



BREAKTHROUGH CENTRAL TEXAS

Strategic Impact Plan

2024-2029

September 2024



www.breakthroughctx.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 2 |
| STRATEGIC IMPACT PLANNING AIMS & PROCESS | 5 |
| Aims | 5 |
| Process | 6 |
| KEY TAKEAWAYS | 9 |
| IMPACT STRATEGIES | 12 |
| Strategy 1: Optimize Impact | 13 |
| Strategy 2: Expand Responsibly | 20 |
| Strategy 3: Sustain Staff | 24 |
| Strategy 4: Raise Funds | 28 |
| IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING TOOLS: 2024 – 2029 | 33 |
| APPENDIX | 37 |

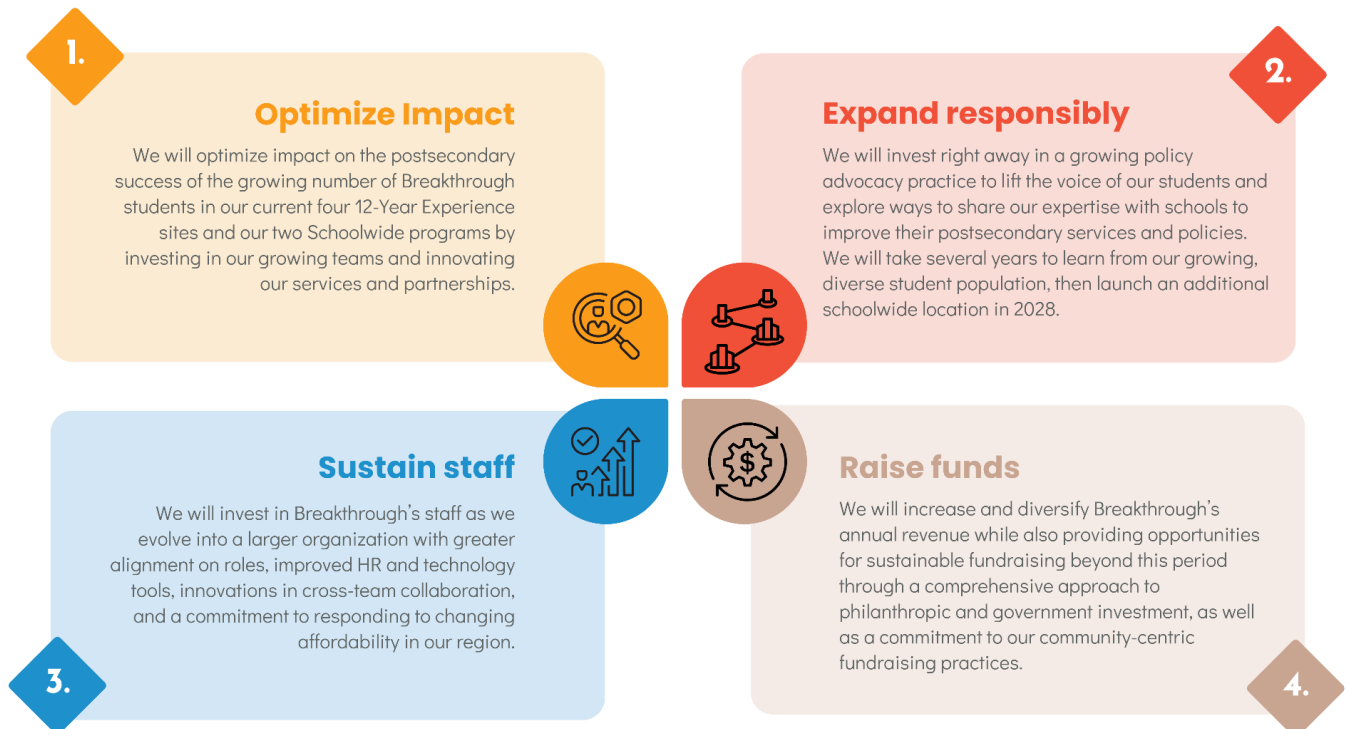
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its 2019 - 2024 strategic plan, Breakthrough charted a course for greater impact in Central Texas. This new direction included building out its highly-effective 12-Year Experience Program while launching two entirely new initiatives: Breakthrough's Schoolwide Postsecondary Advising Program and a Policy Advocacy Practice. Over the last five years, through investment in these areas, Breakthrough has expanded its reach and increased its effectiveness.

- In 2019, Breakthrough served 1,864 students. Today, it engages more than 3,000 youth.
- At every grade level during their secondary experience these young people outpace their peers on critical milestones, including high school graduation, school attendance, grades, enrollment in advanced coursework, STAAR scores, and college entrance exams.
- And, these impacts continue beyond high school: Breakthrough students **enroll, persist, and complete postsecondary degrees at higher rates** than their peers in the region.

The next phase of Breakthrough's work is **to increase impact through the three promising programs** envisioned in 2019 even as it moves through a period of significant growth. With current commitments to building out services to students who join in middle or high school – with no additional program expansion – the organization will grow significantly over the next five years. By learning from and with these students, Breakthrough will also expand its Schoolwide Program to one additional location, enabling the organization to **engage more than 5,500 youth by 2029**.

Through a highly inclusive and iterative process executed between March and June 2024, Breakthrough identified **four key strategies for impact** over the next five years:



Strategy 1: Optimize Impact

Breakthrough will make a deep investment in programs, including more depth of service, in areas that it is uniquely positioned to deliver in support of Central Texas youth.

A growing number of students are participating in its long-standing 12-Year Experience Program in four locations (two in Austin ISD, one in Manor ISD, and one in Del Valle ISD) and its Schoolwide Program in two locations (Manor New Tech HS and Austin ISD's Eastside Early College HS). In addition, Breakthrough's Policy Advocacy Practice is engaging its stakeholders in making their voices heard in local, state, and regional policy discussions that impact postsecondary access and success. The focus of Breakthrough's next five years will be on optimizing its impact on student success through these three programs by investing in its growing teams and innovating its services and partnerships.

Priority Activities

- Invest in the College and Career Success (CCS) Team.
- Innovate staffing structure to meet the needs of a larger organization.
- Clarify services for out-of-district students and unenrolled young adults.
- Address advisor transitions.
- Prioritize academic success and college readiness.
- Build critical partnerships.

Strategy 2: Expand Responsibly

Reach more Central Texas youth by immediately expanding Breakthrough's Policy Advocacy Practice while taking a "learn first" approach to the Schoolwide Program's growth, then launching a new Schoolwide site in 2028.

Breakthrough's two new programs envisioned in 2019 – the Policy Advocacy Practice and the Schoolwide Program – have shown real promise as key levers for opening more postsecondary opportunities to more Central Texas youth. It is clear that evolving and growing each of these programs is imperative to advancing Breakthrough's mission. An investment will be made right away in growing the Policy Advocacy Practice, including identifying new and innovative ways to share expertise with schools to improve their postsecondary services and policies. Breakthrough will take a "learn first" approach for the next three years as it builds out services and supports students to gain access to all postsecondary pathways through its Schoolwide Program. Breakthrough will take time to learn from and with students at its current two locations and then expand to a new Schoolwide Program site in 2028.

Priority Activities

- Deliver education and advocacy to policy and decision makers.
- Evolve and launch new youth-centered policy advocacy opportunities.
- Immediately strengthen support of partner schools/districts to improve postsecondary access.
- Learn from students and their postsecondary experiences in the coming three years to prepare for expansion to a new Schoolwide Program site.
- Clarify criteria for strong campus partnerships.
- Make responsible decisions about new campus partnerships.

Strategy 3: Sustain Staff

Breakthrough will invest significantly in developing the infrastructure, systems, and tools needed to attract, develop, and retain a larger staff in a larger organization.

This effort will require policies, practices, systems, and tools that enable individuals to sustain and thrive in their roles. As Breakthrough evolves into a larger organization, it will need to invest in the infrastructure to make working at Breakthrough in the future as appealing and rewarding as it has been to date. This will require greater alignment within and between roles, improved HR and technology tools, innovations in cross-team collaboration, and a commitment to responding to changing affordability in the region. And, it will require the organization to maintain and advance a culture that is infused with joy and steeped in its REDI values.

PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

- Clarify the role of Breakthrough advisors.
- Build and refine HR infrastructure & technology systems to support a larger-than-ever and still-growing team.
- Strengthen AmeriCorps members' experience and impact.
- Respond to affordability.
- Cultivate connection, belonging, and joy across teams and the organization.

Strategy 4: Raise Funds

Breakthrough will engage in a highly successful philanthropic fundraising campaign while strengthening avenues for non-philanthropic support.

Because it is working toward significant growth, the diversification of funding sources is essential. Over the next five years, Breakthrough will increase and diversify its annual revenue through a comprehensive approach to philanthropic and government investment, focusing on approaches that position the organization for long-term success and demonstrate its commitment to community-centric fundraising practices. Just as Breakthrough partners with students and families in long-term, adaptable ways, it will need to continue to partner with donors and investors with an eye toward the future and toward building win-win funding partnerships that can evolve and stand the test of time.

PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

- Launch an Accelerator Fund.
- Expand annual giving across all funding streams.
- Develop a plan to enable continued increases in annual funding beyond the next five years.
- Continue to evolve a community-centric fundraising approach.
- Invest in marketing and communications.

As Breakthrough moves toward 2030, investing in these four strategies will ensure that its long-standing 12-Year Experience Program and its newly-developed Schoolwide Program and Policy Advocacy Practice reach more young people and yield stronger outcomes than ever before. By optimizing impact, expanding responsibly, sustaining staff, and raising funds, Breakthrough has the opportunity to enter the next decade with three strong programs impacting 5,500 young people through direct service and countless additional youth through policy advances. Ultimately, over the next five years, **Breakthrough seeks to significantly impact the success of thousands of students across Central Texas and move closer to realizing regional educational equity.**

STRATEGIC IMPACT PLANNING AIMS & PROCESS

Aims

The intent of this planning process is to chart a course for Breakthrough in the coming five years. Currently, the organization is in the final year of its [2019 - 2024 strategic plan](#), which called for it to:

- Build out the 12-Year Experience Program
- Launch a new direct-service model, Breakthrough's Schoolwide Program
- Create a new Policy Advocacy Practice

Over the last five years, through investment in these areas, Breakthrough has expanded its reach and increased its effectiveness. In 2019, the organization enrolled 1,864 students. This year, it is engaging close to 3,000 youth. Breakthrough is not only **servicing more students than ever** – it is also **servicing students well**. At every grade level during their secondary experience, Breakthrough students outpace their peers on critical milestones, including high school graduation, school attendance, grades, enrollment in advanced coursework, STAAR scores, and college entrance exams. These impacts continue beyond high school: Breakthrough students **enroll, persist, and complete postsecondary degrees at higher rates** than their peers in the region. An average of 82% of Breakthrough's high school graduates enroll in postsecondary programs within one year of graduation. Their peers from similar economic backgrounds in Central Texas do so at only a 35% rate. Breakthrough students are also persisting from postsecondary year 1 to year 2 enrollment at greater rates (81% to 73%) than their peers. Breakthrough's 2019-2024 strategic plan has been effective and is impacting more students more profoundly.

The next phase of Breakthrough's work is **to increase impact through the three promising programs** envisioned in 2019. Planning has centered in the reality that **Breakthrough is already a growing organization**. Recent expansion of the 12-Year Experience Program and Breakthrough's Schoolwide Program are currently being scaled up, as students are added at the beginning of the program and then services are added as they progress through their secondary and postsecondary years. With current commitments to building out services to students who start with Breakthrough in middle school or high school – with no additional program expansion – the organization will grow significantly over the next five years, reaching close to 5,000 students. The long-term intention is that, by learning from these currently committed students, Breakthrough will expand its Schoolwide Program in 2028-29, opening even more doors to Breakthrough's services. As Breakthrough grows alongside this larger, more diverse student group, there is much to learn. During this period of growth, the next phase of planning raises four critical strategic questions:

1. How will Breakthrough **optimize the impact** of the programs the organization is currently building out?
2. How will the organization **consider expansion** of programs beyond its current commitments?
3. How will Breakthrough **sustain staff** in a larger organization?
4. How will the organization **raise funds** for financial sustainability?

In responding to these critical questions, **Breakthrough seeks to build on its work over the last five years in ways that enable the organization to serve more young people, more sustainably, while impacting policies that affect all youth**. Investing in and refining the direction set in 2019 will enable Breakthrough to, by the end of this decade, nearly double in size to **open more doors to more postsecondary opportunities for more Central Texas youth**.

Process

Early in 2024, Breakthrough assembled a Strategy Planning Team to design and lead its Strategic Impact Planning Process. The 2024 Strategy Planning Team paired outside expertise and capacity with internal leadership to lead a time-bound process aimed at crafting Breakthrough’s strategic direction for the next five years. Jeff Cohen, an experienced strategy consultant, provided continuity from the 2019 strategy planning efforts and served as a critical thought partner. Natalie Gray served as Project Manager, contributing the planning, stakeholder engagement, and strategy design skills she’s built over decades in education and nonprofit leadership. Andrea Harper, Chief Program Strategy Officer, provided project management support along with strategic insight from more than 12 years leading programs and services at Breakthrough. Matt Gray, Breakthrough’s Race, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Manager, led stakeholder engagement and actively supported strategy development throughout the process.

The Strategy Steering Committee worked alongside the Strategy Planning Team to refine critical questions and emerging strategies. This group of trustees, staff, and alumni shared insights, questions, and expertise to support each phase of the planning process. Members included Trustees Mysha Lubke (Committee Chair), Jessica Slade, Christina Corona, Munira Fareed, Jabrell Scott (alumnus), and Jasmin Vara (alumnus and past Trustee) as well as staff members Arelis Palacios, Christi Almeida, and Michael Griffith.

Between March and June, the Strategy Planning Team led the three phases of highly inclusive, iterative strategy development. This report is the culmination of the fourth and final phase, completed in August and September.

| Phase | Phase 1 Generating Questions | Phase 2 Gathering Information | Phase 3 Drafting Strategies | Phase 4 Finalizing 2024–29 Plan |
|--------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Timing | March 1 – March 29 | April 1– May 10 | May 13 – June 15 | August 1 – Sept 30 |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft critical questions • Gather input on critical questions • Steering Committee #1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage stakeholders • BT survey and other data synthesis • External research as needed • Steering Committee #2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft plan • Circulate for input, revise, and finalize • Steering Committee #3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft long-form strategy and implementation plan • Circulate for input, revise, and finalize |
| Deliverable | Critical Questions | Key Takeaways | Strategy Summary | Strategic Impact Plan |

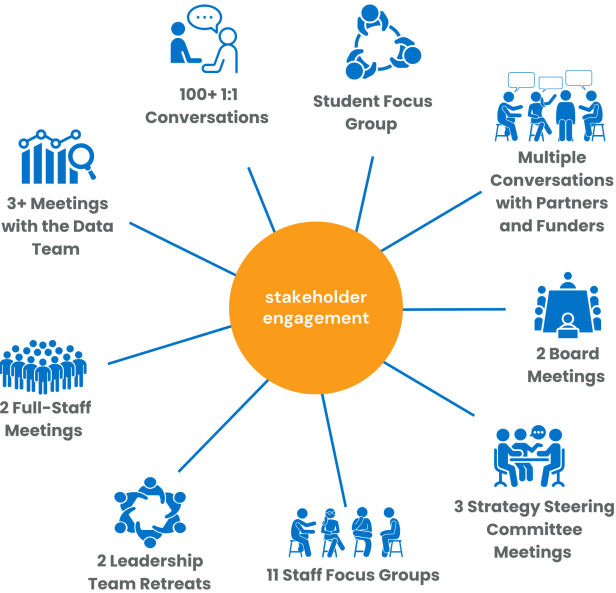
Phase 1 aimed at generating the critical questions Breakthrough faces in the next five years. In this phase, Breakthrough’s Leadership Team, Data Team, staff, and Strategy Steering Committee, informed by student, family, and alumni surveys, worked together to

- *Identify* questions related to challenges and opportunities Breakthrough faces
- *Categorize questions* into overarching themes
- *Seek feedback* from stakeholders to sharpen and refine the questions
- *Finalize* questions to drive data collection and strategy development

The final deliverable for Phase 1, including four critical questions and 24 sub-questions is available [here](#).

In **Phase 2**, the Strategy Planning Team focused on listening and learning to gather information relevant to the organization’s critical questions. They gathered data, drafted strategy, sought input, and refined that input until clear and consistent takeaways began to emerge. Throughout this six-week phase, the Strategy Planning Team worked hard to center student, family, and alumni voices, leverage staff members’ perspective and deep expertise, and stay firmly grounded in data. The team completed extensive stakeholder engagement as part of this phase of work, including:

- More than 100 **one-on-one conversations**
- Hosted a **student focus group**
- Multiple meetings with the Data Team to analyze **surveys, metrics, and other data**
- Multiple meetings with **partners and funders**
- Two **Strategy Steering Committee** meetings, each including nine Committee members
- Two **board meetings**, each including 22 Trustees
- Two Leadership Team **retreats**, each including seven staff members
- Eleven **staff focus groups**, including approximately 40 total staff members from MS Team, HS Team, College and Career Success Team, Operations, Team, Change Team, Development Team, etc.
- Two **full staff meetings for all 93 staff members** to provide both written and verbal feedback



Through focus groups, one-on-one conversations, and close work with Breakthrough’s Data Team, answers to the critical questions for the next five years became increasingly clear. The final deliverable for Phase 2, including a summary of learning, is available [here](#).

In **Phase 3**, the Strategy Planning Team used the learning summary and its key takeaways to inform strategy design. With four clear strategies in place, the Strategy Planning Team worked to identify the priority activities in the coming five years that would allow those strategies to succeed. These draft strategies and priority activities benefited from significant input from staff, the Strategy Steering Committee, and the Board. The four prioritized strategies, described [here](#), will guide Breakthrough’s work through 2029.

Phase 4 of the process occurred in August and September, resulting in the creation of this 2024–2029 Strategic Impact Plan, with the four strategies laid out in more detail. This phase also included significant stakeholder engagement, from both staff and board members, on the format and content. The plan seeks to offer direction to Breakthrough’s Leadership Team and staff as they move toward implementation. The four strategies – optimize impact, expand responsibly, sustain staff, and raise funds – call for the organization to build upon the core elements of the 2019 – 2024 plan to deepen impact and reach more youth by the end of the decade.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

During the first half of the planning process, through an intensely iterative process and with inclusive stakeholder engagement, there were overarching themes that were shared consistently. These **key takeaways** from the process point toward the next phase of Breakthrough's work, undergirding each of the four strategies that ultimately emerged to support and sustain its three core programs. As Breakthrough continues to grow in both scale and impact over the next five years, it will be more important than ever to:

- Build and refine needed **systems and tools**
- Clarify the scope of **advising**
- Cultivate deeper **partnerships**
- Evolve evaluation and **learning systems**

What follows is a more detailed description of each of these key takeaways.

Build systems and tools. One clear takeaway from the strategy process is that Breakthrough has the need and the opportunity to **build systems and tools** required to support a larger organization. Additional structures and resources (or refinements and expansion of existing ones) are needed to enable staff creativity and sustainability, successfully grow the size of the organization, and realize the ambition of its strategic direction. Resoundingly, staff members and stakeholders shared how critical this work will be in the coming years.

Examples of the systems and tools Breakthrough needs to build or improve include the following:

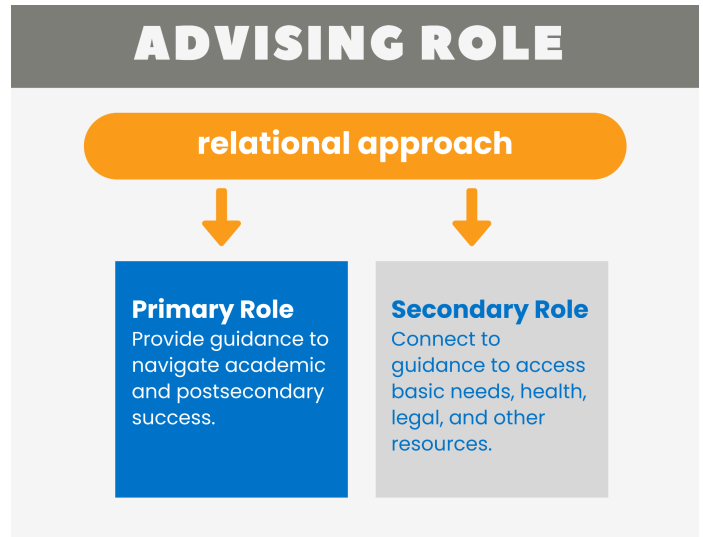
- Expanded and further developed student, family, and alumni data systems
- Additional talent recruitment systems in addition to the CRM and systems currently in place
- New and improved HR support systems such as digital expense tracking, budget management, timesheet tracking, etc.
- Improved staff development systems for onboarding, training, performance management, and evaluation
- New org-wide communications and marketing tools (internal and external)
- Incorporation of Artificial Intelligence tools in multiple aspects of the organization's functioning
- Increased use of customized donor communications, as well as improved volunteer recruitment and management systems
- Adoption and implementation of improved student and family-facing communication platforms
- More robust systems and tools to support the organization's policy advocacy efforts (identifying policy opportunities, communicating agendas, engaging students, families, and staff)

“We need to keep improving tools that help us use data for decision making and planning.”

“Staff members need more role clarity and training, stronger performance management, visible pathways to professional growth and promotion, and a comprehensive employee manual.”

Clarify the scope of advising. Another significant takeaway was the need to **clarify the scope of advising**, Breakthrough’s cornerstone service to students. Throughout staff engagement, varying understandings of the core advisor role surfaced including providing academic skill building, mentoring, postsecondary guidance, and wrap-around support (mental health counseling, housing assistance, food access, legal aid, etc.).

In the next five years, particular attention needs to be given to **refine and clarify the design** of the advisor role (to prioritize school/career navigation and postsecondary guidance) and the **scope** of advising services (especially for out of district students and unenrolled postsecondary youth.)



Cultivate deeper partnerships. Throughout the strategy process, it became clear that Breakthrough will need to **cultivate deeper partnerships** over the next five years in order to reach outcomes for students. The kinds of partnerships that feel particularly important to initiate or deepen include the following:

- Even stronger connections with middle school and high school campuses and K-12 districts in Central Texas
- More formalized and intentional partnerships with targeted Institutions of higher education (IHEs) serving significant numbers of Breakthrough students
- Additional collaborations with organizations that provide services that students and families need but that are out of scope for Breakthrough (social services, mental health providers, immigration specialists, housing support, etc.)
- Strategic partnerships with organizations that support fund development, communications, operations, and talent development
- Additional advocacy organizations and networks to collaborate with in promoting better policies and in supporting impacted youth to become leaders in advocacy and policy making

“
We need more partnerships like the one we have with Texas State University that creates a safe space and an added layer of support for first-gen students on campus.
”

“
Some of my students are interested in learning more about trade, vocational, license, and certificate (TLVC) options. We need partners to help students (and us) navigate that landscape.
”

Evolve evaluation and learning systems. Breakthrough has strong data and evaluation systems that enable strategic decision making and support staff as they plan day-to-day student engagement. As it supports and learns from a student population that is larger and more diverse than ever, paying particular attention to the much larger population of older students enrolled in its newest programs (the Schoolwide Program and the College and Career Success program), Breakthrough has the opportunity to **evolve its evaluation and learning practices**. Doing so will help staff and trustees determine when and how to expand further, help the organization learn from students how to strengthen the program for those who will come behind them, and inform Breakthrough’s evolving Policy Advocacy Practice. Some of the tactics to consider to strengthen learning and evaluation include the following:

- Exploring and implementing increasingly participatory methods in evaluation and program design
- Piloting student-led qualitative and quantitative research on issues that directly impact student success
- Improving the existing forums for student, family, and staff feedback, including surveys and focus groups
- Implementing a student, alumni, family and staff advisory council to help shape programs and proactively implement stakeholder input
- Increasing the amount of quality time in meetings with staff, trustees, and collaborators in engaging with data to influence decision making and shape programming and policy work
- Building an even more positive and non-threatening culture of data sharing and sensemaking across the organization by working closely with program staff to manage, analyze, and interpret data
- Increasing the collection and synthesis of relevant external research and sharing with stakeholders to inform and improve practice
- Building a robust evaluation approach to Breakthrough’s Policy Advocacy Practice, centering outcomes and impact, in addition to the advocacy activities currently measured

“Our 2019 plan created an even more inclusive program. Some students have needs we haven’t encountered before. We are learning our way into opening more doors for more students.”

“We need to continually improve our data systems so that we maintain a strong understanding of outcomes, disaggregated by race, gender, immigration status, etc. in ways that inform our programming to ensure that we meet the needs of all students and change practices to address equity gaps.”

IMPACT STRATEGIES

Breakthrough has set ambitious goals for the coming five years, with a commitment to sustainable growth and improving the quality and depth of its services. By the end of the decade, it seeks to realize the following impact:

- **Tripling the number of Breakthrough students graduating college** each year, celebrating 1,100 total first-generation college graduates
- **Nearly doubling the number of students engaged in Breakthrough** to 5,500 served by 2029
- **Admitting more than 3,000 new middle school and high school students** to Breakthrough in the next five years
- **Expanding the Schoolwide Program** to an additional high school campus, bringing Breakthrough's long-term commitment to more students
- **Providing 600 Summer Teaching Fellows and Student Advocacy Fellows** with invaluable experience, fueling a diverse pipeline of future educators and community leaders

With the clear takeaways from the planning process in mind, the Strategy Planning Team worked to develop strategies designed to support the organization to realize the above impact and move closer toward its vision of all students in the Central Texas region realizing the life-changing power of a college degree.

What follows are four strategies, including a description of each strategy and its key priority actions. By acting on these strategies over the next five years, **Breakthrough ultimately seeks to significantly impact the success of thousands of students across Central Texas and move closer to realizing regional educational equity.**





Strategy 1: Optimize Impact

Make a deep investment in programs, including more depth of service, in areas that Breakthrough is uniquely positioned to deliver in support of Central Texas youth.

In its 2019 strategic plan, Breakthrough set about building out its long-standing 12-Year Experience Program in two locations in Austin ISD, one in Manor ISD, and one in Del Valle ISD. It also launched a new direct-service model, called the Breakthrough Schoolwide Postsecondary Advising Program, supporting all 11th graders and 12th graders to access and realize success in college. That program, now called the Schoolwide Program, is currently operating in two locations: Manor New Tech HS and Austin ISD's Eastside Early College HS.

With a growing number of students participating in each of these two distinct but related programs, the focus of the next five years will be on optimizing Breakthrough's impact on student success by investing in its growing teams and innovating its services and partnerships. **To optimize impact, the organization will work toward the following six priorities.**

Staff-facing priorities: roles, structure, resources, training

- A. **Invest in the College and Career Success (CCS) Team.** The CCS team is at the epicenter of the growth Breakthrough committed to in recent years. As the 12-Year Experience program continues to be built out across all four sites, increasing numbers of students are coming through that pipeline annually. Meanwhile, with two campuses fully engaged in the Schoolwide Program, the CCS team is taking on a larger class of high school graduates every year. In the 2023-2024 school year, the CCS team supported 973 young people across all forms of postsecondary pathways. Within five years, by the 2028-2029 school year, this group is expected to increase to about 2,000 students, the most significant source of growth within the organization.

This team, which currently has nine staff members and seven AmeriCorps members, supports all high-school graduates in their pursuit of a postsecondary degree, certificate, or license. It is clear in the survey and outcomes data that students benefit from the advising and program services the CCS team provides. Advisors support students for up to six years beyond their high school graduation, walking alongside them as they navigate admissions applications, enrollment processes, tuition payments, campus services, career opportunities, and more. The support is robust in comparison to other college success programs, with caseloads for advisors typically between 50 and 70 students. The CCS team needs to maintain its lower caseloads and its relational approach to advising students, while growing the size of the team to support more students. Over the next five years, Breakthrough will provide the leadership, structure, and training the CCS team needs to support a growing number of postsecondary students to enter and succeed in 4-year, 2-year, and TVLC (trade, vocational, licensure, certificate) pathways, with special consideration to:

- **Increase advising capacity.** Grow the number of advisor roles to maintain existing caseload ratios while adding new students.
- **Recruit specialists in College and Career Success.** The team will need to add roles to provide specialization and skill in discrete areas of the team's work, such as specialists in workforce and

TVLC pathways, career placement and support services, community college and the transfer process, and/or supporting students to re-enroll as adults returning to higher education.

- **Innovate on team structure.** Consider innovations in team structure to create distinct “sub teams” in order to provide additional supervision roles, greater clarity for staff members on these sub teams on shared goals and metrics, and improved decision making.
- **Add leadership roles.** Increase the number and ratio of leadership positions (Associate Directors and Directors) in order to improve supervision and the organization’s ability to respond to students’ needs and interventions.
- **Position AmeriCorps members optimally.** Maximize AmeriCorps members’ contribution by positioning them to succeed as advisors in a near-peer role to Breakthrough’s high school graduates and supporting their learning from more experienced staff (coordinators, specialists, and leadership).
- **Train College and Career Success team members.** Continuously improve training of CCS staff members at all levels, both in baseline onboarding to a role and in real-time training and development to improve effectiveness.
- **Evolve programs and services.** Apply learnings from the growing and diversifying student population at the CCS level to inform innovation and improve programs and services, especially in partnership with the institutions of higher education students attend.

B. **Innovate staffing structure to meet the needs of a larger organization.** Breakthrough’s current staffing structure should evolve to support a larger staff, serve a larger student population and engage more community members than ever. Examples of innovation in staffing structure include:

- **Create a specialist team to support the college application and access process.** High school juniors and seniors require intensive engagement with advisors who have deep knowledge of and expertise in the process of applying to a variety of postsecondary opportunities and securing the financial aid needed to attend and persist. Finding the right “fit” – in campus, degree program, etc. – is no small task, nor is securing resources needed to make enrollment and completion possible. Breakthrough will consider how to design a team structure that can sustain this level of specialization without also being responsible for a significant level of other advising or programmatic responsibilities.
- **Add additional specialists.** Staff expressed a strong interest in developing expertise and capacity to support out-of-district students at the middle school and high school level. While the number of students is relatively small (less than 10% of middle schoolers and about 12% of high schoolers), staff report that these students take a disproportionate amount of time to access and support. Considering dedicated specialists, or a team of staff members, to engage out-of-district students could allow all students to receive a higher level of more consistent service. Similarly, additional resources are needed to support the approximately 30% of Breakthrough HS graduates not enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Increasing the team’s expertise and capacity to engage students at that critical time could benefit student success and re-enrollment. Adding specialists might also be a way to create capacity on the Schoolwide Program team as it shares expertise and resources with partner campuses and districts.

- **Innovate in leadership staffing structure.** Breakthrough’s structure was built for a smaller organization with a singular program focus, which allowed for a ‘matrix’ style approach and a culture of inclusivity. Now the organization has grown and diversified, with staff working in middle schools, high schools, and postsecondary institutions across two direct service programs (12-Year Experience and Schoolwide) and its Policy Advocacy Practice. Considering innovations to add additional hierarchy (without losing its culture of inclusivity) could benefit the program team in particular as it grows most substantially in the future. For example, having a dedicated Deputy Executive Director (or similar title), could support the distinct and large teams as they communicate, collaborate, and make decisions with one another.
- **Create other opportunities for organization-wide collaboration.** In the next phase of its work, Breakthrough has the opportunity to implement more opportunities for cross-functional teams to collaborate on designing programs and services and improving shared work products. An intentional approach to developing cross-functional teams could help avoid silos, improve transfer of information across teams, build alignment, support staff learning and development, create opportunities for lateral staff transfers, and more.

Student-facing priorities: scope of services, advisor transitions

- c. **Clarify the scope of services for out-of-district students and unenrolled young adults.** As described above, these two student groups often require a larger investment of time and effort for Breakthrough’s staff. Evolving and articulating clear expectations for students, families, and staff is important given that both out-of-district and unenrolled young adults will grow in number in lock step with Breakthrough’s student population by 2029. It is also important to clarify these services because, while students enrolled outside of Breakthrough’s partner districts tend to see diminished engagement in the program overall, they have comparable success rates in graduating from high school and attaining postsecondary success. Clarifying how these students and young adults will be supported, and by whom, will include:
- **More clearly articulate definitions.** More clear definitions are needed of which schools within Breakthrough’s partner K-12 districts are counted as ‘partner schools’ and at what grade levels. Also more clearly define what it means to be enrolled or not in postsecondary education, recognizing there is variety in how long a person is pausing or stopping their enrollment.
 - **Revise and clarify standards of service.** Outline concrete commitments Breakthrough makes to students enrolled out of district and to young adults not currently enrolled in postsecondary education to minimize variation in service provision between individual advisors or across program teams. Train and coach staff and AmeriCorps members so that evolved policies and practices are known, aligned on, and enacted on the individual, team, and organizational level.
 - **Improve communication to students and families.** Inform families and students about the requirements to remain enrolled in Breakthrough when they are no longer attending school in one of the organization’s partner districts or no longer enrolled in a postsecondary institution.

- D. **Address advisor transitions.** Given the mission-critical nature of strong, trusting relationships, especially within Breakthrough's 12-Year Experience, examining the impact of advisor transitions and a pathway to minimizing them will be important as the program grows. Specific priorities to consider include the following:
- **Improve data tracking and sharing.** Create infrastructure in Salesforce to better track advisor transitions for each student in ways that support an even more strategic advisor assignment process that centers students' needs. Utilize this infrastructure, and the data available on student progress, to support the "handoff process" to ensure advisors are knowledgeable about students as they begin a new advisor-advisee relationship.
 - **Reduce short-term advising roles.** Explore ways to reduce advisor transitions for students during the summer months, creating 'hand-offs' from advisors on the MS team to those on the HS team, as well as from the HS or Schoolwide teams to the CCS team.
 - **Engage students in the process.** Better prepare students for advisor transitions in ways that help them build self-awareness, increase self-advocacy skills, and strengthen communication so that they are more effective in "managing up" to get their needs met and "onboarding" new advocates and mentors.
 - **Streamline planned transitions from advisor to advisor.** Consider innovations in how teams 'hand off' students from one team to another (middle to high school, high school and Schoolwide to CCS, etc). These planned transitions offer an opportunity to institutionalize practices of sharing information more clearly and effectively and "bridging" more thoughtfully.
 - **Strengthen communication with families.** Communicate clearly to families that students are likely to get a new advisor each school year and/or at key transition points (MS to HS; HS to postsecondary) because advisors are trained to support students at a particular grade level. Ensure families know that full time staff can be a throughline for relationships and communication during these transitions.

Program development priorities: school success, college readiness, partnerships

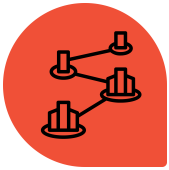
- E. **Prioritize academic success and college readiness.** The cornerstone of Breakthrough's program is academic and postsecondary advising. Yet, many students encounter academic struggles as they move into college preparatory coursework and transition into postsecondary institutions. Without strong academic skills, many Breakthrough college students are required to take remedial coursework or adult education classes before enrolling in credit-bearing courses, and their postsecondary opportunities can be greatly diminished as a result. To optimize impact over the next five years, Breakthrough has the opportunity to support academic success and address college-readiness through refinements and innovations including the following:
- **Increase academic and college readiness programming at the secondary level.** For 12-Year middle school students, consider improvements to math instruction in the summer program at all levels and changes to the 9th grade curriculum to include College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) content and academic learning aligned to readiness tests (TSI prep, etc.). For HS students at both the 12-Year and Schoolwide programs, consider ways to partner with schools, volunteers, and tutoring companies to increase readiness testing, preparation services, and individualized or small-group tutoring during the school year and summer months.

- **Improve early identification of skill gaps.** Consider ways to identify students in the earlier grades with the most significant academic skill gaps with the goal of creating individualized plans to support those students' skill development before postsecondary enrollment.
- **Strategize on long-term solutions.** Designate staff on the 12-Year High School, Schoolwide, and CCS Teams who will serve as leads on tracking college readiness data and spearheading pilot initiatives to increase college readiness. Learn more about innovative programs such as Capital Idea's "Start Strong" program that allows students to enroll directly into certain developmental coursework (who otherwise wouldn't have been eligible due to their college readiness scores) with the requirement of participating in programs that offer additional support.
- **Improve advising efforts with families.** Increase student and family education on the impact of course selection on postsecondary pathways, including but not limited to math courses, rigor of coursework available in their district (Dual Credit vs. ECHS vs. AP), and graduation plans. Identify innovative ways to inform parents/families of their rights as advocates to ensure enrollment in rigorous courses, including Algebra 1 by 8th grade and advanced math in HS, whenever it is appropriate.
- **Advocate for improvements in policy and practice in the region.** Identify opportunities to advocate for full and adequate funding of Texas public schools and for all students to access and succeed in advanced coursework. Promote policies to expand access to high quality college and career advising for all secondary students. Advocate for students to access and benefit from early college high school programs and for institutions of higher education to improve guidance and resources for students not yet demonstrating readiness.
- **Improve staff training and protocols.** Equip advisors with greater understanding of their students' academic standing through improvements in Salesforce tracking and in protocols to share information when students transfer to a new advisor. Improve training on how to advise students on the importance of attaining advanced math coursework (Algebra 1 by eighth grade and at least three years of math in HS). Improve training to advise juniors, seniors, and recent HS graduates across a wide range of college readiness measures including readiness exams (SAT, ACT, and the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) Assessment), including options for re-testing and accessing test preparation, clear guidance on postsecondary options, and selecting college coursework at their institution.

F. **Build critical partnerships.** The opportunity to engage in strategic partnerships will increase as the Breakthrough grows in scale and provides value to school and community partners and access to students and families through the trusting relationships the organization has built over many years. In return, the organization will benefit significantly through increased efficiency and greater impact on students and the schools they attend and other organizations they encounter in the community. The following partnerships will support the organization to optimize impact and address the needs beyond the scope of Breakthrough's services:

- **Higher Education Partnerships.** Breakthrough has developed several exemplary partnerships with area institutions, notably Texas State University, Austin Community College, and St. Edward's University. By strengthening those existing partnerships and developing new ones with

- additional colleges and universities, the organization has an opportunity to reduce barriers to enrollment and increase the likelihood of persistence and completion. The next phase of this work is to articulate clear criteria for high quality partnerships, execute strong co-advising practices with campus staff, increase awareness of and access to campus-based wrap-around services (food pantries, counseling centers, emergency support funds, etc.), and design emergency or last-dollar funding access for students attending the college or university.
- **K-12 and Partner Districts.** Support and train Breakthrough’s campus leads on effective tactics for strengthening campus-based relationships and improving communication tools to inform campus and district leaders of the program’s impact and services. Noting the importance of academic and college readiness, identify opportunities to work with partner campuses in the 12-Year Experience and Schoolwide Program to implement school-based preparatory and testing programs for the ACT, SAT, and TSI assessments. Similarly, work with partner campuses to improve the systems designed to support all students to apply to and afford college (FAFSA tracking and completion, sending transcripts, completing letters of reference, etc.).
 - **Social Service Partners.** Building on recent innovations, Breakthrough should continue to identify partner social service agencies to address non-academic challenges and barriers that can derail students. Continue to improve training and resources for staff on how to access those available services for students to gain resources for basic needs and mental health services. Empower Breakthrough’s Student and Family Support Specialist to provide at-the-ready consultation to advisors and students.
 - **Policy Advocacy Partners.** Continue to increase partnership with organizations engaged in research to provide clear, compelling data to educate decision makers, as well as the number of advocacy organizations dedicated to advocating for policies that support all students in the region. Identify additional partners – including Young Invincibles, Every Texan, and others – who engage in student-led policy efforts to collaborate with and learn from in building an even more effective Policy Advocacy Practice.



Strategy 2: Expand Responsibly

Reach more Central Texas youth by immediately expanding Breakthrough's Policy Advocacy Practice while taking a "learn first" approach to the Schoolwide Program's growth, then launching a new Schoolwide site in 2028.

Breakthrough's 2019-24 strategic plan envisioned and launched two new programs to expand and deepen its impact beyond its 12-Year Experience. In just five years, these new programs – the Policy Advocacy Practice and the Schoolwide Program – have shown real promise as key levers for opening more postsecondary opportunities to more Central Texas youth. As one example of policy advocacy, Breakthrough's role in leading the Student Advisory Council of postsecondary students across the state was critical to informing House Bill 8 from the 2023 legislative session and its increased funding level for all community colleges. Another example, from the Schoolwide Program, is the significant 30% increase in students directly enrolling in college from its pilot location at Manor New Tech HS.

Given these early indicators, it is clear that evolving and growing each of these programs is imperative to advance Breakthrough's mission. Moving into the next five years, **Breakthrough will invest right away in a growing Policy Advocacy Practice**, including identifying new and innovative ways to share learning, expertise, and resources with schools to improve their postsecondary services and policies.

With two existing locations at Manor New Tech HS and Eastside Early College HS, the Schoolwide Program is already committed to growing the number of students served, from just under 600 in 2024 to more than 1,500 by 2029. As more of these students graduate high school and enter the postsecondary setting over the next three years, Breakthrough will take a "learn first" approach as it builds out services and supports students to gain access to and success in all postsecondary pathways. Breakthrough will take time to **learn from its students and their postsecondary experiences and then expand to a new Schoolwide Program location** in 2028. A critical reason for this strategic "learn first" approach, is that Breakthrough's Schoolwide Program is increasing in size and also increasing the diversity of the student population the organization serves. The Schoolwide Program is open to all students at a campus, supporting their plans for postsecondary education across the full range of academic and college readiness levels. With such a radical and impactful approach to opening doors to postsecondary access, Breakthrough needs time to build commensurately strong resources, guidance, and interventions. After all, the Schoolwide Program was an entirely new model for Breakthrough when it launched in 2020 and was replicated in a different campus setting just three years later. While the organization is eager to reach as many Central Texas students as possible, it is also committed to serving them well. To do so, Breakthrough will learn alongside them as they pursue postsecondary opportunities, strengthening the programming for students who will follow them.

The coming years offer significant opportunities for Breakthrough to build out its existing programs and make remarkable strides toward its vision that all young people in this region can benefit from the life-changing power of postsecondary education. Breakthrough will advance the following six priorities as the organization considers how to responsibly expand its Policy Advocacy Practice and Schoolwide Program.

Policy advocacy priorities: engagement, education, resource sharing

- A. **Deliver education and advocacy to policy and decision makers.** With an ongoing commitment to lifting the voices of students and families, Breakthrough will continue to identify and advocate for promising and proven strategies to reduce barriers to postsecondary success. With emphasis on local, regional, and state policies, Breakthrough will:
- **Engage and support staff members and partners.** Support staff members' ability to address policy at the local, campus, and district level – where they are already invested experts – to help students and families thrive. Consider launching a community engagement council or advisory committee to broaden participation in policy advocacy work
 - **Create compelling reports on critical issues affecting students.** Leverage internal research and data to generate external reports on topics which Breakthrough and its community bring expertise and value to, including educator pathways, student wellness, academic readiness, postsecondary advising, etc.
 - **Improve education and communication efforts.** Host events to share findings, the policy implications of them, and opportunities to advocate for change. Collaborate with experts and critical partners to share research and advance policy recommendations to local, state, and regional legislators and decision makers. Publish editorials, write testimony, and drive media attention toward the most needed and most promising policy..
 - **Increase advocacy efforts with local schools, districts, and institutions of higher education.** Identify practices and institutional policies at schools, districts, and colleges and universities that present barriers to student success. Alongside program staff who work within many of those institutions, advocate for change to support more students to access education and advising services and pursue their definition of postsecondary success. For district staff, develop resources and guidance on navigating the requirements for state CCMR accountability ratings and accessing and utilizing outcomes-based funding. Consider ways within existing higher education relationships and collaborations like the Central Texas College Attainment Network and Texas College Attainment Network to share practices that support enrollment, securing financial aid, persistence, and completion.
- B. **Evolve and launch new youth-centered policy advocacy opportunities.**
- **Evolve and grow the Policy Advocacy Fellows initiative.** This cornerstone approach engages Breakthrough students and alumni in advocacy during state legislative sessions, deepening student-led advocacy, aligning programs with advocacy efforts, and formalizing direct involvement of families and staff. As Breakthrough's student population increases, so should its student and alumni policy fellowship.
 - **Consider launching a Policy Research Internship.** Consider formalizing opportunities for policy interns to engage with Breakthrough's data and community to research and write educational reports, inform its own policy advocacy agenda, identify root causes of barriers to postsecondary opportunities, and provide insights into how policy might drive change.

Schoolwide Program priorities: learning, decision making, partnership criteria

- C. **Immediately strengthen support of partner schools/districts to improve postsecondary access.** Even as Breakthrough is growing its understanding and competency in CCMR and learning from students in its 12-Year Experience and Schoolwide Programs to identify promising practices that support access to and completion of postsecondary opportunities, it will explore new avenues for impact within its partner districts. Although Breakthrough is not currently positioned to work at every school in each of its three partner districts, the organization can support their efforts.
- **Provide support in designing data tracking systems.** Share tools and resources available in the market for schools to adopt to improve their tracking of data on postsecondary applications and financial aid processes like completing the FAFSA and TASFA.
 - **Help convene decision-makers and campus advisors.** Join in convenings of district CCMR staff and campus administrators and advisors to coordinate efforts to support all students.
 - **Support the design of school-based services.** Share practices other schools engage in to conduct student and family-facing workshops to complete critical steps and build knowledge about postsecondary pathways.
 - **Share resources, tools, and research.** Open access in partner districts to resources developed by the High School, Schoolwide, and College and Career Success Teams, including advising tools, calendars, and staff training resources. Share critical research on the evolving field of college access and success.
- D. **Learn from students and their postsecondary experiences in the coming three years to prepare for Schoolwide Program expansion.** Breakthrough will take the next three years to learn and build out services for its 12-Year Experience students and the two Schoolwide sites so that students from all sites are well into their postsecondary journey. Specifically, this allows our newest model, the Schoolwide Program, including our most recently launched site in 2023 at Eastside Early College HS, to complete at least two years of postsecondary education. With a much larger and more diverse student population joining the College and Career Success program from two distinct starting points and programs, Breakthrough will take time to learn and build correspondingly strong and impactful resources to support their academic, college, and career readiness to support success and graduation.
- **Monitor key outcomes.** Track and analyze critical postsecondary entrance and persistence outcomes and the interventions that Breakthrough uses to engage students exiting high school and entering colleges or universities.
 - **Engage in participatory evaluation and program design methods.** Conduct robust learning conversations with Schoolwide and 12-Year participants, especially as they graduate high school, enter into postsecondary settings, and persist in their early years of study. Utilize this information to inform future program design.
 - **Commit to continuous program improvement and innovation.** Use learnings over the next three years to inform program refinements and develop resources that support Breakthrough's future student population and expanding programs. In addition, use these learnings to refine the organization's criteria for future campus partners, improving its understanding of what makes a partnership work well in support of student success.

- E. **Clarify criteria for strong campus partnerships.** Identify and build strong relationships with campuses with school profiles and staff commitment that match Breakthrough’s mission and demonstrate an “open door” partnership mindset. To avoid overlap and/or gaps in student support, while maximizing resources and optimizing impact, collaboration with other campus-based providers will be key. While exploring expansion to new campuses, Breakthrough will revisit the School Selection Criteria used when the Schoolwide Program launched (to ensure all relevant factors are considered and to prompt new insights based on strengths/challenges at current Schoolwide sites) and will consider the following:
- In addition to formal sign-off from principals and district leadership, Breakthrough will need to gain **buy-in at multiple levels**, consent from other school leaders, and interest from teachers and student advisors, whose support will be critical for implementation.
 - In keeping with its mission to produce more first-generation college graduates, Breakthrough seeks to work in schools with **significant populations of students Breakthrough has expertise serving**: students receiving free and reduced lunches (best proxy for first-generation status).
 - New Schoolwide Program partners must be willing and able to **contribute a fee-for-service** to cover a portion of Breakthrough’s costs (ideally at least 20–25%) and build collective buy-in.
 - School and district leadership must be **open to change** (“another way of doing things”) and eager to work closely with Breakthrough to co-create and deliver programming.
 - Access to **wraparound service providers** (e.g., mental and physical health) is key so that Breakthrough is not the sole source of support for students and may make referrals as necessary.
 - Campuses that have a **limited number of other organizations offering direct college advising** or capacity building services at the school site are appealing in that their students likely have less access and support for identifying and pursuing postsecondary opportunities.
 - 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.
 - Strong candidates for partnership are able to offer **in-kind support**, such as providing transportation for student college and career experiences, as well as access to sufficient space for advising, office and workshop space, supplies and materials, etc.
- F. **Make responsible decisions about new campus partnerships.** Through a thoughtfully designed, inclusive process, leverage multiple perspectives to apply the above criteria to identify readiness for expansion and the location of an appropriate campus partner. As noted above, Breakthrough should incorporate learnings from its growing student population in this decision-making process and should include stakeholders such as current and prospective students, school partners, staff, and trustees.



Strategy 3: Sustain Staff

Invest significantly in developing the infrastructure, systems, and tools needed to attract, develop, and retain a larger staff in a larger organization.

In the next five years, Breakthrough will hire up to 50 additional full-time staff and AmeriCorps members, growing the team to 140 people. To advance its mission and the elements of this plan, Breakthrough will need to attract, develop, and retain an experienced, skilled, passionate, and effective staff that is committed to equity and to improving postsecondary outcomes for Central Texas youth. This effort will require policies, practices, systems, and tools that enable individuals to sustain and thrive in their roles. As Breakthrough evolves into a larger organization, it will need to invest in the infrastructure to make working at Breakthrough in the future as appealing and rewarding as it has been to date. This will require greater alignment within and between roles, improved HR and technology tools, innovations in cross-team collaboration, and a commitment to responding to changing affordability in the region. It will also require the organization to maintain and advance a culture that is infused with joy and steeped in its REDI values. The following five priorities are central to this evolution over the next five years.

Staff-facing priorities: advisor role clarity

- A. **Clarify the role of Breakthrough advisors.** Breakthrough’s advisors deliver the organization’s cornerstone service: **providing individualized guidance, year over year, to help students access and persist in the postsecondary opportunities they want for themselves.** Over time, the advisor role has evolved to meet students’ and families’ changing needs while responding to changes in Central Texas’ educational landscape. Most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges it created required the organization – and, especially, its advisors – to stretch in ways that were beneficial and often required in the moment but, in some cases, were beyond the designed scope and intent of the role. Some pandemic-era practices have carried forward in Breakthrough’s advising work, especially in innovations to support students and families navigating financial and health challenges. Some of these activities and efforts are simply not sustainable for staff and, given the limitations of advisors’ expertise, not always beneficial to students and families. As the organization moves forward in clarifying the role of advising and advisors, for both staff sustainability and student impact, Breakthrough will:
 - **Define the scope of advising service clearly.** Clearly spell out the scope of the advisor role as academic and postsecondary advisor, a role that builds trusting relationships with students and their families to allow the advisor to succeed in their guidance. Clarify which services, including academic and college goal setting, navigating school services and systems, college and career guidance, and more, are the primary ones for advisors to provide. Concurrently, clarify which advising services are better suited for other types of professionals who support the broader community and other similar populations, including campus-based staff and specialists, social workers, health care professionals, lawyers or other legal advocates, and others.
 - **Create a clear ‘Provider or Connector’ framework for advisors.** To support clarity on the newly-defined scope of advising, provide guidance to advisors about the situations in which they are the primary service “provider” and when they are the “connector,” supporting students and families to access resources outside of Breakthrough’s purview.

- **Improve onboarding and training.** Evolve and develop quality onboarding, training, toolkits, or other resources to help advisors perform their primary role efficiently and effectively, increasing impact and improving the staff experience. Provide ongoing training to advisors on how to connect students and families to community resources, as well as on how to leverage the capacity and experience of internal staff, in particular the Student and Family Support Specialist.
- **Clarify the role of advisor across staff levels and roles.** Provide a clear distinction between the Program Coordinator role and AmeriCorps' member role in advising given their distinct professional expertise and experience. Consider when roles most benefit from specialization and professional expertise to support the primary role of academic and postsecondary guidance.

System development priorities: human resources infrastructure, technology

- B. **Build and refine HR infrastructure & technology systems to support a larger-than-ever and still-growing team.** As Breakthrough has launched two new programs over the last five years and expanded to serve more students, the staff has simultaneously increased in size. Since 2019 Breakthrough has added close to 30 staff positions and, in partnership with OneStar Foundation, has grown the number of year-round AmeriCorps members from 18 to 28. In the summer of 2024, the organization moved from the office it occupied on 11th Street for more than a decade to a new space that will accommodate its large and growing team. While the organization's operating systems and technology have evolved and improved over time and, while most are meeting current needs, it is clear that won't be the case for a much larger organization. Over the next five years, Breakthrough will need to prioritize the development of robust HR and tech systems and infrastructure to support the operations of a rapidly scaling organization. In particular, Breakthrough will need to:
- **Support staff recruitment and hiring.** Building upon recent innovations, like a dedicated hiring software in JazzHR and aligned practices for hiring managers and teams, Breakthrough will need to invest in additional capacity to recruit and hire talent. It should consider investments in marketing and awareness building to attract potential candidates and continue to invest in its operations and talent team to help centralize and support hiring managers and teams. Breakthrough also has an opportunity and need to continue building relationships with values-aligned institutions and organizations to support recruitment of talent in Central Texas.
 - **Invest in staff retention.** To both attract and retain staff, the organization should continue to invest in competitive compensation. Breakthrough should develop clear pathways to promotion supported by comprehensive competency mapping that identifies critical knowledge, skills, mindsets, and behaviors required for each job role and function within the organization
 - **Improve the onboarding and evaluation process.** Consider how to provide an even more consistent new employee experience, including updating the employee manual, to help new staff acclimate to their roles and Breakthrough's organizational culture, including its REDI values. Invest in training and development programs to help staff grow in their roles and advance in their careers. To this end, Breakthrough will need to strengthen its approach to performance evaluation with clearer measures and greater alignment to competencies across the organization and roles.

- **Invest in technology systems.** Create a more clear and accessible HR hub or intranet. Invest in IT support, training, and systems to improve reliability, security, and effectiveness of Breakthrough’s information and computer technology. Strengthen existing and launch new technology tools to increase efficiency in employee experience and organizational operations including systems for managing timesheets, payroll, benefits, expenses, etc. Identify opportunities to invest in technology systems that improve the effectiveness of staff members in their roles, including incorporating artificial intelligence or generative technology, improved communications technology to clients and the community, and other software solutions.

Staff experience priorities: AmeriCorps, affordability, collaboration, joy

- C. **Strengthen AmeriCorps members’ experience and impact.** AmeriCorps members, who serve year-round on all Breakthrough program teams and as Summer Teaching Fellows, provide capacity that supports student outcomes. They are critical to Breakthrough’s mission, and their roles are supported by federal funding that is essential. Given this, over the next five years, Breakthrough will need to identify innovations in supporting members in several key ways:
- **Consider members’ unique value add to programs and services.** To maximize AmeriCorps members’ contribution, strengthen their experience, and develop their skills, Breakthrough should center the members’ service descriptions even more squarely in the services and programs in which the ‘near peer’ power of AmeriCorps members is optimal. And, the organization should differentiate even more clearly when Program Coordinators and other staff provide the expertise and experience that is most needed or beneficial.
 - **Continue to strengthen living allowances and stipends.** Breakthrough should continue mitigating and minimizing the challenges of affordability by committing to and advocating for living allowance increases, providing compensation “at the ceiling” of what is allowable, pursuing housing stipends (and other allowable stipends), and advocating for affordable housing.
 - **Invest in onboarding, training, and development.** Breakthrough should continue to strengthen member development, including improvements to onboarding and ongoing training. By spotlighting pathways from service to employment (within and outside Breakthrough) and higher education, the organization can help members grow and develop through their roles and pursue challenging and rewarding post-service employment opportunities and experiences.
- D. **Respond to affordability.** As Breakthrough increases in size and responds to a changing Central Texas landscape, it will need to strive to be ahead of its peers in addressing affordability and making it possible for talent to invest their time and careers in the organization. Doing so will allow it to shine in other ways for prospective talent as well, including by emphasizing its healthy organizational culture and diverse and invested staff.
- **Invest in competitive compensation.** Remain competitive to peer organizations with Breakthrough’s total compensation package, including salary and comprehensive benefits. Consider future additions to the benefits package as more staff attain greater tenure and the staff as a whole continues to diversify in age, stage of life, and professional experience.

- **Continue to assess salary and benefits compared to the market.** Conduct regular reviews, annually or biannually, of salary and benefits to ensure that Breakthrough is competitive in the Central Texas talent market.
- **Partner with other organizations and institutions to support staff and AmeriCorps members.** Explore strategic partnerships to help Breakthrough staff sustain in their roles despite affordability challenges, including peer organizations and others innovating in providing housing options and guidance, discounted goods, and services (including childcare).

E. **Cultivate connection, collaboration, belonging, and joy across teams and the organization.**

Breakthrough is growing into a much larger organization, and intentional effort should be given to ensuring staff members can deepen their sense of purpose and belonging within it. Breakthrough should build opportunities for connection between staff across the organization, and it should look for ways to continue to foster belonging and joy in roles at all levels of the organization. Some ways Breakthrough could realize this priority include the following:

- **Create opportunities for cross-team and cross-department functions and collaboration.** Build additional opportunities for staff to work in teams on similar or related tasks, with others not on their primary team. Create a structure and system that allows staff to “shadow” peers in ways that deepen their understanding of each others’ work while strengthening their own. Enable cross-team movement (lateral transitions) within the organization to foster professional learning and growth.
- **Create professional learning communities.** Design spaces for dialogue that allow colleagues to ask one another questions, share resources, and surface new ideas and strategies to address persistent challenges. Peer learning circles using dilemma protocols or other prompts might be valuable to growing as professionals, building connection and community, and increasing collective impact.
- **Provide additional opportunities for community building,** Consider a regular cadence of lightly structured, opt-in staff experiences that support building relationships, skills, knowledge, trust, and commitment.
- **Foster and affirm the joy in shared work and supporting student success.** Breakthrough’s staff works hard, and they have – and make – fun. Sparking and noticing the joy that is inherent in developing oneself and in supporting students’ growth is a critical part of sustaining in the work. Consider ways to harness the presence and value of joy, while remaining open for critical feedback and improvements, by honoring individual and team achievements, maintaining a growth mindset, and supporting opportunities to laugh and celebrate together.



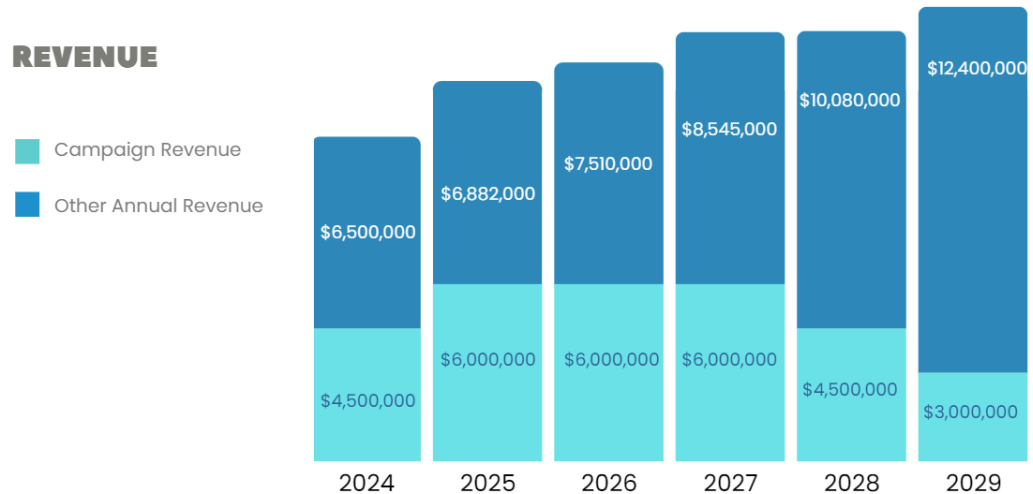
Strategy 4: Raise Funds

Engage in a highly successful philanthropic fundraising campaign while strengthening avenues for non-philanthropic support.

Sustaining and growing Breakthrough’s impact over time will require a mix of philanthropic and non-philanthropic revenue so that the organization is not reliant on limited or fragile funding streams. Because the organization is working toward significant growth, the diversification of funding sources is even more important. Over the next five years, Breakthrough will increase and diversify Breakthrough’s annual revenue through a comprehensive approach to philanthropic and government investment, focusing on approaches that position the organization for long-term success and demonstrate its commitment to community-centric fundraising practices. Just as Breakthrough partners with students and families in long-term, adaptable ways, it will need to continue to partner with donors and investors with an eye toward the future and toward building win-win funding partnerships that can evolve and stand the test of time.

Revenue planning priorities: Accelerator fund, annual giving, sustainability

- A. **Launch an Accelerator Fund.** Breakthrough has planned and is executing an 18-month campaign, the Pathways to Opportunity campaign, to raise \$30M that will support both immediate growth and long-term impact. The major gift campaign will address increased staffing costs, support program growth, invest in future fundraising capacity, and build the Student and Family Support Fund. The Accelerator Fund’s impact will span the full five years of this plan, with most funding in hand within three years to provide resources needed for growth and impact. The funding priorities of the campaign and fund are aligned to the goals of this strategy plan, including to:
- **Hire** up to 50 additional full-time staff and AmeriCorps members, growing the team to 140
 - **Increase** fundraising capacity to leverage \$30 million in additional public and private dollars – a total investment of \$60 million by 2029
 - **Build** systems, structures, resources, and tools to ensure quality, efficiency, and sustainability as the organization scales to double in size and more than triple in impact
 - **Launch** Breakthrough’s Schoolwide Program at a third campus to reach hundreds more youth
 - **Invest** \$3 million in the Student Family Support Fund to support student well-being



- B. **Expand annual giving across all funding streams.** At the same time, the organization seeks to grow annual giving from individual, corporate, and foundation donors, while increasing annual investments from government sources including federal research and AmeriCorps grants, city and county grants, and state sources. Breakthrough aims to increase the percentage of non-philanthropic revenue (government and fee-for-service) to at least 40% of funding by 2029, while growing its endowment to support operations in the long term. In addition, the organization continues to develop fee-for-service revenue from school districts while seeking to add revenue from institutions of higher education and other invested institutions.
- **Federal funding.** Breakthrough receives \$1.6M annually through AmeriCorps, allowing the organization to add capacity to student service teams in ways that increase impact. It should begin increasing this source of funding and exploring federal research opportunities and grants.
 - **State funding.** Breakthrough should explore models from other organizations that have accessed state appropriations while planning for upcoming legislative sessions.
 - **County funding.** As a current Travis County grantee, receiving \$160,000 per year for five years, efforts should be made to increase funding through grants and in support of the county's efforts to fund child care providers and summer programs.
 - **City funding.** Breakthrough should continue to build relationships as a partner and grantee of the City of Austin. Current funding of \$162,000 per year through Public Health and through technology grants are strong partnerships and can be expanded in future years.
 - **Fee-for-service.** Breakthrough generates revenue through a fee-for-service model with its partner K-12 districts. Given the level of service and strength of collaboration with several higher education partners, Breakthrough should innovate to envision a fee-for-service at the postsecondary level.
 - **Earned Revenue.** Other organizations seek out Breakthrough's expertise in postsecondary access and success. The potential for revenue to provide training and materials to those organizations should be examined.
 - **Individual giving.** Breakthrough should continue to build its individual donor base, through the Accelerator Fund and campaign as well as through annual stewardship and cultivation efforts. As the organization grows, the number of individuals investing in the program should increase and be retained year over year. Investments in systems to communicate with donors and personalize their experience will be critical.
 - **Corporate giving.** Breakthrough should seek to scale what is already a substantial corporate investment effort, while leveraging corporate partnerships in more varied ways including employee engagement with volunteer opportunities that may build individual donors and serve as "friendraising" opportunities.
 - **Foundation giving.** Breakthrough should continue to build upon its strong base of local and regional foundation support by continuing to build relationships with and secure increased investment from statewide and national funders. This will include leveraging collaborative grant-seeking efforts with fellow community-based organizations and institutions of higher education, as well with the Breakthrough Collaborative and fellow affiliates.

- C. **Develop a plan to enable continued increases in annual funding beyond the next five years.** Reaching new heights in scale and impact will, as described, require both expanding and diversifying Breakthrough’s donor base. Looking beyond 2029 requires thinking about how to sustain and continue growing the resources needed for Breakthrough’s sustainability and ongoing evolution. In the next five years, Breakthrough will need to prepare for future revenue needs as follows:
- **Increase the size of the development team.** Grow the development team to address key need areas including data management, donor engagement and events, and grant partnerships.
 - **Add specialists in new and growing streams of funding.** Consider the need to add a specialist role or team to focus on government relations, advocacy, and strategies to secure public funding or research-based grants.
 - **Develop a pipeline of trustees and committee volunteers focused on fundraising.** Staff partnerships with volunteer fundraisers have been and will continue to be critical to continued growth of philanthropic revenue. Breakthrough should continue to prioritize identification and engagement of volunteer fundraising leaders who can help the organization further expand and diversify its network of supporters.
 - **Improve technology tools and donor engagement practices.** Breakthrough should invest in the technology and resources the team needs to successfully sustain a diverse and large set of funders in an efficient and effective manner that demonstrates long-term partnership.
 - **Create a strategic fundraising plan heading into the next decade.** By the end of this strategy plan, the organization will need to learn from its efforts to diversify and grow its revenue base, and use those learnings to strategize for the next period of revenue for the organization.

Communication and outreach priorities: community-centric fundraising, marketing, awareness building

- D. **Continue to evolve a community-centric fundraising approach.** As Breakthrough moves forward, it should continue to place value in the many ways people contribute and create community and partnerships to support the organization’s mission. As the organization shares its efforts in the community – and who makes up Breakthrough, in human terms – it will need to convey a diversity of experiences and continue to honor its storytellers and the many who invest in Breakthrough and in education opportunities broadly. Specifically, in the next five years, Breakthrough will start or continue to:
- **Build community partnerships.** Build authentic partnerships with donors, cultivating long-term, honest, relationships in which each sees the other as peers and co-learners and in which youth and families are centered.
 - **Continue to value and honor storytelling.** Continue to refine past efforts on storytelling to reflect the complexity of the challenges faced by Central Texas youth and families as well as the richness and diversity of their experiences. Continue to evolve the organization’s Storyteller Bill of Rights and Storytelling Principles of Trust and ensure that staff members across the organization are trained to use these tools.
 - **Celebrate all pathways to postsecondary success.** Lean into the fullness of the notion that the organization’s work is about ensuring that students develop a plan for their lives after high school, encompassing a variety of pathways and opportunities as Breakthrough supports them to fulfill both their intentions and their potential.

- **Acknowledge the complexity of the community's efforts.** Acknowledge and stay centered on the reality that injustice in many forms, including racial, social, and economic injustice, are the root causes of educational inequity and low college completion rates in the region. Lift up sustaining solutions for students and families grounded in the knowledge of the challenges this community faces.
- **Honor all forms of philanthropy.** Bring community members into programs and events in ways that are connected and that highlight partnership, value whatever they are able to offer and invest, and prioritize the students' experiences in these settings above all else.
- **Center the strength of the community.** Deepen Breakthrough's practice of using strength and asset-based language, use it consistently in communication efforts, and encourage partners' growth, even as Breakthrough's learning and development in this area continues.

E. **Invest in marketing and communications.** Breakthrough's marketing and communications team has done exceptional work in the face of the organization's growth. They have supported fundraising, social media, website development, and communication with key stakeholders. And, as the organization has evolved, they are increasingly supporting programmatic needs, creating both print materials and digital resources for work with students. As the organization looks ahead to the next five years, it is time to innovate marketing and communications practices to reach a broader audience, achieve fundraising goals, and assist internal teams with campaigns to achieve objectives. Specifically, the organization will need to focus on advancing in a few key areas:

- **Increase public awareness.** The organization is at a turning point with building community awareness. While Breakthrough is well-known to certain schools and educators, to its students and families, and in the local donor and philanthropic communities, it is not where it aspires to be in terms of general public awareness. Becoming a "household name" in Central Texas would help achieve a wide variety of outcomes including recruiting (students, year-round AmeriCorps members, and Summer Teaching Fellows), raising funds, connecting with promising partners, and even impacting policy and decision making by making more visible the highly compelling – and entirely changeable – root causes of Breakthrough's very existence.
- **Innovate in communications efforts.** Continue evolving Breakthrough's communications function from what was originally an internal resource for fundraising to what is increasingly a vital support to programs and a lever for achieving student outcomes. Learn from recent efforts such as the revamped website to improve communication tools as a resource for students, families, and alumni.
- **Invest in the marketing and communications team.** Increase the number of staff dedicated to communications and marketing efforts. Identify systems and practices to clarify responsibility, accountability, and budgeting for communications and marketing services, whether provided in-house or through contractors.
- **Improve training across the organization.** Explore ways to create tools and training for staff members across Breakthrough's teams to ensure consistency of branding and voice while supporting professional growth and development.

- **Create a comprehensive marketing strategy.** Develop a defined marketing strategy and the budget and staff to support it including advertising, community engagement, clear goals, and a defined audience.
- **Increase PR and media outreach.** Envision and execute a PR and earned media strategy to increase and deepen Breakthrough's community engagement and elevate the organization as a thought leader in areas including educational equity and college access and persistence.
- **Invest in marketing tools.** Invest in marketing tools and technology, including additional hardware and software add-ons, video messaging, reporting and analytics tools, and services to support SEO, database development and social media AI scheduling.

IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING TOOLS: 2024 - 2029

Five Year Planning Tool

This tool will enable Breakthrough’s Leadership Team to indicate the year in which each priority is anticipated to be essential. The Leadership Team will modify this tool over time, given their proximity to the work, to adapt to changes in the landscape and shifts in priorities. This planning tool can also be used to help staff understand the breadth of the work within and across program years, recognizing that not all priorities can be addressed all the time. In combination with the Annual Planning Tool that follows, it provides a simple, accessible way to visualize the five-year timeline for acting on strategic priorities. It is important to note that with each year, only specific activities within each priority will be executed. Ultimately, it may be helpful to add degrees of shading to indicate “light” vs. “heavy” years for each priority and/or to expand the tool to list critical activities, bulleted within each year.

| Strategic Priorities | | | | | |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Priority Activities | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
| 1a. Invest in the College and Career Success team. | | | | | |
| 1b. Innovate staffing structure to meet the needs of a larger organization. | | | | | |
| 1c. Clarify scope of services for out-of-district students. | | | | | |
| 1c. Clarify scope of services for unenrolled postsecondary youth. | | | | | |
| 1d. Address advisor transitions. | | | | | |
| 1e. Prioritize academic success and college readiness. | | | | | |
| 1f. Build critical partnerships. | | | | | |
| 2a. Deliver education and advocacy to policy and decision makers. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| 2b. Evolve and launch new youth-centered policy advocacy opportunities. | | | | | |
| 2c. Immediately strengthen support of partner schools/districts to improve postsecondary access. | | | | | |
| 2d. Learn from students and their postsecondary experiences to prepare for expansion to a new Schoolwide Program site. | | | | | |
| 2e. Clarify criteria for strong campus partnerships. | | | | | |
| 2f. Make responsible decisions about new campus partnerships. | | | | | |
| 3a. Clarify the role of Breakthrough advisors. | | | | | |
| 3b. Build and/or refine HR infrastructure and tech systems to support a larger-than-ever and still-growing team. | | | | | |
| 3c. Strengthen AmeriCorps members' experience and impact. | | | | | |
| 3d. Respond to affordability. | | | | | |
| 3e. Cultivate connection, belonging, and joy across teams and the organization. | | | | | |
| 4a. Launch an Accelerator Fund. | | | | | |
| 4b. Expand Annual Giving across all funding streams. | | | | | |
| 4c. Develop a plan to enable continued increases in annual funding beyond the next five years. | | | | | |
| 4d. Continue to evolve a community-centric fundraising approach. | | | | | |
| 4e. Invest in marketing and communications. | | | | | |

ANNUAL PLANNING TOOL

Annual priorities have to be determined at the annual level to allow for the level of specificity that good strategy implementation requires. This planning tool will enable the Leadership Team to conduct and support annual planning across the organization and within sub-teams. Drawing from the plan as a whole and from the Five-Year Planning Tool, teams can determine which priority activities will be implemented within the upcoming year and then map those activities across quarters. The tool can be adapted and adopted each year for staff to map and monitor progress toward their quarterly priorities and deliverables at both the organization and team level.

| Year 1 Priorities - 2024-25 | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Strategy | Q1 Activities | Q2 Activities | Q3 Activities | Q4 Activities |
| #1 Optimize Impact | | | | |
| #2: Expand Responsibly | | | | |
| #3: Sustain Staff | | | | |
| #4: Raise Funds | | | | |

EASE: IMPACT PLANNING TOOL

This tool enables teams to determine which activities to prioritize. This Strategic Impact Plan describes priority activities within each key strategy in detail. Mapping those activities onto this grid can help illuminate which ones matter most at any given time in an organization or team’s work. Ideally, in annual and quarterly planning, Breakthrough’s staff will

- **select activities** in the upper right quadrant – those that are both **relatively simple** to execute and have potential to **make a big difference**
- **when potential impact is significant, choose activities** from the upper left quadrant – though **challenging to execute**, the time and effort required is justified because the **outcome is meaningful**
- **consider dropping activities** in the lower right quadrant – though they might be **simple to deliver**, the fact that they also have **little impact** means they may not be worth doing
- **absolutely avoid activities** that fall within the lower left quadrant – those that are both **challenging** and **do not add much value**

As Breakthrough’s Leadership Team moves into planning and execution of this five-year plan, it may be a worthwhile exercise to use this tool to map the entirety of the plan. Doing so will help them evaluate (and re-evaluate over time) which priority activities feel most pressing and relevant. And, it will give them a “well” to return to when selecting each subsequent year’s priority activities.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>HARD & HIGH IMPACT (MAYBE ...)</p> | <p>EASY & HIGH IMPACT (YES!)</p> |
| <p>HARD & LOW IMPACT (NO! NO! NO!)</p> | <p>EASY & LOW IMPACT (WHY? aka probably NO)</p> |

APPENDIX

Key Deliverables

- [Phase 1 Deliverable: Key Questions](#)
- [Phase 2 Deliverable: Summary of Learning](#)
- [Phase 3 Deliverable: Draft Strategies](#)

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

The 2019 – 24 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 students have the opportunity to realize their potential through the life-changing power of a postsecondary 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 12-Year Experience model

- 5th and 6th grade students
- Aspire to be first-generation college graduates

For Schoolwide Postsecondary Advising model

- 11th grade high school students
- Attending a Central Texas high school with a substantial population of low-income students and students of color
- Likely to 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 11% of low-income, first-generation eighth graders go on to postsecondary success by age 24).

- Are less likely to access resources outside of their school such as private tutoring, test preparation, or postsecondary counseling that support college and career access.
- Are more likely to attend an under resourced school due to systemic inequities.
- Are disproportionately 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.
 - Frequently encounter barriers to provide programs and resources to support students for postsecondary success (including sufficient counselors to address college counseling and readiness needs).
 - Face a gap between available funding and the level of services required to meet 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, trusting relationships, college knowledge, and guidance to postsecondary completion for first-gen students through the **12-Year Experience model**
 - Support students to have the academic skills necessary to succeed in college
 - Guide students in meaningful experiences that build leadership and develop non-cognitive skills supportive of postsecondary success
 - Provide skilled advising services to develop meaningful relationships with students and offer academic and postsecondary guidance
 - Support students and families to know and have the capacity to complete required 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 **Schoolwide Postsecondary Advising model**
 - Provide skilled advising services to develop meaningful relationships with students and offer academic and postsecondary guidance
 - Support students and families to know and have the capacity to complete required steps to get into college and secure financial aid
 - Support students in successfully transitioning to postsecondary and navigating through postsecondary experiences
 - Equip schools with the systems and processes to guide all students towards their postsecondary plans
 - Cultivate a campus culture where all teachers, counselors, and 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 **Policy Advocacy Practice model**

Short-Term Outcomes

- More low-income, first-gen, and students of color will access and complete postsecondary education
- 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 Central 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

- All postsecondary pathways offer value to students and are effective levers 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. These barriers cause students to be less likely to 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 an advisor helps students navigate transitions and overcome adversity
- Intervention in the secondary years is a key design element to set students on the path to postsecondary completion
- Postsecondary success programs which develop trusting relationships and provide quality programs and services can support first-gen students to persist and graduate
- Federal, state and local policy shape the conditions in which Breakthrough students move through secondary and postsecondary education, and can reduce barriers for similar students Breakthrough does not have the capacity to serve directly