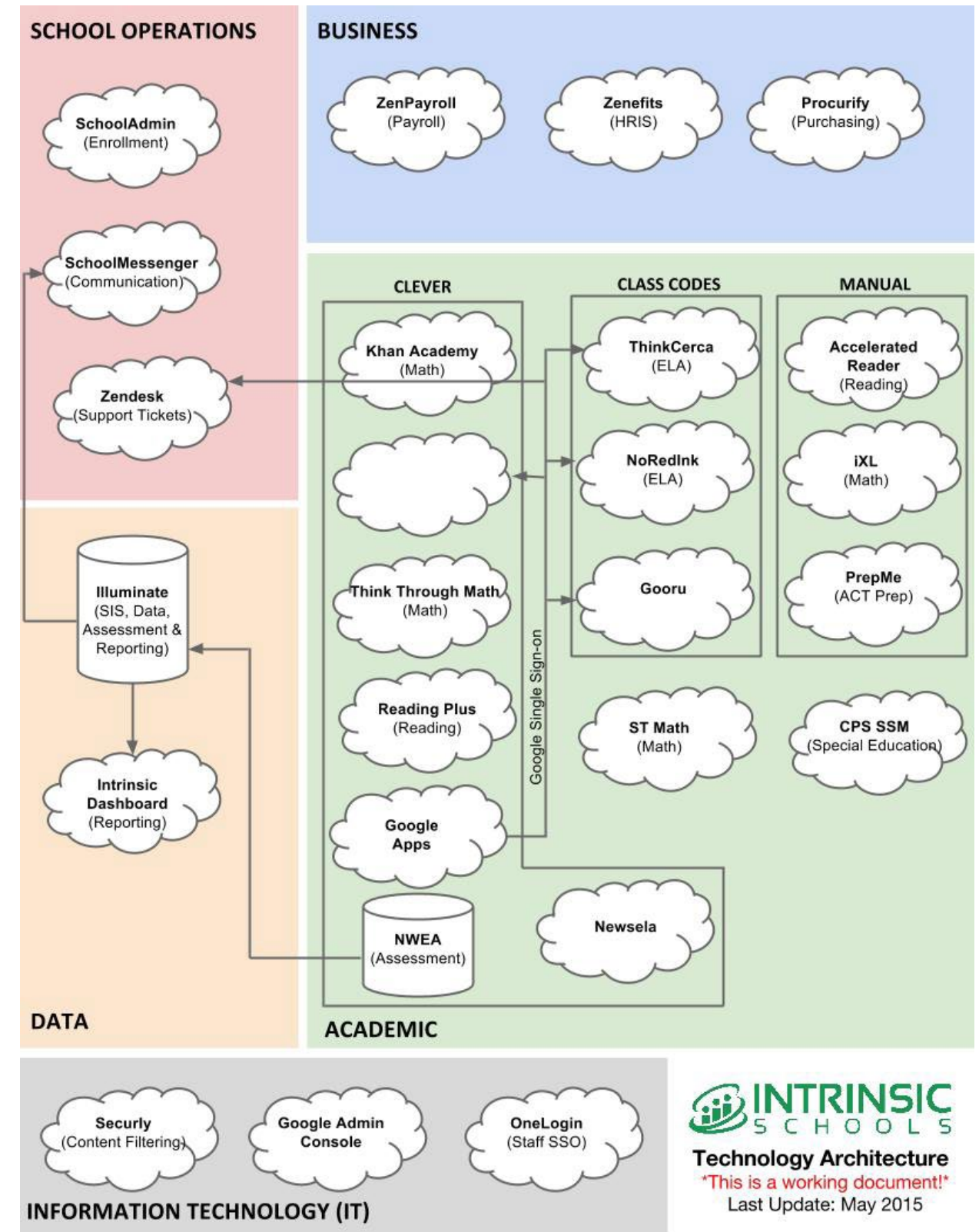


## TECH-ENABLED

Technology is a huge part of what makes breakthrough model schools tick. Here are the software, platforms, and digital content tools Piedmont and Intrinsic expected to use at the time of their applications.

School	Learning Management System and Assessment	Digital Content
<b>Piedmont</b>	Education Elements and MasteryConnect	Compass Learning Odyssey, IXL Math, TenMarks, Classworks, Think Through Math, Discovery Education, Brain Pop, Study Island, NoRedInk, Stride Academy, Global Scholar, Mathalicious, Reflex Math, iStation
<b>Intrinsic</b>	Illuminate, Canvas, and JumpRope	IXL, Reading Plus, ThinkCERCA, OverDrive, Middlebury, Activate Instruction (via Illuminate)

And here's what Intrinsic uses now:



### THINKING ABOUT TECH

- What tools, methods, and resources (digital and/or physical) will your model use to support a personalized pace of learning?
- Check out [Future Ready Schools' Assessment](#) to help you make choices around technology — and remember the technology should support the learning, not dictate it! Also wherever possible, borrow what's already out there. Creating software anew is an expensive path, one that is certainly doable but check to make sure you can't "hack" your way to a solution with platforms that already exist.





## A RELEVANT PATH

How is learning made relevant to each of your students? Do they have choice in, and creative ownership over, their learning? What tools and resources — digital and physical — will you utilize in order to achieve an individualized path for each student?

At Intrinsic, each student has a personalized learning plan that outlines an individualized path toward postsecondary success. Goals ensure postsecondary readiness for all students, but are adjusted upward for students based on specific academic and career aspirations. Technology provides students with real-time feedback on their progress toward meeting goals. To support this goal-generated pathway, students have the responsibility to reflect on their portfolio twice a year as well as the opportunity to lead/co-lead conferences to showcase their goals, projects, and interests.

Day-in-the-life sketches help you plan what a completed path could look like from the student perspective. Take a look at this day-in-the-life sketch of a Piedmont student, from Piedmont's application. This sketch helped them plan what their model would look like in action.

## DAY-IN-THE-LIFE OF A PIEDMONT STUDENT

*"Each day for a student begins the night before when he logs into the school WAN on his laptop. He views brief videos for math and Social Studies classes and then takes short quizzes to measure his content understanding. Later that night, he joins two other classmates in an online discussion about a play they are writing in Mandarin.*

*In the morning, the student joins her classmates for their enrichment class—Mandarin. She logs into the language software system and completes an individual assignment before working with her group on finalizing the scene for the play. Her group rehearses the scene for the media specialist as another group translates the play to English.*

*The student then reports to Community Room 1 for math/science block. There are 60 students in the room working in small groups, large groups, and individually alongside two teachers and an intern from JSU. Individually, the student works on his next set of unmastered objectives - focusing today on science, where he has been struggling. In large group, the students who missed or didn't complete the same objective on recent assignments receive targeted instruction. The student then works on his robotics project in the small group."* - Piedmont Application

## MATH INSTRUCTION FOR AN INTRINSIC STUDENT

For another perspective, [watch this video](#) to see how teachers created a more relevant learning path in math for a small group of 7th graders who were ready for Algebra 1 at Intrinsic.





## HOW HAS INTRINSIC & PIEDMONT STUDENTS' AND STAFF DAY-IN-THE-LIFE SHIFTED FROM PLAN TO NOW?

### INTRINSIC

Although the values and beliefs of Intrinsic have remained the same, the school learned much during implementation, which has had an impact on student and staff experience.

#### 1. Student Independence

"If we came into that first year thinking we were going to have a highly personalized environment that uses technology to differentiate, the thinking was it needs to be highly independent. The question then became for us: how can you create this independence in students so they own this? When we first started, we just gave the independence to them," says Lieberman. During Wednesday and Friday afternoons teachers went to professional development and students were given their independent block for learning. The team quickly learned just handing over independence without much structure and expecting kids to take it on, wasn't working so well. They implemented more structure into the personalized learning time while also focusing on some "broken window" elements that were impacting culture, like attendance, uniforms, and a culture of mutual respect. Together it made for a more optimal student experience than the initial launch.

#### 2. Teacher Training

Going into the planning of the second year, Intrinsic put a lot more energy into professional learning and development. "We did a full month in August of minute by minute role-playing. Practicing how the pod works, how to do rotations; creating a tight culture in order to foster independence. We focused on creating a real structured, sound environment for team teaching."

#### 3. Physical Environment and Technology

The integrity of the pod — an open, flexible space for groups of kids facilitated by teachers has remained the same, but elements like furniture, transitions, and time spent in core academics and other classes has shifted a bit. "Just getting it right took time — it took time to create a fertile foundation," says Lieberman. In terms of technology, the Intrinsic team had been gung-ho about being a completely paperless school, using Chromebooks for all learning. They soon realized that wasn't realistic nor was it best for student learning. In some classes they are referencing textbooks, and kids have notebooks and scratch paper to practice and work. "For new starts, if you approach it without flexibility you're going to get stuck really quickly and some of that old school stuff still works!"

### PIEDMONT

Here's what Piedmont learned through implementation and the shifts they made in response.

#### 1. Personalizing Pace

"I think the most success we've had has been around standards or competencies (we use those terms interchangeably), we do a really good job of addressing standards and allowing kids to move at their own pace," says Akin. One of the challenges, though, around student experience upon first implementing our model hit on this idea of self pace. "We made the assumption if we let middle school kids go at their own pace, their pace would be fast. And that's not always the case. Middle school kids are like middle-aged adults, and sometimes they procrastinate. We got to the first grading period and realized everyone is not on pace. So we set up pacing guidelines to show you have to be here at the end of the nine weeks." The team soon realized that wasn't detailed enough, so they went back and set pacing guides for every two weeks. "Our model is self-paced as long as you go at a minimum pace, is something we overlooked at the beginning," says Akin.

The team is also doing more to prepare students for this independence, similar to Intrinsic. Part of Team Time, is helping kids set goals, whether it's personal or academic, and making sure they stick with them.

#### 2. Growing Student Agency

When Piedmont launched the new model, the school's eighth graders didn't really like it. "Especially eighth grade kids who were successful honors kids," says Akin. "They liked the model of teachers get up, tell them what to do, they do it, and then they take a test on Friday — because they had been successful in that model. They didn't want the responsibility of being held accountable." The mindset has slowly shifted, and now students are enjoying and flourishing in the new way of approaching learning. "They like that if they are a high achiever they can keep moving forward, there's not that boredom aspect. If they are someone who may have struggled — and any of us are strugglers at some point — they are not getting left behind because the whole class has to move on."

#### 3. Connecting Learning

Akin notes the school team is also doing a better job of integrating and connecting school to students' future in terms of careers and colleges. "We're adding flexible electives for kids and trying to move away from the traditional schedule mindset of you take art for six weeks, drama for six weeks, and so on," says Akin. "Kids are able to use My Time to move in and out of learning experiences as they need."





## FINANCIAL PLANNING

All financial forecasts and models have key assumptions built into them. Pore over your initial thoughts, notes, or spreadsheets on revenues (public and private/grant), expenses (staff, tech, curriculum/tools/teaching stipends, and other variable costs), and cash flow.

Piedmont is an existing school district, with predictable operating models and an ongoing relationship with the city government. Intrinsic, on the other hand, is a startup with an operational hill to establish and then climb. Initial feedback to their financial proposals underscored related concerns: Were the rules that influenced their revenue models and fundraising sources dependable? How could systemic risk—such as local governmental policy—throw a wrench in their operational capability and financial sustainability?

### THINKING ABOUT FINANCES

- What are your financial 'weak points'? Find an outside, financially-savvy party to look over your assumptions and offer recommendations.



## TALENT/STAFFING

How will you ensure your current team, and those you hire, align with the vision of your model? How will you address shortcomings and their needs as staff?

Piedmont noted in its application that research shows “the most important key to transforming the learning environment is a highly qualified, effective, and motivated teacher.” Nationally, just three percent of teachers earn National Board Teaching Certification, whereas at Piedmont Middle School, 35% had earned this certification. The teaching core were instrumental to the planning process, which is essential given that Piedmont was an already established school. Piedmont shares that finding sufficient staff for meeting the curricular needs of their learning model was no easy task, nor was it necessarily overcome.

Starting from scratch, Intrinsic had the opportunity to hire its entire teacher core around (and in conjunction with) its concept. Most importantly, it did so by hosting “Fab-labs,” which brought potential hires into the phase of model ideation and iteration. These labs offered prospective teachers the ability to comment on, and contribute to, the model Intrinsic was building a team around. They also tapped their regional and national network in the process, and ultimately, they reported meeting their hiring milestone by May 2013. This approach shows initiative around openness and collaboration.

## THINKING ABOUT STAFFING

- How do you plan to build your team or support your current team to meet the needs of the learning model?
- What competencies are you looking for in educators?
- What characteristics will you underscore as invaluable to the strength of your team? And, knowing that hiring is merely step one, how will you maintain the virtue of your commitment to its long-term development?



## PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION AND BEYOND

It's a big leap between planning your design and implementing it. Undoubtedly, things will not go completely as you planned or predicted, as you can see from each school's shifts in the day in the life of students and adults. What you can do is plan as well as you can and then go in with a growth mindset: don't plan for permanence, plan for learning — it's inevitable. And keep in mind there really is no end to this journey! Even when you have planned and implemented a solid next gen school model, there is still always work to be done. That's why we are all here working tirelessly to meet the needs of learners: learning from new research, from other successful models, from community partners, and coming up with innovative solutions for the challenges that come our way. As any true wayfinder knows, there is never a time to stop, but along the way you learn to better respond to the changing of the tides. Thank you to Intrinsic and Piedmont for being our fearless guides as we all make our way into the future of learning!





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