CENTER FOR THE URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM OF THE FUTURE

FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

POSITION DESCRIPTION

THE CONTEXT
Despite well-intentioned reform efforts over several generations, urban school districts are still tragically underperforming and fail to give students the tools they need to achieve a lifetime of success.

In 2012, Andy Smarick, a partner at Bellwether Education Partners, offered a compelling new vision and action plan for systemic change in his book *The Urban School System of the Future: Applying the Lessons and Principles of Chartering*. In the book—owing much to the pioneering work of Paul Hill and Ted Kolderie and the experience in New Orleans, New York, and other leading cities—Smarick advocates for seeing past each school’s sector (district, charter, or private) to build an integrated “system of schools” in which school performance, parental preferences, and community needs govern the supply of K-12 options. All schools participating in the public system should receive equitable funding and have access to facilities and transportation. Independent authorizers should hold all participating school operators accountable, ensuring that the system remains high-performing, dynamic, responsive, and self-improving. A near-certain consequence of this new approach to managing a city’s portfolio of schools would be the replacement of the urban district as the delivery system for urban public schooling.

When the idea for the book was first conceived, very few decision makers believed the urban district structure was irreparably broken. Even among those conceptually amenable to the idea of systemic change, there were serious doubts that the urban district could be replaced.

OPTIMIZED CONDITIONS
In the years since, these ideas have made remarkable inroads and the pace of change is only accelerating. In more and more cities, these ideas are being brought to life:

- Organizations in numerous cities, including Boston, Cincinnati, Detroit, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, and San Antonio, are pursuing “high-quality seat” initiatives, seeking to grow great schools and foster supportive civil-society activity.
- Major policy interventions, including Louisiana’s Recovery School District, Tennessee’s Achievement School District, non-district authorizers, and district takeovers, are redefining the governance and delivery of urban public schooling and providing space for new systems of schools to emerge.
- In New Orleans, nearly all public-school students are now served by the charter sector. State and national test scores, graduation rates, and other indicators of quality show substantial improvements in student learning since the storms of 2005. A public scholarship program enables New Orleans students to choose private schools that are included in the state’s accountability system.
- Thanks to extraordinarily effective school operators and supportive nonprofits and public policies, charter students in Boston and Newark are learning a year more per year compared to their district peers. In Detroit, more than half of public-school students attend charters, with research showing significant learning advantages in the charter sector.
- In Washington, DC, nearly half of public-school students attend charters. The charter sector is producing several additional months of learning per year while serving higher percentages of
minority and low-income students than (and comparable percentages of special-education and ELL students to) the district. A federally funded scholarship programs enables over 1,000 students to choose private schools.

- The number of cities with at least 30 percent charter market share has increased from 7 to 12 in just three years. Since 2011, the number of states with private-school choice programs increased from 15 to 25.
- Entrepreneurial, reform-oriented nonprofits are proliferating in America’s cities. School incubators and accelerators, human-capital organizations, advocacy groups, and other types of support organizations are fueling the development of the new urban system of schools.
- Finally, and perhaps the best and most recent illustration of the changing tides, is the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation’s decision to suspend the Broad Prize due to urban districts’ inability to adequately improve.

THE CONCEPT

These events and others like them represent the most exciting and promising urban-education developments in decades. This momentum catalyzed the consideration of a “Center” *singularly focused* on scaling and incubating ideas and approaches toward implementation of the urban school system of the future (TUSSOF). An extensive strategic planning process was launched in March 2014 to define: the long-term vision and role of the Center and its priority activities, the relationship between the Center and Bellwether, and the Center’s implementation plan. Led by a Bellwether strategic advising team, the planning process consulted over 40 expert individuals including a working group of Bellwether stakeholders and an external advisory team of field leaders who believe deeply in the promise of TUSSOF. The findings of this group confirmed the need for a harbor master of the work and a large and growing number of thought leaders, policy makers, practitioners, foundations, advocacy organizations, and others have embraced, evolved, and refined this vision for the *Center for the Urban School System of the Future*.

THE PLAN

By calling attention to successful existing initiatives as well as cities primed for new activity, conducting research and analyses, building strategic partnerships, and advising and supporting policymakers, the Center will help create dynamic, responsive, self-improving urban systems of diverse, high-quality schools. To accomplish its bold goals, and informed by lessons from previous systemic-reform efforts, the Center will pursue three primary work streams:

1. **Increase understanding and demand for TUSSOF.** The Center will explain the failure of traditional reform strategies, the promise of systemic reform, and the vision and characteristics of TUSSOF. For instance, the Center will develop model policies and practices for moving a city school system toward TUSSOF.

2. **Catalyze, connect, and coordinate partners.** The Center will draw attention to high-potential cities by connecting aligned individuals and organizations and forging partnerships. The Center will work with partners to build and execute strategies to bring TUSSOF to target cities.

3. **Advise and support local and state leaders.** The Center will help local and state leaders develop policy proposals and implementation plans based on research and experience in other cities. The Center will also advise policymakers and other decision makers as policies are adopted and implementation begins.
The graphic below summarizes the Center’s theories of action and change:

**POSITION**

Fueled by the initial vision and extraordinary recent momentum, the Center for the Urban School System of the Future (CUSSOF) is launching and in search of its founding Executive Director. S/he will develop and lead an organization committed to solving a half-century problem—the inability of urban districts to provide the education our city’s low-income kids deserve.

In that spirit, the Center’s founding Executive Director will be a pioneer, deeply committed to the TUSSOF vision and with the potential to facilitate dramatic change in challenging political environments. S/he will lead the Center in bringing to life its theory of action. The success of the Center will be measured along multiple dimensions ultimately defined by the Executive Director and the future board, though its primary impact goal is to ensure that at least three cities make significant, measurable steps toward CUSSOF by 2020.

Toward that end, the Executive Director’s **responsibilities** will include:

- Providing strategic, visionary leadership to the Center;
- Developing short- and long-term strategic plans for launching and growing the Center;
- Guiding the development, research, publication, and dissemination of analyses, tools, and guides on key topics in the systemic reform of urban school systems;
- Building and cultivating effective partnerships with a wide range of educational organizations;
- Serving as thought partner and advisor to local and state policymakers, ecosystem organizations, and school system leaders working to implement the urban school system of the future;
- Promoting and fostering collaboration between partner organizations;
• Recruiting, hiring, developing, and overseeing a staff of between three and eight full time employees;
• Serving as primary public spokesperson for the Center;
• Developing and implementing metrics and tools for measuring and monitoring the progress of Center work streams;
• Providing compelling advocacy for policies and approaches aligned to the Center’s vision;
• Building relationships with key donors to secure philanthropic support for Center development; and
• Developing a plan for enabling the Center to offer fee-based services.

QUALIFICATIONS
The Executive Director will have a deep commitment to systemic reform and share the belief that student outcomes, not school sector, should govern the supply of school options; that parents must be able to choose from among an array of schools; and that policy and civil society should support the development and maintenance of a thriving schools portfolio. S/he will be an entrepreneurial, tested executive leader, and must bring the following skills and experience:

• 10-15 years of proven, effective leadership in the field of education;
• Deep familiarity with national education reform efforts and the challenges facing urban schools;
• Experience navigating city school systems and understanding local and state politics;
• Experience in multiple cities or states and navigating a variety of reform environments;
• Political savvy and instincts sharp enough to build and maintain productive relationships across national educational, political and philanthropic landscapes;
• Cultural competency and experience working with diverse communities;
• Excellent oral and written communication skills, with the ability to motivate others and represent the organization publicly and passionately to a variety of stakeholders;
• Expert knowledge of choice and accountability;
• Ability to multi-task, set and drive priorities, monitor progress towards goals, and track timelines, data and information; and
• Bachelor’s degree required, graduate degree preferred.

Further, the Executive Director will possess the following personal characteristics:

• Deep commitment to systemic reform and the creation of dynamic, high-performing, self-improving systems of schools;
• A level of integrity and energy compelling enough to bring divergent groups together in a collaborative fashion and inspire them to act;
• Demonstrable dynamism and comfort with fundraising and leading board members;
• The ability to thrive in a start-up environment and comfort with ambiguity inherent to a start-up, flexibility, and a high degree of initiative; and
• A high energy, positive, "can-do" attitude and commitment to teamwork.

REPORTING STRUCTURE
The Executive Director will report the Center’s Board of Directors.
LOCATION
Flexible from a home office anywhere in the United States, or from the Bellwether office in Chicago, Washington, DC, or San Francisco.

COMPENSATION
Competitive and commensurate with experience.

START DATE
As soon as possible.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE
The review of applications will begin immediately and will continue until the position is filled. Applications – including a resume and cover letter – should be submitted electronically prior to April 24, 2015.

Monisha Lozier, Partner & Leslie Nair, Associate Partner
Bellwether Education Partners
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The Center seeks and welcomes a diverse pool of candidates in this search.