FY20-25 STRATEGIC PLAN
August 2019
Our Vision: A “New Deal” for Students

From the first day of kindergarten through high school graduation, most children in the United States spend more than 2,300 days in public schools. Exactly how they spend that time has a profound and lasting impact on the rest of their lives. Do they have chances to tackle challenging, grade-appropriate work? Do they have effective teachers who make lessons engaging and relevant? Do those teachers truly believe they can meet college- and career-ready standards? Have we treated families and communities as essential partners in their schools? And as a result, do students graduate ready to pursue their life goals—or not?

TNTP has worked side-by-side with teachers, principals, and school system leaders for more than 20 years to better understand what’s happening in classrooms across the country—and to help more students get what they need from those 2,300 days. In a field increasingly divided by ideological debates that reach far beyond the classroom, we offer innovative ideas and practical solutions that help schools create more opportunities for their students every day—especially those who’ve too often been denied opportunities throughout our country’s history. We focus on what’s happening in schools and classrooms not to minimize the systemic inequities that shape students’ lives, but because we’re so passionate about erasing them—and because we know there’s no more important place to start.

Through partnerships with hundreds of school districts, state education departments, and charter school networks, we’ve learned how to build and replicate programs that train diverse, effective teachers and school leaders at a fraction of the cost of traditional education schools. We’ve learned that smarter approaches to recruitment and retention can help schools give more students a chance to learn from effective teachers. We’ve identified the crucial skills even experienced teachers must master to bring college- and career-ready standards to life in their classrooms—and how to help them do it. We’ve learned about the power of authentic community engagement to create educational change that endures even as individual leaders come and go.

Even as the scope and scale of our work has grown over the years, the question guiding it has remained the same: How can we make the biggest impact on the most students who’ve traditionally been let down by our education system? We’ve recruited and trained 37,000 teachers for hard-to-staff schools and subject areas in 25 states. We’ve helped more than 50 school systems give students more consistent access to challenging, engaging instruction. We’ve published groundbreaking original research that has inspired changes to policies and practices across the country—expanding our reach far beyond the schools where we work directly.

We’ve achieved all this despite systemic barriers that still stand in the way of the transformational change we seek. Our education system rests on the flawed assumption that students bear responsibility for their own academic success. The truth is that students—most of whom show up each day ready to do everything that’s asked of them—aren’t the variable in this equation. It’s not their effort or ability that determines whether they get what they need out of school. Nor do the size of school budgets, the ebb and flow of politics, or seismic societal forces—although those things can certainly make a school’s job easier or harder.

The true variables are the institutional choices about who and what to prioritize at every level of the system, from individual classrooms to schools to entire districts and states. Every day, adults make choices that directly affect whether students get the opportunities that can prepare them for success: grade-appropriate assignments, strong, engaging instruction, and high expectations. Those choices aren’t always conscious. They’re often a reasonable response to flawed policies, poor implementation, and insufficient support. But whatever the cause, they engineer inequities too great for even the most talented and determined students to overcome. It’s why the “achievement gap”—the focal point of education policy debates for decades—is really a symptom of the more fundamental challenge facing our schools: the opportunity gap.

Understanding and closing that opportunity gap has never been more urgent. Political and public support for education reform policies has cratered even as large majorities of public-school parents remain unsatisfied with the current PK-12 system—and even as hundreds of thousands of students graduate from high school each year unprepared for the lives they want to lead. For all the progress the reform movement has made in recent years to tackle entrenched barriers to equity, it has failed to partner fully with communities to build sustained support for
important policy changes, failed to articulate a positive vision for the school experiences every student should have, and failed to convince the public that adults in schools have the power and responsibility to deliver those experiences. Real, lasting change can’t happen as long as schools where every student is on track to meet their goals remain feel-good exceptions instead of the default expectation.

This is the challenge our work across the country has prepared us to take on, and the one that will guide our work over the next five years. We want to lead the way toward a “new deal” for students—a clear vision that raises the bar for what students and our entire society can expect from schools:

- Access to grade-appropriate assignments and strong instruction that creates consistently challenging, engaging, relevant, and worthwhile experiences worthy of students’ goals and unbounded potential;
- Adults—especially teachers—who honor and reflect students’ aspirations, abilities, and identities; and who hold high expectations for their success;
- A safe, positive environment that fosters academic, social, and emotional growth;
- And, ultimately, a PK-12 experience that prepares every student for college—a standard that ensures they can choose from many paths to economic stability and personal fulfillment, whether they ultimately attend college or not.

**Our Strategy: Close the Opportunity Gap by Providing Four Crucial Resources—At Scale**

We’ll pair our vision with a clear strategy to address the roots of the opportunity gap at scale. We will continue our consulting work on talent, academics, and community engagement—work that has given us a clear understanding of what’s needed at the classroom, school, and system levels to create more equitable opportunities for students. But to achieve the meaningful, sustained change we seek for students and families, we will bring even more discipline to those flagship services. We’ll grow in areas where we can have the greatest impact and deprioritize work that’s less critical to our mission, while reserving resources to invest in finding the next generation of models for improving schools.

Through direct support for school systems, partnerships with communities, and national advocacy, we’ll dramatically increase the number of students who have access to the four in-school resources we identified in *The Opportunity Myth*: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and high expectations. We’re focusing on these resources because our research shows they can help students make substantial academic gains—especially students who start the school year behind.

To that end, we will organize our work over the next five years around three priorities: our core work with school systems, a renewed commitment to community partnerships to ensure we approach all our work through an equity lens, and more robust national advocacy to amplify our impact beyond the systems and communities we support directly.

**Priority 1: We will help educators, schools, and school systems expand access to opportunity.** The heart of our work has always been our partnerships with the people who work directly with students every day, and that won’t change. But we’ll focus that support more tightly on providing every student with the four key resources—the opportunities they need in school every day to ultimately reach their goals. Over the next five years, we will:

- **Reinvigorate and expand our teacher pipeline programs**, establishing ourselves as the nation’s leading provider of diverse, talented educators who expect great things from their students.
- **Grow our talent and academics consulting work** to expand and replicate practices that work in giving more students access to the four resources.
• **Refocus our teacher and leader development work**, building on emerging successes in helping experienced educators grow the skills and mindsets they need to provide the four resources to their students more consistently.

• **Make our core services more cost efficient**, to support the growth and sustainability of the organization and to ensure that our successes are replicable in a wide variety of school systems.

Success on this priority means a greater reach for our work: supporting more school systems, reaching more students, and seeing more of our clients renew contracts with us (especially for the work we’ve identified as high-impact). At the classroom, school, and system levels, it means helping educators expand access to opportunity: more students benefitting from the four resources consistently, and a more diverse and effective teacher workforce.

**Priority 2: We will authentically partner with communities to support the needs and goals of students.** To spark lasting change in the communities we serve, we need to ground all our work in authentic partnerships and a shared goal of equitable access to opportunity for all students. Over the next five years we will:

• **Model a breakthrough approach to local partnerships** in at least two communities—broad, diverse, long-term coalitions committed to strategies that eliminate the opportunity myth in their schools. These will be multi-year commitments designed to help students, families, and local organizations co-create and lead a blueprint for stronger public schools in their community. We’ll adapt our role in these partnerships to address the greatest needs over time—at times a convener, a technical assistance provider, an advocate, or a fundraiser—but our goal will always be to help create bold, sustainable changes to policies and practices locally, while providing a national model for avoiding pitfalls that limited education reformers to only inconsistent or short-term progress over the last two decades.

• **Integrate authentic community engagement strategies** into all our work with school systems by ensuring more of our project teams apply the lessons we’ve learned in recent years from our standalone community engagement consulting.

• **Continue our journey to become a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization**, so that we can ensure that our staff better reflects and is ready to support the goals and needs of diverse learners in the communities we serve.

Success on this priority means successfully launching several long-term local partnerships, increasing the number of non-client partners involved in our work, and more of our contracts setting high-quality community engagement goals for their work. At the classroom, school, and system levels, it means ensuring that partnerships expand access and increase equity of access to the four resources. Internally, it means continuing to implement and refine our DEI strategy: setting and meeting clear diversity targets for our leadership and our entire staff based on the student demographics of the communities we serve, and ensuring that all staff see our DEI strategy reflected in their day-to-day experiences at TNTP.

**Priority 3: We will inspire a national education agenda centered on closing the opportunity gap.** Our ability to extend our influence beyond the school systems we work with directly is one of our defining strengths. We share what we’ve learned with the field and with the world, offering practical solutions that bring clarity to complex issues. It’s the approach that helped us start a national conversation about teacher effectiveness that dominated education policy for most of the last decade—and it’s one we will recommit to at this critical time in the fight for educational equity. Over the next five years we will:
• **Shift the focus of leaders and influencers** from the achievement gap to the opportunity gap through creative storytelling across traditional media, digital media, and conference appearances.

• **Advocate for smarter policies** that will improve school experiences by identifying, analyzing, and reporting on the policy levers that matter most for giving students access to the four resources—and that reflect the voices and priorities of students and families. For example, we’ll spotlight certification policies that can help increase the diversity and effectiveness of the teaching force by focusing on impact in the classroom rather than paper credentials.

• **Show what’s possible** when students have access to the school experiences they deserve, by becoming the go-to source for practical tools that help schools provide the four resources—and by launching a demonstration school that’s rooted in the lessons and commitments from *The Opportunity Myth* from its very first day.

Success on this priority means dramatically increasing the number of educators, policymakers, and community leaders who pledge to uphold the commitments from *The Opportunity Myth*—to a total of one million commitments by 2030. We’ll also ensure sustained publicity for the opportunity gap and efforts to close it, in the form of at least 2,300 stories across traditional media and digital platforms by 2030. At the classroom, school, and system levels, success means identifying and convincing systems to adopt the highest-leverage policies that could increase access to the four resources.

**Looking Ahead**

We’ll approach all these priorities in several phases:

• **In FY20**, we’ll focus on **realigning resources and priorities** to support our core work and the sustainability of the organization. We’ll also **design our next generation of services**, from improvements to our teacher pipeline and educator development work to detailed plans for our long-term local partnerships.

• **In FY21**, we’ll focus on **growing and repositioning our core work** and expanding local partnerships. We’ll increase the revenue and efficiency of our teacher pipeline, talent consulting, and academic consulting work and track each business against specific financial targets. In at least two communities, we’ll connect local partnerships and coalitions with the talent, academic, and community engagement solutions we provide. And we’ll ensure our successes and momentum are translating to a meaningful impact on the national education agenda.

• **In FY22 and beyond**, we’ll focus on **accelerating our impact**. We’ll continue to grow our core work, refine and expand our long-term local partnerships, and translate our emerging national education agenda into our next major research publication. We’ll also select a site and complete the community-driven design process for our demonstration school, which we hope to open in FY23.

If we’re successful, the impact of this strategy will extend well beyond the schools where we work. More than just better academic outcomes, we seek a public education system that empowers every student to choose the life they want to lead—by providing the opportunities that make those choices possible. All of us who work in PK-12 education bear responsibility for policies and practices that have engineered so many inequities in our current system. But we also have the power to build a better system that gives every student opportunities, choices, and a path to a fulfilling life—a system rooted in four resources any school can provide with the right focus and support. We’re ready to lead the way in making it happen.