GETTING SMART COLLECTIVE

Learner-Centered COLLABORATIVE

Transcend

The Public Microschool Playbook

What, How, and Why Now?

Spring 2025

About the Organizations

Getting Smart Collective, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing educational equity and innovation, has been a key force in reimagining learning for over a decade. As a leader in the national conversation on the future of learning, we collaborate with schools, organizations, and community partners to champion learner-centered solutions through impactful advocacy, storytelling, and initiative building. Our work deepens understanding, inspires change, and drives lasting impact in the field—ultimately contributing to a more equitable future for all learners.

Learner-Centered Collaborative is a non-profit led by educators who envision education ecosystems where all learners know who they are, thrive in community, and actively engage in the world as their best selves. We partner with educators to define whole learner outcomes, design meaningful learning experiences, and create the enabling conditions for learner-centered education. Through deep partnerships with schools and districts across the country, we have supported the design and implementation of public microschools where educators are innovating new models that can scale across the system.

Transcend is made up of a team of educators, innovators, and changemakers with experience as school and system leaders, working toward a vision where every young person can learn in ways that enable them to thrive in and transform the world. The organization is unified in the mission to support school communities to create and spread extraordinary learning for all. We do this through model sharing, professional learning, and community-centered school design with many types of schools, including microschools. In partnership with the University of Tulsa, we have developed guidance for school system leaders who want to create microschools in their communities.

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Introduction: Public Microschools

A Transformative Strategy for System Leaders

At this pivotal moment in American education, public microschools provide a transformative approach to meet the evolving needs of learners and the rapidly changing demands of the workforce. These small, agile learning environments provide a scalable solution for modernizing education, allowing educators and leaders to flexibly pilot, refine, and expand next-generation learning approaches.

Unlike large, more rigid structures, public microschools can empower school systems to innovate quickly and intentionally while offering expanded options for learners, families, and educators. With thoughtful planning, public microschools can serve as a strategic lever for broader innovation, paving the way for a more responsive and future-ready education system.

The Public Microschool Playbook was co-created by Getting Smart Collective, Learner-Centered Collaborative, and Transcend. Rooted in our collective expertise and shared experience across the microschool landscape, we offer this roadmap for system leaders to design, launch, and sustain microschools that can transform the opportunities of the learners and communities they serve.

Before diving into implementation, we explore why microschools are emerging as a critical response to shifts in education and the workforce, discuss how they serve as incubators for innovation, and describe what sets them apart. We begin by outlining the microschool landscape and key benefits, illustrating how these models can empower educators and leaders to create learning environments better aligned with the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Who The Guide is For

The Public Microschool Playbook is designed primarily for system leaders like you who are exploring microschools as a strategy for innovation and system transformation. These systems include local education authorities, such as school districts, public charter networks, autonomous public charter schools, and tribal schools, as well as intermediate units like Regional Educational Services Agencies.

However, system leaders cannot do this work alone. Microschools thrive within a broad ecosystem of partners—from nonprofit leaders and community organizations to

policymakers and philanthropists—who help shape the conditions for their success. This guide speaks to all of them.

This playbook is crafted for system leaders and partners who seek to:

- **Serve students differently** through specialized models like project-based learning, learner-directed pathways, and real-world experiences.
- **Modernize your systems** with flexible schedules, multi-age groupings, and competency-based progressions that prioritize mastery over seat time.
- **Expand access to personalized learning**, especially for historically underserved students and communities.
- **Retain and grow enrollment** by offering more adaptable, specialized, and welcoming learning environments within the public system.
- **Drive rapid innovation** by using microschools as R&D hubs that iterate and scale promising practices.
- **Strengthen college and career readiness** through personalized pathways, internships, and work-based learning.

The Playbook also offers insights for:

- **Educators and teacher leaders** who want to integrate microschool-inspired practices into existing programs.
- **Nonprofit leaders and community partners** that provide resources, expertise, and local support to co-design solutions and unlock local assets.
- **State policymakers and policy influencers** who enable regulatory flexibility, funding pathways, and supportive policies to identify opportunities for innovation
- **Philanthropic and education innovation organizations** that invest in learner-centered models to highlight where targeted investment can drive system impact.

Public school systems can lead the way toward a more agile, inclusive, and learner-centered system, but only if we work together. By aligning efforts across this ecosystem, we can remove barriers, expand opportunities, and ensure microschools fulfill their promise as a powerful force for relevance, quality for all learners, and transformation in public education.

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Why and Why Now?

The Case for Public Microschools

The microschool movement has deep roots and renewed momentum. Historically, all schools were microschools—small, community-driven environments where students learned together across ages under the guidance of educators. One-room schoolhouses once numbered in the hundreds of thousands across the U.S., forming the foundation of early American education.

Over time, industrialization led to the development of large-scale, standardized schooling designed for efficiency. While that model supported a mass-production economy, it is increasingly misaligned with the needs of today's learners and tomorrow's workforce. Throughout the decades, interest in smaller learning environments has ebbed and flowed, but today's microschool movement is not about going back in time. Instead, it builds on what we know works in small, community-rooted schools while leveraging new innovations to design future-ready learning environments.

Education must continuously evolve to meet societal needs. We champion public microschools because they address fundamental shifts needed in education, not for novelty, but for strategic improvement across our educational systems. In a world shaped by automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and globalization, the necessary skills and mindsets learners need have changed dramatically. Today's students must be adaptable, self-directed, and capable of working together to solve complex, real-world problems. Most schools, still built for an economy of routine tasks and linear career paths, fall short in preparing them for this future.

A Growing Microschool Movement

Microschools are emerging as a fast-growing and increasingly diverse segment of the education landscape. They represent a rapidly expanding movement responding to a wide range of family needs, educational gaps, and community opportunities.

According to the National Microschooling Center's 2024 Sector Analysis:

- Approximately 2 million students are currently enrolled in microschools across the U.S.
- 40% of these students previously attended public schools.
- Most microschools operate in nontraditional spaces like homes, libraries, and community centers, and many are built by parents or teachers outside of traditional systems.

Importantly, microschool growth is not limited to private spaces. There is a rise in public-sector microschools, especially in districts and charter schools that seek to pilot innovative models or serve niche populations. Microschools are a particularly promising strategy for building options that meet the needs of more learners. A 2024 national survey found that many families choose microschools for more individualized attention, flexible pacing, and safe learning environments.

While enthusiasm is high, there are calls to ensure accountability and transparency, particularly for publicly funded microschools. Experts urge policymakers and educators to establish guardrails that strike a balance between flexibility and ensuring fair access, promoting learner outcomes, and maintaining public trust. With thoughtful design, microschools can enhance public systems, increase access to high-quality learning, and create responsive environments for learners who need something different.

Families and students are seeking learning experiences that are engaging, relevant, and empowering in environments where students feel known and valued, where learning connects to their interests and aspirations, and where they can demonstrate mastery at their own pace. Microschools enable these kinds of experiences: learners build strong relationships in close-knit communities, engage in meaningful projects, pursue personalized pathways, and receive the support they need to thrive.

Meanwhile, educators and leaders face immense pressure to modernize education while managing 'innovation fatigue'—a cycle of new initiatives that often fail to drive meaningful, systemic change. Microschools offer a fundamentally different approach. Small, flexible, and adaptive by design, they are not retrofits of the traditional system, but new environments purpose-built for deeper learning and student agency.

Key Features of Public Microschools

Public microschools represent a dynamic approach to education, offering small, adaptive environments that focus on specific educational goals and the needs of a community, which often includes a focused group of students, families, and educators seeking a different kind of learning experience. Crucially, public microschools operate as part of the public education system, ensuring they are accessible to all learners and funded publicly, with no cost to families.

Defining Features of Public Microschools

- **Funding:** Public microschools are funded via existing per-pupil allocations, providing a tuition-free option for students.
- **Size:** While there's no fixed upper limit for enrollment, microschools are defined by their intentionally small design. Most public microschools serve fewer than 150 students (while others as few as 20-25), which enables personalized learning, flexible scheduling, and innovation in both the learner experience and educator roles. While some microschools serve more, what matters most is that these environments are purposefully designed to be small enough to foster strong relationships, learner agency, educator autonomy, and operational agility. As schools grow in size, it becomes more challenging to preserve the flexibility and personalization that are core to the microschool model.
- **Governance:** Public microschools may operate as standalone schools with their own state-recognized budget codes or as academies within existing schools (often referred to as "school-within-a-school" models). Microschools can be part of a traditional district, exist within a charter school network, or operate under state or tribal authorization. There is also potential for innovative governance structures, such as collaboratives or co-operatives involving local stakeholders, particularly in community-driven or educator-led models.
- **Regulatory Considerations:** Operating within the public education system, public microschools must adhere to the same regulatory standards as any other public school in their state. This includes compliance with state assessment and accountability requirements, even when microschools adopt innovative instructional approaches. Ideally, microschools can pursue waivers or regulatory flexibilities in areas such as curriculum, scheduling, and teacher certification to better align with their model while continuing to meet state and federal assessment requirements.

Because over 90% of students in the U.S. attend public schools, public microschools can be a valuable way to ensure that all students, not just those in private or out-of-system settings, can access these next-generation experiences. As more families explore alternative models outside the system, public microschools offer a timely and strategic response. They help public education systems remain responsive, competitive, and attractive by offering high-quality options that reflect the evolving needs of students and families. In doing so, they can positively impact enrollment by retaining current students, reengaging others, and attracting new families seeking small, personalized environments.

They can also serve as a strategic innovation tool. Public microschools uniquely position school systems to be responsive and agile, enabling them to adapt more quickly to emerging educational needs and community demands. By offering flexible, creative teaching environments, school systems can also attract and retain educators through greater autonomy and meaningful opportunities for professional growth. While microschools serve a limited number of students by design, their purpose extends beyond scale. These small-scale models allow systems to design and explore new approaches that can inform broader improvements across schools and programs. When intentionally designed, microschools can actually expand access to high-quality, personalized learning for more students by creating pathways that respond to specific learner needs and community priorities.

Now more than ever, school systems must align learning experiences with the evolving needs of the workforce and the aspirations of their local communities. Microschools offer one way to deepen this alignment by enhancing relevance, strengthening community connections, and bridging classroom learning with real-world opportunities. Unlike isolated pilot programs or incremental reforms, some microschools serve as high-impact incubators where districts and other public school systems can explore and scale next-generation learning models. By leveraging their small size and flexibility, systems can innovate with greater agility and ensure that successful approaches translate into broader systemic improvements.

Despite growing interest in microschools, relatively few public school systems have launched them. After speaking with dozens of system leaders, a clear pattern has emerged: it's not a lack of interest but a combination of barriers that make microschools feel out of reach. Many leaders lack clear examples of success in a district or charter network context, making it difficult for them to know where to start. Others see microschools as a niche reform rather than a strategic lever to achieve system-wide goals, such as increasing personalization, supporting students who are disengaged, or deepening community partnerships. Access concerns also loom large. Leaders worry that small-scale models may unintentionally exacerbate disparities if not carefully designed for all learners. And in an era of strained budgets and chronic staffing shortages, the perceived

inefficiencies of smaller learning environments can make microschools feel like a less practical investment.

Additionally, questions around outcomes and evidence contribute to system hesitation. It's not that evidence doesn't exist. Individual microschools and networks have shown promising results, but the approach is relatively nascent as a public sector strategy. The field lacks large-scale, longitudinal data that demonstrates how microschools impact student achievement, engagement, and postsecondary success across diverse contexts. As the microschool sector grows, clear evidence of impact will be critical for building confidence, informing design, and growing public investment.

Misconceptions about microschools also fuel hesitancy. Some assume microschools are only for some students, when in fact, public microschools prioritize accessibility for all within the public education system. Others worry that microschools are too expensive to scale, but their streamlined structure can enable systems to pilot cost-effective innovations before implementing them on a large scale. It's important to clarify that scaling doesn't always mean growing larger. It can also mean spreading effective practices, tools, or models system-wide. Another common misconception is that microschools divert resources from traditional public schools, when in reality, embedded in public systems, they can function as dual-operating systems. Rather than competing with traditional schools, microschools offer a complementary strategy to meet the diverse and evolving needs of students.

Importantly, microschools are not about going backward. They build on what has always worked in small, community-rooted learning environments and apply it to the needs of a changing world. When designed intentionally, they help public school systems evolve with purpose, offering all students access to future-ready learning.

Microschools Take Many Forms

While this playbook focuses specifically on public schools, the microschool movement spans both public and private sectors, reflecting a growing interest in small, personalized, and agile learning environments across the broader education landscape. Identifying microschools can be challenging, as many schools (such as rural, alternative, virtual, or outdoor programs), don't use the term "microschool" even if they share some characteristics. What matters isn't what the school is called, but how it's designed and who it's built to serve.

While small size is a common feature, we also define microschools as those that provide meaningful personalization, operational flexibility, and serve students for the majority of their learning experience.

Some operate within a public system, like R&D microschools piloting new models for broader adoption across a district or network, while others operate independently outside of the public system. Some microschools are housed in repurposed community spaces, while others operate virtually. Most are intentionally designed to serve specific student populations. Importantly, microschools do not exist in rigid categories and share overlapping properties. A single microschool may be project-based, career-connected, and located in a nontraditional space all at once. Another may blend Montessori education with competency-based learning at a university-based lab school.

Rather than getting caught up in labels, system leaders can focus on the key conditions and design choices that enable learner-centered environments. This diversity of approaches is a strength, not a weakness.

Benefits of Microschools to Public School Systems

Improve Student Experience and Outcomes

Microschools provide personalized and flexible learning environments tailored to learners' diverse academic, emotional, and physical needs. By centering learning on personal growth and equal opportunity, they empower young people to maximize their potential.

In public microschools across the country, this approach is already yielding meaningful academic outcomes. At EDGE, a district-run microschool within Liberty Public Schools in Missouri, students significantly outperformed state and global averages on measures of college readiness, including AP and ACT exams. Similarly, students at the Arcadia Rancho Lab School demonstrated substantial gains on the state testing in both math and ELA, with growth exceeding comparison cohorts and a 10-point percentile increase, even when starting midyear. These gains are not incidental. They reflect the impact of intentionally small settings that foster strong learning cultures, individualized support, and deep student engagement.

Microschools also enable districts to create environments that are agile enough to meet systemic goals while remaining deeply responsive to students' needs. At KM Global, a

public microschool in Wisconsin's Kettle Moraine School District, students benefit from interdisciplinary projects, flexible pacing, and real-world learning experiences—all of which are showcased through strong academic results and compelling student reflections shared on their website. These models do more than improve student outcomes; they create feedback loops for system learning. By operating as incubators within public systems, microschools generate scalable insights that inform broader instructional practices, staffing models, and assessment strategies. As districts seek to redesign learning for the future, microschools offer a powerful way to elevate both student success and system adaptability.

This matters because traditional, standardized school models often struggle to meet the diverse learning needs of all learners, particularly in foundational areas such as literacy. By reimagining education through small, learner-centered environments, school systems can provide more engaging and effective learning experiences that support the growth and potential of every learner.

The Potential to Boost Literacy Outcomes

Microschools have been shown to improve foundational outcomes, such as literacy. Emerging models, such as literacy-focused microschools designed as "literacy launchpads," demonstrate how small, high-touch settings can accelerate early reading skills through targeted instruction, strong relationships, and adaptive pacing.

Fuel Innovation

The design journeys for microschools can be more nimble, providing opportunities for rapid innovation that adapts to the evolving needs of communities or subsets of people within communities. By serving as innovation incubators, microschools can create a "dual-operating system" that enables school systems to implement and explore new approaches, such as competency-based learning, project-based models, and alternative assessments, in real-time and then scale those innovations across the system. Kotter refers to the "dual-operating system" as a model in which traditional hierarchies are complemented by small groups and informal networks—such as the microschools within a system—that can give rise to emergent, unplanned breakthroughs. As noted by Arcadia Superintendent David Vanasdall in Learner-Centered Leadership, "the dual-operating-system model simultaneously celebrates the need for strong traditional hierarchy, while building a network of small, agile groups that can quickly find solutions in real time." The combination of structure and defined flexibility can lead to faster insights and collective learning.

This matters because larger traditional schools often face bureaucratic and logistical barriers that slow change. Microschools offer an agile way to iterate, allowing school systems to innovate more effectively without full-scale systemic overhauls.

Offer Choice

Microschools offer learners and families expanded educational options, helping to engage those who may not feel a sense of belonging or purpose in traditional school settings. With their ability to offer niche programs tailored to student passions and needs, microschools can create meaningful opportunities for personalized learning.

This matters because families are increasingly seeking alternatives to conventional schooling. A 2024 survey showed that 72% of parents considered a different school for at least one child, a 35% increase from two years ago.

Address Teacher Needs

Many microschools are teacher-designed and teacher-led, fostering greater educator autonomy, leadership opportunities, and job satisfaction. By providing teachers the flexibility to implement innovative instructional strategies, microschools can enhance educator engagement and student learning.

This matters because teacher autonomy and leadership have been key drivers of microschool growth in the private sector. According to the National Microschooling Center, more than two-thirds of microschool founders are current or formerly licensed teachers—a testament to the demand for educator-driven models. By integrating microschools into public school systems, leaders can retain high-quality educators and create more fulfilling professional environments.

Align Learning with Community & Workforce Needs

Microschools can integrate career-embedded experiences, creating workforce development pathways that align with community and industry needs. Through partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and higher education institutions, microschools can provide students with real-world learning opportunities while helping to address regional workforce gaps.

This matters because strong community ties enhance both learner engagement and economic stability. By co-designing educational experiences with local industries, microschools help public school systems ensure students graduate with career-relevant skills, making them more prepared for the evolving workforce.

Strengthen Access and Quality for All

Microschools can create more welcoming learning environments by providing targeted support to historically underserved students from low-income backgrounds, learners with disabilities, and multilingual learners. Their small size and flexibility enable educators to strengthen belonging and address individual learning needs more effectively, potentially reducing disparities in academic outcomes. In addition, an added benefit of public microschools compared to private ones is the accessibility to additional opportunities within the system for students who attend the microschool.

This matters because traditional schools often struggle to personalize learning for all students, particularly those who face systemic barriers. By intentionally designing microschools to promote success for all learners, public school systems can expand high-quality education options and ensure innovation benefits all learners.

At Synergy @Mineola High School, students have access to the best of both worlds, benefiting from experiences connected to the community at Synergy while still attending AP courses, specialty electives, and larger events at the comprehensive high school where the microschool is located.

Enhance Agility & Sustainability

Microschools can offer public school systems a sustainable model for long-term innovation by reducing costs, utilizing community assets, and fostering adaptive learning environments. Their small, flexible nature allows school systems to respond more effectively to changing enrollment patterns, workforce demands, and educational trends.

This matters because traditional school models often rely on large, fixed infrastructures that make adaptation challenging. Microschools provide a scalable, cost-effective approach that allows public school systems to modernize education without requiring extensive capital investment or disruptive restructuring.

Deepen Community Connection & Relevance

Microschools can serve as hubs of community-connected learning, using local spaces and partnerships to create authentic, place-based educational experiences. Whether housed in museums, libraries, nature centers, or local businesses, these schools bring learning closer to students' real lives and offer relevance, context, and opportunities for civic

engagement. They also enable learners to solve real-world problems that matter to their communities.

This matters because community partnerships often feel peripheral or optional in traditional schools. Microschools allow these relationships to become foundational. By integrating community assets directly into the learning experience, public school systems can foster stronger public trust, enhance learner engagement, and ensure that education is responsive to and reflective of the community it serves.

How?

How to Launch A Public Microschool in Your School System

Launching a public microschool requires strategic vision, collaborative leadership, and a deep understanding of the local context. This section of the Public Microschool Playbook offers a roadmap for system leaders and your partners to move from idea to implementation in three phases:

- **Planning**, which helps teams assess readiness and align around purpose
- **Designing**, where system leaders define the essential components of the microschool model with stakeholders and partners
- **Implementing**, which focuses on launching with integrity, learning in real-time, and sustaining success over the long term

Each phase offers guidance, tools, and examples to support bold yet thoughtful action, ensuring that public microschools are built to serve, evolve, and thrive.

Access the Workbook

Ready to get started with your design team? Scan here to access a digital version of the Playbook. You can copy and customize it as a working document to guide your planning through the key questions and action steps.

Planning

Understanding State & School System Conditions

Launching a microschool within a public school system requires a clear understanding of state and system policy conditions and the flexibilities or barriers they create. **While system leaders are not policymakers, they must be proficient in navigating regulations, identifying enabling conditions, leveraging existing openings, and advocating for policy changes that support microschool development.**

Many states and school systems provide policy openings, such as waivers and exemptions, to create the freedom systems need to develop microschools. Understanding and effectively utilizing these flexibilities is essential for system leaders seeking to establish microschools. You can also learn from the efforts of similar districts and other public school systems in your home state and across the country to reduce frustration and increase the likelihood of a successful launch. Here are some examples of policy enablers that system leaders can access to support innovation in your microschools.

Replacing Seat Time with Competency-Based Learning

Traditional funding and accountability systems rely on seat time requirements, which dictate the number of instructional hours students must complete and impact everything from course offerings to bell schedules and hiring decisions. It is now reported that every state offers flexibility through seat-time waivers or competency-based learning policies, allowing learners to progress based on mastery rather than time spent in class. Ohio's Credit Flex Program was an early example of a statewide policy allowing students to earn credit based on demonstrated proficiency rather than traditional course completion.

To implement competency-based learning, system leaders can:

- Research your state's established competency-based education (CBE) policies and frameworks.
- Learn what mechanisms exist in your state for flexible use of learning time inside and outside the traditional Carnegie-unit structure.
- Advocate for seat-time waivers and flexible credit policies that support mastery-based progression.
- Consider how your microschool must be designed to allow learners to demonstrate proficiency and mastery in multiple ways.
- Explore local flexibility in graduation requirements and transcript policies.

- Partner with organizations that support CBE implementation, such as the Aurora Institute/CompetencyWorks, Getting Smart, Learner-Centered Collaborative, KnowledgeWorks, and Transcend.

Implementing Alternative Accountability and Assessment Models

State accountability systems often dictate standardized testing and reporting. However, some states allow alternative assessments, portfolios, or performance-based evaluations that better align with microschool models. New Hampshire's Performance Assessment of Competency Education (PACE) is a groundbreaking statewide accountability and assessment system grounded in competency-based learning. In 2023, a network of 20 Missouri school districts requested that the state implement a more responsive assessment system to personalize student learning. The state Board of Education approved "innovation waivers" to allow the districts, now known as the Success-Ready Students Network, to opt out of the traditional state tests for three years.

To implement alternative assessment models, system leaders can:

- Explore options for flexible assessment approaches in your state.
- Advocate for portfolio-based assessments and performance-based learning evaluations.
- Explore models of competency-based reporting.
- Develop personalized learning plans that measure student mastery over time.
- Take advantage of the state's alternative assessments, portfolios, or performance-based evaluations, or partner with the state education department to pilot and scale an alternative accountability system.
- Develop success metrics that are directly aligned with the microschool's goals.

Expanding Teacher Certification and Staffing Flexibility

Many states require specific certification for educators, but some offer waivers or alternative pathways that allow microschools to staff based on instructional needs rather than rigid credentialing requirements. For example, the Texas Districts of Innovation (DOI) Policy allows districts to waive certain certification requirements, giving microschools within public districts more flexibility to hire industry experts and community educators.

To expand staffing flexibility, system leaders can:

- Explore system-level innovation waivers that allow for alternative teacher certification pathways.
- Partner with industry professionals, higher education institutions, and community organizations to recruit specialized educators.
- Advocate for micro-credentialing or competency-based teacher certification models that align with microschool instructional needs.

Exploring Additional Waivers and Exemptions

Similar to the assessment waivers described above, many states offer waivers that allow public school systems to modify traditional regulations in exchange for implementing innovative practices across various dimensions of teaching and learning. For example, Georgia's Charter Systems Initiative currently has nearly 50 participating districts that waived specific state regulations, giving them more autonomy in curriculum design, staffing, and assessment models to support alternative learning environments like microschools.

To find and take advantage of these options, system leaders can:

- Work with state education agencies to identify and apply for available flexibility options.
- Operate under charter school laws or innovation zone policies that grant greater autonomy when meeting defined performance goals.
- Collaborate with peer systems to understand best practices for navigating waiver applications.
- Document and share the impact of waiver implementation to advocate for continued policy flexibility.

Adapting Nontraditional Facilities for Microschools

Zoning laws and school facility requirements can impact where and how microschools operate. Some public school systems utilize community spaces, such as libraries, museums, or co-working spaces, to create cost-effective learning environments. For example, in Michigan, public school districts can utilize nontraditional facilities for educational purposes, provided these facilities comply with state building codes and regulations. The Grand Rapids Public Museum School, part of the Grand Rapids Public Schools, is located within a museum.

To secure nontraditional facilities, system leaders can:

- Research what flexibility exists in your state to allow for creative use of facilities.

- Explore co-location opportunities with existing schools, higher education institutions, libraries, businesses, and community or workforce development centers.
- Identify and partner with local organizations willing to provide shared learning spaces.
- Advocate for zoning and policy adjustments that allow microschools to operate in flexible environments.

Aligning with Statewide Learner Profiles & Portraits of a Graduate

As more states shift graduation requirements to better align with community and workforce needs, public school system leaders can align microschools with these updated learner profiles, often referred to as a Portrait of a Learner or a Portrait of a Graduate. At least 20 states and hundreds of school systems have developed portraits and profiles. For example, the Portrait of a Nevada Learner is framed as a set of reflection questions for learners about growing, contributing, and making an impact.

To align with statewide learner profiles, system leaders can:

- Identify whether your state has adopted or is developing a Portrait of a Graduate framework.
- Incorporate competencies and progressions from learner profiles into microschool curriculum and assessment models.
- Partner with local employers and community organizations to ensure alignment between microschool learning experiences and the expectations of the workforce.

Navigating State and Local Policy Resources

Public school system leaders do not need to rewrite policy to launch a successful microschool; however, they must understand how to navigate existing conditions and leverage available flexibilities. By identifying regulatory openings, forming strategic partnerships, and advocating for necessary adjustments, you can create microschools that align with your community's needs while remaining compliant with state and system regulations.

Funding is a key consideration in this work. Federal funding streams—such as Title I, Title II, Perkins, and IDEA—often allow for more flexibility than states typically apply. For example, Section 1003A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows states to reserve up to 3% of their Title I allocation for Direct Student Services. These funds can be

used to expand access to advanced coursework, Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways, credit recovery, dual enrollment, and personalized learning options. Yet very few states have taken advantage of this flexibility. System leaders and state partners can collaborate to unlock these underutilized resources, thereby supporting the design of microschools.

While this playbook provides a broad overview of enabling conditions, a future appendix will offer state-specific guidance on policy enablers, funding opportunities, and regulatory flexibilities. In the meantime, system leaders can:

- Engage with state education agencies to clarify waiver processes and policy flexibilities.
- Collaborate with local education policy groups and state-level innovation initiatives to identify conditions for success and gain access to relevant policy briefings.
- Connect with peer public school systems that are successfully launching microschools to learn from their experiences.
- Utilize resources from organizations such as the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the Education Commission of the States (ECS) that provide up-to-date policy tracking and analysis on education laws that impact microschools.
- Stay engaged with our organizations—Getting Smart, Transcend, The Learner-Centered Collaborative, and organizations like the National Microschooling Center—for new resources and opportunities to connect with and learn from other microschool leaders.

By taking a proactive approach to understanding state and school system conditions, you can lay the foundation for microschools that are innovative, sustainable, and aligned with public education's broader mission of opportunity and access.

Innovation from Within: Microschools in Districts

Some public systems are creating microschools within their existing schools and structures. These models reflect an effort to innovate from within, leveraging existing buildings, staff, and systems to create something distinct for students.

- Synergy@Mineola High School (NY) operates as a microschool within the larger Mineola district system. It leverages local autonomy to personalize learning pathways and strengthen relationships among students and staff in a co-located, multi-age setting right across the street from the comprehensive high school.
- Kettle Moraine School District (WI) created multiple microschools within its community by authorizing dependent charter schools that are co-located on existing campuses.
- Experiential Development and Growth Education (EDGE) is a personalized, project-based microschool within Liberty High School in North Kansas City, Missouri. Recognized globally, EDGE is housed in a local business incubator where students engage in real-world projects with community partners while earning academic credit toward graduation.
- Laguna Creek High School in Elk Grove (CA) offers career-focused microschools within its larger comprehensive high school. These CTE-aligned pathways provide students with hands-on experiences and targeted preparation for future careers.
- Mesa Public Schools – Eisenhower Center for Innovation (AZ) hosts a Prenda microschool serving K–6 students on the Eisenhower Center for Innovation campus. This site combines Prenda's self-paced, project-based model with district oversight, allowing students to work in small groups with a guide while staying connected to district systems and supports.

Designing

Defining and Establishing Key Components

Designing a microschool is both a creative and strategic endeavor. It begins by translating a broad vision into a cohesive, actionable plan that aligns your learning model, staffing, funding, and operations. This phase is about making foundational decisions that will shape the learner and educator experience from day one. These decisions must reflect your community's values, needs, and aspirations. **While every microschool will look different, successful models share a common trait: intentional design rooted in clarity of purpose.**

System leaders are uniquely positioned to create microschools that challenge traditional assumptions and reimagine what school can be. But innovation doesn't mean starting from scratch. It means thoughtfully assembling the right components—from instructional models to operational logistics—to serve a defined learner population in a focused, personalized way.

Each element in this section is structured to guide you through a core component of microschool design. For every topic, you'll find a brief explanation of *why it matters*, a set of *guiding questions* to focus your planning, a list of *action steps* to move your work forward, and *tips and examples* drawn from real-world microschool efforts. Where relevant, we also highlight additional considerations related to *opportunity and access*, showing how your design decisions can influence who your microschool serves and how it contributes to the broader system. Taken together, these resources are meant to help you move from idea to blueprint with purpose, clarity, and confidence.

Design Principles for the Future of Learning

Demand is growing for transformative and powerful learning experiences. While each of our organizations offers a slightly different approach to design principles, we share a commitment to learner-centered and community-driven approaches.

Getting Smart:	**Learner-Centered Collaborative:**	**Transcend:**
Learning Design Principles	Whole-Learner Outcomes	Community-Based Design

Clarify Your Vision and Purpose

Why It Matters

Holding a clear system-level vision for your public microschool(s) will enable your design team to make a series of cascading decisions that stem from, align with, and uphold that purpose.

For example, if your goal is to retain learners who *might* leave your school system, the way you navigate funding will be different than if your goal is to increase enrollment by attracting learners who *have already left*. If one of your goals were to offer students more access to college courses, you would approach your design differently than you would if your goal were to provide more personalized learning to under-credited learners.

Your vision may include multiple parts (e.g., retaining students *by* offering a more personalized learning environment). As you choose the school's design, you will return to your purpose and determine which part to prioritize, when, and to what end. In this way, your purpose is your North Star, guiding your entire design process.

Guiding Questions

What purpose will a public microschool serve within your system?
What needs exist in your community (e.g., what population isn't being served, what is driving enrollment decline, etc.)?
How will a public microschool meet one or more of those needs?
How will you center access for all learners in your purpose?
How do the benefits compare to the costs of introducing complexity that benefits a small number of learners (at least to start)?
How do public microschools connect to your system's strategy? (Consider enrollment, learner outcomes, etc.)

Action Steps

Assess your system's needs. While you may have hunches about what to address, you should have concrete data (e.g., enrollment numbers, learner outcome data, stakeholder

survey data, focus groups, and interview findings) to back them up.

Consider system priorities. Aligning what you discover about your system's needs with what you are already prioritizing will help build conviction and coalition among leadership. It may also position you to leverage capacity (i.e., people, money) that is dedicated to ongoing initiatives.

Create a purpose statement. This concise statement should outline the answers to your guiding questions:

- the need you seek to address
- how a public microschool will meet that need
- how it aligns to your system's overall strategy
- how benefits will outweigh the costs to the system in the short and long term

Tips and Examples

- Purdue Polytechnic High School (PPHS) is a public charter network in Indiana. They created a 40-student microschool to address the 4-10% of students who "fell through the cracks" and needed a different approach to learning. A secondary reason for designing a microschool was to fulfill the goal of expanding their network throughout Indiana: they wanted to incubate a version for smaller communities that could not sustain their comprehensive approach.
- Edgecombe County Public Schools created a temporary "school within a school" for 30 students to incubate innovative practices they later incorporated into their comprehensive schools. The microschool did not last beyond its initial year, which was by design.
- A system could open a hybrid microschool to meet the needs of families seeking increased flexibility, particularly those with children who are serious athletes or artists.

Opportunity and Access

Given its size, a microschool cannot serve all learners. To meet its stated purpose, who is the school designed to serve? Who might be *excluded*? How might you resolve this?

For example, if you plan to offer a hybrid high school to serve families who need schedule flexibility, you probably won't want to market only to families who frequently travel. Your school may serve these families well and include them, but it should not be designed exclusively for them when it could offer flexibility to meet the needs of others. Also, how will serving a subset of learners provide further opportunity for all in the school system more broadly?

Understanding Human Conditions

Microschools need more than policies and logistics to succeed—they need the right human conditions to take root and thrive. These five conditions from Transcend aren't prerequisites; they evolve over time and must be nurtured alongside the work.

Coalition: Sustained success depends on committed stakeholders who champion the work.
Key Question: Who needs to be involved for this to work?
Consider: Learners, families, educators, system leaders, community organizations, and industry partners.

Capacity: People, time, and resources must be aligned to design and sustain the school.
Key Question: What capacity is needed to support both technical and human conditions?
Consider: A dedicated leader to guide development, school system staff to problem-solve, and cross-functional teams for support.

Clarity: A strong vision provides direction and keeps efforts aligned.
Key Question: What is the microschool's purpose, and how does it fit within the public school system?
Consider: Alignment with school system priorities, community needs, and learner-centered goals.

Conviction: Belief in the work fuels engagement and ensures it remains a priority.
Key Question: Do key stakeholders consider this essential and worth investing in?
Consider: Commitment to innovation and long-term community impact.

Culture: Values, norms, and practices must support innovation and sustainability.
Key Question: What culture will enable learner-centered approaches?
Consider: Trust, inclusion, adaptability, and shared decision-making.

By intentionally fostering these conditions, you can create a foundation where microschools can take root, adapt, and thrive.

Make the Case: Financial Feasibility and Return on Investment

Why It Matters

Before any microschool can launch, system leaders must determine whether it's financially feasible—and why the investment is worth making. Unlike traditional school planning, funding a microschool requires weighing short-term startup needs against long-term strategic value. These small, purpose-driven models don't just offer new learning environments; they can strengthen the overall public system by attracting or retaining students, piloting cost-effective innovations, and building public trust.

School systems can approach financial feasibility in multiple ways: by investing directly from existing resources, securing philanthropic seed funding, or designing the school to operate within available per-pupil funds from day one. Regardless of the path, it is essential to develop a clear theory of return on investment (ROI) that spans multiple years and reflects both fiscal and non-fiscal value. Early ROI may include increased enrollment, improved learner engagement, or proof points for broader system change. Over time, these outcomes can justify deeper investment and build momentum for scaling.

Guiding Questions

What is your district or system's strategic reason for investing in a microschool?
What student populations or community needs might this school serve that are currently unmet?
Are there specific groups of students, families, or educators within your broader community seeking a more flexible or personalized learning experience that your microschool could uniquely support?
Could launching a microschool help retain learners who might otherwise leave the public system—or attract those currently outside of it?
What does success look like in year one? Year three? Year five? How will you know your microschool is improving learner experiences, supporting growth, and preparing students for future opportunities beyond just tracking metrics like enrollment numbers or operational benchmarks?
What tangible and intangible returns would justify your investment?
Can you make a case for this microschool as an R&D investment for the system?

Action Steps

Define the strategic purpose. Clarify what problem the microschool is solving and how that connects to system priorities (e.g., enrollment, engagement, etc.)

Choose a feasibility pathway. Decide whether your model will be system-funded, externally funded, or designed to be self-sustaining from the start.

Model a multi-year ROI. Forecast expected returns across 2–5 years, including both quantitative (e.g., enrollment impact) and qualitative (e.g., learner agency, teacher retention) outcomes.

Frame the microschool as an investment, not a cost. Align your budget request or funding ask with the long-term value it brings to learners and the system.

Tailor your case to your audience. Highlight different dimensions of ROI—innovation, efficiency, public trust—depending on whether you're engaging internal decision-makers, board members, or funders.

Tips and Examples

- A rural district, county, or region could design its microschool to serve learners with intensive career interests (e.g., agriculture and trades) and model ROI in terms of community workforce development.
- A school system experiencing declining enrollment could position its microschool as a way to recapture students who had left for homeschool, virtual charter programs, or other school systems, and model how even 30 returning students would make a positive financial impact.
- Consider creating an "investment memo" that outlines the purpose, cost, three-year projections, and anticipated benefits to use when seeking board or philanthropic support.

Opportunity and Access

When making the case for launching a microschool, it is essential to consider factors beyond financial return on investment. While cost efficiency matters, the value of a microschool can also be measured in terms of learner engagement, improved educator retention, and the ability to pilot innovative practices that influence the broader system. As you build your feasibility case, consider how this school can stay aligned with long-term district or system priorities, even through leadership transitions. Setting realistic expectations is also key. While microschools can spark meaningful change, their full impact may unfold over time. Focusing on the systemwide learning and innovation they enable can help ensure continued support and sustained opportunity across the district.

Design Your School Structures

Why It Matters

Creating your unique identity as a microschool and developing key school structures that enable learner-centered learning can drive what makes your microschool special and how it will contribute to scaling learner-centered practices within your system.

Consider the following school structures from Learner-Centered Collaborative to reflect on how you want to design your microschool:

- **Small Learning Communities:** Learners belong to multi-age small groups organized by a caring adult to support a sense of community and foster social-emotional and academic development, such as advisory groups, crews, teams, or houses. This may also involve rethinking cohorts of students and educators to create small learning communities across classes within a larger school building, or reimagining the concept of cohorting by grade level.
- **Real World Learning:** Learners are provided regularly scheduled time and structures to engage in authentic, interdisciplinary work in collaboration with community partners. This may look like blocks of time for interdisciplinary and community-connected projects with multiple educators, design thinking challenges, or days set aside for extensive fieldwork and/or internships.
- **Performance Assessment:** The assessment and reporting of student progress include evidence of how learners have grown and the development of the desired whole learner outcomes, in addition to academic outcomes, through competency-based and authentic performance assessments. This could include exhibitions of learning, student-led conferences, portfolios, defenses of learning, and competency-based reporting.
- **Teacher Collaboration:** Educators have regular, structured time during the work day and throughout the year to learn together and collaborate. The time is used to learn and apply new strategies, co-design interdisciplinary projects and learning experiences, reflect on implementation, review data, and create plans to support learners.
- **Distributed Leadership:** Structures that support and facilitate shared ownership and agency at all levels, including opportunities for learners and educators to make decisions. These include structures such as student advisory, Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT), and school committees.

Guiding Questions

What is the microschool's mission and vision? *You may want to refer back to your purpose, but broaden this more holistically to think about your vision for students and how you will operationalize that vision through your mission.*
What value statements describe how you want to operate as a school?
What is your unique identity? *Will you be a STEAM school, a CTE school, a competency-based School, or focus on another area?*
How will students be organized in cohorts to foster a sense of community? *What structures, such as advisory, could students be part of to build relationships and develop critical real-world skills?*
How will students in the microschool engage in real-world learning through community partnerships?
How will the schedule enable real-world learning, performance assessments, small learning communities, and teacher collaboration time?
How will teachers in the microschool collaborate to plan interdisciplinary learning?
How will students demonstrate what they know and can do through performance assessments and authentic demonstrations of learning?
How will students in the microschool engage in decision-making processes?
How will teachers have ownership in the microschool?

Action Steps

Create mission, vision, and values statements through collaborative, learner-centered, community-led processes.

Develop a schedule and calendar that incorporates small learning communities, time for real-world, interdisciplinary learning, performance assessments, teacher collaboration and distributed leadership.

Develop an advisory program or related structures to build community and culture.

Ensure ongoing collaboration and involvement by creating structures for students and teachers to contribute to school decision-making.

Develop structures for portfolios, defenses of learning, student-led conferences and/or exhibitions of learning.

Tips and Examples

- The microschool at Myrtle Avenue Elementary begins each day with a multi-age advisory breakfast, where students in grades 4-6 share a meal and engage in brief SEL programming before their first class.
- The microschool at Lincoln High School in the San Diego Unified School District comprises a cohort of 11th- and 12th-grade students engaged in work-based learning, pre-apprenticeship, and professional certification programs. They share an advisor who is familiar with the challenges and opportunities of this program and gather in a dedicated microschool advisory room to share insights, participate in online classes, and meet with their advisor when on campus.

Align Your Vision with Your Learning Model

Why It Matters

A key reason for increasing accessibility to public microschools is to provide students with more flexible and personalized learning environments. The more these lean away from traditional approaches in favor of more "21st-century" ones, the more likely they will prepare learners for an uncertain future. Given this, your school's academic model—including curriculum, instruction, and assessment—is critically important.

Guiding Questions

What do we want teaching and learning to look like? *What instructional approaches best serve the needs of my student population, my school's vision, and my staffing model?*
What materials must we create or purchase to meet our learners' needs? *This includes, but is not limited to, learners with special needs or English Language Learners. What state funding or philanthropy exists to support our vision?*
What curricular materials are available for free through my system and beyond? *To what degree do they align with my school vision and state/system requirements?*
What are my state and system's instructional, curricular, and/or assessment requirements? *What, if any, waivers or exceptions exist?*

Action Steps

Determine non-negotiables for curriculum, instruction, assessment, and exemptions. Research your state's minimum expectations (including mandating testing or vendors), which vary from state to state. Alongside your understanding of exemptions and waivers, this information will establish guardrails around your planning.

Seek free programs and materials that align with system expectations and your school's vision. This will enable you to maximize your budget and your time. Many microschool providers value online learning platforms; you may want to explore whether your school system can provide you with free access to one or more.

Identify additional materials to support your learners and your vision. Create new materials, leverage free materials from vetted sources, research state-funded programs, or find the funding to purchase something new (either through your existing budget or through fundraising or philanthropy). Be sure to consider the unique needs of your student population.

Determine instructional approaches or models. Ensure that these take into account your student population, your school's vision, and your available staffing capacity. Instructional approaches and models encompass the types of experiences learners will have that support their growth and learning, bringing value to students in and of themselves.

Seek inspiration. You don't need to start from scratch, and there are existing resources to draw inspiration and ideas from, including the Innovative Models Exchange.

Plan your approach to assessment, progress monitoring, and feedback. Your students will likely have to take mandated state assessments. Especially if your instructional approach is deeply innovative, you must ensure learners are prepared to engage with these assessments. You will also have to plan how to assess students, monitor their progress, and share feedback along the way. There are many innovative ways that learners can demonstrate their learning and track their own progress, which you will likely want to consider.

Tips and Examples

Consider digital resources: Digital resources offer a range of benefits that can enhance the effectiveness and flexibility of microschool environments. Here are some key advantages:

- **Personalization**: Learners can work on different standards and topics at their own pace, catering to individual learning needs and speeds.
- **Support for independent work:** Provides teachers flexibility during class time, enabling them to engage in more focused, one-on-one support with learners who need it.
- **Access to diverse curricula:** Offers engaging and standards-aligned curricula in areas outside the teacher's certification or expertise, enriching the learning experience.
- **Space efficiency:** Ideal for microschools that operate in borrowed or compact spaces, as they do not require physical storage.
- **Flexibility for families:** Supports hybrid learning models, accommodating the needs of families who require greater scheduling flexibility.

Consider *how* to utilize any required materials that do not align with your learning vision. Many schools are required to use system-approved materials, but *the way* they are used can vary. If the materials don't suit your school's primary focus, consider using them to build projects or as supplements, rather than as your core approach.

Consider leveraging partnerships to enhance your curriculum. For example, you can partner with a university or business to provide college or career-embedded offerings. This may impact how you design your schedule to enable learners to participate in "off-campus" learning.

Put students in the driver's seat of their own learning. This is the best way to promote active self-direction, a 21st-century skill that will benefit learners for the rest of their lives. A public microschool is the ideal setting for this because its small cohort size will prevent learners from falling through the cracks.

Communicate with families and caregivers. Especially if your approach is remarkably different from what learners have experienced before, it will be essential to be transparent and communicative about it. You should provide ways to understand innovative approaches, especially those related to learner progress. For example, if caregivers are accustomed to traditional grades but are tracking competencies, you may need to find ways to translate your approach to a schema they can understand. You may want to use *some* assessments or materials that are more familiar to families so that, however innovative you are, you have a way to communicate their child's progress.

Opportunity and Access

A helpful way to factor opportunity and access into your planning is to ensure that your academic model is designed to meet the needs of all learners. You can explore Transcend's Leaps for 21st-Century Learning, Getting Smart's Design Principles, and Learner-Centered Collaborative's Learning Model as inspiration for how to think about the shifts you want to make in teaching and learning. All of these models describe the types of learning experiences that we believe prepare all young people to thrive in and transform the world. We strongly recommend exploring these resources and using them as a foundation for your school design.

Identify Funding: Budget and Cash Flow

Why It Matters

Designing a microschool is not just an instructional challenge; it is also a logistical one. It's a financial one. Even the most compelling vision requires a clear, realistic plan to fund the early development and launch stages. While many school system leaders focus on long-term funding models, microschools also require up-front investments: time to plan, personnel to lead design work, and often seed capital to begin operations before per-pupil dollars arrive.

It's also critical to look beyond the budget and consider cash flow. Many grants, reimbursements, or school system budget allocations are not timed to match monthly or bi-weekly expenses, such as payroll. Without a strong cash flow strategy, even well-funded schools can run into solvency issues. Launching a microschool requires aligning your resources, timelines, and payment structures to ensure money is available when it's needed. Getting this right increases your chance of a smooth launch and builds trust in the microschool's viability from day one.

Guiding Questions

What will your early-stage design and planning process cost, and how long will it take?
Who will lead the planning work, and how will they be compensated for their efforts?
What sources of seed funding are available internally or externally? *What philanthropic dollars/grants might you seek? Would a local business or industry be interested in your design? Does your system have a budget allocated for innovation?*
What startup costs (e.g., space, materials, tech) need to be covered before students are enrolled?

Will funding flow monthly or via reimbursement (e.g., with grants)? *How will you manage gaps?*
Can system funds be used to front-load expenses until state or federal funding, or philanthropy, arrives?
What is your system's budgeting calendar, and how does it align with your microschool launch timeline?
How will you ensure a consistent flow of public dollars over time?
What is the design of your state's funding formula? *How does this relate to student count? How does the timing of the count affect your system's funding?*
Will you expect to enroll students from within your school system or from outside your school system?
Will your school be part of a larger school or have its own school code?
What resources would be provided centrally versus those procured by the microschool?
Will funding be allocated and spent centrally, or would the system leverage a school-based budgeting model?
Can a partner (e.g., university, business, community center, comprehensive school) provide infrastructure at minimal or zero cost to you?
Can you design a school that can operate sustainably on the available per-pupil funds?
What is the budgeting timeline in your system? *What does that timeline tell you about your plan for creating and launching your microschool?*

Action Steps

Secure seed money. Launching a public microschool will require a start-up budget to pay for a person to lead early-stage design work. In some cases, this money will later be used to hire a leader or lead teacher to take over design work and move it into an implementation stage. The funds may come from an existing budget allocated to innovation or redirected for this purpose, or they may need to come from philanthropy or business contacts.

Study your system and state's funding formulas to understand your anticipated operating budget. Utilize resources such as the 50-state comparison tool from ECS to learn about K-12 funding in your state. You need to understand what money exists and how it flows. Your public microschool should have access to a budget from the formula's per-pupil dollars. However, each state and school system has different regulations for allocating and disbursing that money. A few things to consider:

- A school district or charter school network may have an intradistrict funding formula that is used for school-based budgeting. If so, that formula could be used to create the budget for the microschool.
- Most systems allocate funds based on the number of students they have. Still, the money won't necessarily follow a student if they transfer from a comprehensive school to a microschool because school systems need to cover fixed costs at the larger schools.
- Enrolling new students in the public school system who were previously homeschooled or attended private schools will generally draw more state-distributed funds into the system; however, that does not mean those funds will be available to the microschool.
- Federal funding is distributed differently within systems. Determine whether the funds are distributed on a per-pupil basis or are used as determined by the central office.
- Your state likely has policies regarding whether students can transfer from one system to another and, if so, how that transfer is managed. Operating a public microschool in a state with open intersystem transfers could mean a much larger population from which to recruit students.
- Incremental funding can impact when funds are distributed (or how much of the total funds are distributed at different points in time), so—assuming you will have access to per-pupil funds—you may want to keep in mind a plan to operate on approximately 65% of that amount.
- The student population you enroll could lead to additional funding (e.g., students with special needs, English Language Learners, students from low-income families) to support the needs of those learners.

Identify anticipated operational costs. We recommend making a list of operational costs you anticipate and identifying what can be reduced, borrowed, supported, or leveraged free of charge. See below for more information on how to reduce operational costs. Examples include, but are not limited to: facilities, transportation, food, school safety, health services, administration, payroll, and technology.

Explore partnerships to lower or eliminate some operational costs. You should plan to operate on a lean budget to start. Consider ways to leverage existing resources to reduce your operational costs. For instance, depending on the purpose of your school, you might consider partnering with a local business, university, community college, or K-12 school to utilize their facilities (at a minimum) and possibly their security, health facilities, technology, curriculum, and more, as feasible and appropriate.

Create a financial model to ensure a consistent flow of public dollars. Using the information you have collected, calculate the cost of running your school and compare it to your anticipated budget. As you plan, you must toggle between what you think you need to pay for and what funds you are likely to acquire, making adjustments as necessary or helpful.

Be aware of and adapt to your system's timeline for setting a budget. Place the public microschool initiative within the context of how the system currently allocates its budget. Strategic planning for the *following* school year typically begins in the fall, around September or October. School systems generally want to identify focus areas for spending before the December holidays. Budgeting generally happens at the school level in the spring, around March. This is the point at which you, and your overall school system, will want to have a solid understanding of funding needs.

Tips and Examples

Plan ahead. Financial sustainability for a public microschool does *not* guarantee it will last forever. Instead, financial sustainability means that a school is not fighting for money year after year. The school may last a long time, or it may close once a community's needs have been met.

- Edgecombe County Public Schools created a temporary "school within a school" for 30 students to incubate innovative practices they later incorporated into their comprehensive schools. The microschool did not last beyond its initial year, which was by design.

Develop and nurture relationships with potential philanthropic funders. These include Getting Smart, Vela, local foundations, and businesses in industries related to your school's focus.

- Example: In 2023, Getting Smart launched a grant program called "A Big Push for Small Schools" to create a network of microschool leaders and support the development of scalable models.
- Purdue Polytechnic High School Lab School received a Getting Smart Collective grant to launch a pilot microschool. In their first year, they received $50k to support startup costs. In the second year, they received $100,000, part of which was allocated to codifying their approach in anticipation of scaling it. They understand that they can't rely on philanthropy indefinitely and are testing its feasibility under their available per-pupil model.

Protect the initiative from the impact of leadership changes. Leadership changes can significantly shift a school system's financial priorities. Protect the seed money allocated to the project by creating a formal agreement.

- The mayor of a Massachusetts town approached a successful nonprofit after-school program provider to design an innovative public microschool. After an extensive but successful approval process, the school was ultimately rejected due to a conflict between a new superintendent and funders. The new superintendent wanted to funnel money from the funder into the broader district, but the funder wanted it directed to the school.

Consider your long-term strategy. We anticipate that almost any larger school system could create a single microschool on its existing budget. However, if your goal is to launch multiple microschools over time, it is advisable to develop a long-term financial plan. At scale, there is a likely tipping point for the system, perhaps at 5 to 10 microschools, where the operational and other system-level services become sustainable without placing additional strain on the system overall. This will depend on many factors, including enrollment trends and student movement. Attracting new families and retaining students who might otherwise leave enables the district to serve its community better. In cases where students are moving within the system, that movement could potentially create budgetary pressure on the schools from which those students are leaving. System leaders should anticipate this dynamic, plan for it explicitly, and communicate transparently about how microschools sit within the broader financial strategy of the system. Part of your strategy will likely involve starting with a single microschool to develop a proof of concept, such as success in retaining families. As you demonstrate success, public microschooling becomes more compelling, and the benefits of investing in these innovative models become increasingly evident.

Opportunity and Access

The way a microschool is funded plays a critical role in determining who can access it. If early funding is delayed, uncertain, or misaligned with student needs, it can ultimately limit the number of students who can participate. Without a clear cash-flow plan, even well-designed microschools may struggle to open their doors in a way that is accessible to all. To avoid this, stay closely coordinated with your system's business office to ensure that financial constraints do not become barriers to student access in the critical early phases.

Navigate Governance and Accountability

Why It Matters

To innovate within a public school system, you must comply with federal, state, and system policy. Policies will differ based on your governance model (e.g., district public, charter, public-private partnerships). Because microschools are intended to be nimble, innovative, and learner-centered, they benefit from the most significant degree of autonomy the system can provide. You and the person or team responsible for preparing the system for a public microschool must be well-versed in all policies and requirements, as well as the workarounds that may grant you the autonomy needed for your school to thrive.

Guiding Questions

What governance model will you choose, and why? And how does it align with your defined purpose and goals?
What steps will you need to take to get approval for your school's design?
How will you plan for the greatest level of autonomy your system can offer, while still meeting necessary requirements?
What are your state's regulations for opening and running a school? Examples: • *Teacher qualifications and certification* • *Staff: student ratio* • *Curriculum standards* • *Required assessments* • *Special education regulations* • *Health and safety regulations* • *School calendar and hours* • *School oversight and teacher evaluation* • *School performance accountability*
What autonomy will you need to accomplish your goals for innovation? What workarounds (e.g., waivers, exceptions, etc.) are available to you?
What supervision will the school have, and by whom?

Actions Steps

Determine your governance model. There are a few possible governance models for a public microschool. Including:

- ***District public microschools,*** like other district public schools, are overseen by a local school board.
- ***Charter microschools*** would require you to negotiate a charter contract with an authorizing agency and would be overseen by its own governing board. A charter microschool might be designed as a new option within an existing charter network.
- ***A public-private partnership*** is a collaboration between a public school system and a private entity, such as a university or business. In these cases, the school system maintains responsibility for meeting state and federal regulations while the private entity provides support with facilities and offerings. The private partnership may influence curriculum and pedagogy, but it does not have the final say.

Align governance with you your accountability system. In addition to identifying the governance structure, it is critical to determine whether your microschool will be formally recognized as a school by the local or state education agency with its own school code, or if it will operate as a school within a school. This distinction will shape your accountability requirements, funding mechanisms, reporting responsibilities, and degree of autonomy. In

some states, acquiring a school code involves navigating a complex bureaucracy, while in others, it is more straightforward.

Having a school code will give you more autonomy and independence, allowing you to view information and data about your learners more easily. If you are operating as a school-within-a-school, be sure to clarify how your microschool's performance will be tracked and reported, and how you will maintain visibility into key student-level outcomes.

Identify the approval process for your design. Once you know your governance model, you will be able to fulfill the necessary steps to receive approval for your school's design. While you may need to flesh out the details of your design to gain approval, it is important to understand process requirements and timelines.

Compile a complete list of federal and state regulations. Use the list under "guiding questions" to get you started. This list will serve as a starting point for your planning *and* help you determine where you may need to explore workarounds to secure the types of autonomy your school will need to fulfill its mission.

Identify areas where you believe you will need autonomy and pursue workarounds. The best innovation requires at least some autonomy because it involves trying something that hasn't been done before. Making a microschool *public* requires some degree of fidelity to existing regulations, but there are often workarounds in the form of waivers and exceptions.

Tips and Examples

Consider workarounds for regulations that may be challenging to meet. For example, dual enrollment and virtual learning help schools navigate gaps in teacher certifications. These structures also lead to more personalization, allowing students to take higher-level courses or college courses, for instance, and offering schedule flexibility.

Consider staffing implications. In Tulsa, a woman hired to run a public microschool could not be appointed as principal because of restrictions on the number of hours a principal is allowed to teach; however, her background experience necessitated that she be compensated at that level. As a result, they included "director" in the position description to indicate that she would teach and also engage in leadership. Another teacher at a small public microschool was unable to enter grades into the district-wide system because her certification did not match the specific content area; therefore, she required a partner teacher from within the district to support her.

You can start under another school's local education agency designation (LEA) and acquire your own later. This may allow you to avoid the bureaucratic steps while you are working on launching your public microschool, leaving them for a calmer time.

Opportunity and Access

You can establish community forums and advisory boards to inform and support decision-making at your school. The more you can invest and engage your community, the more it is likely to (a) serve the community's needs and (b) reflect its diversity.

While you may want to seek workarounds for some regulations, it is essential to be as transparent as possible about your actions to ensure that your school and its leadership are held accountable for serving all students to consistent, high standards.

How Microschools Empower Educators

Microschools provide a unique opportunity for educators to lead, innovate, and shape transformative learning experiences. Rather than concentrating leadership in traditional administrative roles, microschools often embrace distributed leadership models where teachers have greater voice, autonomy, and ownership over instructional design and school culture. This empowers educators to act as co-creators of learning environments, which in turn improves student experiences and contributes to higher teacher satisfaction and retention. By reimagining the educator role, microschools help build a more dynamic professional culture, making them a powerful tool for both innovation and long-term system renewal. Here are some examples:

- Teacher-Powered Schools – There are currently more than 300 schools in nearly 30 states in the U.S. operating in cooperative models where educators lead instruction and school governance without traditional administrators.
- Wildflower Schools – These small, teacher-led microschools provide educators with both instructional and operational control, enabling them to design learner-centered environments that align with their teaching philosophy.
- Kettle Moraine School District – This district launched microschools within its high school, leveraging teacher leadership and interdisciplinary learning to reimagine education from within the public system.
- Lamont Elementary School District - Empowered 3rd-6th grade teachers at LESD's Myrtle Avenue Elementary have formed a microschool in which innovative practices such as community-connected project-based learning and competency-based assessment can be launched and refined before scaling school-wide.

Solidify Staffing

Why It Matters

Staffing is one of the most critical decisions you'll make when launching a microschool. In a small, relationship-centered environment, every team member plays multiple roles—educator, advisor, problem-solver, and connector. The individual(s) you hire must be flexible, collaborative, and deeply aligned with the mission of your microschool. Because there are fewer people on staff, each person has a more significant impact on school culture, learner outcomes, and operational success.

This alignment goes beyond qualifications and experience. It includes mindset, values, and a belief in the school's purpose. Microschool educators must see themselves as entrepreneurs, co-creating a fundamentally new experience for students. To secure this kind of alignment, consider strategies such as targeted recruitment, values-based interview questions, and partnering with union leaders where relevant to prioritize mission-fit in staffing decisions.

Staffing decisions also determine the legal, logistical, and financial structure of your school. Whether your microschool operates under a school district umbrella, as a charter school, or through another governance model, you'll need to understand how employment policies apply, including benefits, retirement plans, and collective bargaining agreements. Securing access to essential employee benefits, such as healthcare, insurance, and pensions, may require additional coordination or negotiation, depending on how your microschool is authorized and funded. Thoughtful planning in this area ensures that your team is supported, your model is sustainable, and your microschool is well-positioned for long-term success.

Guiding Questions

What are the state and school system certification requirements for teachers and school leaders?
Are there required staff-to-student ratios or other regulatory staffing requirements?
What are the expectations outlined in local collective bargaining agreements?
How will the grading authority work, especially for secondary courses and credit-bearing subjects?
How many staff members will you need, and what roles will they be responsible for? What qualifications and dispositions will be most important to fulfill your microschool's mission?
What will staff titles, roles, and pay structures look like?
Will staff be full-time, part-time, or year-round employees?
Who will supervise and evaluate microschool staff, and how will this role be connected to existing system structures?
What benefits (healthcare, retirement, insurance) will your staff receive, and how will those be administered? *Will your microschool be part of the school system's benefits platform? If independent, can you access the state system or negotiate buy-in through a third party?*

Action Steps

Familiarize yourself with state and system regulations, and consider how to navigate them. The table below outlines some common categories related to staffing regulations, key points to understand about them, and potential ways to navigate them to support your public microschool's vision.

Note: This list is not comprehensive, and workarounds must be legal, approved, and prioritize the best interests of your students and families.

Teacher Certification Requirements

What to Know	Possible Solutions | Workarounds
You should be aware of any laws regarding the certifications teachers need to serve the population you plan to enroll, such as content specialists, learners with IEPs, ELLs, etc. Some states will require middle school or high school teachers to acquire cross-curricular certificates if they teach across content areas (elementary licenses are typically "generalist").	• Leverage online learning platforms and virtual tutoring for some or all content. • See if a content specialist at another school with grading authority can serve as a "teacher of record" and offer support/grade entry. • Pursue waivers or alternative certifications to hire professionals who have extensive experience. • Be clear about the type of support the school can and cannot provide legally.

Supervision Requirements

What to Know	Possible Solutions | Workarounds
It is unlikely that a microschool will have the budget or need to hire a full-time, site-based administrator; however, it will still require supervision.	• The district superintendent or a charter network leader will likely provide supervision. You will need to learn what this will look like in terms of type and frequency of support.
If the school's primary "teacher" holds an administrative license, there may be rules related to the number of hours they can teach per day.	• Giving the teacher or leader a different title, such as "director," may be possible to ensure they are compensated appropriately, but they can still teach enough hours. • You will need to ensure that any roles are allowable by the union, align with the system pay scale, and comply with other applicable HR systems.
In some cases, anyone who supervises another staff member must hold an administrative	• In this case, it may be necessary and advantageous for the teacher to obtain an administrative certificate.

certificate. If you plan to hire a teacher who oversees a teaching assistant, they may need this license.	

Staff to Student Ratios

What to Know	Possible Solutions | Workarounds
Staff-to-student ratios will influence how many adults you hire, which will influence your budget! It will also shape the skills you seek in your staff (e.g., they will need to teach in multi-age classrooms, help learners with varying needs, and support learning across content areas, etc.).	• Leveraging self-guided, online curricula can free up a smaller number of teachers (or a single teacher) to provide coaching and personalized support to individuals, thereby mitigating issues related to their lack of content expertise. • You will want to be intentional about the skills you seek in a teacher, focusing on a person who can and wants to wear many hats.

Health & Safety

What to Know	Possible Solutions | Workarounds
There are likely regulations regarding the presence of health and safety personnel, such as nurses, security officers, or janitorial staff. Failure to abide by these regulations can lead to day-to-day complications, such as not knowing how to assist injured children, *and* liability issues.	• It may be possible to partner with a local school to share a nurse, provided the school has first aid and medical supplies. • Instead of a security officer, you could research methods and measures, such as an electronic access control system, to control access to your facilities and screen visitors. • Refer to the section of this playbook related to facilities for more information on sharing building support staff.

Apply what you have learned to finalize your staffing plans. This will require you to toggle between your school vision, budget, and school system requirements. You may also revisit your plans for the population you'll serve (e.g., will you have the necessary staff and conditions to support learners with special needs?) and the curriculum and resources

you'll use to help you maximize the small number of people you employ and supplement any gaps in skill or experience.

Coordinate with HR and legal teams. Work closely with system leadership (or charter authorizers) to ensure compliance with hiring, benefits, and labor regulations.

Draft staffing plans and job descriptions. Ensure they reflect the flexibility, collaboration, and multi-role expectations of the microschool environment.

Plan for professional learning. Build in structures for onboarding, coaching, and collaborative planning that reflect your learning model and team culture.

Tips and Examples

It's okay to be scrappy at the beginning. A school can successfully be staffed by a single person if there is a clear understanding of what they can do, how they will be supervised, and how they will be supported.

According to Vela, some microschools begin as a one-person show. Since there are many tools available (like this playbook!) that help people navigate the "back of house" details (e.g., budget, governance), it's most important to hire someone with the skills to work with learners, which requires a different kind of expertise.

Leverage non-traditional teachers to supplement student learning. Just because your microschool may not have a robust enough staff to offer a range of electives does not mean diverse learning experiences are unavailable to them. We recommend working with your local community to identify volunteer guest teachers.

Consider new educator roles. The best teachers are expert facilitators and thinkers who *support* students in their learning without needing deep expertise in every area. Support may involve pointing a student to resources, learning together, or referring them to an expert for additional assistance.

Opportunity and Access

It is crucial that microschools do not inadvertently contribute to school segregation by race, language, income, or ability. We want public microschools to increase access to high-quality, free options for all, not just some families. In our long-term vision for public microschooling, a system will gradually be able to offer a variety of small learning environments that cater to different needs, allowing every learner and family to find their "just right" fit.

As we build toward that future, it is critically important to consider what your staff will be able to offer your student population and how to make that offering inclusive and desirable, particularly for marginalized groups. Of course, this does not mean a

microschool serving a small number of learners will be able to accommodate every learning need. Instead, it means that you must be crystal clear about your mission, what you will offer to meet it, what you will not be able to do, and why.

Plan for Operations and Facilities

Why It Matters

Microschools serve a smaller number of students and are therefore more nimble than larger or more traditional schools. Their size offers opportunities for flexibility, particularly in finding affordable and safe spaces that align with the learning vision. Co-location with existing schools or partner facilities can be a cost-effective solution, especially in the early stages, but it also has trade-offs. Leaders must be intentional about maintaining the microschool's distinct culture, strategy, and identity to prevent it from being negatively altered by the host, especially when the co-location host is another school. Careful planning around operations and facilities can help ensure that efficiencies don't come at the expense of innovation and autonomy.

Guiding Questions
What are the safety and liability requirements for your school system?
What are free or low-cost options, including co-location? *Do they already meet safety requirements? If not, what work would we need to do to meet the requirements? For co-location options, whether another school or a partner facility, consider the hours of operation and accessibility to the space as needed.*
What are any space needs aligned to your school vision (e.g., open space for group projects, technology infrastructure, etc.)?
What must you prioritize now vs. later?

Action Steps

Familiarize yourself with school safety and liability requirements in coordination with your public school system. Even if a space seems ideal—affordable, accessible, and aligned with your instructional vision—it must still meet all applicable safety and liability standards. These considerations should be addressed early, in partnership with the district or authorizing entity, to avoid potential legal or operational issues down the line. Examples of safety and liability requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Fire prevention systems: These include alarms, smoke detectors, sprinklers, marked and accessible emergency exits, and fire extinguishers.
- Fire doors and escape routes: Fire doors must be self-closing and unobstructed. Exit routes must be clearly marked, well-lit, and easily accessible.
- Security and surveillance: To protect the students and staff, access to the school must be controlled, such as through secure and limited entry points or electronic access control systems.
- Health and hygiene: Schools must maintain sanitary conditions to prevent the spread of disease. This includes regularly cleaning restrooms, classrooms, and common areas, including those where food is handled. Standards related to ventilation and air quality may also apply. Schools will be subject to ongoing health and safety inspections.
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance: The school must be accessible to individuals, including visitors, with disabilities. This includes ramps or elevators, accessible restrooms, and doorways and hallways wide enough for wheelchair access.
- Traffic Safety: There must be safe drop-off, pick-up, or walking/bicycle zones.

Explore free and low-cost options, ideally co-location arrangements *that already meet safety codes*. It can be a huge cost-saving for public microschools to co-locate with community partners, especially those with facilities already up to code. Ideas for co-location:

- Small schools or other microschools (public or private)
- Community organizations (e.g., churches, community centers)
- Unused spaces within an existing school
- A local business or university, especially if part of your vision is a partnership with them
- If you cannot find a co-location partner and need to seek a separate facility, you will need to revisit your budget and consider fundraising to afford the rent.

Compare available facilities to the needs dictated by your instructional vision. Your plan for how learners spend their time will likely influence the type of space you desire. For instance, if your students are learning online, ensure your space has the necessary infrastructure to support that technology. If your model centers on project-based learning, you may want an ample, open space with modular furniture that can flex to the needs of the day.

Compromise. You will need to consider many factors we've named—budget, accessibility, safety and health regulations, and instructional needs—and no situation will be perfect. As such, you will need to make compromises. You will also likely need to work to improve your facility. You may find that the space you have is good enough to launch your school, and later, you may invest time and energy into finding a space that works better for your

school community.

Tips and Examples

When selecting a location for your microschool, consider both the opportunities and challenges of co-locating within a traditional school building. While having a separate space can help reinforce your microschool's unique culture and protect against slipping into more conventional practices, many public microschools have found success operating as a school within a school. Shared spaces can offer valuable access to resources, reduce startup costs, and foster collaboration when the vision is clear and well-supported. If co-location is the most viable or strategic option, be intentional about preserving your microschool's distinct learning model through thoughtful design choices, effective staffing, well-structured scheduling, and ongoing communication with stakeholders.

In Atlanta, the Ferguson School, Lighthouse Prep ATL, the NIA School, and Brave Learning Space are all co-located on the same floor of a local church, which leases rooms to each of these schools. While each microschool operates independently and offers a distinct model, the schools can share costs and, in some cases, personnel resources. They also demonstrate the potential for strategic collaboration, such as building a pipeline that would enable students to transition from one microschool to the next as they grow older.

Wichita Learning Lab is housed in a space with four microschool tenants, including two public and two private schools.

Opportunity and Access

Since your public microschool may be unable to provide a bus for its students, location is a critical consideration. Your school's location can have a significant impact on who enrolls and whether the school is truly inclusive. For instance, a school in an inconvenient location may be more accessible to wealthier families with the time and resources (e.g., vehicles) to navigate a long or tricky commute. Also, as mentioned above, you must ensure that any potential facility is ADA-accessible. Even if you aren't currently enrolling a student with a physical disability, you need to be prepared for that possibility—*and* for the possibility of hosting a visitor who does.

Meeting Families Where They Are: Microschools that Expand Access

Across the country, public systems are utilizing microschools to provide more flexible and personalized experiences that cater to students and families where they are. These models often complement virtual learning, reengage students, or offer part-time options that reflect learner needs.

- ASU Prep Digital (AZ), a public charter school, offers a hybrid microschool model that combines online coursework with in-person learning co-located on three ASU campuses in Phoenix. Students attend 1–3 days per week to access college courses, work-from-site opportunities, and project-based learning experiences.
- Building on the success of ASU Prep's virtual Khan World School for grades 6-12, ASU Prep Powered By The Levitt Lab is a new micro high school on the ASU Tempe campus that blends digital coursework with interdisciplinary projects, Socratic seminars, and real-world learning experiences.
- Gem Prep Learning Societies (ID) are small in-person microschools that pair the flexibility of public charter Gem Prep Virtual with in-person collaborative learning centers. Students benefit from personalized support and peer collaboration.
- Issaquah School District (WA) is launching a series of microschools across the district to support students at risk of disengagement. The model blends traditional classroom learning with interdisciplinary, project-based Design Labs in community settings, offering a hybrid, student-centered experience.
- Snoqualmie Valley School District (WA) operates a part-time microschool for over 100 homeschooled elementary and middle school students as part of its Parent Partnership Program. The district provides academic support and enrichment in a flexible format that complements home learning.

Implementing

Launching and Sustaining the Microschool

Designing a microschool requires courage, clarity, and collaboration. While the process involves practical decisions around staffing, funding, governance, and instruction, it ultimately creates the conditions for meaningful, learner-centered experiences. Thoughtful design lays the groundwork for everything that follows. By investing time and energy into these foundational components, you're not just preparing to launch a new school; you're creating a model that can inspire broader transformation across your public school system and beyond.

Once the core design of your microschool is in place, the real work begins: launching, learning, and sustaining. **Implementation is not a single event—it's a process of activating your design, responding to real-world conditions, and building the relationships and routines that make your vision come alive.** In this phase, leaders must balance urgency and patience: you're working toward transformation, but with the understanding that success will come through iteration, not perfection.

Microschools thrive when leaders create space for continuous learning, not just for students but also for educators, families, and the system itself. Implementation is your opportunity to test ideas, center the voices of those most affected, and develop the conditions for long-term success. From student enrollment to educator support, from early feedback loops to scaling strategy, this section equips you to move from startup to sustained impact with clarity, adaptability, and purpose.

Recruit and Enroll Students

Why It Matters

The enrollment category refers to how students register to attend your public microschool. This process involves several components, including:

- determining if you will serve students within a specific geographic boundary, across the full school system, or outside of your system
- aligning with your system's existing enrollment process and timeline
- finalizing the number of students you will serve
- clarifying any special population(s) you intend to enroll
- considering the transportation impacts of the above decisions
- marketing your public microschool

Careful planning will ensure that families are aware of this new option, have the necessary information to make an informed decision about whether to apply, and understand the process for doing so.

Guiding Questions

What is the enrollment process in your system?

- *What is its timeline? Are there any exceptions?*
- *What steps are required for a new-to-your-system student?*
- *What steps are required for a student transferring within your system?*
- *If more student enrollment exceeds available seats…*
    - *Can/will you hold a lottery?*
    - *Can/will you have a waitlist?*
- *What rules exist for intersystem enrollment?*

Can/will you show preference to special populations, siblings of students, or families of staff?

What is your recruitment plan (e.g., who you will target and what you will say)

Action Steps

Set enrollment goals. Microschools are intentionally small, and this is particularly true in their initial year. We recommend setting a goal for the number of students you will enroll, both a floor to ensure you recruit enough students for the school to launch, and a cap to prevent compromising the integrity of the microschool.

- The goal is to create a small learning community where relationships are at the heart of the experience. Research has shown that under 150 is a good number to aim for, but, as described earlier, as long as the space is intentionally designed to be small and facilitate building relationships, it can be larger.

Determine whether your school will be part of an existing school's enrollment or if you will enroll students separately. If you operate a school within a school, for example, the process you take to enroll students may be different than if you are launching a public microschool that is housed within a local business or in another separate facility.

Understand your system's enrollment timeline. We cannot overstate the importance of being clear on enrollment timelines, especially in your first year of operation. They will help you project plan effectively so you don't miss opportunities to engage families before it is too late for them to enroll, while you iron out other pieces of the school's design.

Understand the enrollment process and rules in your system. Developing an early understanding of these enrollment rules and requirements will ensure that these factors are integrated into your design and your recruitment strategy. Keep in mind that, as part of the public education system, most microschools cannot limit access based on student background or learning needs. Here are some areas to consider:

- Interdistrict enrollment: New schools often attract learners from other school districts and systems. Be clear on your state and system's rules regarding interdistrict enrollment to prepare your team to support interested families during recruitment.
- Transfer process: Determine whether students enrolling in your public microschool need to undergo a transfer process or can enroll directly. This knowledge will streamline the enrollment procedure and help manage family expectations.
- Student selection: If your school system uses a school choice mechanism, a lottery process may be necessary for student selection when the number of applications exceeds the available seats. This may also involve a waitlist. Familiarize yourself with how this lottery mechanism functions to manage timelines effectively and communicate clearly with all families involved.
- Preferential enrollment: Identify any existing rules that might prioritize specific student populations, such as family members of school staff, siblings of enrolled learners, or learners with particular needs. Ensure compliance with legal standards to avoid discriminatory practices.
- Geographic boundaries and open choice: Consider whether your microschool will serve students from a specific geographic area or offer open enrollment to students regardless of their location. This decision has implications for:
    - Transportation eligibility: Open choice schools may need to address transportation logistics, especially if students from multiple areas are eligible to attend. Determine if your system will provide transportation support and what impact this may have on enrollment choices.
    - Recruitment strategy: Geographic boundaries can influence your marketing and outreach strategies. Schools without boundaries may attract a broader demographic, while those with set boundaries might focus on community-specific needs and partnerships.

Note: If you are designing a school-with-a-school or similar model, you may not have to launch a system-wide enrollment process.

Update your school's enrollment details in the vision. You should regularly review your school vision to ensure it aligns with federal, state, and system regulations. If it doesn't, you will need to update your vision *or* possibly seek a workaround, if it is meaningful and feasible.

Ensure your school is included in your system's enrollment process. Communicate with the system's enrollment department to confirm that your new school is included in the enrollment process and verify that it appears as an option on the relevant enrollment platform.

Note: If you are operating a school-within-a-school, your enrollment process may differ from that of a standalone microschool with its own school code. Be clear on how students are enrolled so you can accurately communicate next steps to families.

In addition to enrollment, microschools must also be prepared to meet all relevant accountability and compliance requirements, including tracking attendance, administering safety drills, maintaining student records, and generating reports for submission to the governing entity. Early coordination with your system's operations and accountability teams is essential to ensure smooth implementation.

Plan a recruitment strategy, including steps, messaging, and timelines. Especially in your first year, you may be operating on a tight timeline, making it challenging to create a fully fleshed-out plan. Even so, it's smart to consider these three components so you (a) create a smooth process for families that meets your goals, (b) have your pitch ready when you begin to engage families, and (c) accomplish these things before the school year begins!

- *Steps: If your system already has a clear recruitment process, align with it while making adjustments to* how the microschool will function within the school system.
- *Messaging:* You can likely refer back to the documentation you've already created regarding the purpose of your school to craft a "pitch" that you'll use in media or conversations. Consider the following:
    - Audience (e.g., families, school counselors, learners, community groups)
    - School purpose
    - Tradeoffs (i.e., what the school will and will not provide students)
    - Ways to learn more
    - Application and enrollment process
- *Timelines:* Again, timing is everything. Be sure you work with system timelines for enrollment to map out your recruitment strategy before windows close. You want to ensure that families have ample time to learn about their options, including the microschool, and make decisions that feel right to them.

Tips and Examples

Be thoughtful about your enrollment goals for the short and long term. While it is likely to take time to enroll the "just right" number of learners, you should have a goal in mind that makes sense for your community, and that considers your school's goals, your budget (e.g., how many students you need to enroll to justify staff expenditure), space, programmatic constraints (e.g., do you need to cap enrollment because every student will

need a career-based internship?), and more.

The founder of a project-based microschool in Massachusetts told us that, in his experience, it is possible to enroll *too few* students. He said having at least 25 students ensures everyone finds friends and collaborators. It also helps to have a "critical mass" of learners to boost engagement so that students are pulled back into their projects if they become distracted or demotivated.

Consider partnerships to provide learners with access to extracurricular activities. Due to their size, microschools cannot independently offer many (or sometimes any) extracurricular activities, but they *can* partner with comprehensive public schools. This will take coordination and compromise, mainly on the part of the public microschool.

We've heard from our partners that there can be hiccups in this process. For instance, a team or club may have mid-day practice on their school's campus, which could interrupt the microschool's schedule and/or require transportation, depending on the location of both schools.

Learn what students and families value; use that to shape your recruitment strategy and messaging. To capture and hold people's interest, you will want to be sure you understand your community and what drives their decision-making.

PPHS initially attempted to recruit students by entering classes in their comprehensive high school and presenting their unique offerings. They quickly learned that students selected schools based on their offerings (e.g., clubs, sports) *even if they didn't participate in them*. Their microschool did not seem compelling because their offerings were few. This led them to adjust their strategy. They started to recruit from within the middle school instead of the high school, explaining the differences between students' options and being candid that the smaller setting would not offer the same programs, but would offer something different. Being clear about tradeoffs helped.

Consider offering tours to families. People want to *see* their school options. You may need to be creative about how to do this if you're recruiting students while also securing a facility. You might create a virtual tour that focuses less on the facility and more on a "day in the life." You might also host virtual and/or live Q&A sessions with the teacher(s) so that families can build relationships and get a sense of the school's culture. Another idea is to have your teacher(s) host an immersive recruitment event that showcases a part of the school's innovative model through a hands-on session, such as a design sprint, if the school is focused on project-based learning anchored in design thinking.

Make enrollment clear and straightforward. An easy way to lose a potential student is if the enrollment process is complex or unclear. Regardless of what information is shared publicly, you can compile and disseminate information on your own. You can also set up

events where you help parents enroll students in person.

At a public microschool in Tulsa, parents enrolled through the Tulsa Public Schools Enrollment System. While this occurred online, the school set up a table at their site to provide tours to parents and support them in enrolling their children.

Opportunity and Access

Transparent and inclusive enrollment processes are crucial for ensuring that all families, not just the most informed or connected, have a genuine opportunity to consider and access your microschool. While school system leaders may assume that families are familiar with enrollment processes, the reality is that timelines and requirements can be confusing or entirely unfamiliar, particularly for families new to the public school system or exploring alternative educational models. To create broader access, publicize timelines and steps alongside your recruitment materials, and ensure that information is clear, straightforward, and available in multiple languages where needed. Go beyond digital outreach by offering in-person enrollment support, especially for families with limited internet access or those who speak a language other than English. Host school tours and information sessions at varied times, including evenings and weekends, to accommodate working caregivers. Finally, be intentional about reaching out to underrepresented communities so that no single population dominates your applicant pool. When enrollment is thoughtfully designed, it invites broader participation and helps ensure that the microschool reflects the needs of the wider community.

Establish a Strong Culture and Launch Experience

Why It Matters

The first days and weeks of a microschool set the tone for everything that follows. In small, relationship-driven environments, culture isn't just important—it is the operating system. A well-designed launch experience helps students and staff internalize the microschool's purpose, build trust and a sense of belonging, and co-create the norms, rituals, and relationships that define the learning community.

For public microschools, a strong launch is also an opportunity to differentiate the experience from traditional schooling in ways that learners and families immediately feel. Whether your microschool emphasizes project-based learning, advisory structures, or real-world experiences, your launch experience should reflect that vision. Done well, it reinforces many of the benefits described throughout this guide—personalized learning, empowered educators, strong community integration, and meaningful student voice.

Guiding Questions

How will the first days and weeks of school reinforce your microschool's mission and learning model?
What do you want students and staff to feel, believe, and understand by the end of Week 1?
How can you intentionally build trust, belonging, and psychological safety?
What rituals, routines, and community agreements will shape your culture?
How will you engage families and community partners during the launch?
What aspects of your learning model should students immediately experience (e.g., projects, advisory, off-site learning)?
How will you gather early feedback to assess and iterate on the launch experience?

Action Steps

Design your launch intentionally. Create a multi-day experience that immerses students in your microschool's values, structures, and learning model.

Center relationships from day one. Build time for community-building, storytelling, and advisory, so learners feel seen, known, and supported.

Model your instructional approach. Use early projects, fieldwork, or inquiry-based activities to introduce students to how learning works here.

Co-create culture with students. Establish community agreements, shared expectations, and daily rituals together, rather than enforcing pre-set rules.

Engage families and partners. Host a launch event or welcome night to introduce your microschool's vision and connect families to the work.

Build your own team culture. Set aside time for staff to reflect, collaborate, and celebrate during the launch period. It's foundational for retention and coherence.

Tips and Examples

- Many microschools launch with a "founding week" or orientation retreat, where

students co-design community norms, begin their first interdisciplinary project, and engage in outdoor or off-site team-building activities.

- Consider starting the year with a shared question, such as "What is a good life?" or "What does it mean to belong?" to set a reflective tone and anchor future learning.
- Leverage student voice in launch planning. Invite founding students to help design activities or lead parts of the orientation.
- Use visuals, storytelling, and artifacts to make the invisible visible. Post your vision, highlight your learning model, and name what makes your school different.
- Revisit your vision and community agreements regularly, especially during the first 30 days, to ensure alignment and continuity.

Opportunity and Access

The launch experience sets the tone for students and families. Deliberately crafting a school culture that welcomes and values every student and family ensures that each member of the community feels included and valued from the outset. It's crucial to be clear when the microschool's calendar or daily schedule differs from traditional norms. Families need to understand how and when the school year begins, as well as what supports will be in place for students who join mid-year or outside of the initial cohort. A well-supported launch helps all learners feel a sense of belonging and clarity from the very beginning. It's also essential to document your approach and reflect on what worked. Creating a thoughtful, repeatable launch model will allow your staff and other microschools to benefit from what you've learned, ultimately increasing access to strong, learner-centered beginnings systemwide.

Support Educators and Ongoing Professional Learning

Why It Matters

The success of a microschool depends heavily on the people leading learning every day. Educators in microschools take on a wide range of responsibilities. For example, they design learning experiences, build deep relationships with students and families, solve problems on the fly, and often lead school operations as well. Because of this environment's unique demands and opportunities, professional learning must be intentional, embedded, and aligned with the school's core values and instructional model.

Launching a new microschool also presents an opportunity to approach professional learning in a different way. Instead of traditional top-down professional development, microschools can foster cultures of inquiry, reflection, and collaboration. By investing in educator development from the start—and sustaining it through clear routines, coaching

structures, and community support—you can ensure your teams grow alongside the learners they serve. A robust professional learning system enables microschools to fulfill their promise of innovation, opportunity, and teacher empowerment.

Guiding Questions

What knowledge, skills, and mindsets do educators need to thrive in your microschool?
How will you onboard staff in a way that builds alignment to the vision, learning model, and culture?
What ongoing structures will support professional growth (e.g., coaching, collaboration time, peer observation)?
How will you model the kind of learning experiences you want educators to create for students?
What role will educators play in shaping and refining the microschool's design over time?
How can professional learning reinforce learner-centered practices?

Action Steps

Launch with a clear learning plan. Design and deliver a robust onboarding experience that introduces educators to your microschool's vision, instructional model, and community values.

Establish regular collaboration time. Protect time each week for team planning, reflection, and shared problem-solving.

Build a coaching structure. Identify who will provide instructional support, feedback, and mentorship—internally or through partnerships.

Model learner-centered practices. Use professional learning time to demonstrate the same principles of inquiry, agency, and reflection you want to see in the classroom.

Foster peer learning. Create opportunities for educators to observe one another, co-teach, and lead workshops that leverage their individual strengths.

Continuously align learning to your vision. Revisit your purpose and learning model regularly as a team to ensure that practice aligns with intent.

Tips and Examples

- Some school systems offer cross-school coaching support for new microschools through innovation or instructional leadership teams.
- A "microschool educator handbook" or onboarding guide can provide grounding and clarity without the need for more formal system structures.
- Consider peer-led professional learning days, where educators share strategies, tools, and learning, can build ownership and community.
- Many successful microschools start with a multi-day summer institute or retreat to align, build relationships, and co-develop systems before the school year begins.
- Look to local partners, such as higher education institutions, educational networks, and nonprofits like Learner-Centered Collaborative, Transcend, and the Getting Smart Collective, to provide additional coaching or content-specific training.
- Explore resources such as learner-centered strategies and online courses that educators can access to personalize their own learning.

Opportunity and Access

Smaller microschools often operate with leaner teams, which makes it especially important to invest in thoughtful, sustainable professional learning. This is particularly important in models that serve learners with a range of learning differences and needs or in models that offer a departure from conventional teaching and learning practices. Sustaining educator growth is crucial to maintaining a positive student experience. Microschools can offer educators unique opportunities to grow professionally through piloting new instructional approaches or taking on distributive leadership roles. System leaders can use microschools to develop new educator pathways. Clarify how your professional learning model aligns with district or system-wide evaluation and HR processes, and make sure teachers understand how their growth will be supported. If your microschool shares space or staff with another program, it is even more crucial to safeguard dedicated time for professional learning that reflects the unique goals, roles, and instructional vision of your microschool.

Lead for Continuous Improvement and R&D

Why It Matters

Public microschools are more than an opportunity to serve learners differently; they are an opportunity to learn differently as a system. Due to their small scale, flexibility, and autonomy, microschools are ideal places for exploring and refining new approaches to

teaching, learning, and school design. When leaders treat microschools as living R&D spaces, they not only improve student outcomes within the school but also generate insights that can inform practice and policy across the public school system.

Some microschools generate insights that lead to practices other schools can adopt, while others evolve into entirely new models designed to serve distinct student populations. These models improve through rapid feedback from students, families, and educators within them—an advantage greatly enhanced by the microschool's small size and agility. While some lessons may strengthen broader system practices or inspire replication, others are best left intact, as tailored solutions that wouldn't translate effectively within traditional structures. Each of these outcomes offers meaningful value to public education.

Continuous improvement is not a one-time check-in; it is an ongoing process. It is a mindset and a habit. It means listening deeply to learners, families, and educators; using data to surface what's working and what isn't; and making intentional changes in response. By embracing cycles of reflection, iteration, and documentation, microschool teams can sharpen their own model and contribute to broader system transformation. This work helps fulfill the promise of public microschools as engines of innovation and future readiness.

Guiding Questions

How will you regularly gather feedback from students, educators, and families?
What early indicators will help you understand whether the microschool is meeting its goals?
What tools or frameworks (e.g., design cycles, improvement science) will guide your process?
How will you document your insights, adaptations, and lessons learned?
How might your findings inform the broader system strategy or spark additional innovation?
How will you determine whether an innovation is best scaled, replicated, or sustained as a standalone model?

Action Steps

Adopt an R&D mindset. Frame the microschool as a space for learning, not just for students, but for the system.

Design your feedback loops. Develop lightweight systems for collecting qualitative and quantitative feedback from students, staff, and families continuously.

Use data to drive iteration. Identify key metrics (e.g., learner engagement, growth, belonging) and analyze them regularly with your team.

Build structured reflection into your calendar. Set aside regular time for team reflection and rapid design cycles. Don't wait for quarterly reviews.

Prototype and test new ideas. Treat new structures, lessons, or schedules as experiments; try them, gather feedback, and refine.

Document your learning. Capture what you're trying, what you're learning, and what's changing. This becomes the foundation for scaling and sharing.

Tips and Examples

- Use short, iterative cycles to test changes and gather quick feedback from students and staff.
- Consider using a digital tool or shared document to capture real-time team observations, challenges, and wins.
- Partner with a local university, research organization, or nonprofit to support your inquiry cycles or external documentation.
- Host end-of-quarter reflection sessions with students and staff where they analyze their own experiences and contribute ideas for improvement.
- Align your R&D efforts to system innovation goals so your microschool serves as a proving ground for future system shifts.

Opportunity and Access

Microschools offer a unique opportunity to learn what's working for students, families, and educators, but collecting feedback must be done with care. Be mindful of data collection fatigue and focus on gathering insights that are both meaningful and actionable. Consider whose voices might be missing, and design your improvement practices to elevate feedback from students and families who have traditionally been underrepresented in decision-making processes. The findings you gather shouldn't stay within the microschool. Sharing what you learn across the district or system can build

broader momentum, strengthen future school design efforts, and ensure more learners ultimately benefit from what's working.

Scale and Sustain the Model

Why It Matters

Microschools are designed to be small, but their impact doesn't have to be. When designed and supported thoughtfully, a microschool can be both a powerful learning environment and a driver of broader system transformation. But scale doesn't always mean replicating a single design. In some cases, the microschool itself may remain intentionally small, serving a specific student population or local context while influencing the system through practices it pioneers or the evidence it provides. In other cases, a successful design may be adapted and replicated in new settings.

Importantly, some microschool models may deliver the most value by remaining unique to their context. Their practices may not be transferable to other schools in the system, but their success can still offer powerful evidence that different approaches are possible.

Systems may also choose to scale microschooling as an innovation strategy—expanding the number of small, agile learning environments, but not necessarily the models themselves. The right path will depend on student needs, community priorities, and system goals. Sustainability means planning for that future from the start: building the capacity, funding, and policy conditions needed for microschools to endure and thrive. It also means documenting and sharing what you learn so others can adapt, build on, or be inspired by your work.

Guiding Questions

What does success look like after year one? After year five?
What is your vision for scale: replication, adaptation, or system influence?
What resources, structures, or supports will be necessary to sustain the microschool in the long term?
How will you build internal capacity to lead, staff, and support future microschool growth?
What role can documentation and storytelling play in enabling scale?
What system-level or policy conditions need to shift to support long-term growth?

Action Steps

Define what you mean by "scale." Clarify whether you're growing enrollment, launching new sites, influencing practice, or something else.

Build a sustainability plan. Identify your long-term funding sources, staffing models, and governance structures to ensure ongoing viability.

Develop internal capacity. Train staff, codify systems, and create tools that make your microschool model replicable.

Document your model. Capture design principles, implementation practices, and lessons learned in a playbook or toolkit others can use.

Measure and share impact. Communicate outcomes clearly to stakeholders, funders, and system leaders to build support.

Create a scale strategy. Identify timelines, decision points, and key milestones for potential expansion, and revisit them regularly.

Tips and Examples

- Some public school systems create a dedicated innovation or portfolio team to support the launch and growth of microschools over time.

- Microschools that influence systemwide professional learning, scheduling, or assessment policies are examples of *scaling by diffusion*, not just replication.
- Codify your model while staying flexible. Anchor your work in values and design principles rather than fixed formats.
- Engage students and staff in sustainability planning; their insights often surface challenges and ideas that leaders may miss.
- Consider external partnerships, such as foundations and research organizations, to support growth and capture evidence of impact.

Opportunity and Access

As microschools grow or replicate, it is essential to approach expansion with clarity and care. Scaling too quickly can strain resources or dilute the culture that made the original model successful. Be honest about tradeoffs. Growth should be anchored in opportunity to ensure that new microschools serve a broad range of learners and that access isn't limited to those who happened to enroll early. Just as importantly, systems must protect space for continued learning and iteration. Each new microschool should deepen the collective understanding of what is possible, rather than simply replicating what has already been done. Sustained innovation requires room to adapt. Growth should never come at the expense of learning and iteration.

🎯 Build for Long-Term Financial Sustainability

Why It Matters

A successful launch is only the beginning. To truly fulfill their promise, public microschools must be designed with long-term sustainability in mind. While early grants or special funds may support startup costs, those resources often expire. The real challenge is ensuring your microschool can thrive on available public dollars, operate leanly, and adapt as needs evolve.

Financial sustainability doesn't always mean scaling up. It means planning wisely so the model is viable, adaptable, and not dependent on unpredictable resources. That includes designing for a manageable cost structure, anticipating fluctuations in enrollment or funding, and being clear-eyed about essential expenses. Long-term viability also supports credibility with system leaders, funders, and families, ensuring your microschool is not seen as a temporary but as a lasting part of the public education landscape.

Guiding Questions

Can your microschool operate within your state's per-pupil funding allocation over time?
What recurring costs (e.g., staffing, facilities, tech) need to be sustained—and how?
What operational costs can be reduced or shared with other schools, partners, or the school system?
How will your microschool adjust to enrollment fluctuations or shifting budgets?
What assumptions are baked into your financial model—and what would happen if they changed?
How does your sustainability strategy support (or limit) future replication or scaling?

Action Steps

Map your recurring expenses. Identify which costs will persist beyond the first year and how they will be covered in the long term.

Design for lean operations. Make deliberate choices to minimize overhead, such as utilizing shared facilities, employing flexible staffing, and leveraging technology effectively.

Plan for enrollment-based funding. Use conservative projections and monitor student numbers to align with revenue realities.

Leverage shared services. Collaborate with your school system or partners to access infrastructure, such as IT, HR, or transportation, at a reduced cost.

Monitor cost vs. value. Continually assess whether your spending aligns with your microschool's impact and intended outcomes.

Document your financial model. Create a simple multi-year projection that shows how the microschool will remain viable on public funds.

Tips and Examples

- Some school systems use a shared staffing model where specialized roles (e.g., counselor, SPED coordinator) support multiple microschools to reduce costs.

- A microschool that co-locates within a larger school building may avoid facility and maintenance costs entirely, allowing more funds to go directly to learning.
- A microschool could design its initial staffing around flexible part-time roles, helping it stay under budget while still delivering personalized instruction.
- As part of a sustainability strategy, a microschool could negotiate an in-kind contribution from a local business to cover student transportation costs during internships.

Opportunity and Access

Planning for the sustainable use of public dollars is essential. Long-term financial planning ensures that the opportunity to participate remains stable and accessible as the model grows and evolves, and that staff capacity and learner support remain a priority. By building a financially resilient model, system leaders ensure that their microschools remain a viable and reliable option for the long term, rather than a short-lived innovation available only to a select few.

Strengthen Community and Ecosystem Partnerships

Why It Matters

Microschools thrive when they are deeply rooted in the communities they serve. Whether located in a neighborhood library, partnering with a local business, or engaging families in school design, public microschools are most powerful when they act as part of a broader learning ecosystem. These partnerships enrich student experiences and help microschools access vital resources, expertise, and support systems that public school systems can't provide alone.

From internships to mental health support, funding, and communications, community partners can play a variety of roles in sustaining and growing your microschool. Engaging external partners also reinforces one of the key value propositions of public microschools: that learning can extend beyond the school building and draw strength from the assets of the surrounding community. Strategic partnership-building strengthens sustainability, enhances real-world relevance, and ensures your microschool remains connected, collaborative, and resilient.

Guiding Questions

What local organizations, institutions, or individuals could enhance your microschool's learning experience?
How can families and community members contribute meaningfully, not just as participants but as co-creators? What supports or services do students need that could be provided through a partnership (e.g., wellness, mentoring, transportation)?
How might community partnerships align with your microschool's theme, focus, or learning model?
What systems will you use to initiate, manage, and sustain partnerships over time?
How can you ensure partnerships are reciprocal and mission-aligned?

Action Steps

Map your ecosystem. Identify local partners—cultural institutions, nonprofits, higher ed, businesses, government agencies—aligned with your microschool's vision.

Build a shared purpose. Engage partners early in conversations about your goals and values to ensure alignment.

Create clear roles. Define what each partner will contribute and how the collaboration will operate (e.g., formal MOU, informal support, advisory roles).

Establish communication routines. Set regular check-ins, feedback loops, and shared planning opportunities to strengthen coordination.

Leverage partnerships for student learning. Design authentic learning experiences (e.g., internships, fieldwork, mentoring) that connect learners to the community.

Elevate family partnership. Treat families as collaborators in shaping the microschool's culture, supports, and future direction.

Tips and Examples

- Partner with a local parks department to co-design outdoor learning projects and host student exhibitions.

- Consider recruiting a local college to offer dual-enrollment opportunities and provide mentoring in STEM fields.
- Invite a health clinic to embed mental health services and wellness programming for students and staff.
- Establishing a community advisory board can help formalize relationships and provide consistent input into the development of microschools.
- Consider rotating "community days" where partners visit, co-lead sessions, or showcase opportunities for students.

Opportunity and Access

Partnerships can enhance the microschool experience by providing real-world learning opportunities, mentorship, and access to local expertise and resources. These opportunities should be available to all students, not just those with existing networks or resources. As you evaluate potential partnerships, stay grounded in your microschool's mission and be mindful of arrangements that could pull focus or place additional strain on staff. Building trust with community partners takes time, but strong relationships can lead to long-term sustainability and greater impact. When designed with care, partnerships can expand access to meaningful learning and strengthen the microschool's connection to its community.

Conclusion: Public Microschools Offer A Promising Path Forward

Together, the strategies in this playbook form a practical roadmap for launching public microschools with purpose, clarity, and community at the center. While each design element stands on its own, they are most powerful when approached as a connected process that honors your microschool's unique vision and contributes to a broader transformation in how public schools can serve students.

Public microschools offer a powerful way forward—not as a departure from public education, but as a way to reimagine it from within. At a time when traditional structures are struggling to meet the moment, microschools provide public school systems with the freedom and flexibility to design learning environments that are personalized, purposeful, and deeply connected to their communities.

Public microschools are not about serving a select few; they are about serving everyone. When designed with intention, they expand opportunity by centering the learner experience, empowering educators, and aligning education with the realities of today's world. They create space for relevance, agency, belonging, and innovation. While public microschools are intentionally small, their reach can extend across the system. Microschools demonstrate what's possible when public education systems are trusted with the freedom to innovate and supported in doing so with care and integrity. The promise of public microschools lies not only in the powerful experiences they create for students and educators but in their ability to catalyze broader transformation across the system.

Change won't happen overnight, but each microschool launched is a step toward a more modern, learner-centered future. The future is already being built. Let's meet it with creativity, clarity, and a deep commitment to every learner.

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To the reader, thank you for your commitment to reimagining what's possible. We invite you to keep learning, keep sharing, and stay connected as part of a growing community dedicated to empowering students and transforming systems.

View the Digital Resource

While you're there, be sure to sign up for our Public Microschool Playbook alerts.

Access the Workbook

Ready to get started with your design team? Scan here to access a digital version of the Playbook. You can copy and customize it as a working document to guide your planning through the key questions and action steps.

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