



Breakthrough Central Texas

Strategic Plan for 2019-2024

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Prepared in Partnership with FSG



Breakthrough Central Texas Strategic Plan for 2019-2024

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Executive Summary

Breakthrough Central Texas creates a path to postsecondary success for students who aspire to become the first in their families to earn a college degree. Established in 2002 with 41 students in its inaugural cohort, Breakthrough now serves 1,700 students across Central Texas. The organization makes a commitment – to provide the right support at the right time – to help students overcome the systemic barriers and find college success. There are many indications that the approach is working. Independent studies have confirmed that Breakthrough students are significantly more likely to graduate high school on time, twice as likely to enroll in college, and seven times more likely to graduate from college than their peers.

However, there is much more work to be done in the region. Despite the success of Breakthrough students, less than eight percent of all students from low-income communities across Austin are graduating from college each year, a tremendous loss of opportunity and potential. Breakthrough recognizes that it is poised to take a leadership role and support more students to college success. The 2019-2024 Strategic Plan describes a path to scale that is sustainable and impactful. Over the next five years, the organization will move closer to its vision that all Central Texas children have the opportunity to realize their potential through the life-changing power of a college degree.

NEW RESEARCH FINDINGS

Breakthrough engaged with strategy consulting firm FSG in an intensive research effort, analyzing regional and national data on the inequity of the postsecondary completion that exists for different students, as well as the research on solutions to that challenge. This research uncovered five key findings.

1. Central Texas has the lowest college completion rate in the state (8%) for students from low-income communities (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board).
2. Nationally, college degree attainment rates have risen dramatically for all students but those in the bottom two income quartiles. While college degree attainment rates have gone up over time, they have only done so for individuals with the greatest financial means. (Figure 1)
3. Nationwide, inequity in college access and success is a “complex” problem; strictly technical solutions, such as mass texting services or online test preparatory models, have failed to create impact at scale. Effective approaches to complex problems address root causes to shift the underlying conditions. (Figure 2)
4. Breakthrough’s 12- year core model is highly effective but also intensive and faces a challenging path to rapid scale. If Breakthrough is to expand its reach significantly, it must experiment with different approaches to supporting students.
5. Breakthrough’s most critical competency is building and maintaining trusting relationships with students, families, and education institutions. The success of Breakthrough’s approach is largely built around interventions provided in the context of a trusting relationship, which is an adaptive solution appropriate to a complex problem.

Figure 1
U.S. Bachelor's Degree attainment by Age 24 by family's income quartile

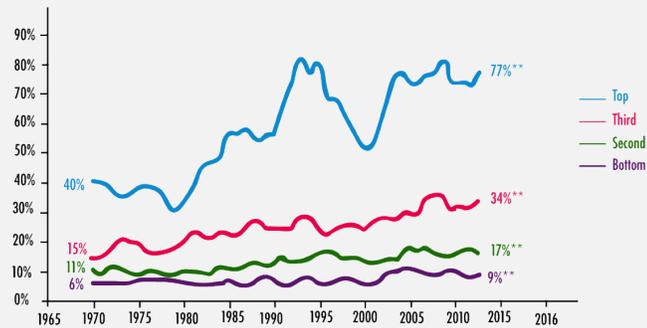
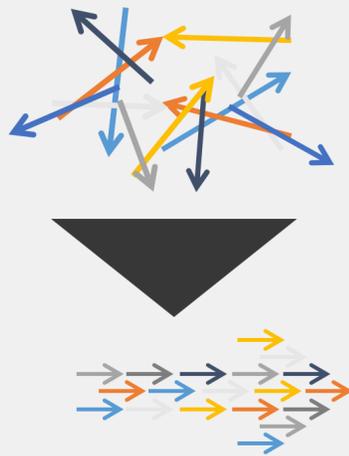


Figure 2



Social problems and their solutions:

- Arise from **interaction of many organizations and individuals** within larger system
- Address **multiple intervention points** rather than relying on a single lever to produce change
- Use **mutually reinforcing** interventions
- Are highly **specific to context**

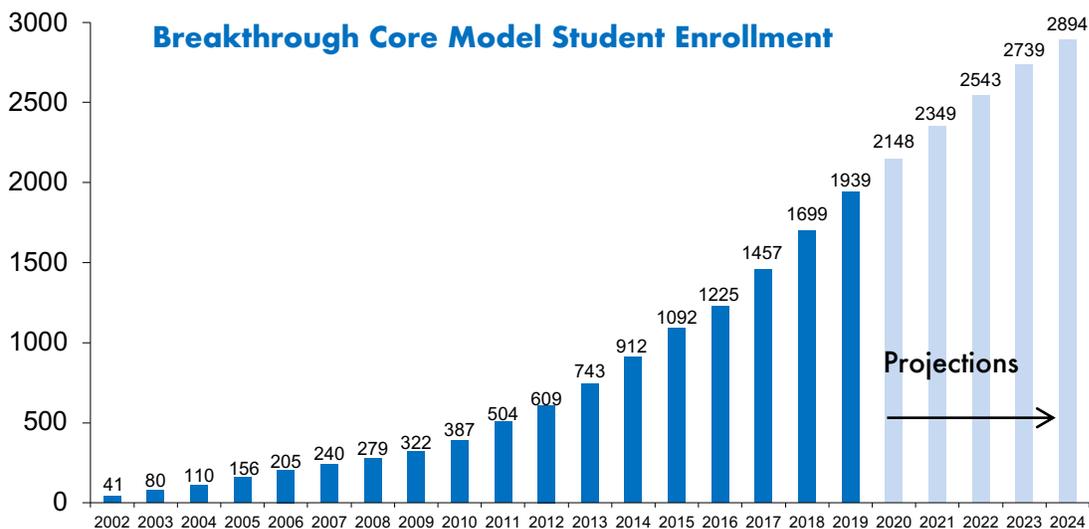
A SUSTAINABLE PATH TO IMPACT: THREE STRATEGIES

Breakthrough's primary growth challenge is to find feasible, sustainable strategies that keep relationships at the center of our work. We initially sought to address this challenge by continuing to grow the twelve-year core model. However, given potential cost constraints we sought out settings where trusting relationships could be cultivated to provide high touch support for students. Strikingly, it was clear from conversations with Breakthrough's school partners how much trust and capital the organization has as a solution provider. An opportunity exists to enhance human resources available in school settings with the boost of additional services from Breakthrough's staff. In concert with more responsive policies, we can catalyze deeper impact across the region and activate the untapped potential of our students.

The research led us to three strategies to stretch toward Breakthrough's north-star goal to double the number of Central Texas students from low-income communities who graduate from college. First, it will build out its core 12-year model to greatly increase the number of students who attain college success. Second, Breakthrough will launch a school-based model combining direct advising to students with capacity building services at their school to improve college-going rates for every student. Lastly, the organization will create a policy advocacy practice to remove barriers that exist for marginalized students in the region.

Strategy 1: Build Out of Breakthrough's Core Model

In the next five years, Breakthrough will increase the number of students served by its twelve-year, core model by 70%, from approximately 1,700 students to more than 2,900.



To build out the core model well, Breakthrough is prioritizing four objectives:

1. *Optimize programs and services for a significantly greater number of students and families* - Breakthrough will greatly increase the number of students and families it serves, in particular students at the secondary and postsecondary levels. While doing so, it will improve its programs and services by seeking opportunities for greater efficiency, effectiveness, inclusivity, and equity of access.
2. *Develop structures and systems for a much larger organization* - As Breakthrough's core model increases in size and impact, the amount of resources required will also increase. To support the expansion of programs, Breakthrough will develop new structures and systems to improve communication, decision making, data tracking, evaluation, external collaboration, and use of technology.
3. *Create an organization where people at all levels of the organization thrive* - People are the greatest resources and assets of Breakthrough's core model. In order to serve more students with a better service and with stronger systems, Breakthrough will invest in the staff members, teaching fellows, AmeriCorps members, instructional coaches, trustees, and volunteers who work to provide a path to college completion for students.
4. *Generate sustainable funding and a larger community of support* - The ambitious growth of Breakthrough's core model requires additional financial resources, volunteers, and partners. We will raise awareness of the organization while securing a larger and more diversified funding base.

Strategy 2: Extended Impact Strategy: The School-Based Model

Breakthrough will pilot a school-based model combining direct advising to students with capacity building services to improve college-going rates for every student at the school. Breakthrough will work closely with the school to design the direct services offered to students, as well as the structural and cultural changes that will allow those services to flourish.

1. **Services** - Deliver college access and success services from no later than 11th grade through at least the first year of college. College access and success services will be delivered by Breakthrough advisors directly to students through 1:1 advising and cohort-based programming.
2. **Structures** - Support schools to create processes and infrastructure (e.g., data systems, curriculum integrated with college options). Capacity building services will be delivered by Breakthrough staff to administrators, counselors, and teachers.
3. **Culture** - Support schools to cultivate a strong college-going culture and develop competencies to support first-generation college students. Create an environment that enables college access services and structures to thrive. Capacity building services will be delivered by Breakthrough staff to administrators, counselors, and teachers.

In the next five years, Breakthrough anticipates serving an additional 1,400 students through the whole school model, with the goal of ultimately doubling the number of students from participating campus(es) who go on to graduate from college.

Strategy 3: Extended Impact Strategy: Policy Advocacy

Breakthrough will launch a policy advocacy practice to extend its influence beyond what is possible through the existing direct service model or the new school-based model. Affecting policies at the local and state level that can enable the success of first-generation students will have wide-ranging impact on the landscape for postsecondary access and completion. The organization is well-positioned to work towards creating structural change through shifting policies, practices, and resource flows that prevent first-generation and low-income students from attaining postsecondary success.

Conclusion: looking toward the future

Breakthrough Central Texas has the potential to expand its impact through more solidly grounding the success of its core model and broadening its reach to many more students and families through the extended impact approaches. Having thoroughly examined the current configuration of needs and resources in our region and thought deeply about Breakthrough's own assets, strengths, and lessons learned, this dual approach represents the best path to animating the organization's guiding vision and attaining its north star: to double the number of first-generation college graduates in Central Texas each year. The work outlined in this plan will require great commitment and significant investment from its staff, board, and donors. The results will repay the investment many times over: in students' lives transformed, in schools more strongly supporting students to success, and in communities turned into places of opportunity for all.

Mission, Vision, Values, and Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The strategic planning process developed and refined Breakthrough's core ideals. Our mission statement describes our purpose – why we exist and what we do. Our vision statement describes a future when our greatest aspirations have been fulfilled for Central Texas. Our values statement articulates the enduring principles that guide our decisions and actions as an organization. Our statement of commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion describes how fundamental that commitment is to the health and impact of our organization.

Mission

Breakthrough Central Texas creates a path to and through college for students who will become the first in their families to earn a college degree.

Vision

All Central Texas children have the opportunity to realize their potential through the life-changing power of a college degree.

Values

Equity, Empowerment, Inclusivity. We value equity, empowerment, and inclusivity first and foremost for our students, families, staff, and supporters. We honor student agency and choice in the process and recognize there are many paths to postsecondary success.

Accountability, Alignment, Engagement. We believe that in order for change to be made, we must align our actions with our values, and be willing to hold ourselves accountable for our actions. We commit ourselves to engaging in the process of transformation both as an organization, internally, and externally, with our community.

Competence, Education, Knowledge. We believe in the power of education to transform minds and hearts, and strive to give our students and staff the competency, knowledge, and skills needed to be change leaders in our community.

Courage, Willing Transformation, Leadership. We believe it takes courage and leadership to inspire change and that transformation is at its most powerful when it comes from a place of transparency, openness, and willingness.

Culture of Philanthropy. We believe it takes a community of support to create enduring change. We commit ourselves to creating a thriving culture of philanthropy where all contributions are valued and celebrated.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Breakthrough Central Texas is a safe place for people of all races, abilities, ethnicities, gender expressions, sexual orientations, immigration statuses, religions, and backgrounds. We accept, support, and celebrate all students and families.

We believe that building our practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion will allow people to access and thrive in this community. With thriving people, we will be able to achieve greater impact and move toward our vision for a better future. In order to have clarity in our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we have created the following definitions:

- **Diversity** includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. At Breakthrough we define diversity as broadly as possible. Furthermore, diversity can include diversity of thought, perspectives, ideas, and values.
- **Inclusion** is creating an environment in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.
- **Equity** is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.

Theory of Change

Target Population

For core twelve-year model

- 5th and 6th grade students
- Aspire to be first-generation college graduates
- Passing majority of state standardized tests and classes.

For school-based model

- High school students
- Attending a Central Texas high school with a substantial population of low-income students and students of color
- May be a first-generation college student

External Context

- First-generation, low-income students:
 - Have less access, relative to their middle-income and continuing-generation counterparts, to the educational and economic opportunities and social capital required to matriculate into and eventually graduate college (fewer than 8% of low-income, first-generation eighth graders go on to postsecondary success by age 24).
 - Are more likely to attend an under resourced, lower-performing school, due to systemic inequities.
 - Are impacted by state and federal policies that shape K-12 education funding, college cost, income inequality, and social safety programs.
- Central Texas school districts and institutes of higher education:
 - Serve increasing numbers of low-income and first-generation students, especially outside of Austin's urban core.
 - Frequently lack programs and resources to support students for postsecondary success (including sufficient guidance counselors to address college counseling and readiness needs).
 - Face a gap between available funding and the level of services required to meet low-income student needs.
 - Are facing increased pressure to support all students to and through college.
 - May lack processes for deliberation and decision making that take into account the voices and experiences of the most vulnerable students and families.

Activities

- Provide academic preparation, social-emotional learning, trusting relationships, college knowledge, and guidance to postsecondary completion for first-gen students through the core twelve-year model
 - Ensure students have the academic skills necessary to succeed in college

- Guide students in rich, meaningful experiences that build leadership and develop non-cognitive skills critical for postsecondary success
- Provide skilled advising services to develop meaningful relationships with students and offer guidance to overcoming barriers, academic and nonacademic, that arise.
- Ensure students and families know and follow the necessary steps to get into college and secure financial aid
- Support students in successfully transitioning to and navigating through postsecondary experiences
- Provide trusting relationships, college knowledge, and guidance to postsecondary access for first-gen, low-income and other students through the **school-based model**
 - Provide skilled advising services to develop meaningful relationships with students and offer guidance for overcoming barriers, academic and nonacademic, that arise.
 - Ensure students and families know and follow the necessary steps to get into college and secure financial aid
 - Support students in successfully transitioning to postsecondary and navigating the first year
- Equip high schools serving large populations of low-income and first-generation students with the resources and competencies to deliver high-quality, culturally competent college access services through the **school partnership model**
 - Equip schools with the systems and processes to guide all students towards their postsecondary plans (*e.g.*, by independently delivering rigorous, inclusive college access services)
 - Cultivate a culture where all teachers, counselors, and school administrators are invested in the postsecondary success of *all* students
- Inform and educate policy makers using data and student voices to make changes that widen access to postsecondary credentials for all students, especially first-gen students through the **shaping policy program**

Short-Term Outcomes

- More low-income, first-gen, and students of color will go to and graduate from college and graduate with minimal student debt
- Schools are able to provide and tailor services to support underserved students in navigating college access
- Schools are invested in the postsecondary success of all their students and are committed to building inclusive, college-going cultures

Long-Term Outcomes

- Higher rate of college completion in Texas for all students, and shrinking disparities between first-generation and continuing generation students and between low-income and middle-income students
- More district, state and federal financial resources are available for first-gen students and programs which support first-gen students (on and off campus)

- Secondary and postsecondary institutions are committed to supporting first-gen students and improving first-gen student outcomes

Assumptions

- College is the most effective lever for interrupting the cycle of poverty and increasing economic and social mobility
- First generation college students face more barriers to college completion than their peers. They are less likely to be prepared for, apply for, enroll in, persist in, and complete postsecondary education
- Having a strong support system of family, peers, teachers, and community helps first-gen students reach their goals; and a supportive, trusting relationship with a non-familial adult helps students navigate transitions and overcome adversity
- College success programs which develop trusting relationships and provide quality programs and services can equip first-gen students for postsecondary success
- Early intervention is a key design element to set students on the path to college completion
- There is strong attrition from the college completion path in 11th and 12th grade (this often manifests as students not taking the necessary steps to apply / enroll) and in the first year of college (*e.g.*, not arriving on campus, not returning for the second semester)
- State and local policy shape the conditions in which Breakthrough students move through secondary and postsecondary education

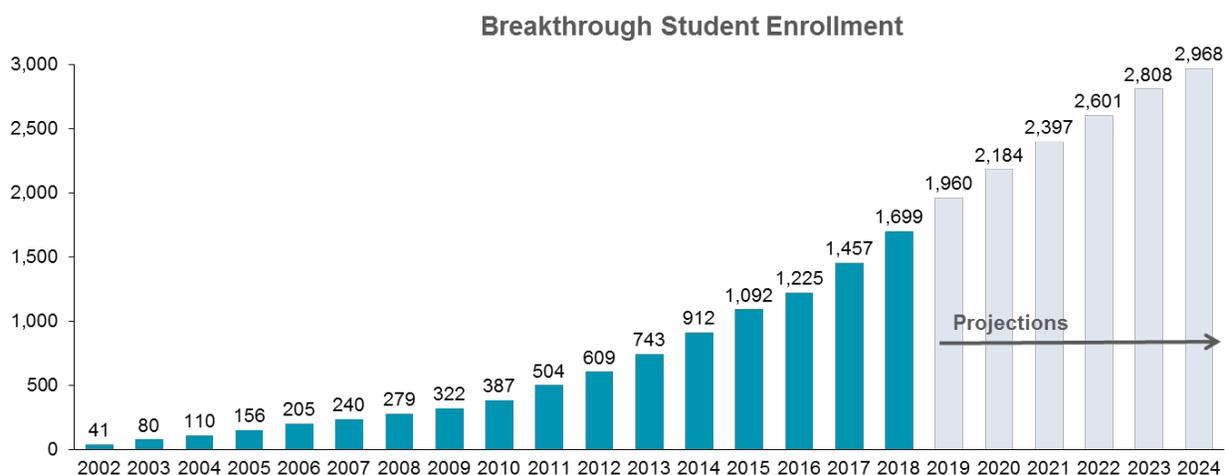
Impact Strategy: Build Out of Breakthrough’s Core Model

Introduction to the Approach

Breakthrough’s core model provides out-of-school learning experiences and individualized advising for up to 12 years for middle school students who will become first-generation college graduates. The model is an adaptive and responsive intervention, well suited to the complex challenge of improving college access and completion rates for marginalized and underserved student populations. It is also a cohort-based model. Breakthrough makes a commitment to a group of sixth graders each year, a commitment that lasts until the individuals in that cohort earn a postsecondary degree or age out of services six years after graduating high school.

The number of students served by Breakthrough’s core model is increasing rapidly. The first cohort of 41 students from Austin ISD enrolled in the program in 2002. Since then the program has increased the number of students it serves in two distinct ways. Each year it has added new cohorts of sixth grade students, creating a twelve-year pipeline of students from middle school through college. In addition, the program has increased the number of students it serves by creating new pipelines in new geographic regions. These expansions have occurred three times in Breakthrough’s history – in Manor in 2011, in Northeast Austin in 2014, and in Del Valle in 2017.

The additional pipelines have led to an exponential growth rate because the cohort sizes are significantly larger than in years past. Over the next five years, the core model will expand 70%, from approximately 1,700 students today to approximately 2,900 students in 2024.*

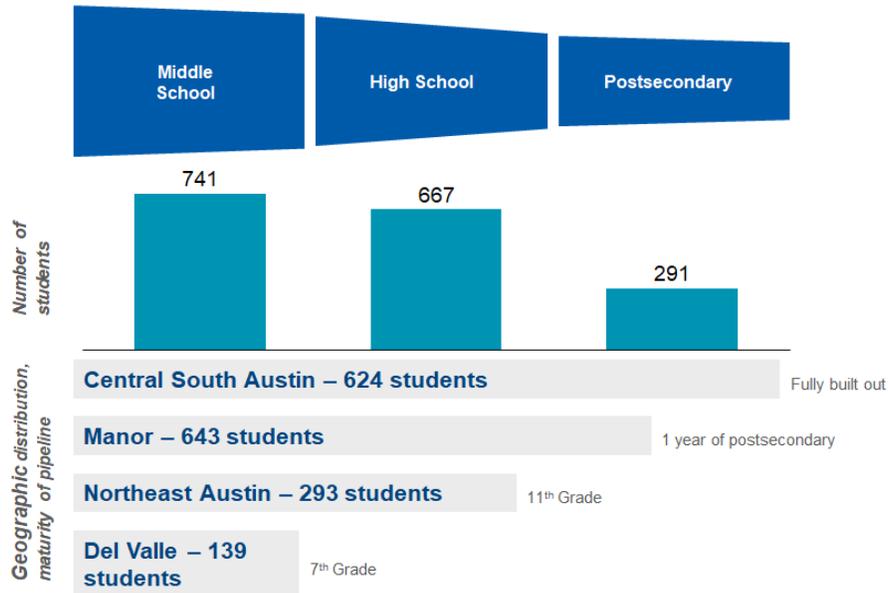


Currently, the program enrolls 280 students from four pipelines: Central/South Austin, Northeast Austin, Manor, and Del Valle. Only one pipeline – Central/South Austin– is fully built out. Because the other three pipelines are still being developed, Breakthrough has a greater proportion of students in middle school and high school than enrolled in postsecondary education (see Figure 1).

* Note that the projections included in this document are based on enrollment figures as of Spring 2019 and are subject to change based on updates to enrollment figures over time.

Figure 1: Current Distribution of Breakthrough Central Texas Students by Segment

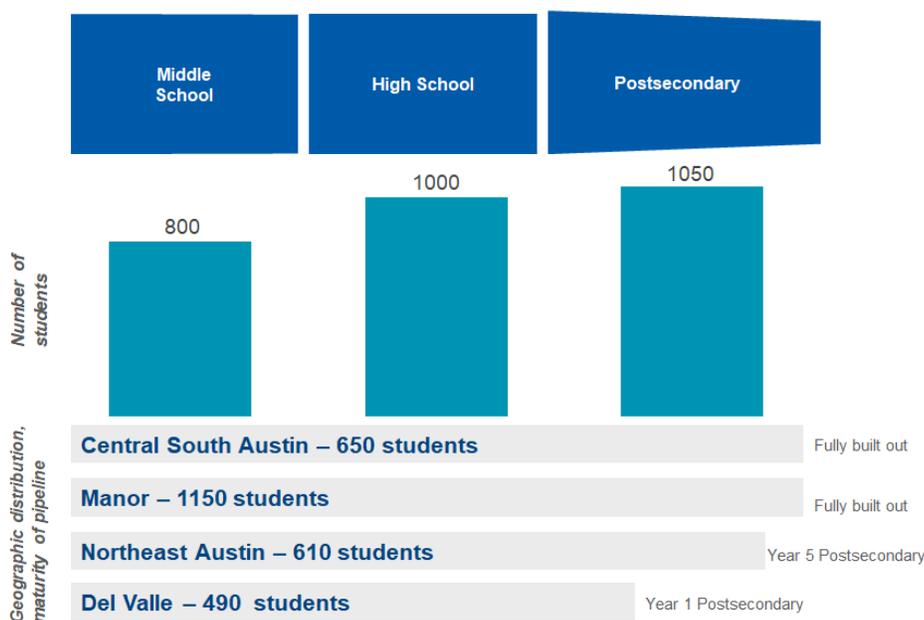
In 2019 Breakthrough’s core-model is growing, with the high school and college segment about to grow substantially



In the next five years, Breakthrough will be serving a much larger number of students and will experience that growth most significantly in the high school and postsecondary components of the program. By 2024, Breakthrough will serve approximately 800 middle school students (an 8% increase), 1050 high school students (a 57% increase), and 1,050 postsecondary students (a 260% increase) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Projected Distribution of Breakthrough Central Texas Students by Segment in 2024

In 2024 there will be significantly greater number of students at the high school and postsecondary level



Overview of Strategies

During the five-year period covered in the 2019-2024 strategic plan, Breakthrough will experience remarkable growth in the number of students it serves with its core, twelve-year model. In addition, it will be serving a much larger percentage of students in the high school and postsecondary components of the model. The organization must develop strategies for the volume of students and the programs and services designed to support them on their journey to college completion. The four goals below outline a path that is impactful, sustaining, and rooted in the organization’s values and its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Goal 1: Optimize programs and services for a significantly larger number of students and families

Breakthrough will greatly increase the number of students and families it serves. While doing so, it intends to improve its programs and services by seeking opportunities for greater efficiency, effectiveness, inclusivity, and equity of access.

- **Develop programs and services at the high school level.** Improve the service model in schools with concentrated numbers of high school students, such as Northeast High School, Manor High School, Travis High School, and others. Provide more robust services to develop the academic readiness of students while also refining the nonacademic support services needed for students at the high school level. Establish a presence at Del Valle high school, including securing space conducive to individual and group advising and instructional space for afterschool, Saturday, and summer

programming. Develop relationships with key personnel at the school and revise existing curriculum from other Breakthrough Central Texas sites and innovate to create services to meet the unique needs of students in Del Valle.

- Develop **programs and services at the postsecondary level**. Refine Breakthrough's tiered service model to provide differentiated service for students depending on their needs on their postsecondary path. Establish cohort and near-peer support networks at campuses with concentrated numbers of Breakthrough students. Create a comprehensive curriculum document that outlines the programs and advising services offered for high school graduates. Craft a robust training practice for the large number of staff and AmeriCorps members that will be hired during the period of the strategic plan. Develop and refine Breakthrough's College Fit Guide to support students as they seek out institutions best suited for their needs. Establish greater use of small, need-based grants to support students.
- Create an **inclusive environment for students to access Breakthrough's services and thrive** in our community. Improving the organization's ability to attract and retain diverse students, in particular male students and Black or African American students, by developing annual enrollment targets, improving recruitment practices, and removing barriers to full participation. In future years, respond to the changing demographics of Central Texas to ensure populations that could benefit from our service have the opportunity to do so. Create curriculum in Breakthrough's programs and advising services to develop the multicultural competency of our students and to establish our community as a safe place for students. Diversify images of students, families, staff, and other members of the community on display in the office and in print materials to better represent the range of individuals who make up our community.
- Improve **services to family members and caregivers** as they support their student on the path to postsecondary success. Provide more robust guidance on how to navigate secondary and postsecondary schools, including sharing knowledge of the requirements for postsecondary attainment and information on how to access to district and campus services and decision makers. Develop guidance for families and caregivers to advocate for better practices and policies at the campus, district, and institutional level for their students. Ensure equity of access to Breakthrough's advising service for families and caregivers across all grade levels and sites. Create materials and presentations in languages other than English and Spanish that are utilized by the community.
- Engage **students and families/caregivers in the design and execution of Breakthrough's services**. Create regular opportunities to provide input on Breakthrough's services. Engage families and caregivers in diversity, equity, and inclusion conversations at programs and through advising services. Share and reflect on Breakthrough's values statement and its statement of commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion at regular intervals with students and families.
- Add **additional staff and AmeriCorps members** to ensure sufficient resources to provide high-quality programs and services to students and families and allow for sustainable workloads for staff members. Our projections envision adding approximately 20 staff members and AmeriCorps members in the Del Valle, Manor, Northeast Austin, and College Completion programs.
- **Evaluate the staffing model** to ensure sufficient level of resources for our services and programs and allow space for model innovations and refinements.

Goal 2: Develop structures and systems for a much larger organization

As Breakthrough's core model increases in size and impact, the amount of resources required will also increase. Breakthrough will need to develop new structures and systems to support the expansion and improvement of programs.

- Develop systems to allow for **improved communication and decision making** across a larger team. Establish communication channels to allow for equity of access to information at all levels of the organization. Provide opportunities for collaboration on decision making and innovations between departments and teams.
- Refine Breakthrough's **data systems and performance management tools** to drive improvements and to communicate better across a larger team and to an increased number of stakeholders and partners. Improve Breakthrough's customized Salesforce database to drive advising services and interventions for students. Create a robust system of reports that demonstrate impact and areas for improvement internally and to key supporters and partners. Evaluate the impact, outcomes, and consistency of implementation of Breakthrough's core model in Central Texas.
- **Collaborate with school, district, and institute of higher education partners** to improve programs and services. Seek opportunities to embed the core-model work more deeply in the existing structure of these partners. Create partnerships with colleges of education, student organizations, and other school-based groups to provide additional volunteers, school year interns, and summer staffing.
- Create **technology solutions** to allow staff and AmeriCorps members to spend a greater percentage of time on their primary roles and responsibilities. Improving the functionality of Breakthrough's operating systems such as document storage and sharing, communication and calendaring, project management, compliance, expense tracking, and other technology solutions. Provide sufficient information technology support services to minimize downtime.

Goal 3: Create an organization where people at all levels of the organization thrive.

People are the greatest resources and assets of Breakthrough's core model. In order to serve more students with a better service and with stronger systems, Breakthrough needs to invest in the staff members, teaching fellows, AmeriCorps members, instructional coaches, trustees, and volunteers who work to provide a path to college completion for students.

- Refine practices of **recruitment and hiring of talent**. Diversify the pool of candidates for all positions. Invest in more resources to conduct active recruiting in racially and otherwise diverse communities in Central Texas. Innovate in recruitment practices to incentivize referrals and to increase retention of AmeriCorps members and seasonal staffing such as teaching fellows and instructional coaches. Create an inclusive process to assess candidates and to make good decisions on hiring. Include Breakthrough's values statements and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the hiring process at all levels.
- **Improve onboarding practices** for staff members, AmeriCorps members, and seasonal staff. Develop a baseline of skills for all staff and AmeriCorps members. Consider centralizing resources for onboarding and training of job requirements. Develop a training module for supervisors leading the

onboarding training for their direct reports. Include a robust training on multicultural competencies and Breakthrough's approach to diversity, equity and, inclusion. Refine onboarding practices for job-based competencies and skills.

- Invest in ongoing **professional development, education and training**. Create systems to ensure equity of access to professional development offered internally by the organization and externally through conferences, workshops, and other venues. Differentiate trainings to account for the varied staffing structure of seasonal staff, year-round staff, and AmeriCorps members. Align the content of trainings to the competencies and skills required for the various staff positions in the organization and to allow for individuals to grow into roles with greater or different responsibilities.
- Create greater visibility into **pathways to advancement** for staff and AmeriCorps members. Clearly define the skills and competencies of roles at Breakthrough and the support needed to advance. Create opportunities for employees to experience what others do in the organization. Consider a structure that allows for more specialists in the execution of the core model, such as specialists in curriculum and learning, mental health services, and college and financial aid applications.
- Continue to **develop a strong and inclusive culture** for all people to bring their whole selves to their work. Improve the sense of belonging for all identities. Raise awareness of and seek to reduce heteronormativity in the work place and in our community. Tackle the culture of urgency, perfectionism, and “whatever it takes” by setting realistic work plans, providing the space for innovation, and celebrating the process of learning.

Goal 4: Generate sustainable funding and a larger community of support

The ambitious growth of Breakthrough's core model requires additional financial resources, volunteers, and partners. We seek to raise awareness of the organization while securing a larger and more diversified funding base.

- Increase awareness of and improve **Breakthrough's position as a community leader**. Increase Breakthrough's presence in media, social media, at conferences and meetings of policy makers, funders, community leaders, and other influencers. Improve practices of engaging storytelling including establishing deep consent, honoring the comfort levels of all students, and committing to strength-based stories that shed light on the systemic barriers to completion. Develop authentic ways of engaging community supporters with students participating in the Breakthrough program and honor the individual students in the process. Bring the voice of authentic practitioners who are skilled at developing trusting relationships to the conversations happening in the community about the inequity in college attainment.
- Develop a **strong culture of philanthropy** at all levels of the organization. Establish the organization as a strong and ethical leader in philanthropy, able to steward the community's investments and honor the experience of both donors and students. Engage all members of the Breakthrough community to play a meaningful role in philanthropy, empowering and equipping them with the tools to give and to inspire others to give of their time, talent, and financial resources.
- Meet **current growth commitments** through a diverse funding strategy. Continue to diversify funding toward a sustainable level of approximately 65% philanthropy and 35% non-philanthropic revenue stream. Grow and mature Breakthrough's philanthropy program by increasing donor

acquisition and retention at all levels. Create avenues for more individuals to join in support of the organization. Broaden our donor base to include individuals from diverse backgrounds. Increase the level of regional and state-wide foundation and corporate funding. Seek additional government and fee-for-service sources of revenue. Develop practices to ensure alignment with our organizational values and to prevent conflicts of interest.

- **Position Breakthrough for future revenue needs.** Establish an endowment to further diversify revenue sources and provide a long-term fund to support Breakthrough's long-term commitment to students. Invest in additional resources including staffing to support the greater efforts in revenue generation and community engagement. Refine systems to develop revenue prospects and donor engagement.

Extended Impact Approach: The School-Based Model

Introduction

Breakthrough plans to scale the reach and impact of its direct service work through a school-based model. Based on analysis of regional education outcomes data, stakeholder conversations, and staff / student focus groups, Breakthrough has determined that there is unmet need for its services and an opportunity to significantly scale up its reach and impact through this growth plan.

Schools serving significant populations of low-income students are under-resourced to provide high quality and culturally competent college access services to students. There is significant unmet advising need around understanding college options, completing college applications, and navigating the financial aid process. From a personnel perspective, schools often lack the capacity to serve all their students effectively; the average student-to-school-counselor ratio in Texas is 449-to-1, which is nearly double the ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association¹. Under these conditions, schools are challenged to provide students with the hours, individualized attention, and responsive support that all students, especially low-income and first-gen students, require to finish secondary school on-track for postsecondary success.

In addition to capacity constraints, many schools have opportunities to cultivate an environment which enables students to reach postsecondary success. Structures such as effective use of data systems to drive data-informed decision making and the design of advising programs to introduce college options early are strong tools for secondary schools to increase college going-rates and the level of student preparation for postsecondary education. Developing a culture that enables advising services and structures to thrive is essential to seeing results from any new programs or offerings. Foundational to creating this supportive culture is the mindset that every student should have the opportunity for postsecondary education. Among other things, this involves “untracking” students who have been labeled as “workforce-bound” instead of offering pathways to pursue postsecondary education.

Breakthrough sees the potential for sustainable results by blending direct service with structural and cultural transformation in school environments. The approach is rooted in a philosophy of change that Breakthrough can fill unmet service needs in the short- and medium-terms while also enabling schools to lead the work themselves in the long-term. By equipping schools to offer strong advising services and integrate best practices of college access into the curriculum and other school structures, Breakthrough can help schools increase college matriculation and completion rates among low-income and first-generation students in Central Texas.

¹ *State-By-State Student-To-Counselor Report: 10 Year Trends*. American School Counselor Association. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Publications/ratioreport.pdf>. 2015.

Breakthrough's Positioning

Breakthrough is well-positioned to take on this approach based on its competencies, relationships, and reputation. Breakthrough has strong experience in providing college access and success services. This content expertise is highly transferable from the twelve-year model to this new approach, positioning Breakthrough to nimbly transition to this work.

In addition to functional knowledge and skills, Breakthrough's strength at building relational trust is a foundational asset that will underlie any new program or model. Through the twelve-year model, Breakthrough has learned how to effectively speak to first-gen families and position staff as trusted, relatable advisors to students. A track record of interactions with "friends of Breakthrough" (students who participate in some activities of the twelve-year model but are not Breakthrough students) suggests that trusting relationship development can occur on an accelerated timeline, especially when (1) Breakthrough's approach is to listen and give attention to students and (2) when students are underserved by other sources of support / guidance.

Results from the twelve-year model program sites as well as Breakthrough's style and relational approach to working with students families has earned Breakthrough a strong reputation in Central Texas. Breakthrough's work is widely respected and the staff's familiarity with how to support first-generation students is well understood. Additionally, Breakthrough has a strong network of relationships with schools, districts, and communities that know Breakthrough and trust our work. Our reputation and expertise mean Breakthrough is in a strong position to expand its work and to innovate in a way that builds directly on its established strengths and results.

Other organizations around Texas and the U.S. provide services to students and schools that resemble offerings Breakthrough intends to provide, but Breakthrough's stand apart in two key respects.

Breakthrough has considered the competitive landscape and is confident that the expanded impact programs can be successful and fundable, for two key reasons. First, the market for these services is far from saturated. Only 41% of low-income Central Texas high school graduates enroll in postsecondary within one year of graduation. Just 34% of those students earn a diploma within 6 years, a rate that is increasing but still too low.² There is no doubt that Breakthrough can and must improve the rates of both college enrollment and completion. Many schools in Central Texas lack a nonprofit service provider offering college access services to all students, as Breakthrough proposes to do. Second, Breakthrough's robust plan to resource the college access services will differentiate us from other service providers. Other providers may trim programming or substitute low-cost, low-impact interactions over digital platforms for higher-cost, high value in-person interactions with a caring and well-trained adult advisor. For Breakthrough, effectively resourcing the program also means not stopping at college acceptance or even high school graduation; it means scoping continued services for at least the first year of postsecondary. Given the low first-year persistence rate of first-generation students in college, to truly move the needle on college graduation rates it is essential to support students through the transition from secondary to postsecondary, a commitment which few peer programs are willing to make.

² Source: E3 Alliance, Central Texas Education Profile. 2017 Data.

Strategy Overview

The school-based model incorporates three strategies to serve students and support schools. Schools engaged in all three strands of service will become “Breakthrough Certified Schools.”

- 1. Services** - Deliver college access and completion services to help students navigate postsecondary options and transition to college. College access and success services are delivered by Breakthrough advisors directly to students through 1:1 advising and group programming.
- 2. Structures** - Support schools to create processes and infrastructure (*e.g.*, data systems, curriculum integrated with college options). Capacity building services are delivered by Breakthrough staff to administrators, counselors, and teachers.
- 3. Culture** - Cultivate strong college-going culture and build competencies of advisors and teachers to support first-generation college students. Capacity building services are delivered by Breakthrough staff to administrators, counselors, and teachers.

Anticipated Impact

Breakthrough is embarking on this work in order to increase the number of first-generation students who attend and graduate from two-year and four-year institutions. In designing a higher-leverage strategy for raising college-going rates, Breakthrough chose to focus on grades 11 and 12 and freshman year of college because there is high attrition from the college-going path during these years and Breakthrough has the knowledge and competencies to reduce that attrition through evidence-based practices.

Breakthrough anticipates positively impacting several outcomes, including on-time high school graduation, on-time college enrollment, and college graduation within six years. Breakthrough believes the school-based model can improve high school graduation rates by at least 3 percentage points. Since some attrition happens before the advising program begins in 11th grade, the school-based model will not completely curb attrition, but it will contribute to its reduction. For on-time college enrollment, Breakthrough expects to increase the rate to at least 50% of students, from an average of 43% on-time enrollment for Texas students. Lastly, Breakthrough anticipates doubling on-time college graduation rates, to 25% from 12%.

This approach also seeks to positively impact the infrastructure and connections in place in schools serving low-income students. Fortifying the college access services and structures in high schools and cultivating college going cultures will improve the environment in which students learn and make decisions about their postsecondary pathways. Breakthrough’s impact can outlast its presence on campus in this way, and extend beyond the reach of its advisors’ direct interactions.

Implications for the Direction of Breakthrough

A school-based model is a natural extension of the twelve-year model. Given the inflection point Breakthrough has reached, we must consider what it would mean in practical terms to engage in this type of work. A few key considerations are below:

- **Thinking more broadly about postsecondary success.** One condition of gaining access to work with an entire school grade will be supporting students on whatever postsecondary pathway they are on - college, career, or military. While one of Breakthrough's purposes will be "untracking" students who have not been given the opportunities to state and pursue post-secondary plans, this role will also involve honoring student agency and choice to be on a different path. This will require thinking of success not just as supporting students to and through postsecondary education, but also to and through credentialing programs to prepare for careers, and to find well-matched placements within the workforce and the military.
- **A shorter-duration, but equally relational model.** Breakthrough's twelve-year model is distinguished by trusting relationships between students, families, and advisors that are built and sustained over years. While many participants in the twelve-year model locate the power of the program in the long-term relationships, Breakthrough strongly believes in its ability to quickly build familiarity and trust with new students. Further, adapting the relational model is a key component of scaling impact. Breakthrough seeks to not only build trust between Breakthrough advisors and students, but also to build the competency of school staff to form those relationships with students. This is how the organization will scale that essential element of student success and resiliency that is currently determined by the size of Breakthrough's advising staff, which is a limiting factor.
- **Balancing depth of relationships with shorter, cost effective programming:** The school-based model does not make the same degree of commitment to students as Breakthrough does in the twelve-year model. Realistically, the relationships formed between students and advisors in the school-based model will feel different in terms of depth and familiarity. Breakthrough is clear-eyed about this tradeoff, and is proceeding for two reasons. First, this model has substantially lower cost per student and does not exacerbate the unfunded liability challenge of the core program. The school-based model is a more financially viable path to scaling up the number of students reached in Central Texas, compared to enrolling more students in the twelve-year model. Second, Breakthrough believes that this approach will be highly effective. Based on a literature review of evidence-based college access practices, Breakthrough anticipates being able to meaningfully change outcomes on high school graduation, college enrollment, and college graduation.

"If weren't so welcoming, like a family, kids would be like, 'whatever'. There are programs at school too, but it doesn't matter... Breakthrough knows you, understands you, know where you come from, know what resources you need."

– Breakthrough Student

School Selection

The school site selection process will be informed by conversations, data, and research to identify a school that has the conditions in place to become a “Breakthrough Certified School.” A series of exploratory conversations with schools must precede reaching a decision on where to pilot this new approach and for every site expansion thereafter. Breakthrough can consider adopting a set of criteria to evaluate potential partnerships with schools (see Figure 3). Some of these conditions will be absolute while others may inform decisions with context.

Figure 3: School Selection Criteria

Essential Conditions	Factors for Additional Consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buy-in at multiple levels: In addition to formal sign-off from principals and district leadership, Breakthrough will need to gain consent from other school leaders and garner interest from teachers and student advisors, whose support will be critical for implementation. ● School demographics: In keeping with its mission to produce more first-generation college graduates, Breakthrough seeks to work in schools with significant populations of students receiving free and reduced lunches (best proxy for first-generation status). ● Willingness to pay: Schools/districts must be willing and able to cover some portion of Breakthrough’s costs (ideally at least 20-25%). ● Openness to change: School and district leadership must be open to “another way of doing things” and eager to work closely with Breakthrough to co-create and deliver programming. ● Wrap-around services: Access to other service providers (e.g., mental and physical health) so that Breakthrough is not the sole source of support for students and may make referrals as necessary. ● “Competitors”: Limited number of other organizations offering direct college advising or capacity building services at the school site (if there are other organizations, identify a clear path to partnership to avoid redundancy). ● Data sharing: Schools must be willing to give Breakthrough access to historical and current data on student grades, test performance, and college going rates disaggregated by gender, race, and free and reduced lunch status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Breakthrough presence: Co-located twelve-year model at the school (especially for the pilot site). ● School demographics: Will Breakthrough consider the percentage of students of color in the school? ● In-kind services: Access to office space for Breakthrough. ● Collaborators: What other services are offered to students that could be advantageous to this model? ● Location: Access to volunteer resources and manageable travel time from 11th St office. ● Size of student class: Manageable class size (especially for the pilot).

Considerations for Selecting the Pilot Location

This is a model that could ultimately be viable in any school, whether or not Breakthrough is running the twelve-year model in the school already. While there are numerous benefits to piloting this model at a location where Breakthrough already has an established presence, that is not a strict requirement and Breakthrough is open to considering a school that is a strong fit regardless of whether it already has a twelve-year program running.

However, there are a number of benefits that could be expected from co-locating at a site with the twelve-year model, including:

- **Trust from school leaders and staff** who have seen Breakthrough's impact and believe in its ability to do the work. These schools have seen that students working with Breakthrough perform differently - both anecdotally and through impact metrics - which will lend trust in this new model. This trust may provide easier access to decision makers and resources for programming.
- **Halo effect** of relationships with students in the twelve-year model.
- **Efficiencies** of having two program teams co-located (twelve-year team and school-based team) - strong knowledge of relationships and school dynamics, a familiarity that can take time to develop.
- **Less risk to learn** in a "known environment" and carry over learnings to the second site for expansion, as opposed to doing the reverse

There are two primary disadvantages to piloting in a school where the twelve-year model is already operating. From a "proof of concept" point of view, piloting at a twelve-year model school does not necessarily prove the model will work *anywhere*. It will be complex to disentangle what factors produced the results. Was it the pre-existing relationships? The name recognition? From a student experience point of view, it may cause confusion among students about the two Breakthrough tracks and / or lead to feelings of inequity if students in the expansion model feel they are receiving a "lesser" program model (*see Differentiation from a Co-Located Twelve-year Model on page 28*).

Yet, there are higher barriers to entry in piloting in a new school where Breakthrough does not have a presence. Breakthrough will need to understand how to establish strong relationships with leadership, schools, and students. It will take time to gain regular, consistent access to influencers within the school, when not working with the benefit of another Breakthrough team on site as a trail-blazer and partner. This calls for considering timeline implications for capacity building work. It may need to proceed at a slower pace as trust and relationships are built between school staff and Breakthrough staff. It may also require shifting expectations for how much work it will be possible to accomplish through collaboration.

Decision Making on School Selection

The Executive Director and leadership team will pursue conversations with several districts and schools and assess readiness against the criteria listed above. Essential for the school selection process is an understanding the goals, challenges, needs, and assets schools have related to college access

services. These conversations would be informational, as Breakthrough will present data to schools on the benefits for students *and* schools of supporting postsecondary pathways (*e.g.*, showing that investing in college prep has a return on investment in terms of increased high school performance, attendance, graduation, and college going rates).

Breakthrough will make the decision to move forward with the scoping and contracting conversation based on its assessment of the conditions in place at a school (see Figure 3 on page 22). Breakthrough expects the decision to launch a new site to be made six months before the start of the school year. For the pilot site, that means signing a contract with a school by February of 2020.

Program Design

Breakthrough will co-design the approach with the selected school partner. Breakthrough's philosophy of program design is that it is highly dependent on the school context and should be co-created. First, Breakthrough will conduct thorough due diligence on the "readiness" of schools (see criteria in Figure 3 on page 22) and seriousness of the school's commitment to college access. The due diligence will involve in-depth conversations and data gathering to understand conditions and context of the school and the current status of postsecondary support options and outcomes for students. Breakthrough will seek authentic input from students and families to understand opportunities and challenges that are specific to the school or are typical of the first-gen / low-income secondary experience in Central Texas. Through thought partnership with school / district leaders, the parties will together arrive at a vision for transformation and impact for students through a partnership with Breakthrough.

After identifying a school site, Breakthrough will enter a contracting phase with the school partner.

We anticipate that this will involve:

- Defining the scope of services, including:
 - a) Breadth of college access and capacity building services offered
 - b) Number of in-school hours that students will be engaged on college access services, and where those hours will come from (*e.g.*, homeroom, English class, counseling hours)
 - c) Number of hours of capacity building services to be delivered, and when staff will be engaged (summer, free periods, after school)
 - d) Timeline / duration of partnership
- Discussing staffing arrangements, including:
 - a) Differentiating roles and responsibilities of Breakthrough advisors and school guidance counselors
 - b) Determining positioning of Breakthrough advisors (*e.g.*, as conventional school counselors or as outside advisors)
- Agreeing to budget and fee for service / in-kind payment, including:
 - a) Payment for college access services, based on student headcount
 - b) Payment for capacity building services, based on hours of services delivered
 - c) In-kind offering of office space, classroom space, and other materials or facilities

The planning phase will be a continuation of the due diligence phase of understanding the school context and co-creating a vision with school leadership. As a continuation of the exploratory conversations that took place before the contracting phase, Breakthrough will continue gathering information. This could look like a more extensive listening tour of school and district leadership and staff; focus groups or surveys of students and families; and / or analysis of student performance data and college-going rates, disaggregated by gender, race, and free and reduced lunch status.

The phase of co-designing the school-based offerings will be one of the most important in the planning process. Based on the scope of services agreed to in the contract, Breakthrough and school leadership will refine the scope of activities that Breakthrough would deliver to the school. It will be their task to consider the following dimensions of the engagement with Breakthrough:

1. Structure of college access and capacity building services (see shaded boxes below for questions to be answered during the design phase)
2. Relative emphasis on the different strands of capacity building services
3. Timeline and workplan for Breakthrough team
4. Staffing the Breakthrough team (see *Staffing Model* section, pages 29-30)

Question for discussion with school partners:

- What kinds of capacity building services are needed and what is the balance of activities that Breakthrough should deliver?

Program Elements

This section contains our initial thinking on the school-based offerings; greater specificity in defining program elements will come from the design phase. Breakthrough anticipates continuing the process of planning through conversations with stakeholders and further research regarding competitors' models.

Student Services

	College Access and Summer Melt Services	College Persistence Services
What	College options, college advising, financial aid process, and test prep	Ongoing support and advising (courses, financial aid, navigating institutions, adjusting to college life)
For Whom	All 11th and 12th graders	Students continuing to college (two- or four- year) or certification programs that <i>opt into</i> a continuing year of Breakthrough services
Standard of Service	1:120 Breakthrough advisor: student ratio	1:75 Breakthrough advisor: student ratio
Structure of Services	Services will be delivered during the school day, integrated as much as possible into the curriculum.	Most support / advising will happen through phone conversations between students and their advisor. Students attending colleges in Austin may receive some in-person visits from their advisor.

Question for discussion with school partners:

- How many hours a week will be designated for college access services and when will they occur? (*e.g.*, homeroom, English class, counseling hours)?
- What will engagement with families look like?

Capacity Building Services

	Structures	Culture
What	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data systems to track test scores, college readiness, application status, financial aid / FAFSA / TAFSA application, college acceptance, enrollment, and completion • Standards of service around postsecondary goal setting and conversations about plans after high school • Curriculum that integrates learning and college knowledge components (<i>e.g.</i>, folding college essays into Language Arts class, test prep into math class, etc.) • Design of advising model (including integration of advising / postsecondary options into standard counseling) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for counselors on advising low-income and first-gen students • Professional development for teachers to integrate postsecondary pathways and preparation into every classroom • Creating a college-going culture and a culture of engaging families
For Whom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance counselors • Teachers / leaders who design and inform development of curriculum • IT staff • School and district administrators who control structures, requirements, and standards of service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance counselors and other school professionals • Teachers • School and district administrators who control structures, requirements
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:1 coaching during free periods for teachers / business hours for administrators • Small group workshops and trainings on teacher training days or after school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small group workshops and trainings on teacher training days or after school • 1:1 coaching during teacher free periods / business hours for administrators • Professional development for teachers

Differentiation and Implications for the Twelve-year Model

Launching the new approach area will not divert resources from the twelve-year model or change Breakthrough's commitment to those students. Breakthrough is committed to keeping the core model intact and serving the students in that pipeline.

Some services are common for students in both models. College access services for students in both the twelve-year model and the school-based model include college option advisory services, college advising, test prep, and support navigating the financial aid process. College completion services for students in both models include summer melt offerings, advising, and continuous support during the first year of postsecondary.

Some services do not extend to students in the school-based model. Students in the school-based model will not receive services in grades 6-10 or services after the first year of college (the first year of college will be *opt-in* for students in the extended impact approach but *mandatory* for core model students). In 11th and 12th grade, students in the school-based model will not receive out-of-school services (including Saturday and after school programming, college visits, and overnights), summer programming, or regular individual family engagement.

Differentiation from a Co-Located Twelve-year Model

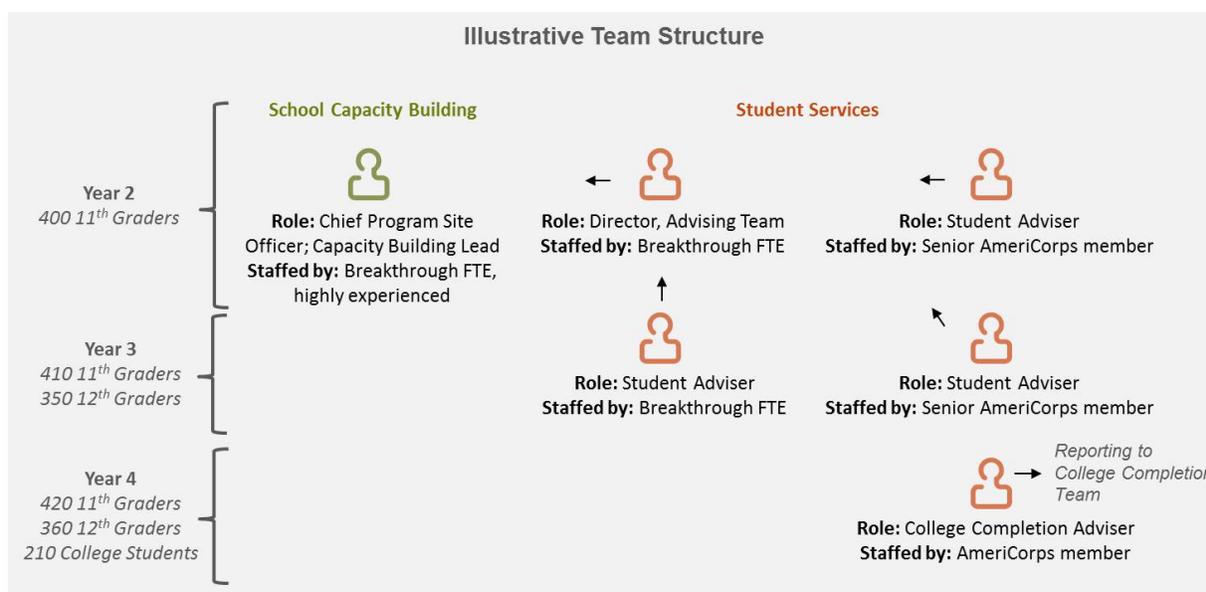
At campuses where the twelve-year model and the school-based model are operating in parallel, it will be important to differentiate the two programs and anticipate student perceptions. It will be critical to position the school-based model distinctively so that it is not seen as a “lesser version” of the twelve-year model. Not doing so could cause students enrolled in the new offering to experience feelings of inequity, which would be counter to the environment of support and inclusivity which Breakthrough seeks to cultivate. One potential path to differentiation is to position Breakthrough advisors as school advisors, so there is not a perception of two competing Breakthrough programs operating simultaneously.

Breakthrough will also need to think through implications for twelve-year model students located at campuses with the new offering, who participate in both programs. To avoid redundancy in their program experience, it may make sense to alter the structure of their participation so they participate in programming at their school rather than with their twelve-year model cohort (i.e., receive application support in-school instead of attending Saturday sessions). However, twelve-year model students would continue to receive advising and other follow-up services from their advisor, and participate in out-of-school core model programming with their cohort.

Staffing Model

Given the novelty and complexity of the school transformation approach, Breakthrough is committed to staffing experienced and balanced teams. This involves two commitments: first, that Breakthrough will always staff at least two team members to each school, and, second, that the ratio of professional staff to AmeriCorps members will remain close to 1:1. In the initial years, as Breakthrough is building the program, the team will likely have a majority of professional staff. Over time, Breakthrough may transition to a heavier reliance on AmeriCorps members.

The advising and capacity building work will be implemented by different teams, with a reporting structure that integrates the two teams. As both teams are on the same site, it will be efficient and advantageous (from a relationship-building, trust-forming perspective) to have a single leadership / management structure that oversees both capacity building and advising services. Given that the professional delivering the capacity building services will be the most senior staff member on site and will have the closest communication with school and district leadership, it may be logical for them to oversee the entire site.



Through the design phase, Breakthrough will gain greater visibility into what competencies will be required for staffing the capacity building role. Breakthrough will seek 1-2 highly experienced professionals to take on this work and to function as leaders of the school transformation approach at the school site. Delivering the capacity building services will likely require hiring from outside the organization and developing some new competencies, which can be reasonably developed within the implementation timeline. These new competencies include operations/process improvement, understanding and developing organizational culture, and coaching/staff management. The capacity building role may also be responsible for a small advising caseload to stay close to the student experience and ensure that the advising program can inform direction of capacity building services.

Staffing the advising team will look similar to staffing a program team for Breakthrough’s twelve-year model. Expertise in college access processes and a strong understanding of postsecondary options in the region is essential for the role. Since trusting relationships with students are the foundation of the approach, strong interpersonal competencies and the ability to build relationships with students is critical. Other skills, such as cultural competence and the ability to provide adaptive solutions to complex student challenges, will be key to executing on Breakthrough’s approach.

At sites where a school transformation team is co-located with a twelve-year model team, the two teams will collaborate closely but retain separate leadership and reporting structures. This policy reflects Breakthrough’s commitment to not diverting resources (including time) from the twelve-year model, and its commitment to resourcing the school-based model adequately. In cases of co-location, teams will explore norms and structures for sharing information and learnings between each other.

Learning Questions

Program Strategy

- What will it take to position Breakthrough advisors as school advisors? Will this create any challenges with respect to branding or name recognition?
- What are implications for the twelve-year model of diverting some students to participate in school-based programming?

Program Design - Capacity Building Services

- What is the optimal number of hours for each service offering to schools? What is the minimum viable “dosage” for each service?
- What, if any, other services is there demand for from schools?
- What steps does Breakthrough need to take to qualify capacity building services as professional development for teachers and gain access to designated Title funds?

Program Design - Advising

- How many hours a week will be designated for college access services and when will they occur? (e.g., homeroom, English class, counseling hours)?
- What will it mean for the college completion team to fold students from the school-based model into their caseload of students from the twelve-year model? Are there changes in strategy or procedure that the college completion team will need to make?
- In walking the line between untracking students and respecting student agency to pursue a non-educational plans, what are the guidelines for advisors around how much to present and encourage alternatives to career / technical tracks?

Staffing

- What competencies / knowledge will Breakthrough need to support students interested in a path to the military? To what extent will Breakthrough advisors need to specialize in this, or will they be able to “outsource” this to other advisors on campus?
- What competencies / knowledge will Breakthrough need to support students interested in a path to the workforce (directly or via a credentialing program)?

Extended Impact Approach: Policy Advocacy

Introduction

As a part of scaling its work to increase impact for first-generation students in Central Texas, Breakthrough will begin to work in policy advocacy. Engaging in policy advocacy work will extend Breakthrough's influence beyond what is possible through the existing direct service model or the new school-based model. Affecting policies that can enable the success of first-generation students will have wide-ranging impact on the landscape for postsecondary access and completion.

By pursuing a public policy advocacy approach, Breakthrough will begin to engage in systems change work in addition to its direct service offerings.

Systems change can be defined as “shifting the conditions that hold a problem in place.”

Breakthrough is well-positioned to work towards structural change, which occurs through shifting policies, practices, and resource flows that hold a systemic problem in place.

- Policies can be defined as government, institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others' actions.
- Practices are the activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improve social and environmental progress.
- Resource flows are how money, people, knowledge, information, and infrastructure are allocated.³

By advocating for policy changes, changes in institutional practices, and resource allocation, Breakthrough can contribute to shifting aspects of the system that disadvantage first-generation students on their journey to college access and completion.

While Breakthrough has had limited policy engagement to date, it is well positioned to do this work and brings unique perspective and expertise to the advocacy space. Few other organizations in Central Texas conducting advocacy work can bring both practitioner expertise and community voice in the way that Breakthrough can. Engaging in policy work leverages Breakthrough's intimate knowledge of student and family experience to advance its mission on a larger scale.

This new approach has minimal barriers to entry and low-resource intensity with the potential for wide reaching impact. Breakthrough can begin this work with one full-time employee and move deliberately as it learns the landscape and best practices. A policy advocacy program requires a much smaller budget than direct service work but can lead to systems level changes that shift the context for

“Every outcome we care about at the national level is going in the opposite direction. College admission is down 7%. We need to think about scale differently. School by school, a couple here or there is not sustainable. We have to think about things differently if we want to change these numbers on a population level.”

-Breakthrough Partner

³ *The Water of Systems Change*. FSG. John Kania, Mark Kramer and Peter Senge. 2018.

first-generation students and beyond. Additionally, working in the policy space may enable access to new funders or funding sources for Breakthrough.

As it enters the policy advocacy space, Breakthrough will engage in intentional conversations about how to maintain a nonpartisan approach. Minimizing risks for Breakthrough students, families, and communities is of the utmost importance to Breakthrough staff. Breakthrough will make changes to internal processes (*e.g.*, data privacy) to protect students and families.

Strategy Overview

Developing a Policy Agenda

To begin the work, Breakthrough will develop a guiding statement for policy work. This guiding statement will function as a vision or purpose statement for the policy advocacy work. It will also establish parameters for remaining nonpartisan and mitigating risk.

Breakthrough will engage in research to build its knowledge of the policy field and to identify channels for advocacy at district, local, state, and national levels. Staff will conduct research on best practices of other postsecondary access and completion organizations working in advocacy. Through this research, Breakthrough will identify how it could engage with policy and decision makers at different levels of government, from school districts, to the state legislature, to the Department of Education. In addition, staff will conduct research on policies that improve outcomes for first-generation students. This would include researching policies that have proved successful in other regions.

Following this research, policy staff will develop a process and criteria for determining Breakthrough's annual policy agenda. This process will engage students, families, and staff to understand concerns and needs. Policy staff will benefit from the experience and knowledge of Breakthrough practitioners and educators who are on the ground in schools and universities, and have perspectives on necessary policy changes. The process will also include a look at the shifting postsecondary and policy landscape. Breakthrough will use this process on a yearly basis to create its annual policy agenda.

Engaging with Potential Partners and Leaders

The team will explore cooperation and partnership with other postsecondary access and completion organizations as well as leaders in the space. Staff will aim to participate in conferences and convenings around policy and advocacy to support first-generation students and more equitable college access and completion. These will be opportunities for staff to learn about policy agendas as well as approaches to advocacy. Convenings are an opportunity for Breakthrough to establish its presence in the advocacy space.

Staff will also explore partnerships and collaboration with other organizations advocating for postsecondary access and completion. Potential education advocacy partners include E3 Alliance, NCAN, Educate Texas, TexCan, TGAK, TACAC, TexPost, Austin College Access Network, One Voice Central Texas, and College Forward.

As Breakthrough develops a policy agenda and expertise in this space it will explore opportunities to partner with other Breakthrough sites and the Breakthrough national collaborative in its advocacy work. There is also an opportunity to lead advocacy through the national Breakthrough collaborative as the team becomes more familiar with national policy and future plans. The Breakthrough team can engage with collaborative leaders about the potential for engaging the larger collaborative in a national policy agenda.

Staffing Model

One full time employee will be hired to manage the policy and advocacy work. This employee will drive research as well as the development of the annual policy agenda and be the one to execute advocacy activities. The policy staff member should be integrated into the organization to listen to and leverage the internal expertise of staff who work directly with students and schools. The policy staff member will report to and take directional guidance from the Executive Director.

Learning Questions

Policy Agenda

- What criteria could Breakthrough apply to identify and prioritize focus issues?
- What are essential focus issues for Breakthrough's advocacy? (*e.g.*, student debt, educational opportunities for undocumented students, institutional support for first-generation students, etc.)
- What geographic areas and policymaking entities would Breakthrough prioritize in its advocacy efforts? (*e.g.*, Austin vs. Manor School Board, Texas State Legislature)
- How will Breakthrough engage students, parents, and communities in the process of developing a policy agenda?
- How will Breakthrough mitigate risk for its students and families as it engages in this work?
- What internal process changes are necessary to mitigate risk in this work?

Partnership

- How does Breakthrough identify partners / collaborators for advocacy?
- To what end does Breakthrough partner with other organizations (*e.g.*, complementary expertise, amplify voice)?
- To what extent does Breakthrough seek to cultivate its own voice vs speak / act as part of a consortium?

Staffing

- What competencies will policy work require?
- What internal practices should Breakthrough use to maintain open channels of communication between the core model and policy teams?
- What measures need to be taken to balance the Executive Director's time on the new policy program and attending to the core model?

Approach to Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning

Strategic evaluation and learning enhance organizational effectiveness, influence, and impact. As Breakthrough rolls out the school-based model and policy advocacy work, engaging in deliberate organizational learning and strategic evaluation will be essential to informing the growth and success of the work.

Organizations may engage in learning to advance several goals. Four reasons to engage in learning include are: 1) analyzing and building shared knowledge of an issue; 2) developing a new plan or initiative; 3) assessing current activities to identify course corrections; and 4) understanding outcomes from completed projects. All four goals are relevant as Breakthrough seeks to course correct and understand outcomes from the new approaches.

“In light of the complexity of social change, evaluations should remain iterative, consider all aspects of the system, support learning across the system, adapt to the local context, search for effective principles, identify sources of influence across the system, focus on relationships and interdependencies, explain variations in an initiatives outcomes, and watch for emerging patterns.”

- Evaluating Complexity, FSG

Learning - including evaluation - will look different for the new approach areas. Understanding outcomes from the college access services will closely resemble programmatic evaluations that Breakthrough has conducted for the core model. This nature of evaluation can focus on understanding the change in outcomes *attributed* to Breakthrough’s intervention. Evaluating school capacity building and policy advocacy work will require borrowing from methods of ‘systems change evaluation’ which aims to understand an effort’s *contributions* to shifting complex systems.

The College access program will track the following indicators to compare outcomes of the student cohort to historical data from the school and to the same-year state averages.

- FAFSA / TASFA completion rate
- SAT / ACT score
- High school GPA
- Enrollment in honors / AP courses
- On-time high school graduation
- On-time college graduation

Beyond demonstrating impact, a strategic learning and evaluation system provides guidance for making important strategy decisions. As Breakthrough enters new territory with the new approaches, success means adopting a “learning orientation” that creates a positive feedback cycle between outcomes and strategy. The aim is to tailor strategy based on outcomes results, and those changes in strategies produce stronger outcomes.

College Access Services

A rigorous approach to evaluation of the college access services is critical to confirming or complicating the hypothesis underlying this expansion, namely that years 11-13 are high-attrition, high-reward years for intervention. By tracking metrics related to college readiness, acceptance, persistence, and completion, Breakthrough hopes to understand the effectiveness of the new model.

For data collection, Breakthrough can draw from its method for the twelve-year model. For quantitative output and outcome data collection and tracking, Breakthrough may use the same digital database used in the twelve-year model. To receive qualitative feedback from students and families each semester, Breakthrough will consider qualitative feedback and evaluation tools such as self-assessments, focus groups, surveys, etc.

The policy advocacy program will track the following indicators

- Process and progress of policies proposed to institutions
- Increased college completion in Texas for all students
- Increase in financial resources and non-financial supports available on postsecondary campuses, especially at institutions serving large numbers of first-gen, low-income students, and students of color

School capacity building and policy advocacy work

Understanding the impact of the capacity building and policy work will be less metrics-driven and more heavily based in ongoing, intentional learning. For evaluating all types of change, learning is an active and applied process that is the result of specific learning activities (*e.g.*, reflection, asking questions in a survey, analyzing data, and seeking feedback). When evaluating interventions on a complex system (like school culture or state policy), it is particularly essential to engage in continuous learning and evaluative thinking.

For the school capacity building work, learning and evaluation can identify how schools are *acting* and

thinking differently. This corresponds to the two strands of the capacity building work, addressing 1) school structures and 2) school culture. To understand change happening with respect to school structures, evaluation efforts could track changes in processes, systems, and procedures (*e.g.*, how many classroom curriculums integrate instruction about postsecondary pathways; are schools tracking postsecondary data). To explore how school culture is evolving, Breakthrough can consider mindset shifts happening among school staff and leadership. This could take the form of before- and after-surveys of mindsets and attitudes about postsecondary access or increases in knowledge about helping students towards their postsecondary goals.

For the policy advocacy work, learning and evaluation activities can consider how Breakthrough's activities are contributing to efforts to shift policy on multiple levels. Breakthrough's learning questions can encompass process questions (*e.g.*, how can Breakthrough collaborate more closely with others? What models for advocacy have had the most influence?) to outcomes questions (*e.g.*, what role, if any, did Breakthrough's advocacy play in policy victories or change?) to questions about the field (*e.g.*, what factors are changing the policy landscape? What role is Breakthrough playing relative to

others?). Breakthrough can also track outcomes related to specific policy goals, with the understanding that those outcomes are influenced by a wide range of factors and are therefore not a very precise or reliable measure of Breakthrough's effectiveness.