



# LINKING LEARNING TO LIFE

How Expanded Learning Time Creates the  
Opportunity for College and  
Career Readiness Programming

 **GENERATION**  
SCHOOLS NETWORK

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# Executive Summary

Now more than ever, mastering academic subjects does not guarantee success after high school. Few would argue with the fact that the U.S. economy has changed dramatically over the past thirty years. Globalization and the shift from manufacturing to service are just two elements of the new economy that call for a generation of workers prepared with both academic skills and the personal and professional competencies needed in the 21st century workplace.

School systems are slowly evolving to provide additional preparation for postsecondary life in education and the workforce. Still, broadening experiences such as job shadowing, college visits, and internships are offered sporadically and, more often than not, outside of the daily high school curriculum or only to select groups of students. Schools occasionally expose students to essential interpersonal workplace skills such as collaboration and leadership, but these opportunities are the exception and not the norm. Traditional high school guidance counseling is an asset to be sure, but due to ratios of students to guidance counselors too often it devolves into last-minute decision-making (“Where should I go to college?”), instead of being offered in the context of an ongoing experiential process throughout the middle and high school years.

Many low-income and minority students are told “the sky is the limit” when it comes to their future, but when they can’t relate to careers and college in the context of their own families and extended families, the hurdles may seem insurmountable. Unfortunately, it is all too common for students to graduate without taking the preparation sequence necessary for college or postsecondary success.

Thus there is a desperate need for schools to create “visions of the possible” and paths to postsecondary success for all students. Generation Schools Network™ (GSN) is leading the way in making college and career readiness programming a fundamental element of the middle and high school experience. The Generation Schools Model is carefully designed to increase learning time to allow for incorporation of a unique and robust college and career readiness program for every student with the goal of preparing them for school, work, and life.

In the Generation Schools Model, for two months out of every school year, students transition from their typical course sequence to explore and create an academic connection to high-growth industries and careers and cultivate personal and professional competencies in the classroom, in workplaces, on college campuses, and at other locations throughout the community. These opportunities and experiences provide critical connections for students—linking learning to life, reinforcing the importance of core academics, and helping them dream about and then pursue work and life goals.

The results show that Generation Schools Network is on the right path as measured by student feedback, graduation rates, and college acceptance levels. Yet, we also know that models are meant to evolve, and this paper includes a presentation of lessons learned throughout implementation with the goal of helping other practitioners, researchers, and funders consider fully how we can close the opportunity gap for students while preparing a workforce that will keep our nation competitive.

Slow and incremental education reform will never catch up with the current pace of economic evolution. The times call for fundamental and immediate shifts in postsecondary readiness programming—the kind of dramatic initiatives in place today at the GSN Schools in Brooklyn and Denver.

# Preparing Every Child for Life's Responsibilities, Challenges, and Opportunities

*"We need to recognize the fact that our education system is not broken, but has simply become obsolete. It no longer meets the needs of the present and future generation."*

**Naveen Jain - Business executive, entrepreneur, and founder of InfoSpace, Intelius, and Moon Express**

Our country's public school system fails to prepare roughly half of American students for higher education and future success.<sup>1</sup> This is neither new nor surprising. The education system was designed almost two centuries ago to meet the social and economic needs of that time. At the start of the industrial era, the system evolved to teach basic academic and vocational skills students could readily apply in that day's manufacturing-oriented workplace to provide well for themselves and their families.

More than a century later, while the world has changed dramatically, public education has remained almost stagnant in its outcomes and methods. The majority of well-paying jobs once readily available to unskilled workers no longer exist. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 62 percent of jobs will require some form of postsecondary credential by 2028.<sup>2</sup> In an increasingly global, technology-enabled world, jobs that do not require advanced education nonetheless must be filled by workers with a solid foundation in reading, math, and problem solving.

In states such as Colorado, the gap between the skill level of the current workforce and the needs of industry is even more pronounced. According to the recent report, *The Business Case for Education Reform*, from Colorado Succeeds, a business-supported education reform group, Colorado schools are producing only half the workers needed to fill Colorado's increasingly high-skilled jobs.<sup>3</sup>

Approximately 32 percent of U.S. adults age 25-29 have college degrees. Only 20 percent of these degrees belong to African-Americans and just 13 percent were earned by Hispanics.<sup>4</sup> The gap in education achievement is even more pronounced across socioeconomic strata. The college completion rate for high-income students is approximately 54 percent, while the rate for low-income students is 9 percent.<sup>5</sup> Further, the gap in college degree acquisition between wealthy and poor students has nearly doubled since 1980.<sup>6</sup>

Given today's highly technological and interconnected society, graduates could very well be competing for jobs with others not just from across town but from around the globe. Their long-term success will hinge on obtaining a wider range of skills that make them more competitive. Unfortunately, the academic skills reflected in today's standardized test-oriented curricula will not be adequate to meet the demands students will face when they graduate. Test taking and information memorization are not in themselves marketable skills.

The general public appears to agree. According to The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, based on a nation-wide poll of registered voters, "An overwhelming 80 percent of voters say that the kind of skills students need to learn to be prepared for the jobs of the 21st century is different from what they needed 20 years ago. Yet a majority of Americans say that schools need to do a better job of keeping up with changing educational needs."<sup>7</sup>



In addition to academic competencies, students must develop and practice the personal, professional, and entrepreneurial competencies—21st Century Skills such as perseverance, problem-solving, adaptability, and collaboration. Since these typically are not taught in classrooms but rather in family/community environments, low-income and minority students in general will be at a disadvantage and postsecondary education and well-paying jobs may seem well beyond reach.

Ongoing research of The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has led it to conclude that “The increase in the number of service sector jobs, which include high growth, high wage and high skilled occupations in new and emerging occupations, requires students to have different skills and a greater familiarity with technology than ever before.”<sup>8</sup>

Students from low-income backgrounds often do not have access to the guidance and support mechanisms necessary to navigate the postsecondary education search, application, and enrollment processes. In contrast, in many middle-class and higher-income environments, family members and friends often serve as role models and mentors, sharing their professional and college experiences and creating an awareness (and expectation) from an early age about the transition to postsecondary education.

Schools can and should level the playing field, but many students continue to fall through the cracks, failing to take the basic courses needed to get into college. Unfortunately, most students must make do with just an hour or two of college and career guidance from a high school counselor typically responsible for supporting more than 450 students at any given time.<sup>9</sup>

For students of color, postsecondary matriculation figures are particularly grim. However, prospects improve dramatically for those who have ongoing college and career mentoring through middle and high school. In fact, students who understand the link between school and future goals are far more likely to graduate from high school and succeed in college.<sup>10</sup>

Scaffolding low-income students into the workforce has been a persistent challenge. In his book, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell describes a study launched in 1921 by Dr. Lewis Terman, a Stanford University psychologist and pioneer of the IQ test. Terman identified more than 1,500 students who scored 135 or better on the Stanford-Binet exam and tracked their careers into their eighties. He found that many students from under-resourced backgrounds, despite their genius, failed to live up to any standard measure of success.



A student entrepreneur sells cards at a reception for Community Engagement Team members in Denver. During her Arts & Digital Media Intensive, her venture team developed a business plan for a card company, designed, produced, marketed, and sold the cards for a profit with some money reserved for charity.

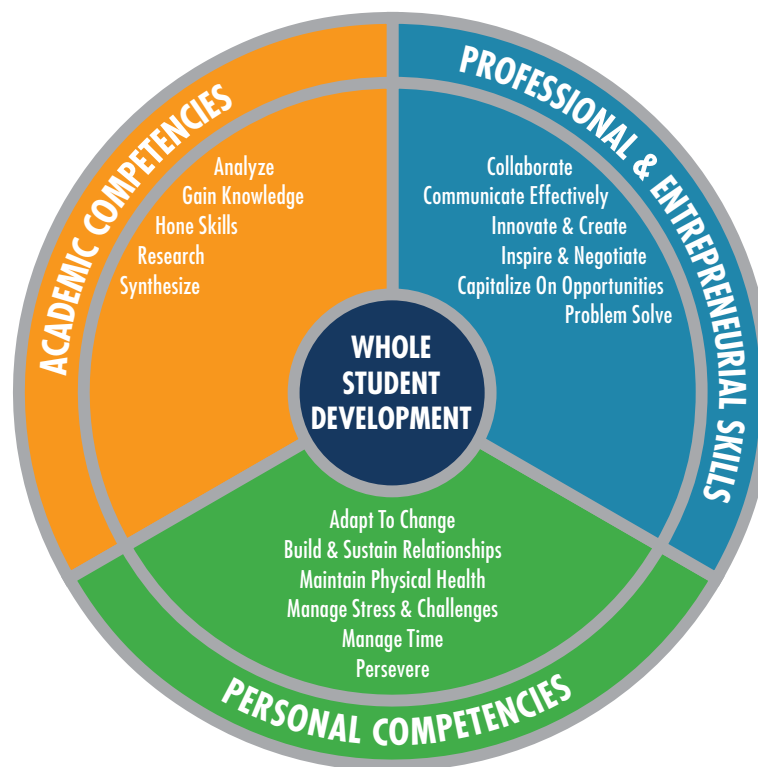
Gladwell writes:

“The Terman results are deeply distressing. Let’s not forget how highly gifted [this group of children] was...In the end, almost none of the genius children from the lowest social and economic class ended up making a name for themselves. What did they lack, though? Not something expensive or impossible to find; not something encoded in DNA or hardwired into the circuits of their brains. They lacked something that could have been given to them if we’d only known they needed it: a community around them that prepared them for the world. They [children] were squandered talent. But they didn’t need to be.”<sup>11</sup>

The talents of too many young people are indeed squandered because they do not have the benefit of a supportive community or access to sufficient school-based college and career readiness programming. The challenge for schools is to identify and nurture each student’s talents and cultivate his or her personal and professional competencies throughout middle and high school in preparation for postsecondary success.

Generation Schools Network is working to solve this complex and persistent problem and has developed a promising, new approach to help students succeed in high school and beyond, regardless of personal circumstances.

## More Time Enables Whole Student Development



# College and Career Readiness Programming

*“You can’t dream unless you know what the possibilities are because dreams don’t just pop up in your head.”*

**Sonia Sotomayor - Supreme Court Justice<sup>12</sup>**

The Generation Schools Model is a comprehensive framework that reorganizes the use of time, talent, and technology in schools. The new structures and systems are responsive to student needs, supportive of teachers, and flexible enough to adapt to each local community, while operating largely within budget constraints and the scope of teacher contracts.

GSN fundamentally transforms the way students are prepared for college and careers by adding up to 30 percent more learning time to support a unique, scalable, and sustainable model that provides students future-focused training and guidance. Elements of the model include:

- a strong academic foundation
- personal and professional skills
- experiences that inform and inspire
- “college knowledge”
- support during the postsecondary application and financial aid processes
- sustained school-based guidance

| Factors                                | GENERATION SCHOOLS                                  | Conventional Models                 |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Much more learning time                | Up to 30% more, 200 days per year (8 hours per day) | 180 days per year (6 hours per day) |
| Remarkably small core class sizes      | 18-25   | 30-40                               |
| Exceptional college & career guidance  | 280 hours per year                                  | 1-2 hours per year                  |
| Daily small advocacy groups            | 45 minutes daily                                    | None                                |
| Technology-enhanced learning           | In-class mini-labs and more                         | Limited Access                      |
| Reduced student load for core teachers | 75 or fewer students daily                          | 175 students daily                  |
| Reduced course load for core teachers  | 3 classes per day                                   | 5 classes per day                   |
| Expanded common planning time          | Up to 2 hours daily                                 | Typically 45 minutes weekly         |
| High caliber professional development  | 20 or more days per year                            | 2-4 days per year                   |

Generation Schools Network launched Brooklyn Generation School (BGS) in 2007 and Denver’s West Generation Academy (WGA) in 2012. Both represent turnaround efforts at “failing” high schools in

communities historically underserved by the public education system. For example, in WGA's first year, 80 percent of incoming students were five or more grade levels behind in reading and math. (This rate was cut in half by year two.)

## Elements of the College and Career Readiness Program



West Generation Academy students spent a day at The Curtis Hotel during a Hospitality and Tourism Intensive. Students were able to job shadow in customer service, administration, housekeeping, and food and beverage.

The Generation Schools Model includes significant time for a number of distinct yet overlapping structures that support postsecondary student readiness and success. Within each, students spend more time engaged in activities that link learning to life.

Delivering a higher level of readiness programming requires repurposing the roles of teachers and school professionals. In conventional schools, guidance/college counselors help students in their junior or senior year make a decision about where to apply for college. However, this coaching is usually based on limited information as opposed to classroom interaction with the student and personal interaction with the family over time. Rarely does the guidance extend beyond that narrowly defined, immediate decision point of where to apply for college. The Generation Schools Model pairs the teaching and guidance functions, with teachers providing the critical link.

Generation Schools Network has developed a grade 6-12 sequence for college and career readiness programming that includes

- Development of pertinent academic, personal and professional competencies;
- A range of broadening experiences in the classroom and the community;
- Knowledge of college and postsecondary options;
- Support throughout the college admissions, college financial aid, and job application processes.

Creating and sustaining this type of future focus support during these critical years not only fundamentally recreates the roles and responsibilities of teachers, it requires the unique instructional elements found in the Generation Schools Model such as the Foundation, Studio, and Intensive Courses and the Advocacy program.

## A Strong Academic Foundation for College and Career Readiness: Foundation and Studio Courses

The Generation Schools Model is built upon two unique types of classroom experiences: Foundation and Studio Courses.

The Foundation Course curriculum focuses on Humanities and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) instruction. Every student takes one STEM and one Humanities course each day. The 90-minute sessions employ a rotational, blended learning model, giving students the opportunity to explore



content in depth as well as make connections between subject areas typically taught separately. Curriculum integration results in measurable positive outcomes, including improvement in student discipline, broader and stronger student collaboration, and higher teacher satisfaction.<sup>13</sup>

Foundation Course teachers have up to two hours of common planning time daily to collaboratively prepare these rigorous, interdisciplinary courses and have the freedom to group and regroup students within the grade level as necessary to support student academic outcomes.

In three daily 75-minute Studio Courses, students have a range of complementary educational experiences. Some are more rigorous and academic, building on one or more Foundation Courses. These can include

## Foundation Courses

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>HUMANITIES</b><br>+ English<br>+ Language Arts<br>+ History<br>+ Social Studies | <b>STEM</b><br>+ Science<br>+ Technology<br>+ Engineering<br>+ Math |
| 90 minutes   | 90 minutes  |

Foundation Courses offer a standards-based, integrated curriculum that weaves together subjects through a substantial theme or complex topic.

By immersing learners in integrated, thematic units, the Generation Schools Model provides vibrant and relevant learning experiences across numerous subjects in a way that motivates and encourages students to transfer and retain knowledge and conceptually understand topics. The learning environment is technology enabled to support project-based learning and provide leveled academic skillware to remediate and accelerate core skills.

foreign languages, advanced sciences, literature, and art. Other Studio Courses provide targeted support for (English Language Learners (ELL) and Special Education (SPED), for example, or broadening activities like physical education and music.

By significantly focusing staff resources on Foundation and Studio Course instruction, the Generation Schools Model delivers more class time; smaller classes; integrated SPED and ELL support; the flexibility to group and regroup students; incorporation of computer skillware to reinforce, remediate, and advance learning; and a wider range of future-focused experiences than other schools of similar size. All of these integrated features keep students engaged and help to ensure academic success.

|                           | FOUNDATION<br>Teachers   | STUDIO<br>Teachers   | INTENSIVE<br>Teachers  |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>PRIMARY<br/>Role</b>   | Teach 2 core Foundation courses each morning. Most teachers serve this role. | Teach 3 courses each afternoon (electives, other cores, mandated services, etc.) | Teach Intensive courses focused on college and career readiness. Each course lasts for one month.                |
| <b>SECONDARY<br/>Role</b> | Teach one Studio course each afternoon; or provide mandated services         | Provide school administration support each morning such as attendance support.   | Provide Smart Start support to launch the school year and college/career guidance functions throughout the year. |

## Scaffolding Students Toward College and Career Success: Intensive Courses

*“You know how when you go to buy a video game, you can download a demo for free? You can try it out and decide if you like it? That’s what the Intensives are like [for college and careers].”*

**John - Student, Brooklyn Generation School**

*“I don’t see my mom doing algebra. I don’t see my mom writing essays. But then I started College and Career and I came to understand what people do in their jobs and careers.”*

**Charissa - Student, Brooklyn Generation School**

The cornerstone of the Generation Schools Network’s College and Career Readiness Program is the Intensive Course curriculum. Twice each year, one grade at a time, Foundation and Studio Courses are suspended for one month, and students shift into the Intensive Course sequence. In grades 6-9, instruction is intended to be eye-opening and horizon-expanding, providing students the opportunity to explore high-growth industry sectors and offering exposure to postsecondary and professional life. In grades 10-12, the Intensive Courses often are focused on securing internships and jobs, applying to college, and obtaining financial aid. Students benefit from at least 280 hours of Intensive Course instruction annually—for a total of nearly 2,000 hours of intentional, focused, and scaffolded college and career guidance and preparation over middle and high school.



*“I wanted to be an actress. So, in my first year I picked a Theater Arts Intensive, but I was horrible at it. I took an Intensive with Ms. Hill, Careers in Medicine. As part of the Intensive, we visited SUNY Downstate. I met people at the Arthur Ashe Institute for Public Health. I’ve been part of the Arthur Ashe Institute’s Science Academy (a rigorous, after-school program). Now I’m going to SUNY Geneseo, where I’ll major in Biology.”*

**Raysa, Brooklyn Generation School Student**

During each Intensive Course month, students read, write, do research, work on projects, and deliver presentations. They connect with professionals who visit the school to discuss real workplace issues and career pathways. The goal is to inspire students to visualize their futures, recognize the tangible results of hard work, and set life goals. The classes directly address one of the most cited reasons for dropping out of school—what students see as a lack of relevance in the curriculum.<sup>14</sup>

Intensive Courses also provide a critical link between learning and life by taking students to visit workplaces and colleges. For example, the WGA Bioscience Intensive Course curriculum includes field trips to a cadaver lab, ecology lessons in city parks, and interaction with farmers and ranchers at the National Western Stock Show in Denver. In New York, students visit SUNY Downstate and meet with staff of the Arthur Ashe Institute for Public Health. WGA’s Fuel & Energy Science Intensive Course students visit local colleges as well as the National Renewable Energy Lab in Golden, Hat Creek Energy facilities in Denver, and the “Poop is Power” program at the Denver Zoo. Nonprofit & Government Intensive Course teachers lead excursions to the local U.S. Environmental Protection Agency office, Denver Health facilities, and numerous other nonprofit agencies in the area.

The horizon-expanding Intensive Course curriculum includes personal and professional skill-building exercises in areas such as negotiating, communicating, facilitating, debating, problem solving, synthesizing, organizing, project management, and budgeting—essential college and workplace skills. Clearly, the depth and intensity of exploration offered in the Intensive Courses cannot be delivered through the 45-minute classes and brief counseling sessions offered in a conventional school setting.

Intensive Course teachers are full-time certified teachers; they do not have other instructional or institutional responsibilities except for coordinating orientation activities at the beginning of the school year. They rotate from grade to grade throughout the year, teaching and facilitating the type of life-changing college and career readiness preparation appropriate at that grade level.

During the period when Intensive Course teachers are working with students from a certain grade, the Foundation and Studio teachers who teach at that grade level have a full month in which they are not responsible for students. During that time, they spend one week collaborating and preparing for upcoming Foundation and Studio Courses and then take three weeks of vacation. Intensive Course teachers take a similar vacation break in September and then again during the spring month when high stakes testing takes place. This staggering of teacher schedules makes it possible for the Generation Schools Model to extend the school year for students by 20 days without increasing the work year for teachers.<sup>15</sup>

## ANNUAL SCHEDULE

- Vacation
- Professional Development – all teachers receive at least 20 days of job embedded PD a year
- Foundation & Studio Courses for students; Grade Teams with students.
- Intensives for students; Intensives teachers with students.

### STUDENTS: 200 School days

| Grade | July                    | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun |
|-------|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 9th   | Full School<br>Vacation |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 10th  |                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 11th  |                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 12th  |                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |

### TEACHERS: 180 school days spread over a longer school year

| Role       | July                    | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun |
|------------|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 9th grade  | Full School<br>Vacation |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 10th grade |                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 11th grade |                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 12th grade |                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Intensives |                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |

- Teachers have vacation in July and August. They also have two separate four week breaks throughout the school year, consisting of three weeks of vacation and one week of team planning and professional development.
- A side agreement with the United Federation of Teachers in New York and an Innovation Plan in Colorado allow for this schedule.

Over time, a student might work with the same Intensive Course teacher as part of an industry-focused sequence. Alternatively, he or she can choose to be assigned to several different Intensive Courses and explore multiple industries.

The Intensive Course experiences and opportunities help level the playing field for students from low-income backgrounds. This is critical, since according to Harvard Professor Robert Putnam, low-income

## SAMPLE INTENSIVE COURSES

### **Building Champions**

sports management, health, wellness, nutrition

### **Is There a Doctor in the House?**

medical, bioscience, pharmaceutical, veterinary

### **iRobot**

engineering, software development, IT

### **CSI**

law, forensics, public safety

### **Powering the Future**

conventional and green energy

### **Says Who?**

mass media, journalism, web design, social media

### **Lights! Camera! Action!**

arts and creative industries

### **Design Build**

construction, real estate, development, architecture

### **The Customer Experience**

hospitality and entertainment

### **Money Matters**

financial literacy

### **Good Works**

public sector, education, human services

### **World Perspectives**

languages, diplomacy, international relations, travel

families spend an average of \$480 per year on enrichment opportunities for their children while middle and upper income families spend \$5,300—creating a significant experience gap.<sup>16</sup>

The GSN College and Career Readiness Program is designed to help close this gap. Many students have never accessed the cultural and educational opportunities in their communities nor do they know professionals working in growing industries. The Intensive Course experiences feed students' aspirations, helping them return to their Foundation and Studio Courses, as the GSN motto says, *dreaming bigger, working harder, and caring more.*

## On-going Mentoring and Support: Advocacy Groups

The Generation Schools Model includes an Advocacy program, which serves as a powerful complement to the Intensive Courses. Advocacy groups meet for 45 minutes each day and are made up of 8-12 students led by a faculty or staff member (Advocate). In these sessions, students learn life skills (such as financial literacy), set goals, review their individual performance, and maintain their Personalized Success Plan and Portfolios (described below). Sufficient time also is set aside to address individual student personal and academic concerns in a stable and supportive environment.

The Advocacy sessions reinforce interpersonal and professional skill development in areas such as cooperation in the context of peer groups, building and maintaining stable institutional relationships, and participating in collective problem solving and similar team exercises. These are future-focused skills critical for student success in high school, college, and careers.

The Advocate also serves as the school's primary point of communication with the parents of students in the group. Ideally, the parents and the Advocate work together to eliminate barriers to student success and support postsecondary planning.

This type of support is critical. According to author Paul Tough, "An emerging body of research shows...that what matters most in a child's development...is not how much information we can stuff into her brain in the first few years. What matters, instead, is whether we are able to help her develop a very different set of qualities, a list that includes persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence. Economists refer to these as non-cognitive skills, psychologists call them personality traits, and the rest of us sometimes think of them as character."<sup>17</sup>



**Students visited Denver Workforce Center to learn about resume writing and summer job opportunities.**

## Personalized Success Plans and Portfolios

Throughout their time in middle and high school, GSN students, in partnership with their Advocate and teachers, develop a Personalized Success Plan and Portfolio (PSPP) to ensure that their goals and experiences are documented and that they develop and maintain a long term vision.

PSPPs initially are drafted as a set of academic goals and a roadmap for success. A PSPP is one of the first significant steps toward developing a future focus as it provides a detailed plan for what the student will do each year in Foundation, Studio, and Intensive Courses and Advocacy. Goals are revised and expanded as the PSPP evolves over time to serve as a repository of work, experiences, and accomplishments. When students transition from one grade to the next, their PSPPs go with them. When it is time to apply for college, financial aid, an internship, or a job, the PSPP provides a wealth of personal information to make the process easier.

## Community Engagement Teams

To support the College and Career Readiness Program, GSN schools convene Community Engagement Teams (CETs) comprised of professionals within an industry or sector that students are studying. CET members meet regularly with Intensive Course teachers to plan hands-on experiences and excursions; support relevant and



engaging curriculum development; and discuss industry needs and trends, job requirements, and educational preparation options. As a result, an Intensive Course teacher can thoughtfully plan authentic experiences that tie to that industry sector and the professional world in general.

Many CET members offer job shadowing and internship opportunities and volunteer to serve as mentors, tutors, and judges for final presentations and mock interviews. Others support students by reviewing resumes, cover letters, college essays, and financial aid applications. Ultimately, CET members can choose to serve as professional references and assist students in securing jobs.

## Other Opportunities Within the GSN Model

While the content of Foundation, Studio, and Intensive Courses is purposeful and complementary, the Generation Schools Model is not overly prescriptive. Schools may choose to use Studio and Intensive Courses to provide opportunities for entrepreneurial experiences, Career and Technical Education Courses, and concurrent college enrollment. Many conventional schools offer these programs as stand alone experiences, but the Generation Schools Model incorporates them directly into the curriculum as part of a student's sequence toward postsecondary success.

### Entrepreneurial Experiences

Today's students will graduate high school or college to join a job market fueled by entrepreneurs, and preparation for this world must begin in middle and high school. The Generation Schools Model offers the opportunity to expose students to the world of entrepreneurship through a Studio Course or as part of an Intensive Course.

To support Intensive and Studio Course programming, GSN has developed partnerships and accessed business development and entrepreneurial support from Junior Achievement, LaunchUR, The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, the National Academy Foundation, and similar groups. Programs such as these give students the opportunity to experience simulated business ownership and propel them toward future success. The U.S. Department of Labor cites studies showing that students who have participated in entrepreneurship programs are more likely to attend college, pursue career aspirations, demonstrate leadership, and read independently.<sup>18</sup>

In Spring 2013, students at Denver's WGA successfully piloted the LaunchUR Toolkit® "Greetings Inc." in the 8th grade Digital Arts and Media Intensive Course track. The students participated in a unique peer-driven, real world startup experience to launch their own line of creative greeting cards that generated over \$300 in sales. Business launch activities included

- applying for jobs within their Venture Teams;
- leading a community service project and social entrepreneurship opportunity;
- learning essential software applications;
- pitching their business idea for start-up product funding;
- budgeting, pricing, and measuring profitability;
- role playing and real-world customer service and sales.

## Career and Technical Education Courses

In the last few years, districts and schools have reexamined and reimagined their Career and Technical Education (CTE) efforts. Historically, CTE programs tracked students and destined “underperformers” for low wage jobs in lieu of a postsecondary education. Fortunately educators now see the advantage of providing high school students not only opportunities to complete conventional academic classes and earn a diploma, but simultaneously pursue valuable job training and career door-opening certifications that ensure living wage jobs upon graduation. The Generation Schools Model creates time for students to pursue and complete CTE courses in the context of the three course types while staying on track for progress toward high school graduation.

## Early College and Concurrent Enrollment

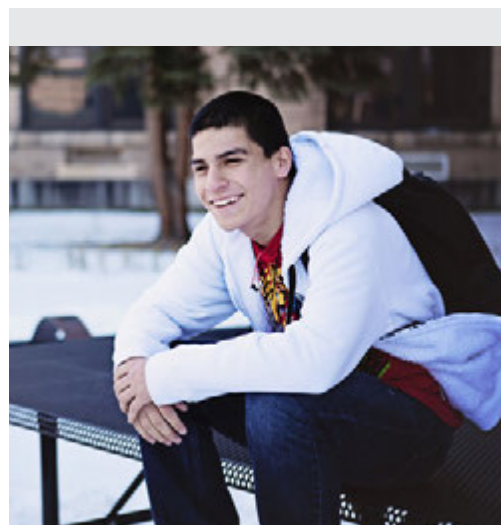
*“Through concurrent enrollment, students can see the unique relevance of their high school work through a new lens of how it connects to their future.”*

**Robert Hammond - Commissioner, Colorado Department of Education**

Over the past decade, many districts and schools have been rethinking the connection between high school and college—questioning the assumptions that high school has to occupy students for four years, that students can only begin college-level work after they graduate from high school, and that high school and college staff must be separate and distinct. As districts move away from a “seat time” mentality towards competency-based learning, many are offering college credit courses through “9-14 programs” that simultaneously prepare students for a high school diploma and an Associate’s Degree. Depending on their current preparation and goals, students have the opportunity to take career and technical education courses, introductory survey courses, and remedial and college entry level courses toward a specific major.

Concurrent enrollment is an important education attainment strategy for low-income and minority students. In addition to facilitating a more seamless transition to postsecondary education, earning college or certification credits while in high school can significantly reduce the overall cost of a postsecondary education, helping to eliminate a major barrier to completion.

The additional learning time offered within the Generation Schools Model provides an excellent opportunity for students to explore an early college experience and advanced academic concepts within the Foundation and Studio Course curricula. College credit programs at GSN schools give students a head start toward college completion while they have the advantage of the unique GSN support structure.



*“I’m different now because I’ve learned that there are many opportunities out there and it’s up to me to take them. Now, when opportunity is shown to me, I actually take it. I’m also learning a lot about how to reach my goals.”*

Misael, West Generation  
Academy Student

## Internships

The Intensive Course program provides much more than personal connections between students and professionals. It can lead to an internship that delivers a deep and sustained experience within the world of work.

Internships are incorporated into the Intensive Course curriculum for individual students or groups of students. Some young people as early as grades 9 and 10 already have a realistic and clear idea of what they want to do in high school, college, and beyond. For them, it may be less helpful to explore multiple industry areas and a better use of time to delve deeply into an internship in that area to determine if it, indeed, is a good fit. Students in grades 11 and 12 who are on track to graduate also are given the opportunity to take on an internship rather than enroll in additional Foundation or Studio Courses.

The Intensive Course program prepares students for their internship experiences, teaching them business culture, etiquette, dress code, and other critical elements of workforce success. During the internship, Intensive Course teachers continue to support the students as they navigate the new environment and experience.

## Peer-to-Peer Programs

While peer pressure can have serious detrimental effects on students, there is a positive aspect of *peer influence* that the Generation Schools model seeks to capture. Building on a youth development model, upperclassmen in the Denver and Brooklyn GSN schools are encouraged to serve as resources for peers. Older students can be ideal role models for younger students, especially for those who are first in their families to be on track to matriculate to college.

Similarly, GSN school alumni are an invaluable resource for students completing high school, applying to college, and matriculating. At Brooklyn Generation School, many alumni return to the campus in late August, before they begin their college fall semester, to assist teachers with student orientation. Alumni can



**“It has been the privilege of our team to build upon the financial support Franklin Templeton has provided to Generation Schools by helping to formulate the Finance Intensive programming around jobs in the financial sector and create opportunities for on-site job shadowing and mentor-mentee relationships between Franklin Templeton employee volunteers and BGS students.”**

Amanda Vardi & Ema Gaubaite, Franklin Templeton Investments

also chaperone Intensive Course worksite visits and many have noted how they personally benefited from treating these experiences as professional networking opportunities. Most important, alumni serve as role models to reinforce the idea that students can go to college and succeed.

## Benefits and Challenges

All education models have benefits and trade-offs. The Generation Schools Model is no exception and the Generation Schools Network continues to refine its programs. Several challenges and opportunities stand out in spite of the fact that by nearly all measures, the benefits for students, especially in terms of college and career programming, far outweigh the trade-offs. These benefits include:

**More and Better Learning Time.** The Intensive Courses that prepare students for college and careers are far more comprehensive and relevant than the guidance counseling offered in traditional high schools. Students who participate in Intensive Courses in grades 6 through 12 benefit from 280 hours of rigorous and meaningful college and career programming annually.

**Every Student Noticed Every Day.** The Advocacy program facilitates an ongoing student relationship with a supportive education professional who not only is tracking day-to-day achievement but progress toward long term personal, educational, and career success. This is an important factor in graduation rates, as students who drop out often cite the fact that no one at the school seemed to notice them.

While by no means insurmountable or unexpected, we quickly confirmed that we needed to address two fundamental challenges.

**Different roles and responsibilities for adults.** While the features of the Generation Schools Model clearly meet the needs of students, it asks teachers, school professionals, and community partners to view their jobs and relationships to the school in a new light. The Generation Schools Network provides tools, training, and technical assistance to hire new staff to take on these roles and to support existing staff in transitioning their skills and focus. Within this new educational environment, teachers and school professionals are responsible not only for core academics, but to support students' social and emotional needs, postsecondary planning, and the development of personal and professional competencies. In short, teachers own a broader set of instructional and relationship-oriented responsibilities.

**Early and ongoing investment in community partnerships is required.** Successful college and career readiness programming requires support from outside the school. Invaluable community partners can be found in both the private sector (e.g., entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and corporations) and the public sector (e.g., governments and colleges). The Generation Schools Model ensures there is staff in place to engage in and sustain these relationships. Intensive Course teachers have the benefit of designated blocks of time in which to collaborate with community partners and Community Engagement Team members. In addition, the staff of Generation Schools Network is committed to supporting these efforts at GSN school locations.

# Lessons Learned in Implementation

Most of the features of the Generation Schools Model that support college and career readiness are in place in the GSN schools in Brooklyn and Denver. The results clearly demonstrate that outstanding outcomes are possible if the school founders, leaders, and administrators think outside the box and adapt elements of the Model to fit specific local needs and circumstances.

At Brooklyn Generation School, despite the fact that 80 percent of entering students were behind or significantly behind in core competencies, student achievement now meets or exceeds citywide averages. Graduation rates at BGS have doubled, more students with Individualized Education Plans have graduated, and 90 percent of the graduates have been accepted into college.

Of the many lessons learned in Brooklyn and Denver, these are the most significant:

**Without full enrollment, it is difficult for administrators to stabilize implementation.** Transitioning a school to the Generation Schools Model is often done one grade at a time. Due to a small enrollment in early years, resources may not be sufficient to hire a full complement of Intensive Course teachers from the start. Since Intensive Courses in any grade take place one month at a time, twice a year, it may be necessary to use temporary staff until there are four grade levels. This can make it more challenging to establish firm practices and protocols in the area of college and career readiness programming.

**Administrators and teachers need tools, training, and technical assistance.** Communicating new roles and responsibilities to school staff and community partners and then implementing them has proved challenging for both teachers and students used to a conventional model. In recognition of this, Generation Schools Network has developed and continues to refine tools, training, and technical assistance, including a Learning Pathway for Intensive Course teachers, access to the Community Engagement Teams, and curricular units designed around high growth industries.

**Teachers must think differently and be willing to shift their mindset.** The Generation Schools Model, including the College and Career Readiness Program, calls for a teacher calendar significantly different from a traditional school setting. All teachers take some of their annual vacation during the school year. Advocacy adds another layer to the job description of Foundation and Studio Course teachers even though it falls within contract provisions. Intensive Course teachers must adapt to the planning, pacing, and expectations of leading day-long courses for one month at a time and to their related readiness programming responsibilities. GSN has seen first-hand that when teachers are open to change and given the support they need, they are much more likely to be successful and personally fulfilled in these new roles.

**Community partners are critical.** The College and Career Readiness program could not function without outside partners—those relationships greatly enhance the program and provide students with opportunities the schools could not offer on their own. We have learned, though, that developing quality organizational, corporate, and postsecondary partnerships takes time and those efforts must begin during the planning stages of the school, well before the doors are open.



**New evaluation tools are needed.** The Generation Schools Model restructures time, talent, and other resources in ways aligned with broader goals for student success. Unfortunately, the methodologies for assessment and oversight of public education have not undergone similar transformations. Using traditional criteria to evaluate the GSN College and Career Readiness Program can unfairly penalize a GSN school in spite of the fact that its students are receiving far more of the future-focused support and planning they need.

While all schools track academic growth, GSN is also developing key performance indicators to track growth in the development of professional and personal competencies, providing a balanced scorecard measuring the attainment of skills required for success in the 21st century. This is being done in partnership with community stakeholders, practitioners, academic researchers, and for-profit companies concerned about the workforce pipeline. GSN will share more information about this effort as it evolves.

**Schools must account for transportation challenges.**

A critical aspect of providing successful future-focused Intensive Courses is exposing students to multiple workplaces, colleges, and other settings in the community. Depending on the accessibility of public transportation and the availability of district or school transportation, providing an adequate number of excursions can be problematic.

Brooklyn Generation School is 1.5 miles from the nearest subway stop and BGS Intensive Course teachers often choose to meet their classes at the excursion site so that students can ride public transportation to and from their homes (with the permission of parents). GSN teachers have learned to anticipate these challenges and plan accordingly.

Please see the article in the Appendix, *My 100 Mile Walk with West Generation Academy Students*, written by one of our Intensive Course teachers in Denver.



**“I believe it is important for our students to spend as much time experiencing educational opportunities outside of the classroom as possible. When not in the classroom you could find the Sports Intensive out in the community. Fields trips ranged from hiking Dry Creek Gulch to touring Coors Field and learning about the hundreds of jobs there.**

**Mike Wilbourn, Sports Management  
Intensive Teacher,  
West Generation Academy**



**Professional & Personal Competency Development.** Acquisition and practice of workplace and life skills.

**Postsecondary Exploration.** What is college and post-secondary training? What does it feel like to be on a college campus? What kinds of jobs require what kind of training? How much will I earn in that career?

**Linking Learning to Life.** What am I learning in the classroom that relates to a career? What does a workplace look like for that career? What school activities are similar to specific work activities? Project based learning activities.

**Self-discovery.** Who am I? What do I enjoy learning about? What careers am I interested in?

## Conclusion

The College and Career Readiness Program elements of the Generation Schools Model are, in essence, a carefully timed process of exposure to and preparation for lifelong success. The Program would not be possible without teachers who define “teaching” in a broad sense and community partners who understand the value of helping every student, regardless of circumstances, achieve his or her full potential. This approach to preparing students for postsecondary opportunities offers much more promise than the current paradigm of 450 students assigned to one guidance counselor.

Generation Schools Network challenges both the education community and the business community to think differently about what it will take to prepare the workforce of the future and to embrace the fact that through partnerships and new thinking, vast improvements in this area are indeed possible.

*In addition to sponsoring schools in cities across the United States, Generation Schools Network offers coaching and technical assistance to other schools and districts interested in applying the insights and strategies found in the GSN Model to their own situations. Detailed information about partnership and services is available at [www.generationschools.org](http://www.generationschools.org).*

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# Appendix

## My 100-mile Walk with West Generation Academy Students

by Elisa Cohen, West Generation Academy Intensive Teacher

Retrieved from <http://www.northdenvertribune.com/2013/07/my-100-mile-walk-with-west-generation-academy-students/>

In my life I have taken some great journeys. I have walked from Panama to Colombia through the Darien Gap. I guided a raft for three weeks down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon. This past week ended a most enjoyable and educational year of walking 100 miles with West Generation Academy students through the cultural, educational and business landscapes of Denver.

West Generation Academy is a new innovation school sharing the West High School building with three other programs. Our College and Career Intensive program, along with our small core classes and extended day, sets us apart from other programs in the city. As an Arts and Media Intensive teacher, my job was to take students out into the community to learn about jobs and post-secondary training within the field of art.

“Why don’t we get a yellow school bus?” students asked repeatedly in each of my six classes over the year. A school bus excursion costs approximately \$140. A trip by foot, combined with RTD (Denver’s municipal bus system), was just \$45. An added bonus was that my classes grew into a cohesive team while walking through the city; we all got some exercise in addition to the learning objective for each outing. Each outing was about two to three miles of round trip walking. We went on a lot of expeditions.

An example of a set of outings for my class included walking from 9th and Speer to the Leonardo da Vinci exhibit on the 16th Street Mall. Before going to the exhibit, we researched da Vinci’s life. At the exhibit we were able to see replicas of his paintings and machines. Then to follow up with the college aspect of our Intensive program, we walked to the Metropolitan State University of Denver where we were given a tour of the art program and mechanical engineering department. Metro engineering students showed off the erosion control and monitoring machine they built during the semester. The engineering department had many fantastic machines. I wish I had taken this tour when I was a teen.

Another set of expeditions included visiting the Denver Art Museum, Denver Open Media, and Denver Comic Con as part of my 9th grade art Intensive focused around violence in the media. My students read *Yummy*, a graphic novel about an 11-year-old gang member who kills a girl and the consequences in the community. For homework, they read *The Outsiders* about white gangs gone amuck. We also read the Freakonomics chapter that explained why drug dealers live with the moms. (It’s a low-paying dangerous job.) The students took part in a Romeo and Juliet (rich Italian gang bangers,) workshop put on by Vision Box, a professional actors training organization on Santa Fe Drive.

These students walked to Denver Open Media where they created a televised talk show about the Denver west side. As part of the career aspect of this unit, we visited the law office of Ken Padilla. He shared with the students what a career in law can be and also shared with them tips for exercising their rights to remain silent. The final career expedition included walking to the Denver Comic Con at the Denver Convention



Center where our class presented our final 64-page comic book the students drew in the four-week class. There they saw many working artists selling their creative products.

Over the year, we explored and learned in the Denver Art Museum, the Denver Aquarium, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science as well as the galleries along Santa Fe Drive. We were invited into graphic design offices and listened to speakers who came to share information about their jobs. I loved hearing student opinions about art we saw—a collective “meh” after seeing a show with abstract art and their begging to stay longer in galleries with art they related to. I was touched by the generosity of businesses who invited my students in to learn about careers in the arts. I truly appreciated RTD drivers who were always on time for the 60 rides we took. The community partners who stepped up with expeditionary options for our students made this year possible.

While my classes explored the world of arts careers, my colleagues took their students on expeditions to learn about business, science, non-profits, sports management and construction technologies.

During my 100 miles of walking, I lost a dress size and gained a deeper appreciation for the thoughtfulness of the young people I had the privilege of traveling with this year, as well as the richness of our cultural, educational and business institutions.

# LINKING LEARNING TO LIFE

How Expanded Learning Time Creates the  
Opportunity for College and  
Career Readiness Programming

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