Since August 2018, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has made a series of grants to organizations working with middle and high schools across the country to use continuous improvement methods to advance high school graduation and college success rates for Black and Latino students and students experiencing poverty. Known as Networks for School Improvement, or NSIs, these grantees support groups of middle and high schools that work together to identify and solve common problems using approaches that best fit their needs, learning what works and refining their approaches as they go.

Our Model Design and Initiation (MDI) grants represent a continuation of our existing NSI strategy, as we believe that a data-informed approach to these adjustments will help school teams know whether their approach is having a positive impact on outcomes for Black and Latino students and students experiencing poverty. We’re therefore continuing to make MDI investments in partners with deep roots in their communities who know how best to support schools and students during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 changes much about how teachers, schools, and districts serve students, and we are working to support our partners and the field in their efforts to respond. We also reaffirm that our commitment to the overall goals of our education strategies are not changing.

Our previous MDI investments asked grantees to demonstrate or build capacity in all skills associated with running an NSI. With these new investments, we’re supporting grantees to focus their efforts on capacities associated with continuous improvement and measurement. In response to MDI finalists’ enthusiasm for more intentionally integrating student voice and agency into their work with schools, grantees will also build their capacity to integrate student participation into local improvement processes.

We are excited to share more about this second cohort of Model Design and Initiation grantees below.

MODEL DESIGN & INITIATION (MDI) GRANTS

We believe the K-12 public education system should provide a great education for all students, enabling them to reach their full potential. The goal of our K-12 work remains consistent and straightforward: to significantly increase the number of Black and Latino students and students experiencing poverty who earn a diploma, enroll in education after high school, and are on track in their first year to earn a degree or credential.

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty.

In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Mark Suzman, under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.
**Battelle for Kids**

Battelle for Kids helps realize the power and promise of 21st century learning for every student. They help education leaders engage their community to re-envision and transform their school systems. They take a systems approach to promote enduring transformation of the system and equitable, deeper learning outcomes for every student. They accelerate this work through their regional, state and national networks of K-12 public school districts. Student engagement and equity are the basis of their work in this partnership with the foundation. They seek to strengthen the capacity of middle and high school teachers and continuous improvement teams to try, learn, iterate, and adapt student agency practices aligned to deeper learning equity aims. There are two key aspects to this focus: 1) expanding the impact of the improvement practices in their Student Led Assessment Networked Improvement Community (NIC), and 2) using student experience survey data on belonging and engagement to inform system wide transformation.

**Californians for Justice**

Californians for Justice (CFJ) is a youth-powered organization fighting to improve the lives of communities of color, immigrant, low-income, LGBTQ and other marginalized communities. The aim of CFJ’s school and district capacity building work is to improve the lived conditions of students so that they are able to reach their full potential regardless of their race or zip code. CFJ’s fundamental belief is that school/district continuous improvement that neglects to center the voices of marginalized students and shies away from difficult conversations about race and power are less likely to result in deep-rooted equity-focused change. MDI funding will be used to: develop a toolkit around street-level student voice data and inquiry cycles that are rooted in racial equity; test those tools by supporting student-adult teams; and evaluate the impact of leadership development offerings for school and district leaders.

**Center For Powerful Public Schools**

The Center for Powerful Public Schools focuses on strengthening the capacity of teachers and school leaders across five districts in Southern California so they can better prepare Black, Latino, and students experiencing poverty to reach their full potential in school, in postsecondary education, and in 21st-century careers, while closing the equity gaps existing for the most underserved students. Through this MDI grant, the Center will focus on strengthening three areas of its work: building data infrastructure, creating disciplined inquiry cycles, and providing district leadership and leadership support.

**Center for Supportive Schools**

The mission of the Center for Supportive Schools (CSS) is to help schools become places where students want to be. Their priority focus is Black and Latino students deemed economically at-risk or impoverished, and they partner with schools to: develop all students into leaders; empower teachers to collaborate with each other and with students, and engage entire school communities to improve how learning happens. Through this MDI grant, they seek to build their capacity in three essential areas of their work: equity-focused continuous improvement; practical measurement, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). A cornerstone of their work is the enhancement of student voice and agency, with a focus on deeply involving students as core stakeholders and equitable partners in school change efforts. This project will place a special emphasis on leveraging students as leaders and helping them feel valued, affirmed, and empowered.

**EMERGE Fellowship**

EMERGE’s mission is to empower and prepare high performing students from underserved communities to attend and graduate from selective colleges and universities across the nation. As an MDI grantee, EMERGE seeks to build out a robust data infrastructure, pilot continuous improvement methods utilizing student voices and perspectives to develop a shared codified model of improvement with district partners, and improve its approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**ImpactTulsa**

ImpactTulsa supports 21 school districts in Tulsa County in Oklahoma as part of their mission to align to the community to provide a pathway for all students to thrive from cradle to career. ImpactTulsa aspires to build upon their existing continuous improvement efforts while increasing their capacity around (1) disciplined cycles, (2) data infrastructure to build capacity of system and school leaders for data-driven decision making, and (3) student agency and family engagement to refine and codify ImpactTulsa’s model in support of Black, Latino, and youth experiencing poverty to increase the number who are college ready on-track. ImpactTulsa will test refined continuous improvement methods in partnership with district and school teams to restructure existing strategy in response to shifts due to COVID-19. They will do this through examining processes of student recruitment for concurrent enrollment, identifying best practices for student peer advocacy, building components of strategy inclusive of student voice and authority, and consulting with family engagement experts that have led high school family engagement for college and career advocacy.

**Inflexion**

Inflexion coordinates networks of school leaders to articulate school identity and intended student outcomes and facilitates school change as these leaders align organizational structures and learning approaches to a shared, holistic vision for student readiness. The Inflexion Approach is grounded in organization effectiveness research and implementation science. Through the MDI grant, Inflexion will embed improvement science through incorporating disciplined inquiry cycles using practical measures into Inflexion Approach services to the school networks. Additionally, Inflexion will enhance its support to schools striving to engage families and students in empowering ways that enhance student agency. Finally, Inflexion’s unique school network structure and processes will be optimized to support multiyear engagements and peer support among schools.

**New Teacher Center**

NTC’s mission is to disrupt the predictability of educational inequities for systematically underserved students by accelerating educator effectiveness. NTC partners with systems and schools that serve a majority of students who are in five priority student populations: Students of color, students living in poverty, English language learners, immigrant students, and students with learning differences. In 2019-20, NTC developed the instructional leadership of more than 8,000 mentors, coaches, and school leaders to support the development of 25,000 teachers, and impact the learning of 1.8M students in over 340 districts across 25 states. Through the Gates Foundation MDI grant, NTC will increase capacity in the following skills to build a refined and codified model for supporting the implementation of continuous improvement processes in schools to better serve Black, Latino, and students experiencing poverty. Continuous Improvement Methods, measurement and data for improvement, DEI and inclusive culture, and leadership support. A critical factor throughout these capacities will be focused on capturing student voice and agency to improve NTC’s support to districts. Two key strategies will include (1) Activating a process to integrate student voice into feedback loops, such as through the Classroom Connections Program, in partnership with Dr. Jason Okonofua (EDENS Lab) and Dr. David Panesku (PERTS) and teams, aligned with NTC coaching cycles for teachers, to inform action and decision making and (2) Enlisting the partnership of a student-led advisory group to support the implementation of student voice into coaching cycles and provide input on continuous improvement design and decision making.

**NYC Outward Bound**

NYC Outward Bound Schools transforms schools and changes lives by bringing its educational approach, which places character and academic development on equal footing, to NYC’s young people and their public schools, with a focus on students from educationally underserved communities. Through this MDI grant, NYC Outward Bound Schools will build organizational mindset and capacity to implement continuous improvement practices that will allow them to adjust support to students, teachers and school leaders so they are more impactful. This work includes expanding, piloting and refining data and knowledge management systems that allow school teams to monitor academic and student experience data simultaneously to inform changes in practice. Using their extensive experience developing student agency and leadership, NYC Outward Bound Schools will elevate the voices of students in their schools to inform their continuous improvement approach and codify school-level changes centered on student belonging and engagement especially important in the context of COVID-19.
Pivot Learning Partners
Pivot Learning is a non-profit organization based in California whose mission is to partner with educators in pursuit of educational justice. They partner with districts on selection and implementation of high-quality curriculum and development of systems that provide timely, individualized supports for students. With this grant, they plan to deepen their facility with continuous improvement while partnering with districts to address COVID-driven loss of instruction, focusing particularly on preventing inappropriate special education identification. As part of their approach, they will be conducting empathy interviews with students and families, district administrators, and school leaders to better understand experiences of learning loss, as well as screening and data collection tools employed by the district.

Providence Public Schools
The Providence Public School District (PPSD) is a large urban school district located in Providence, Rhode Island, the state’s capital city. PPSD serves approximately 24,000 students and their families across 22 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 10 high schools and 2 public district charter schools. With the support of the MDI grant, they will continue the ongoing transformation in their secondary schools through capacity building of the district and school based leadership teams. The specific student outcomes that this project seeks to achieve are two 8th grade on-track indicators as measures of improvement: decreased student suspensions, specifically in the disproportionate suspension rate of black students in Providence, and decreased student chronic absenteeism. They will look to improve the conditions in which those two outcomes can ultimately improve, and specifically will focus on the dispositions, skills and knowledge needed by adults to create culturally responsive learning environments that leverage and elevate student expertise.

Puget Sound Educational Service District
Puget Sound College & Career Network at the Puget Sound Educational Service District builds regional capacity to implement gap-closing policies, programming, and practices to increase equitable postsecondary readiness and completion for students of color who have been historically underserved across King & Pierce Counties by leading with racial equity. With this grant they will increase their capacity to facilitate disciplined improvement cycles around equitable financial aid completion and postsecondary enrollment. They will also investigate the data infrastructure they need to support a broad set of districts in King and Pierce counties with these services, and co-create practical measures with students and staff to track progress toward their shared goals.

Shelby County Schools
Shelby County Schools serves more than 100,000 students in more than 200 schools in Memphis, TN. The district’s mission is to prepare all students for success in learning, leadership and life. Inherent in this mission is a commitment to continuous improvement. The district will use this MDI grant to build capacity among school staff and those who coach school leaders to implement equity-centered continuous improvement practices and to sustain adoption of continuous improvement processes in more schools on a more consistent basis. A key goal of this work is to make student equity and agency a deliberate focus of the district’s continuous improvement work. First, the district plans to increase understanding at the school and district level of the ways implicit bias can influence adult mindsets about students, goal setting, and accountability. Second, the district plans to improve district and school capacity to develop comprehensive evidence-based theories of change that directly challenge barriers to student equity and incorporate student voice into the cycle of data review. Finally, the district will identify the conditions for success and barriers schools experience when adopting continuous improvement processes and then codify the drivers of success in continuous improvement resources, training and coaching efforts.

South Bend Empowerment Zone
The South Bend Empowerment Zone (SBEZ) was established in spring 2019 to transform five schools on the west side of South Bend, Indiana. SBEZ aims to dramatically increase student achievement as measured by Indiana’s state assessment while deepening student learning, strengthening teacher instructional efficacy and cultural responsiveness, supporting the whole child through robust social-emotional supports, and establishing strong partnerships between their schools, families, and community. With the MDI grant, SBEZ will strengthen and develop the capacity of their leadership team to launch and support disciplined inquiry cycles using an equity lens.

United Schools Network
United Schools Network (USN) is a non-profit CMO that serves as the home office for four public charter schools in Columbus, Ohio. USN’s mission, to transform lives and their communities through the power of education, has had as one of its foundational components a relentless focus on continuous improvement. Through this grant, USN will build leaders’ capacity to support school-based improvement teams to use disciplined inquiry cycles, increase the capacity of USN schools to monitor student progress through the design of a strong data infrastructure system, and build USN leaders’ capacity to use Deming’s System of Profound Knowledge as the theory by which to increase student agency.

UP Partnership
Through UP Partnership, San Antonio has a broad network of community, civil servant, and systems leaders with strong track records, commitments to equity, and a desire to advance lasting and integrated solutions across sectors. We plan to build their capacity to run communities of practice within their networks, namely the Equitable Enrollment Collaborative (EEC), a tailored space where professionals from secondary and postsecondary institutions across San Antonio can convene. Through the EEC, they will build formal and actionable strategies to increase the success of students from target school districts in their community. With time, we plan to expand their work into training youth leaders in organizing insights on college and career readiness from their peers and presenting those to district leadership.