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## **Absolute Priority 2 - Improving Charter School Access to Facilities and Facility Financing**

Breakthrough Schools, a charter management organization in Cleveland, Ohio, knows from experience the burdens facing charter schools trying to identify, access, and finance adequate facilities. The U.S. Department of Education, numerous states, communities, parents, and certain city governments all recognize the place of charter schools in improving the nation's educational system. Yet, the laws on charter schools leave them largely on their own to find appropriate buildings and then assemble financing to convert them into safe and suitable spaces for 21st century learning. There is a patchwork of support that charter schools can cobble together, including (often low amounts of) public revenue, public grant programs, tax incentives like New Market Tax Credits, low interest financing through bonds or other programs, and private-sector philanthropy, in addition to working within innovative facilities plans to minimize expenses. Successfully navigating such a system requires capacity and expertise that may elude new charter schools. Breakthrough Schools hopes to provide resources and support in this area.

If awarded funding through "Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Program- National Dissemination Grants," Breakthrough Schools (Breakthrough) will work to improve the quality and accessibility of information for charter schools trying to navigate a complicated facilities landscape. By the end of the grant period, we will have produced and distributed (1) a series of open access digital and written materials on various charter school facilities topics, (2) conference presentations and panels to be presented over two years at national meetings of charter schools, and (3) a conference held at the Breakthrough headquarters targeted to newer charter school operators.

The content for the materials, conference presentations, and our own conference will be culled from Breakthrough's own experiences acquiring and renovating buildings as part of our growth and expansion plan. Since forming in 2010, Breakthrough has supported an aggressive

growth plan targeting Cleveland neighborhoods most lacking in quality public school seats. To carry out this plan, we have actively identified and redeveloped retired school buildings and industrial spaces. We have succeeded in rental and co-location negotiations with our local public school district and also landlords of privately owned buildings. We have pulled together funding packages including some combination of philanthropy, low interest loans, public grants from the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission, and New Market Tax Credits. We have self-assessed and learned from experience, continue to build capacity, use data to serve target populations, decrease costs, and select the right properties that can adjust as school or network needs adjust.

We expect work on this grant to occur over three years. In the initial six months we will create the Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce, codify existing processes and practices related to facilities, and also solidify the dissemination plan set forth in this application. In the next phase of the project, we will create and release the materials, to be freely accessible on our website and shared with charter schools in various ways, including conferences and peer mentoring, as requested. In the final year of the grant, we will host a conference on our site geared to new or newly expanding charter schools and networks.

### **Applicant Background**

Breakthrough Schools is a nonprofit charter management organization (CMO) operating a network of 11 high-quality K-8 public charter schools serving 3,500 students in Cleveland, Ohio. The student population is 98% minority and over 80% low-income. The network also includes a fundraising and advocacy arm, Friends of Breakthrough Schools, which is a 501c3 nonprofit organization as well.

Like most other large urban areas in the deindustrializing north, Cleveland faces enormous challenges delivering education effectively to the city's young people, in large

measure due to the effects of poverty. The poverty rate in the Cleveland neighborhoods we serve is 45%, more than double the national childhood poverty rate (21%). Median household income in Cleveland was only \$26,150 in 2016.<sup>i</sup> Commonly, parents face joblessness or underemployment, and opportunities are limited by the low educational attainment in the city. Only 16% of Clevelanders aged 25 and above have a Bachelor's degree or higher, and nearly 22% never completed high school. The literature finds that one generation's poor experience at school can get passed to the next, through attitudes, difficulty modeling study habits, less reading at home, and the like.<sup>ii</sup> The tremendous traumas of poverty also impact Cleveland schools, as does a long legacy of racial disadvantage still observed in the economy and society today.

In response to the public school district's struggles to confront these challenges, a number of charter schools began to emerge in the 1990s after the state of Ohio passed a charter school law. By 2010, three of the highest performing stand-alone charter schools in the city decided to collaborate and form Breakthrough Schools, in order to operate more efficiently, plan for growth, and create access to better educational options in neighborhoods under-served by the public school district. Breakthrough became a network of school models, with the three founding schools each becoming flagship schools that have since been replicated multiple times. Today, our three distinct school models all share a commitment to academic results and whole child development but fulfill that commitment through different sorts of pedagogical approaches and school cultures. The models are the Preparatory Model, the Citizens Model, and the Citizens Leadership Model. Descriptions of our education models can be found in Appendix B.

Since inception, Breakthrough has outperformed the state's "Big 8" public school districts serving student populations most like ours. The Ohio Department of Education issues School Report Cards each year as objective barometers of how well schools serve students on a

variety of measures, including academic performance. Last year, Breakthrough's Performance Index score, capturing student performance in math, reading, and other core subjects, was 13.7 points higher than the eight largest districts in Ohio.<sup>iii</sup> Each year, 80% or more of our eighth grade students advance to the highest performing high schools in the area, and our initial research into college-going is encouraging. An internal report found that nearly 71% of our very first student cohort enrolled in college, and 31% graduated in four years- three times higher than the six year college completion rate of local district students, which is 11%.<sup>iv</sup> Breakthrough recently initiated its Alumni Relations department in order to develop alumni support programming to boost college attainment even further.

Breakthrough has had success on the programmatic side, educating students and preparing them for success in life, but much of that would be impossible without the physical space to open new schools to serve children and families and without structures to responsibly finance network growth. The project proposed in this application intends to outline and disseminate the success, best practices, and lessons learned in the area of charter school facilities.

### **Introduction to Project**

Our project, entitled **Breakthrough Facilities Resources and Dissemination (BFRND)**, intends to codify Breakthrough's facilities practices and prepare a series of written and electronic materials for open dissemination to charter schools, charter school networks, traditional school districts, and policy makers. If awarded, key members of our leadership team as well as board representatives will form the Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce (from here referred to as the Taskforce) to carry out the project.

Breakthrough has over eight years of experience as a CMO, and another eleven years of experience from the flagship schools that were formed as far back as 1999. Due to expense and a

lack of equitable per pupil facilities funding, we are unable to build new and must operate within the constraints of the available facilities market when we are looking to open a new school. Historically, our schools have been located in renovated warehouses, closed school buildings, and places of worship. Our facilities approach has combined public funding, philanthropic support, subsidies like New Market Tax Credits, helping to draft state legislation to create a facilities fund for high-quality charters and subsequently accessing competitive grants from that fund, and a formalized partnership with the local public school district.

While only 8% of charter schools in Ohio have been able to access district facilities, and less than 10% of Ohio's charter schools are able to generate philanthropic dollars for capital projects<sup>v</sup>, our track record is one of considerable success. To date, we have accomplished the following:

- Over \$26 million in philanthropy raised for facilities
- \$6.5 million secured from state or federal grant programs for facilities
- \$2.5 million low interest facilities loan from the Charter School Growth Fund
- Facilities financing structures, receiving over \$7.3 million in New Market Tax Credits
- 1 building purchased below market rate from a private-sector owner
- 5 school buildings purchased at fair market value from the Cleveland school district
- 1 building leased at or below market rates from the public school district
- 2 buildings leased at or below market rates from private-sector owners
- 2 co-locations with the public school district
- Renovation of non-traditional spaces such as a former factory and closed hospital

The experiences, best practices, and lessons learned that are reflected in this track record are what we seek to share through BFRND and are explained in the Experience and Historical Context section below.

After the Taskforce has codified Breakthrough's practices and collective wisdom in various content areas, we will begin to prepare written materials and videos for dissemination. All of the materials will be freely available online, and Breakthrough will publicize titles via social media platforms and in opinion-editorials in trade publications. Breakthrough will also widely publicize the availability of this information through email blasts and newsletters.

Beyond the series of titles, Breakthrough also plans to make facilities a focus of conference participation. The leadership team, as they attend national conferences and meetings, will prepare panels or talks on different topics to be adapted to audience, and offer to follow up with any charter school operators seeking more assistance or advice. Through these activities, an objective of BFRND is to work with 30 charter schools or networks. This objective does not include schools and networks that will access the open materials online, which could range from hundreds to thousands.

Finally, in order to enable or increase the capacity of the newer or least established charter school operators, Breakthrough plans to organize a conference or meeting at our Cleveland headquarters meant to introduce facilities and facilities financing in a more intimate setting. We will begin planning for this event in Year 2 by assessing interest, determining size of the conference with a maximum of 30 participants, and tailoring content to attendees and their needs.

## **Our Experience and Historical Context**

*Funding School Buildings.* The way we finance new school facilities has been mostly stable throughout the years. The state of Ohio offers a facilities allowance that is currently \$200 per pupil (or \$558 less than the average charter school in Ohio spends per pupil on facilities<sup>vi</sup>), and this subsidizes a small portion of our facilities costs. Breakthrough's facilities cost per child is about \$800. This is also significantly less than what traditional school districts receive in public dollars to build new facilities.

With dedicated staffing capacity, Friends of Breakthrough has a team of nine staff members responsible for (1) identifying and accessing public resources for charter schools, (2) researching and cultivating major gift, foundation, and corporate donors, and (3) participating in advocacy networks that inform policymakers and expand organizational credibility as a leader in the charter school space.

The main financial instruments we have used include:

- Seven New Market Tax Credit projects totaling \$30,500,000, of which Breakthrough received over \$7.3 million in reimbursement
- Helped to draft legislation in Ohio that created a facilities fund for high-quality charter schools. Three Breakthrough schools subsequently accessed a combined \$6.5 million in competitive grants through this fund.
- In becoming part of the Charter School Growth Fund portfolio in 2011, receiving a \$2.5 million low-interest loan that has since been repaid.
- Ongoing capital fundraising through corporate and private foundations, as well as gifts from individuals and successful fundraising events. This strategy has

cultivated four generous donors who contributed a combined \$6 million for naming rights to four Breakthrough school buildings.

*Facilities Planning and Property Selection.* Our approach to property selection has evolved over the years as available facilities, partnerships with the local school district, and relationships with the local community have shifted. Increasingly, we are incorporating market analysis into the building selection process and are beginning to use demographic data to inform school building selection and planned renovations.

In our earliest days, we faced a superintendent that did not yet embrace collaboration with charter schools. Even though Ohio law offered the right of first refusal to charter schools and Breakthrough should have been permitted access, barriers remained; oftentimes, district buildings were demolished before there was a chance for potential buyers to visit. By necessity, we concentrated in the commercial real estate market and typically accepted any building we could find, largely non-school buildings that would need substantial conversion for school use. One of these was a former elevator manufacturer, with a landlord initially hesitant to lease to a school. With persistence and time invested in the relationship, he was able to embrace our schools and invited us to rent the space, in addition to fronting millions of dollars for renovations paid back as a portion of the rent and eventually a lump sum. He also bent on his desired ten year lease, and gave us a year-to-year exit clause allowing us to reduce the financial risk of starting a charter school.

The hiring of a new CEO of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) in 2011 opened district school buildings to us. Breakthrough was able to develop a collaborative relationship with the new superintendent, who made good on Ohio's right of first refusal law; Breakthrough purchased four closed school buildings from the district, and CMSD was also

willing to rent one school building at a significant discount. We also co-located two of our schools inside district buildings, sharing the space. Breakthrough has also since purchased a fifth school building. When possible, CMSD buildings are a key plank in our facilities decision-making, but district buildings are not always available or suitable in the moment we need them in our target neighborhoods. One of our most recent projects was in a district school building that had been purchased and repurposed by a private owner.

In our two most recent development projects, we have begun to use market research supplied by an external study commissioned by two of the city's major grantmaking foundations to identify neighborhoods in greatest demand of quality school seats. We adopted those neighborhoods as our priority areas. In a 2015 school development, due to the market study, we passed on a pristine Catholic school building as it was in a middle income neighborhood with high-quality seats already available. Though the opportunity would have provided significant cost savings in terms of minimal architectural and construction expense, the location did not align with our mission and allow us to serve the Cleveland population most in-need.

We are continuing to build additional market research and feasibility studies into our planning processes to better inform whether a high demand neighborhood can support a school. We envision that data can also help us narrow facilities choices and architectural plans, as we gain capacity to better predict student and community needs in each school building. Increasingly, our schools serve parents as well as students, as when we form partnerships to develop job training programs or targeted service delivery by school location. Schools in neighborhoods likely to have greater demand for such services may require different configurations of space, and this is only predictable by assessing neighborhood data in advance of selecting and renovating buildings.

We have also begun to prioritize buildings that can support two of our own schools on the same property, or locating a preschool on our campus. This is because a preschool can feed a band of kindergarten, and an elementary school can feed our middle school. In that way, co-locating two charter schools or a preschool and a charter elementary school is a strategy to assist with network enrollment and makes perfect sense operationally. Co-location with the district can stabilize charter schools, but we are also beginning to see that charter schools can stabilize each other by providing full grade continuums.

### **Selection Criteria A - Project Significance**

#### *A.1. Potential for generalizing from the findings and results*

We believe the strength of Breakthrough's proposal is that we come to questions of best practice as practitioners. We imagine at least some of the applicants will be national in scope and capable of preparing studies that are aimed at aggregating data from all states that allow charter schools by law. While such information is extraordinarily valuable, we believe the charter sector's information needs are broader and that the practitioner voice adds something unique. In every area, the mix of factors is the same: facilitative laws, public grants or funding, philanthropy, financing, buildings, and lease or purchase terms. Having our feet on the ground, we know that trying to apply the aggregated knowledge on those factors raises challenges; in reality, charter school operators are forced to confront the limits to best practices on the ground.

By definition, practice happens within place. There are many limits specific to place and even time, i.e. buildings available at a given time, local opinion or acceptance of charter schools, variable laws making it easier or harder for charter schools to access financing, and the list goes on. Here in Cleveland, our reality is shaped by the fact that we operate in a city with significant economic distress and population loss, blight in neighborhoods, abandoned buildings, older

building stock, state laws moderately supportive of charter school development, a dire need for high-quality seats in grades K-8,<sup>vii</sup> and a municipal education plan that considers charter schools part of its school portfolio. Other regions face more or less difficult constraints, that could mean anything from almost no real estate vacancy, overt hostility from traditional districts, and no facilities funding, to operating next to municipalities that freely give buildings, receive state facilities aid amounting to over \$1,000 per pupil, and are eligible for revolving loan funds run by the state to perpetuate facilities financing.

While it may seem like a practitioner with experience in one region may have few generalizations to offer, we believe the contrary. The generalization is that everyone in the charter movement will come against place-specific constraints, and making use of best practices requires interpretations rooted in local awareness and experience.

Partnerships and relationships have been our main solution to the limits posed by our facilities environment. To navigate the particularities posed by place, we have assembled a wide network of supporters to deliver the knowledge and resources that we would otherwise lack. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers recommends that the ideal charter school board includes between 11 and 15 members. Our average school model board has 13 members, and the Breakthrough CMO board calls for 11 members. In addition, Friends of Breakthrough Schools (FOB), the fundraising and advocacy arm of the organization, has a board of 47 members and is growing. Through the FOB board, the Breakthrough network has the ability to increase resource development capacity significantly beyond what would be possible with a board selected primarily for education management and school oversight abilities.

Across our network, board members with real estate, construction, and finance expertise have engaged actively in facilities assessment and acquisition for new schools over the years.

Examples of this include board members arranging for network leaders to view available suitable properties, helping to estimate fair costs, assessing construction plans, or assembling tax packages that ultimately discount sales price. Board members have also permitted extensive relationship building with the city's business and civic leadership, and have amplified access to major philanthropic gifts for facilities as well as operations.

A general lesson, then, is for charter school operators to build boards or other sorts of active advisory roles that cull local expertise in facilities. Each and every one of our school buildings has a relationship figuring prominently in the story of how it was acquired, leased, or renovated. Such a lesson applies to all charter school operators looking to expand, but especially to new operators or out-of-state operators trying to enter new markets. Opportunities and challenges will necessarily vary from place to place. The best practices and ideal practices are guidelines and aspirations for most charter school operators, and they will necessarily take on their own life in particular space and time. That is why we wish for our materials to lay out best practices but also describe how we tried to troubleshoot, learn from experience, and mobilize a strong base of supporters. Navigating place depends on that.

The practitioner view also predisposes a longitudinal view that might be missed in overview or aggregated studies not focused on the particularities of case. Our experience over the years is that the environment for charter school facilities is an ever moving target. Short of a standardized public program that fully funds charter school facilities costs, charter schools will be navigating a market shaped by a mix of public and private opportunities. Our experience and awareness is that the laws, customs, and public and private opportunities are not stable. Public funds for charter school facilities might be earmarked one year but not the next. A private foundation might establish a charter school replication drive one year, then three years later shift

focus away from capital giving. A glut of real estate in a target neighborhood might give way to shortage if a major development project is announced.

Studies on best practices or materials that aggregate facilities data may obscure how fluid and nonlinear the facilities landscape is. A general lesson is that charter school operators must adapt to an unstable set of assumptions and opportunities. Sometimes, this is difficult, as when previously available funding pools dry up. Other times, this is an opportunity, as when turnover at a foundation or in the legislature or at the school district brings new attitudes or openness to partnering with charter schools. Our experiences tell us that that charter school operators need to adjust strategies and methods continuously as the older policies, inducements, or barriers give way to different ones in their markets. That is why some of the materials we wish to disseminate focus explicitly on our evolution, for instance, how we were at first willing to take too small buildings but now prioritize co-location potential, or how we are incrementally increasing our use of data to inform site selection and building features. Each charter school will need to make the decisions that make the most sense given their operating environment at the moment, but understanding the evolution of a more established charter school network might help newer operators get to more efficient practices sooner. The generalizations are there, but so is the understanding that how to get to the generalizations is likely to vary on the ground.

#### *A.2. Extent of the dissemination plan*

Breakthrough plans to disseminate materials on charter school facilities over three years. The dissemination plan is comprised of four parts: planning by key members of the project; creation of materials to disseminate; actual dissemination of the materials; and evaluation of the project. Over the three years of the grant, our dissemination plan has the potential to reach many charter school operators, CMOs, and charter school support organizations through a number of

conference presentations and online platforms. We will commit to reach at least 30 schools or networks through these dissemination activities, as well as state and local officials that execute education policies in the state or represent districts in Ohio or Cleveland. Appendix C summarizes the project timeline that supports implementation of the dissemination plan.

Immediately following award announcement, key members of the project will form the Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce. In the first six months, the Taskforce will be charged with fine-tuning the details of the dissemination plan, including what to disseminate, how to disseminate, with whom to share the information, and how exactly to reach audiences. The proposal thus far has suggested the type of content we are conceiving as part of this grant, but sample titles of publications or other materials might include:

- Evolving Your Use of Data to Select School Facilities that Meet Community Needs
- Buying or Leasing from Private Owners- Negotiating the Best Deal
- Activating your Board and Community in Local Fundraising for Facilities
- Accessing Facilities through Charter-District Collaboration: Purchase, Lease, and Co-location
- Accessing and Understanding New Market Tax Credits
- Winning State Appropriations for Charter School Facilities Grants and Per Pupil Facilities Allowances
- Converting Industrial Spaces to 21st Century Learning Spaces
- Accessing Facilities Grants
- CMOs Co-locating Schools to Create Educational Continuums and Enrollment Stability
- A Policy Agenda for Charter School Facilities in Ohio

- Breakthrough Schools Policy Brief: Expanding Opportunity Through Charter Schools Program- National Dissemination Grants

The Taskforce will hold responsibility for setting the purposes and messages for each title, as well as identifying additional topics that could be valuable to the charter school sector. The Taskforce will also decide how to present content, whether to do so as a video, as a booklet, as a how-to guide, or as a study as different subjects may be best disseminated in different ways. For example, a white paper might be the best way to disseminate industry-specific information to be shared in a best practices publication, while a brochure might be the best way to disseminate information that is easily digested and applicable to many different types of schools. The Taskforce will make decisions in consultation with Breakthrough's Marketing department to intentionally plan for each area and the intended audiences.

Once those decisions have been made, the project will move to the third phase of the dissemination plan, which involves the creation of the materials. Breakthrough's Marketing department will lead this phase, developing printed materials like brochures, reports on specific subjects, and booklets or guides. The Taskforce, in concert with the Marketing department, will also hire and oversee outside vendors like a writer, graphic designer, printer, and videographer to manage specific aspects of the materials production that cannot be handled in house.

To prepare for the active dissemination of materials, the Marketing department will also help develop presentations for the Taskforce to deliver or disseminate during conferences and meetings of charter school operators and associations. These presentations will be tailored to the expected or typical audience, as these can vary from conference to conference. For example, the typical audience for a National Alliance for Public Charter Schools conference is composed of educators, school leaders, board members, and CMO or central office staff and vary from brand

new charter schools to more mature networks. In contrast, the typical audience for a Charter School Growth Fund conference is better described as leaders from CMOs that are carefully vetted and selected to become part of the Growth Fund portfolio. Both attendee groups might benefit from our materials, but the type and level of information shared may vary greatly.

Breakthrough's Marketing department will also prepare for the social media aspect of this project, which will begin with the announcement of the award on the network's social media pages and will intensify as materials and publications become available for dissemination. Breakthrough is connected to a number of charter schools, CMOs, and traditional districts via social media, so the award announcement will draw potential audiences for the dissemination activities. Also along the lines of social media, any graphics or videos prepared for dissemination can be shared via Breakthrough's social media accounts: Facebook (7,500 followers), Twitter (900 followers), LinkedIn (2,000 followers), and YouTube (11,200 views). In this way, we hope to further engage our school community, supporters, and the general public in this grant.

In developing the dissemination materials, the Taskforce will tap into the valuable insights from others that have been a part of the network's facilities processes over the years. These include our New Market Tax Credits consultant, pro bono lawyers, and contractors that have carried out the actual construction and renovation of school facilities. Insight from these individuals is crucial to the conveying the story of our facilities plan, successes, and lessons.

The final phase of the plan involves actually disseminating the information. This is the most significant component of the project, focused on presenting best practices and lessons learned to a variety of audiences. Outside of the award announcement keying subscribers and website visitors into the dissemination to come, Breakthrough will work actively to deliver materials to key stakeholders. How will we do this?

First, we will tap in to existing mechanisms maintained by Ohio's High-Quality Coalition (of which we are a member), the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (authorizes two of our schools), Charter School Growth Fund (of which we are a portfolio member), the Cleveland Education Compact (district-charter collaboration group of which we are a part), and any other large scale charter school membership associations or institutes identified by our Taskforce that can share our materials. Each has shareable member databases and email lists including charter school leaders and advocates from across the country, the potential audiences and recipients of our resources.

We also maintain our own contact lists of charter school operators, Ohio Department of Education officials, state and local representatives, grantmaking organizations with a policy role in K-12 education, and CMSD leaders that we can send email blasts each time a title is released. These hundreds of internal contacts will serve as an invaluable resource to connect the BFRND project with others in the field, our target audience for this dissemination plan. They may also send blasts to their own contacts, at our request.

Also in the final phase, we plan to deliver presentations and talks at conferences or other meetings of charter school organizations and advocates. Breakthrough executives regularly attend a number of annual meetings, including National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Conference (annual convening of charter school educators, leaders, and advocates- 4,700 attendees), Charter School Growth Fund Retreat (convening of CSGF portfolio members, of which Breakthrough is a part- 150 attendees), Excellent Schools Summit (Building Excellent Schools' annual summit- 100 attendees), Center for Reinventing Public Education Conference (convening districts and charters together to collaborate- 50 attendees), and ASU+GSV Summit (summit on innovation in education and technology- 4,000 attendees). We estimate this to be a

total population of 9,000, some of which may be duplicated, but nonetheless all actively engaged in charter school practice or advocacy. Of course, we will not reach every attendee, but the pool of potential supporters that might be interested in our work is large. All of the conferences allow for attendee participation, and our Taskforce members are prepared to arrange panels on facilities or deliver invited talks.

We are also a member of the Cleveland Education Compact, which includes CMSD and 36 charter schools in the Northeast Ohio area that meet quarterly. With approval from the Compact Executive Committee, Breakthrough could present on one or more topics resulting from the grant, as decided upon by Compact member schools.

To continue driving an audience to our facilities materials, the Marketing department will continue sending email blasts and press releases to trade publications as we release new reports, videos, or other material. We realize that writing opinion editorials (op-eds) or guest blog postings are additional ways of driving awareness and traffic to our facilities materials; therefore, we will also prepare such writing periodically during the final phase of this grant.

We are likely to arrange a small, intensive conference to be held at Breakthrough headquarters in the third year of the grant. Year 2 is when we will begin to assess demand, make contact with the charter school operators that we have met through our various dissemination activities that we believe could benefit from small group discussion and assistance, and begin planning for the conference. We expect this gathering to serve a maximum of 30 attendees to maintain quality and tailor offerings to the needs of each school or network.

The conference, which would be held in Cleveland, is likely to be by invitation or publicized as targeting new or newly expanding operators. As we envision it, the conference will include workshops run by Breakthrough Schools staff and board members most heavily involved

in facilities work, as well as past project partners and consultants. The external partners might include our New Market Tax Credit consultant, lawyers from Jones Day that have provided pro bono legal assistance, contractors from many of our facilities projects, representatives from the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, and/or major grantmaking institutions that have supported capital fundraising.

Though the conference will be most beneficial new charter school operators or leaders preparing to open a school, Breakthrough believes that CMOs and traditional districts might be interested in the network's insights, as our experience is pertinent to each type of entity. If registrants include CMOs or agencies of other types, the content and messaging for each workshop will be tailored accordingly.

Breakthrough Schools is aware that governments at all scales are essential elements of progress on charter school facilities. While we consider other charter schools and CMOs as our main audience, we also desire to disseminate information directly to government agencies or elected officials in our city, state, and perhaps beyond. In order to do so, we plan to issue a policy brief, summarizing the findings of Breakthrough's deep dive into facilities practices as facilitated by the grant. The brief would explain Breakthrough's participation in the grant, prepare a synopsis of each of the titles we disseminated as part of the grant, and our sense of the policy agenda that should follow.

Routinely, Friends of Breakthrough Schools convenes school tours targeted to prospective donors or supporters, and each tour includes a formal presentation to introduce Breakthrough Schools. We could modify the typical school tour format to present the highlights of the policy brief to government officials with some policymaking responsibility or interest in charter school education within the state of Ohio. We will distribute physical copies of the full

brief to each participant and mail copies to invited guests unable to attend. The invitation list might include individuals or multiple members of the following: Ohio Department of Education (ODE); ODE Office of Community Schools; the Governor of Ohio; Ohio State Senate District 21; Ohio House of Representatives District 10; the U.S. House of Representatives 11th Congressional District; U.S. Senators for the state of Ohio; the Mayor of Cleveland; Cleveland Metropolitan School District; Cleveland Metropolitan School District Office of Charter Schools; Cleveland City Council President; Cleveland City Council Wards 1, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 15 (where our schools are located); and the Cleveland Transformation Alliance.

Breakthrough Schools is also part of the High-Quality Coalition, a loose-knit group of high-performing charter schools or networks in the state that regularly meet to discuss issues such as funding, legislative updates, performance reports, etc. We will ask to devote a meeting to the policy brief, in order to solicit feedback and also to enlist participation in reaching legislators in other Congressional and State Congressional districts throughout the state of Ohio.

#### *Collaboration with Dissemination Grant Awardees*

If awarded, Breakthrough hopes to work with other organizations awarded dissemination grants through this competition in an effort to not duplicate resources. During the project planning that will take place at the beginning of the grant period, the Taskforce will connect with the Department of Education Program Officer to determine any potential overlap between BFRND and other awarded projects. If there is potential to collaborate, combine best practices into one resource, and realize cost savings for both projects, Breakthrough would be glad to work with other grantees. Examples of this might include providing white papers on a particular subject for a quarterly publication, including a BFRND dissemination video on a partner's website, or collaborating to create a joint brochure on a particular topic. Whether there is

opportunity to collaborate or not, Breakthrough looks forward to learning more about the dissemination grant awardees and gleaning valuable information from their projects.

#### *A Note on Project Sustainability*

At the end of the grant period, Breakthrough will be equipped with a number of useful resources related to charter school facilities. Though Breakthrough will no longer be required to disseminate the information or meet performance measures, we hope to continue sharing expertise and the materials generated from this grant. The information and resources created will be too valuable to not be put to continued use, and we will continue to make them available online. After the grant period, Breakthrough might also continue to meet with leaders from charter schools and networks as requested to share the information in a more tailored way. Breakthrough might charge a small fee in order to cover the time and effort of the leadership team in these efforts. If awarded, Breakthrough's CSP dissemination activities will have a lasting impact even beyond the grant period.

#### *A.3. Likelihood that the project will result in system change and improvement*

Our project could improve the system, primarily by increasing the informational inputs and supports available to new charter school operators. Breakthrough Schools was motivated to apply for this grant opportunity primarily out of concern for smaller and inexperienced charter school operators that are facing unnecessary barriers to entry and/or survival. We remember the challenges of being a new CMO, every day seeing the desperate need for better schools in the city of Cleveland, knowing we had high performing school models to offer families wanting to do better for their children, but needing to find and fund buildings on our own. That system, the one that places charter schools largely outside of their home district's facilities plan and funding stream, led us to make quick decisions on school district buildings that we feared would be

demolished or sold if we did not act fast. In other instances, we had to delay new school starts because it was difficult to find properties for sale in the underserved neighborhoods that it is our mission to serve, even passing on turnkey school buildings in pristine condition in favor of distressed buildings incurring significant renovation costs due to of address. We also have had to incur the costs of starting in buildings that we knew would be short-term, only to have to move to a new facility later, because that is what we could find and afford at the time.

The research on facilities shows that Breakthrough's experiences are common. The "Landscape Studies" by the Charter Schools Facilities Initiative found that only 27% of charter schools construct buildings customized to their purposes and mission. The rest rent, lease, or buy existing buildings, but more than half are in spaces unable to accommodate projected enrollment growth. Forty percent resort to buildings lacking amenities like lunchrooms, gymnasiums, libraries, or playgrounds.<sup>viii</sup> All of this underscores the limitations of the private marketplace as a system for allocating specialized uses like tuition-free schools.

The current facilities system also contributes to charter school failures. According to Alison Consoletti of the Center for Education Reform, fifteen percent of charter schools fail, and almost half of the failure (41%) relates to facilities expense. Another 10% of failures are due to problems finding buildings or getting permits and zoning approvals from school districts or cities. Independent, smaller charter schools are most at risk of failure from these causes, says Consoletti,<sup>ix</sup> with the system effectively erecting higher barriers to entry to grassroots efforts and depriving the whole charter school sector of new models, new ideas, and new energy. These statistics are a huge red flag for the charter sector. How are we to enact real change, continue to grow our networks, and provide high-quality opportunities to children and families across the country if we cannot even afford or access space?

Breakthrough agrees with the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) that the ideal charter school facilities system would entail each state fully funding per pupil facilities costs for charter schools, as they do for district schools, and also including high-quality charter schools in school district master facilities plans. Such a system would reduce the risk of failure for smaller operators and established CMOs alike, and also incentivize a diverse educational landscape that can experiment, the original justification for granting school charters in the first place. The NAPCS found that, by 2016, only 16 states offered per pupil facilities allowances to charter schools and, of those, only nine offer allowances in excess of \$350 per pupil. That amount is far less than actual per pupil facilities costs at charter schools.<sup>x</sup>

As a charter school network, we are not able to fix the laws, ensure smooth district-charter relationships, or fully fund facilities across all 50 states, all of which would make for the ideal system.

We believe we can help improve the system, specifically by improving the quality and accessibility of the information that feeds the charter school facilities system. Breakthrough does not have all the answers, but we hope that compiling experiences and developing resources through BFRND will help decrease the number of situations that Conseletti and NAPCS describe.

Our Google search on the keywords “Charter Schools Facilities Help” discovered some apparent difficulties in the supply of information. Of eighteen links appearing in the first two pages of the search, ten could be considered analyses geared to policy discussions, one was an opinion piece by a policy institute; and four were promotional pages for companies or nonprofits offering professional services to charter schools. While these links contain valuable information that undoubtedly expand the knowledge base of new charter school operators, they are not how-

to guides that would help charter school operators get started with project-based facilities planning or financing. Two of the links were to a guidebook and toolkit, respectively; however, readers needed to supply personal information to access those materials, which might discourage access by some.

A second Google search on “Charter Schools Facilities Toolkit” yielded additional reasons to improve the information available to new charter schools. Several of the toolkits published by charter school associations are available to members only; others are publicly accessible but in the form of PowerPoint presentations or checklists lacking narrative. Inadequate description, explanation, or contextualization, as is the case with PowerPoints or checklists, might be less helpful for charter schools new to the scene, new to replication, or new to organizational growth. From our point of view, there is an informational quality and accessibility problem that we can help resolve.

How will our proposal improve the informational inputs to the system? First, we can provide materials freely and with no strings attached to charter school operators or newly forming schools or networks, even if they have not yet joined a charter school membership organization or prefer not being contacted by a charter school service firm. Our desire is not to generate business leads from the materials we disseminate, so we can create truly open access materials for schools to access at any organizational stage or at any point in their facilities process.

Second, the materials we provide will come from the practitioner’s perspective. This will add value to the charter school (non-academic) literature, by combining technical assistance with a good sense of on-the-ground challenges to achieving best practices. Throughout our eight years in operation, we have encountered roadblocks, policy changes, missteps, and more that we have

had to troubleshoot. In our experience, getting to best practice and the best possible outcomes in a specific operating environment depends on relationships, forming an organizational structure to constantly build those relationships, and plugging the right mix of people into efforts. We believe our content, as enabled by this grant, would certainly improve the informational inputs feeding the system and draw needed attention to the relational side behind every technical dimension of successful charter school facilities processes.

This is the case for any applicant with a proposal focused on adding information, but it is worth noting that we recognize information can only make a difference to the degree that the charter school operators invest time and resources to act on the information. We know how daunting it feels to handle facilities aspects, set in motion the operational aspects, and build an organizational structure that meets the requirements of the law all before revenue is flowing. As Breakthrough was establishing, we benefited from the support and friendship of several existing charter school organizations and operators, and we understand the sort of peer mentorship that we received as an important part of the charter school facilities system. We have always been open to helping other charter school operators answer questions or troubleshoot problems and, when asked, we advised an effort to open Emerald Academy in Knoxville, Tennessee. As part of this grant, we are prepared to publicize that same willingness to act as peer mentors. Adding to the stock of organizations that can advise charter schools, especially on a peer to peer basis and with no financial motive, improves the system by shoring up available supports. The proposed conference is also a way to build peer to peer support, as well explore the information we produce and the lessons we have gleaned in a more personalized way

#### *A.4. Extent of project to build local capacity to provide, improve, or expand services addressing target population needs*

A subset of the content we wish to produce relates to the incorporation of data in facilities planning, and this content is the main way we foresee our project helping to promote or elevate target population needs. Ideally, charter schools would open in neighborhoods with the highest need for effective schools with a gamut of amenities valued in that neighborhood. Since such neighborhoods most often are lower income, this also means charter schools must consider the range of human needs that impact learning and then plan facilities as community hubs that educate children and meet certain family or neighborhood needs. Doing both of these things well is likely to create charter schools that are able to fill seats, retain most students long term, and set an environment and culture in motion that achieve academic results.

In practice, this is complicated and challenged by a number of factors outside a charter school's control, including available building stock, finances, and that drive to not pass on buildings when there is pressure to grow. Our experiences with those pressures have brought us to the importance of neighborhood-level market research and data-driven planning as a way to better satisfy student and family needs.

In Breakthrough's earliest years, we used relatively little advanced planning. We selected facilities by arranging a ride along with knowledgeable board members to view all available properties, then purchased the buildings that seemed best. In 2015, the publication and dissemination of an expert report commissioned jointly by two of Cleveland's major grantmaking institutions changed our game. The analysis, called *A Shared Responsibility: Ensuring Quality Education in Every Cleveland Neighborhood* prepared by the IFF, ranks Cleveland neighborhoods according to the service gap, or the percentage of school seats in a

neighborhood that are low quality. It helped us match site selection to community need for quality schools more intentionally than ever before.

Even with *A Shared Responsibility*, we are realizing the need for even finer-tuned market research and feasibility study to inform our choices. At some of our school sites, we are experiencing under-enrollment, even though some of the schools competing for our enrollment are underperforming or failing. Operating with unfilled seats is a great financial risk that can jeopardize charter schools, and we see that better analysis of neighborhood demographics, the school aged population, and district facilities plans could help us better forecast best and worst case scenarios as we select sites and decide on school size. In some cases, non-Breakthrough schools have opened almost adjacent to our school sites, to the detriment of both schools.

The other consideration that an assessment like *A Shared Responsibility* cannot convey is the general level of need in the neighborhood or ease/difficulty accessing services outside of school. Neighborhood- level demographic data can help predict the physical characteristics of a school building that will best serve students, their families, and the surrounding community. Leaving too many needs unattended in a family or community can hurt a school's success, as families and students might need to focus on their basic needs before academic performance.

Neighborhood and demographic data can help charter school operators paint a picture of the amenities a school building needs to make it easy for families to enroll and put more of their energy on academics. For instance, schools in communities with a lot of vehicle ownership might need larger parking lots and pick-up lanes, whereas schools in communities reliant on public transit might need to be located nearer to bus routes. Buildings near a community recreation center might not need a dedicated gymnasium if the school and center can arrange a "shared facilities" agreement; a school near a city playground might not need to build one of its own.

Schools in communities with high rates of joblessness might need facilities with space appropriate to add a food pantry or office space dedicated to case management. Breakthrough, for instance, has begun offering case management and a job training program (in partnership with a local workforce organization) given family needs at certain school locations. In this way, predicting the services of benefit to families can help narrow down the architectural properties required in a school building. A charter school, on the basis of a neighborhood audit and data-driven feasibility study, might even decide not to open in a particular neighborhood already saturated by public and private schools, or without as much objective need.

Breakthrough's data-driven facilities planning process is still evolving. While the bulk of our proposal is outward-looking, planning is an area where a grant award could spur us to expand our own capacity and strengthen internal processes. We wish to promote our own sustainability by selecting buildings that can compete locally and fill to capacity, as well as provide an accommodative architecture providing the right mix of amenities that increase family satisfaction and improve conditions for learning.

Increasingly for us, a large part of our consideration means finding facilities that can accommodate having two of our schools at a single facility or campus. As mentioned above, we have co-located elementary schools with preschools that can then feed our kindergarten, and this has created opportunities for student recruitment efforts. Increasingly, we are also locating two of our own schools, specifically an elementary school and a middle school of similar educational models, in order to create the full K-8 continuum at one location. Our Village Prep and Entrepreneurship Prep schools have been doing this since inception, but this is a new development for Citizens and Citizens Leadership branches. This practice provides families with more continuity when selecting a school, and we believe it will be likely to increase both student

enrollment and retention over the long term. We are exploring further benefits such as combining IRNs for schools sharing a campus, which would provide both operational and cost savings.

We consider data-driven planning and co-locating charter schools in shared school buildings to be best practices that should be solidified, codified, and disseminated as future directions for the charter sector. As a maturing CMO growing into this practice ourselves, Breakthrough sees exceptional value in doing the intellectual work of carefully thinking through the contours of an ideal data-driven planning process that is capable of forecasting market demand, competitive forces, advantages to shared space, and basic facilities needs to aid students and their families. We envision an internal audit of our existing market research processes plus our school and network's list of needs to be the basis for a checklist, manual, or other guide that other charter school operators could adopt.

**To our knowledge, there are no existing guides that instruct charter schools how to use neighborhood and demographic data in their facilities planning, even though there is a growing array of freely available neighborhood-level open source data online.** Creating such a guide out of this dissemination grant could introduce information for charter schools to serve the community and the target population better, at the same time that they set themselves up for financial sustainability and enrollment success. The value added is probably intuitive but, as charter school operators, we believe that planning facilities around deep understanding of neighborhoods and their residents will help make charter schools the truest community anchors, capable of starting out of the gate as organizations attuned to a community's needs, as opposed to adapting that capability over time and experience. Becoming that anchor early, by basing school architecture and amenities off the objective conditions in the school's neighborhood, is likely to stabilize a school early; create operational advantages for charter schools in a

competitive market; create value for families who need help creating a good life and learning environment for their children; and ultimately assure consistency for students, the ultimate target population.

Part of the BFRND evaluation plan includes a measure to track charter schools and CMOs that utilize the dissemination materials and track progress in their facilities work. Through WestEd's evaluation, Breakthrough will be able to measure the extent of the project's success in building this capacity. As outlined in the goals and objectives section, we hope that in the second part of Year 2 and in Year 3 of the grant period, we are able to actually assess how many schools, CMOs, or districts utilized our resources and information to benefit their school(s).

### **Selection Criteria B - Quality of the Project Design**

#### *B.1. Project demonstrates a rationale*

Breakthrough's proposal aligns with the goals of the grant program in that it is cognizant of the facts facing the charter school sector, and our content is geared to questions of strength and stability given a difficult environment. Nationally, the growth of the charter school sector has slowed, despite the fact that U.S. students come in 35th in math, 15th in reading, and 18th in science among all the students in 60 nations participating in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).<sup>xi</sup> The results in math give particular pause and underscore an ongoing imperative for the U.S. educational system to provide options like charter schools with greater flexibility to customize programs to boost student academic performance.

While this grant would add tasks and activities that are not routine for us, we feel strongly about committing to the effort because we are aware of the role of facilities in the health and vitality of the charter school sector. Among others, the National Alliance for Public Charter

Schools identifies facilities access and financing as key obstacles to the expansion of charter schools.<sup>xiii</sup> Increasing knowledge and practical information in this area is inherently valuable.

Why Breakthrough’s proposal specifically advances the interests or intent of “Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools- National Dissemination Grants” is because we can expand the range of voice in the store of information available to the charter school sector. As with most sectors, the charter school sector has a number of associations and institutes that are national in scope that exist to study, aggregate, and disseminate best practices, as well as issue policy recommendations to states, municipalities, or federal agencies. Typically, the kind of output produced by national, state, or otherwise large organizations can be described as systematic research that aggregates findings across a variety of markets. While incredibly valuable in terms of forging standards for charter schools and advising state or governmental policy, such output may be less suited to delving deeply into the intricacies of applying standards and practices on the ground.

Including CMO voice and, therefore, perspectives shaping the sector’s knowledge base is an important part of the rationale for why our proposal is so important to fund. Through our reserves of direct experience, Breakthrough Schools will be able to add value to the body of existing knowledge by sharing the often hidden dimensions of striving to apply best practices in a community or market. We hope to build on, and potentially contribute to, this knowledge as our dissemination materials are available.

In our experience, beneficial laws on the books, awareness of public or private grants earmarked for charter school facilities, or great credit are not enough to avoid barriers to finding the right facility. In many instances, grant programs are competitive or laws, such as right of first refusal to unused school buildings, do not automatically produce properties that a charter school

needs. Privately owned buildings may be too expensive to acquire, lease, or renovate, especially when schools are new and untested. In some cases, a new school starting up might not even know where to begin; the knowledge of right of first refusal or understanding about grants and funding may prevent them from pursuing these avenues in the first place.

Unfortunately, charter school operators trying to implement best practices are going to discover a need to troubleshoot. Adding the practitioner perspective to the knowledge and technical assistance store adds understanding of steps to take to handle the necessary challenges and fires. In our experience, and as something we will emphasize in most of the materials, relationship-building is what has allowed us to troubleshoot and make progress locally.

Yet, as far as we can tell, the role of charter school relationship-building does not figure prominently in existing materials on charter school best practices. This is despite a significant amount of technique involved in the relational aspects of progress on facilities. The technical components involve such factors as organizational structure, the right mix of players to include on boards and advisory committees, and how to motivate them to engage in campaigns. Certain titles we produce will focus on this topic extensively, while we foresee smaller sections on relationship building or board member participation incorporated into most of the titles resulting from this grant opportunity.

Another perspective that we can provide through this dissemination grant is that the structures enabling work on facilities makes a difference. There are various options but, for the Breakthrough Schools network, the “Friends of” structure has been the main innovation to increase the magnitude and quality of relationships we can mobilize to assist in facilities selection, financing, and policy/advocacy. Our “Friends of” structure has built relationships for facilities in the following ways:

1. Board appointments from commercial real estate, architecture and construction, and accounting backgrounds and expertise.
2. Formalizing a partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.
3. Active participation in charter school associations and conventions to build networks and garner regional and national attention for Breakthrough Schools.
4. Active participation in local civic life through structured leadership and engagement opportunities, such as like Leadership Cleveland and the City Club of Cleveland.
5. Routine tours and events held at the schools to cultivate new and existing supporters.
6. Advocating for important issues such as equitable funding and charter facilities access to state legislators and Ohio Department of Education officials.

Friends of Breakthrough's capacity to build relationships and enthusiasm for our schools has translated to considerable progress and positive outcomes on facilities, and this organizational structure is something that other charter schools could easily emulate to amplify their own capacity, or modify to build into a less complex organizational structure.

We believe all of this is important to discuss in the context of facilities because building relationships and keeping a high profile in the community contributed to numerous problems solved for us as we moved along our growth plan. Ultimately, another rationale for supporting our proposal is that we can root discussions of practice and our messages about the relational aspects of facilities in real world examples, so that readers or consumers of our materials have a way to make their understandings concrete.

There are so many examples of relationships, for instance, helping us make progress on facilities that we are able to share. As described in the introduction, building a relationship with a property owner resulted in him fronting us millions for redevelopment that we initially paid back

in rent. In another case, we identified a district school for co-location because of an existing relationship between the principals of the Breakthrough and CMSD school. In 2010, a board member familiar with New Market Tax Credits plugged us into the opportunity and helped us get through the complicated process, thereby increasing our financing options considerably. Our high community profile stemming from active civic participation led a local community development corporation to seek us out when it had developed a space that they thought would fit the mission of one of our schools. The practitioner voice can make clear the element of serendipity that is part of facilities processes on the ground, as well as the importance of the human side of getting through the serendipity.

In our view, the human side of the facilities process is not simply intuitive, and this is a main reason why Breakthrough's proposal should be funded: there are lessons about the human side that we can communicate. These lessons are expansive, including the mix of professionals to bring onto boards that can help with real estate, zoning, and tax subsidies; the sort of civic participation that has been useful in fundraising and lobbying; and how to cultivate a collaborative relationship with the local school district. While this does require a substantial time investment by charter school operators, this is an aspect of navigating the charter school facilities landscape that should not be underestimated and is not fully explored or discussed in much of the applied literature on facilities that we have seen.

### *B.2. Goals, objectives, and outcomes are clearly specified and measurable*

There are three primary goals for BFRND with measurable objectives embedded within each. To keep each objective concise, more specific details are fully described in the dissemination plan section of this proposal.

1. **Create dissemination materials** - specific objectives include:

- a. Formalize internal documents such as key practices and network standards.
  - b. Create a portfolio of printed materials including brochures, booklets, etc. related to facilities access topics.
  - c. Create presentation decks related to facilities topics and tailored to each conference or audience.
  - d. Create videos focused on different aspects of facilities best practices.
2. **Widely disseminate charter facilities information** - specific objectives include:
- a. Share news of dissemination grant on network website and social media pages.
  - b. Once created, make facilities resources available on Breakthrough website.
  - c. Connect with at least 30 charter schools, CMOs, or traditional districts to disseminate information.
  - d. Attend at least 6 conference or meetings per year.
  - e. Explore interest in a conference held at Breakthrough, and if determined to be a good fit, hold conference in Year 3 of the grant with a maximum of 30 attendees.
3. **Have a positive impact on the charter school sector in terms of facilities access** - specific objectives include:
- a. Become a known resource for charter school facilities best practices among our peers across the country.
  - b. Schools and networks that have learned from the project are actually utilizing plans - at least one school in Year 2 and three schools in Year 3.
  - c. Evaluation by WestEd demonstrates successful dissemination.

By completing these goals and objectives, BFRND is expected to have a number of short- and long-term outcomes. First, the project will enhance collaboration among charter to charter, and

charter to traditional public schools. Breakthrough's dissemination activities will build bonds with other charter schools and networks that we might not have had the chance to work with otherwise. Our network also sees this as an opportunity to learn ourselves, as each charter school or network may have their own best practices related to facilities, operations, or academics that we could benefit from as well. Between charters and districts, we hope that our history with CMSD will inspire others across the country to open lines of communication and pursue the same types of relationships with their local school districts in order to benefit all students.

BFRND's second outcome is to increase knowledge and awareness around public funding and school facility laws for charter schools, innovative options for facilities, and innovative funding strategies. This outcome will be realized as we connect with schools and networks across the country, make our new materials available online, and also share information with the state department to shed light on the challenges faced by high-quality schools like ours.

Our final outcome is that the issue of inadequate charter facility resources will be resolved, as our materials will be readily available and easily accessed by charter schools and networks searching for such information. As described in section A.3., the amount of practical information and guides regarding access to charter facilities is scarce. We hope to provide resources that are easily accessible and can be applied to many different types of schools, organizations, and areas of the country.

Please see Appendix D for the logic model including resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact for the proposed project.

### *B.3. Project represents an exceptional approach to the competition priorities*

Breakthrough Schools imagines that many of the proposals for this dissemination grant will gear to creating written materials, studies, guides, and conference presentations, much like our proposal. We believe the exceptional features of our approach relate to the content we will contribute and to our practitioner perspective that appears under-represented in the existing applied literature. We have discussed these features in several sections of the application, yet we wish to make very clear the unique contributions that our project could contribute if it were funded, contributions that relate to practitioner voice and much of the specific content we would develop as part of this grant. We regret any unavoidable repetition

*Practitioner Voice.* Since practitioners are usually involved in running and supporting their schools, original research and materials dissemination are not at the top of their to-do lists. It follows and makes sense that most of the materials to inform charter school operators are written by national organizations, state alliances, or professional service firms trying to aggregate practices. That type of information is inherently valuable but, because the system for allocating charter school facilities is rooted in the private marketplace, facilities processes are inherently local and variable. In local markets, our experience underscores that operators must be prepared to apply the aggregated best practices in the context of constraints and challenges faced on the ground.

We will present our materials in this light, explaining the practices we have tried to activate, as well as the troubleshooting we have had to do to get the best outcome for our schools and, ultimately, our students. This perspective on best practices, cognizant of the obstacles to best practice that can arise locally as well as the ways we have been able to resolve them, we believe is a unique contribution to the applied literature on charter school facilities. Much of our

troubleshooting involves relationships and the social networks that we invest heavily in building and sustaining.

As mentioned earlier, the practitioner view also facilitates and almost structures a longitudinal view, as well as messaging or information priming charter school operators to be adaptive and constantly pushing. For instance, Cleveland, through the Cleveland Education Compact, is known as a city distinguished by strong charter-district collaboration.<sup>xiii</sup> But, our proposed title on district-charter collaboration will offer understanding of partnership with our school districts as a living, breathing relationship that must be stoked continuously. Our experience has been that partnerships with school districts have brought benefits like co-location and below-market rent, but it has not led to other commitments (like master facilities planning) that charter schools might want. Over time, we are seeing that the extent of benefit relates not so much to a formal structure in place, but to a decision process that inspires district and charter members to renew trust periodically and openly review the benefits or challenges to partnership felt on both sides. The longitudinal view that we can introduce or highlight in our publications or presentations will produce something exceptional in a best practices applied literature that might not highlight the element of time.

*Content Innovations.* Emphasized throughout our proposal, we believe that relationships and partnerships have been at the root of all of our success on facilities and facilities funding; they are what have allowed us to keep moving forward when we could not find a suitable building or when we needed funding to acquire and renovate a school. As mentioned, we envision the importance of relationships to be a recurring theme in most of the titles that we produce, and we will also prepare specific titles devoted to relationship building for capital campaigns that cover some of the technical aspects of social networking, i.e. board selection/

engagement for facilities, routinizing contact with the local or even national philanthropic community to win grants, and embedding in policy networks to secure helpful policies and public funding.

Given the previously cited dearth of charter school operators that can sustain fundraising (for instance, only 10% in Ohio), relationship-building for capital fundraising from public and private sources does not appear to be understood intuitively by many charter school operators. Our scan of the literature also suggests board or community activation in facilities processes more generally is an under-developed theme in the literature. For instance, Charter Board Partners created *Governance Best Practices for Highly Effective Charter School Board*.<sup>xiv</sup> The publication emphasizes maturing boards and committees focused on finance, executive decisions, governance, development, and education. It does not emphasize key issues related to board capacity in facilities, such as the mix of industry affiliations that can produce on charter school facilities or how civic participation increases access to funding. We feel as if our work on the relational side of facilities could add some novel information and technical guidance.

Our proposal also mentions data-driven planning and a more expanded definition of co-location as future directions for the charter school sector and explicit themes that we will develop as materials. On data-driven planning, we have come to see great value in using data in our facilities planning process, and this is a practice or capability that we are still evolving in order to create schools that are customized to specific communities in ways that can fill all seats. We realize that open source data capabilities are growing exponentially, as technology advances and more academic centers and private institutes are willing to make their data publicly available. Charter schools can and should utilize this capability, but our scan of the applied literature uncovered no materials, documents, or webinars suggesting how to incorporate neighborhood-

level data into facilities planning processes. A Breakthrough report or guide describing our increasing use of data in our facilities processes, as well as the capability we are still building to use data to inform site selection and architectural plans, would be another novel contribution to the applied literature on facilities.

Another area that we think Breakthrough materials could really accelerate thinking and practice concerns co-location. As mentioned in sections above, Breakthrough has come to expand our understanding of co-location as a strategy to apply with districts but also to apply internally or with explicit feeder schools. What we can tell from a brief literature search for this grant proposal is that the applied literature on charter school facilities is still defining co-location more narrowly. The New York Department of Education (where the policy environment has promoted extensive charter-district co-location until recently) created what we consider the best and most comprehensive co-location handbook,<sup>xv</sup> but this handbook conceptualizes co-location as locating together a district school and a charter school, or two districts schools; it is silent on the question of how to co-locate two charter schools; two charter schools connected to the same CMO sharing a campus; or a preschool, elementary school, middle school and/or high school in order to create grade level continua in a neighborhood. Our preparation of materials on this topic could add a novel element to the existing information on co-location, an element that carries implications for building selection, architectural plans, funding needs, relationship building with other charter school brands, and other standard parts of the facilities process.

In summary, our lessons learned and best practices are easily transferable: any charter school or CMO has the potential to follow these same steps to benefit students, families, and the local community. Most of the project components that will be disseminated began with, were driven forward by, or were finalized thanks to a partnership or strong relationship with an outside

entity. The entities include the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, the City of Cleveland, Cleveland City Council, community foundations, other high-quality charter schools, corporations with an interest in Cleveland or education, developers, and other nonprofit organizations. We hope that by sharing our lessons learned, best practices, and network resources related to facilities, we can strengthen the sector, push the sector in new directions, and positively influence charter school growth across the country.

#### *B.4. Mechanisms to broadly disseminate will support further development or replication*

Our mechanisms for disseminating the materials created as part of this grant can be described as internal and external. Each of the mechanisms are already established so using them to disseminate our materials on facilities is a more simple matter of utilization, as opposed to needing to create mechanisms from scratch.

Internally, we already support infrastructure to maintain an active online presence, including a permanent website, active social media accounts, and an expansive organizational contact list. Breakthrough's public website will be the holding ground for all of the written and digital materials produced for dissemination. We foresee our Marketing staff adding a "Resources" or "Publications" page allowing interested visitors to link directly to pdf (or other) versions of each title we produce. This will be available during the grant period and beyond if there is continued demand for the material. We already have social media accounts with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Each time we release a report, we will publicize and add links directly to each title, and this is a second vehicle for users or subscribers to access the content produced through this grant. Our Marketing team can re-publicize titles at various intervals as a way attract readers months after the initial release date.

We envision direct email contact will be another important way of disseminating our materials directly to our audience. With eight years as a CMO that has been active in multi-state charter school associations, we have built an extensive contact list including charter schools, CMOs, or allies. We can easily send email blasts each time we release content as part of the grant, alerting each contact to the free publication or digital offering. As we meet other contacts at conferences or because they followed up with us about a topic, we also have capacity to add them to our master contact list; this will help the audience grow as the dissemination plan proceeds.

Externally, we are active members in several associations or other groupings of charter school operators and policy advocates. Because we enjoy good relationships with the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the K-12 program of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the Charter School Growth Fund, KIPP, and others, we foresee an opportunity to enlist them in the task of disseminating materials broadly. Each maintains their own contact lists and may be willing to send email blasts to get our materials in the hands of many more charter schools or allies; we will certainly ask. Some of these peer organizations maintain blogs on their own websites, or issue trade publications. We will ask to publish guest-blogs publicizing our materials or contribute opinion-editorials, to drive traffic to our own site.

As mentioned in sections above, conferences that we typically attend routinely congregate members of our target audience in one place. Participating as presenters at conferences will get our information out to those audiences choosing to sit in on panels or workshops planned around our facilities materials, in other words those most curious or in need of guidance on facilities. At each conference presentation, in addition to preparing talks on a

subset of titles, we can make our audiences aware of our web portal containing the full series of publications. If permitted by the organizers of the conference, we can also collect the contact information of audience members interested in more information or that would like to be added to our email blast list. This will help us develop new relationships to use as we build a survey and an invite list related to the facilities conference we wish to organize. Our hope for the project is to reach at least 30 charter schools or CMOs, still in the early stages of growth and development, that could benefit from an intimate conference on facilities.

### **Selection Criteria C - Project Management Plan and Resources**

#### *C.1. Management responsibilities, timeline, and milestones*

To administer the grant, the main management responsibilities are to form a structure to channel and sustain effort toward the project, and put the personnel in place to drive the workflow. As mentioned in earlier sections of this proposal, the implementation structure we plan to create is a Taskforce of staff, board members, and other experts that have assumed key roles in our facilities processes over the years. This structure is similar to what we have used successfully to implement other federal grants previously received, including a CSP replication and expansion grant and Teacher Incentive Fund grant from USDOE.

John Zitzner, the President of Friends of Breakthrough Schools, will make appointments to the Taskforce and serve as Project Director. Appointments will include Breakthrough and Friends of Breakthrough executive-level staff, a board member with thorough experience in network facilities, and project management from past and current facilities projects. A project assistant will work alongside the Taskforce to ensure successful implementation of the program. The assistant's main responsibilities will be to convene and document Taskforce meetings, including agendas and meeting minutes; determine what the Taskforce must work on and

produce at each meeting; assemble specialists like graphic designers and videographers needed to produce the materials prioritized by the Taskforce; conduct research related to dissemination materials; conduct surveys and preparation for Breakthrough conference; assign workload to specialists and internal departments; and collect work due from specialists, Breakthrough staff, or external Taskforce members by specific deadlines. The project assistant will be identified after award announcement. The Project Director will ensure accountability of the assistant and all participants, and will be in constant communication and make sure contractual obligations are being met.

All of the workflow is intended to build toward the project's major milestones. The earliest milestone, which we define as accomplishment that gets our resources and content into the hands of other charter schools, is making the materials available online. We should be able to begin meeting that milestone in the beginning part of Year 2, but it will unfold periodically as we can create additional materials. Also in Year 2, we can begin meeting our conference milestones, which are to attend and present facilities presentations at six meetings per year. In Years 2 and 3, we will also plan local presentations to provide and discuss our materials with other charter schools and the political/policy community in our area. We will also offer an on-site conference to 30 participants able to explore our materials and get expert advice in thinking through how to apply lessons and best practices in their own circumstances. All of this culminates in being able to demonstrate impact on charter schools and/or operators who used some or all of our materials in facilities planning. Please see Appendix D for the project timeline and milestones.

### *C.2. Project costs are reasonable in relation to objectives, design, and significance*

Costs related to the project are reasonable and directly tied to the objectives, design, and significance of the project activities. As indicated in the project timeline, the first leg of the

project will be focused on intentional planning for the creation and dissemination of materials. This component of the project will require time and effort from Breakthrough leaders, including the Friends of Breakthrough's President, Breakthrough's Chief Executive Officer, Breakthrough's Chief Operations Officer, Managing Director of Operations, and Project Manager for Breakthrough Schools facilities. As detailed in the budget narrative, each individual is expected to spend a certain amount of his or her time on the project, and time and effort may scale up and increase as the project goes on. For example, the President will serve as the Project Director will help to plan and create dissemination materials in the first year of the project. In years 2 and 3, his involvement will increase significantly as we move from the planning phase and into actually disseminating the material.

Travel is also included in the project budget to allow for the mandatory Project Director's meetings as well as conferences and meetings with other schools and networks. Travel costs were calculated with each trip including airfare, hotel accommodations, travel to and from the airport or meetings, and meals. Two individuals were included for the Project Director's meeting and for six conferences or meetings, and three individuals were included for the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools conference. The Supplies line includes the office supplies necessary to carry out the frequent Taskforce meetings and also to create materials for the conference to be held in Year 3. This line also includes print costs for the materials to be distributed (brochures, booklets, etc.).

The Contractual line includes support for the marketing and design of printed materials, the videographer and video editing services for dissemination videos, and a consultant to conduct cost analysis research in the planning phase of the project and also assist with some program management. In the first two quarters of the project (fall-winter 2018), vendors will be identified

and selected by the Taskforce. The Evaluation line includes the cost of project evaluation over three years by WestEd. The cost was calculated by WestEd's formula, 15% of the total project cost.

### *C.3. Relevance and demonstrated commitment of each project partner*

We attribute much of our success to a complex organizational structure involving separate but interlocking 501(c)(3) organizations. Breakthrough Schools, the first of these, carries out all of the functions related to operating schools, including building renovations and maintenance. Friends of Breakthrough Schools specializes in fundraising and policy advocacy. This structure permits a division of labor and has made resource development a key function for the Breakthrough network rather than needing to fit it around the day to day work of keeping schools strong. It has also allowed for extensive relationship building with the local community, the national charter school advocacy community, and public agencies at the state and municipal levels. In our experience, passing laws, submitting funding proposals, and establishing public-private partnerships only manifest when rooted in solid relationships. A letter of support from Friends of Breakthrough Schools can be found in Appendix F.

BFRND does not require additional project partners, with the exception of WestEd as the project evaluator. The project will be carried out by Breakthrough Schools leaders who hold the institutional knowledge, as well as network board members and project managers of past facilities projects.

## **Selection Criteria D - Quality of Project Personnel**

### *D.1. Employment of persons part of traditionally underrepresented groups*

Breakthrough's Human Capital department seeks diverse candidates to fill vacant roles in our schools and central office. In addition, we work with contractors and consultants that adopt

the same principles and seek diverse candidates for employment. Internally, this initiative includes a regional partnership among traditional, charter, and private schools to host a diversity career fair, of which Breakthrough was a sponsoring organization for the inaugural event last year. The Human Capital department also partners with HBCU's and colleges with urban education foci.

In addition to attracting a talent pool that is demographically diverse, we would like to source talent from institutions that prepare their teachers and leaders to serve in the urban communities we serve. Breakthrough is working to identify university partners with strong urban teacher and leader preparation programs and increase the number of candidates participating in those programs.

#### *D.2. Qualifications of the project director*

John Zitzner, President of Friends of Breakthrough Schools, will serve as the Project Director. John is a successful entrepreneur who founded Entrepreneurship Preparatory School, one of Breakthrough's flagship schools, in 2006. John helped to form the Breakthrough Schools CMO and has led the fundraising arm of the organization for nearly 10 years. In his role with Friends of Breakthrough, he is involved in most, if not all, aspects of facilities work as Friends of Breakthrough owns many of the network's school buildings and also oversees the capital budget. As head of the fundraising department, John represents the network in requesting philanthropic gifts from corporations, family foundations, and community foundations for both operations and facilities support.

A successful entrepreneur, John is the founder and former President and CEO of Bradley Company, a Cleveland-based software firm that began in 1983 and was acquired by Xerox Corporation in 1998. John went on to found E CITY (Entrepreneurship: Connecting, Inspiring,

and Teaching Youth), a nonprofit organization that provided entrepreneurship education to Cleveland high school students utilizing the curriculum of the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship. John is a graduate of Wittenberg University and has studied nonprofit organizational management at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School. John has been an invited speaker on the topic of education reform in several settings, including the 2010 Chautauqua-in-Chagrin lecture series and the 2011 Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland Policy Summit-Housing, Human Capital and Inequality.

John and the Breakthrough team have extensive experience administering federal discretionary grant awards. In 2011, the network was awarded a Charter Schools Program Replication and Expansion grant, and in 2012 was awarded a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant. Breakthrough successfully administered both awards and received positive evaluations from WestEd (CSP) and Consortium for Policy Research in Education (TIF). Breakthrough is confident that John and others involved in BFRND will successfully carry out this project as well and responsibly utilize federal grant dollars.

### *D.3. Qualifications of key project personnel*

The key project personnel includes Breakthrough and Friends of Breakthrough leaders, a Board member, and a facilities professional that has experience. that will oversee the success of the project. These leaders will also serve on the Breakthrough Schools Facilities Taskforce mentioned in section D.1. The Taskforce holds the necessary expertise to guide and oversee the project to successful completion. The Taskforce will be comprised of Friends of Breakthrough's President, Breakthrough's Chief Executive Officer, Breakthrough's Chief Operations Officer, a Board Member and facilities professional, and a facilities planner/project manager. The

Taskforce will meet weekly immediately following award announcement to begin scheduling the work to be completed over the first year of the grant.

The Taskforce will be led by Friends of Breakthrough President, John Zitzner. John's qualifications are detailed in the section above (D.2.) and in Appendix E. John will also serve as the Project Director for BFRND.

John is also point for Breakthrough's relationship with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. His standing relationship with the District has established a partnership between Breakthrough and CMSD- the benefits of this partnership are not limited to facilities. However, related to this project, John has a wealth of experience building trust and negotiating with the District. John was also involved in closing eight New Market Tax Credit deals for Breakthrough school facilities.

Alan Rosskamm is Breakthrough's Chief Executive Officer. Alan joined the network when Breakthrough formed in 2010. Prior to that, Alan was President and CEO of Jo-Ann stores, Inc. from 1985 to 2006. Alan serves on the Cleveland Transformation Alliance, the Board of Hawken School, and is a Life Trustee of the Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio. Alan also has a strong relationship with CMSD and has helped to negotiate a number of facilities purchases and co-locations.

Tyler Thornton is Breakthrough's Chief Operations Officer. Tyler previously served as a Director on the Strategy Team at the KIPP Foundation, and has CMO operations experience with Education for Change and Rocketship Education. In her role, Tyler works closely with the construction teams as new facilities are vetted, contractors complete work, and schools begin functioning within a building. She oversees the Operations teams within each school and has developed a multitude of standards and best practices utilized across the network. The

Operations team that she oversees will also help to develop the internal documents such as key practices and network standards, which will also be disseminated.

Mark Lenart is a facilities planning and project management consultant. Mark offers 25 years of progressive design, construction, real estate, and program management experience, primarily serving as an Owner's Representative across a diverse number of project types. He has worked alongside Breakthrough leadership in the evaluation, purchase, design, and construction of multiple Breakthrough school facilities.

Richard Pace is a long-time Breakthrough network board member and owner of Cumberland Development. Richard has completed significant development and architectural work on over 70 facilities in the Cleveland area, including charter schools, public district schools, and universities. He has served as an incredible resource as Breakthrough has evaluated potential facilities, assessed construction or renovations to be completed, and in vetting contractors and other vendors.

Megan Johnston is the Managing Director of Network Operations. In her role, Megan oversees the food service, custodial, and facilities management programs for all Breakthrough schools. As head of the facilities team, she is responsible for service delivery and repairs and maintenance for all of the network-owned campuses, and also serves as project manager for major construction projects. Along with Tyler, Megan will help guide and develop the internal documents such as key practices and network standards, which will also be developed.

Full qualifications and resumes for the Breakthrough Schools Facilities Taskforce can be found in Appendix E.

Rebeca Diaz, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate at WestEd. She brings over 18 years of experience in research and evaluation and is an experienced project manager, responsible for

supervising project tasks and timelines. Since joining WestEd in 2000, she has directed multiple projects, including a variety of federally funded education projects. She also has over eight years of experience in compliance monitoring of Charter School Program grants that have been awarded to educational organizations, including CMOs, throughout the country. Diaz has deep knowledge of the U.S. Department of Education's requirements regarding GPRA measures, project objectives, and project performance measures. Diaz would work solely on the evaluation of Breakthrough's dissemination grant and not on the national monitoring activities so as to avoid any potential conflict of interest. As an evaluator, she works collaboratively with clients to gather data that is meaningful and helps guide decision-making in project implementation. She is bilingual in Spanish and English and understands working with diverse populations. Diaz earned a PhD in Social Studies and Comparative Education from the University of California at Los Angeles.

#### *Network Experience in Dissemination Activities*

Breakthrough Schools has experience disseminating best practices and lessons learned, as one of its member schools, Entrepreneurship Preparatory School Cliffs, received a dissemination grant in 2011 to share information on its education model. The school worked with a local filmmaker to develop a series of videos sharing the school's history and successful strategies. The videos were posted on the school's website, social media, and received thousands of views—they are still available today.<sup>xvi</sup>

Breakthrough also recently worked closely with a charter school in Knoxville, Tennessee to disseminate information on school startup, one of our education models, facilities, school leadership, and continued growth. Leaders from Breakthrough's Village and Entrepreneurship Preparatory education model toured leaders from Emerald Academy in Knoxville, and

communicated frequently through email and conference calls. Emerald Academy leaders are very appreciative of the support provided by Breakthrough's school team. We were proud to learn that after a successful opening of the elementary school, the campus opened middle school grades in the following year. The Emerald Academy and Breakthrough teams still stay in touch and hope to continue to learn from each other in the years to come.

Breakthrough also has experience on the other side of dissemination- as a recipient of best practices- making a great candidate to share information with other charter schools and networks. When schools now part of the Breakthrough network were forming back in the early 2000's, leaders visited other high-quality charter networks to gather resources and learn as much as possible. We deeply understand the role more mature charter schools and networks have in helping peers across the country start up and build successful schools, as we all seek the same outcome: to better education for all students.

### **Selection Criteria E - Project Evaluation Plan**

Breakthrough Schools will contract WestEd as the external evaluator to conduct an objective evaluation of its CSP dissemination grant and the BFRND project. WestEd, a preeminent not-for-profit organization, is a leader in educational research and evaluation. The evaluator will utilize a mixed-methods approach that will produce both quantitative and qualitative data. The evaluator will examine each of the proposed project objectives and the performance measures to assess the extent to which progress is made over the course of the project. For the duration of the study, the evaluator will provide interim reports to inform project leaders, as they seek to make adjustments to the strategies and activities funded by the grant. The evaluator will present findings to multiple audiences, including ED and program stakeholders, via narrative reports and presentations.

The three goals guiding the project and the evaluation plan are:

- Goal 1: Create dissemination materials
- Goal 2: Widely disseminate charter facilities information
- Goal 3: Have a positive impact on charter school sector in terms of facilities.

The 2018 – 2021 evaluation plan will be implemented immediately at the onset of the project, when key members of the project begin planning. During the planning stage, Breakthrough will commence various critical activities, including: establishing the Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce; refining the project timeline, roles and responsibilities; and refining and confirming dissemination topics, media, and strategies. The evaluator’s engagement in the planning stage enables a shared understanding of the project’s development and evolution, including the opportunity to collaboratively identify any necessary adjustments for the upcoming year.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to effectively measure the project objectives, performance measures, planned activities and the overall outcomes of the dissemination project. Exhibit A illustrates the project objectives and activities as well as the evaluation methods and sources that will be utilized to gather the necessary information.

Exhibit A. Evaluation Plan for Breakthrough Schools CSP Dissemination Project

Project Objectives and Activities	Evaluation Methods and Sources
<b>Objective 1: Create dissemination materials</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalize key practices and network standards</li> <li>• Create portfolio of printed and digital materials, including brochures, booklets, and videos</li> <li>• Create presentation decks related to each subject</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviews of project documents, videos, brochures and booklets</li> <li>• Interviews with members of Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce and other key stakeholders</li> <li>• Observations of facilities</li> <li>• Surveys of staff at schools to assess satisfaction with facilities/buildings</li> </ul>
<b>Objective 2: Widely disseminate charter facilities information</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share news of dissemination grant on website and through social media</li> <li>• Make facilities resources available on Breakthrough website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviews of Breakthrough website and social media posts</li> <li>• Analyze the number of views, comments, likes on website/social media</li> <li>• Survey of school staff from the 30 anticipated charter schools, CMOs or traditional districts to assess</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect with at least 30 charter schools, CMOs, or traditional districts to disseminate information</li> <li>• Attend at least 6 conferences or meetings per year</li> <li>• Host conference at Breakthrough headquarters, with a maximum of 30</li> </ul>	<p>understanding of best practices and quality of the dissemination efforts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey of attendees at Breakthrough conference</li> </ul>
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**Objective 3: Have a positive impact on charter school sector in terms of facilities**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become a known resource for charter school facilities best practices</li> <li>• Schools/networks that learned from the project are utilizing plans (impact at least one in Y2 and 3 in Y3)</li> <li>• Evaluation by WestEd demonstrates successful dissemination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development attendance data</li> <li>• Surveys of school staff who received dissemination documents or attended conference sessions to assess impact of dissemination efforts on their school or organization</li> <li>• Interviews with members of Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce and other key stakeholders.</li> </ul>
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*Objective 1: Create dissemination materials*

WestEd will assess Objective 1, Create dissemination materials, through the use of various methods and sources. The evaluator will conduct interviews with the Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce and other key stakeholders to understand their vision and assess fidelity to the objectives, performance measures, and timeline for the project. Key questions relevant to Objective 1 include:

- What are Breakthrough Schools' key practices regarding facilities?
- What are Breakthrough Schools' standards regarding facilities?
  - To what extent are these standards understood or shared throughout the organization? Throughout the schools in the network?
- How will Breakthrough Schools determine the avenue by which to share these key practices?
- What are the perspectives of school staff regarding the school buildings in which they work?
  - What do they like most about their school building?
  - What challenges, if any, have been overcome with regard to school buildings?

The evaluator will also review project documents and products, including videos, brochures, booklets, etc. Additionally, the evaluator will conduct site visits to carry out observations of Breakthrough Schools' facilities.

*Objective 2: Widely disseminate charter facilities information*

WestEd will assess Objective 2, Widely disseminate charter facilities information, by collecting information that addresses this objective and any relevant performance measures. The evaluator will work closely with the Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce as they begin leading the proposed activities to determine the extent to which their dissemination efforts are reaching the desired audiences. Key questions relevant to Objective 2 include:

- What changes have been made to the Breakthrough Schools' website since the dissemination grant?
  - What types of facilities resources are available on the website?
  - How does Breakthrough track views on its website?
  - How does Breakthrough identify the use of facilities resources by viewers of its website?
- How is Breakthrough Schools using social media to share news of the dissemination grant?
- What strategies is Breakthrough using to disseminate facilities key practices with charter schools, CMOs or traditional districts?
- What are the perceptions of staff from other charter schools, CMOs or traditional districts regarding Breakthrough's key practices regarding facilities?
  - What was the quality of the information presented by Breakthrough?
  - How useful is this information to staff from other educational organizations?
  - What key facilities practices are most attainable or transferrable to other educational organizations?

These questions will be addressed through various data collection methods, including periodic reviews of the Breakthrough website and social media posts; surveys of school staff from other charter schools, CMOs, or traditional districts; survey of attendees from Breakthrough-held conference, review of participant rosters from mini-conference; and samples of dissemination-related communication between Breakthrough and other educational organizations.

*Objective 3: Have a positive impact on charter school sector in terms of facilities*

WestEd will examine longitudinal data collected over the three years of the project to determine Breakthrough's impact in terms of facilities key practices dissemination. Key questions relevant to Objective 3 include:

- To what extent is Breakthrough Schools a known resource for its key practices regarding charter school facilities?
  - What other educational organizations are aware of Breakthrough's facilities practices?
  - Where are these educational organizations located?
  - Which Breakthrough resources regarding facilities have been most widely disseminated?
- To what extent have other schools, CMOs or districts implemented Breakthrough's key practices regarding facilities?
  - What successes have these other educational organizations had in implementing Breakthrough's key practices regarding facilities?
  - What challenges have these other educational organizations had in implementing Breakthrough's key practices regarding facilities?

- What is the impact of these key practices on other schools, CMOs and traditional districts?
- What is the impact of the dissemination grant on Breakthrough Schools' facilities key practices?

WestEd will collect the necessary data to help determine Breakthrough's success in disseminating its key practices regarding facilities. In the final year of the project, the evaluator will conduct more targeted surveys and interviews, as appropriate, of educational organizations that have, or are in the process of, implementing Breakthrough's key practices regarding facilities. The evaluator will also conduct final interviews with members of the Breakthrough Facilities Taskforce and other key stakeholders to reflect on the objectives and outcomes of the dissemination grant.

The WestEd evaluator has over 18 years of experience in educational research and evaluation, including 8 years of charter school program grant compliance monitoring, and has the capacity to collect and report valid and reliable performance data. The evaluator will work collaboratively with Breakthrough Schools to plan and gather information that is meaningful its dissemination project.

## **Conclusion**

Through BFRND, Breakthrough Schools hopes to share best practices and lessons learned related to charter schools facilities access and financing. We hope to add an important voice- that of the practitioner and as a growing charter school network. If awarded, BFRND will add tremendous value to the sector by providing resources and materials from this important point of view, in hopes to increase knowledge, awareness, and collaboration.

## Endnotes

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