Phase I Stakeholder Engagement Process

Over the course of Phase I, the Great Schools Partnership systematically engaged all of the major stakeholders in the planning process for this proposal including the commissioners of education, senior SEA staff, legislators, higher education representatives, professional organization representatives, state board of education members, and principals and school-based leadership teams from across the 75 League of Innovative Schools Members in all five New England Secondary School Consortium states.

Our core leadership team consisted of GSP staff working in close collaboration with the NESSC State Leads—a group of senior SEA leaders who have been coordinating NESSC and League activities in each of their states for the past five years. Our team participated in full-day planning meetings in each state, a regional full-day planning meeting bringing together principals and school-based leadership teams from across all the states, attended the Gates Foundation convening in Denver, and participated in weekly conference calls, during which the State Leads provided feedback on all aspects of the planning and design process.

Each year, principals and teacher-leaders from all the League member schools come together at least three times, and our October 2014 meeting was almost entirely dedicated to the Next Gen Systems Initiative project. GSP staff introduced the schools to the grant opportunity, requested their participation in the needs-assessment survey, and began building enthusiasm for the project.

GSP presented its evolving proposal and implementation plan to the five NESSC state advisory groups, which include superintendents, principals, teachers, higher-education officials, SEA specialists, and business leaders from each of the five member states. Once GSP had put together its preliminary implementation plan—including the school selection process and criteria for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2—it convened five state-based meetings to solicit feedback from each advisory group and address any concerns that emerged. These four-hour discussions with the advisory groups allowed GSP to address the different concerns that emerged based on differing state-by-state policies and contexts. Following these meetings, GSP brought the members of all five advisory groups together for a full-day workshop to further discuss and refine the proposal and project design. By this time, each state had largely approved the proposal, so GSP formed smaller discussion groups and asked each group to discuss and debate one of the five core questions that had emerged in the state meetings, and then present their discussions and proposals to the full group. Representatives from all five states participated in each group discussion. By the end of the day, the skeptics came to understand the value of the project and the supporters had become true champions.
GSP also presented the project design and proposal to the NESSC Council—a regional steering committee comprising commissioners of education, senior SEA staff, legislators, state-board members, governor’s representatives, and other state and regional leaders—on two separate occasions to educate the group about the opportunity, discuss the major features of the proposal, and secure the Council’s formal endorsement of the plan. In addition, GSP worked directly, and through the NESSC State Leads and Council, with each of the five commissioners of education to solicit their feedback and secure their formal endorsement of the proposal. Over the past five years, GSP and the NESSC leadership has worked hard to ensure that personalized learning, proficiency-based learning, and multiple pathways are perceived as apolitical issues, and we are happy to report that—through the NESSC Council and SEAs in each state—the NESSC has achieved broad-based bipartisan support for its goals and strategies.

Finally, GSP’s staff provided their perspectives and expertise throughout the process. Many of GSP’s fulltime staff members are veteran school coaches with decades of experience in school improvement. Our school coaches have been district and school administrators, college professors, and classroom teachers, and several have been or are currently school board members. All of our school coaches spend most of their time each week embedded in schools, where they work closely with superintendents, principals, leadership teams, and teachers as they lead their schools through an improvement process. GSP’s staff shaped and informed all dimensions of our proposal, including the project design, selection process, progress benchmarks, and school-coaching model.

We are confident that GSP has experience, expertise, and capacity to fully and successfully execute all elements of our Next Gen Systems Initiative proposal. Importantly, we believe that our organization also brings the connections, credibility, and proven track record required to realize the full potential of a project representing the ambition and scope described in our proposal.