

School Solutions

SEED FUND



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MANNING

ABOUT EDVESTORS

EdVestors' mission is to increase the number of schools in Boston delivering dramatically improved educational outcomes for all students.

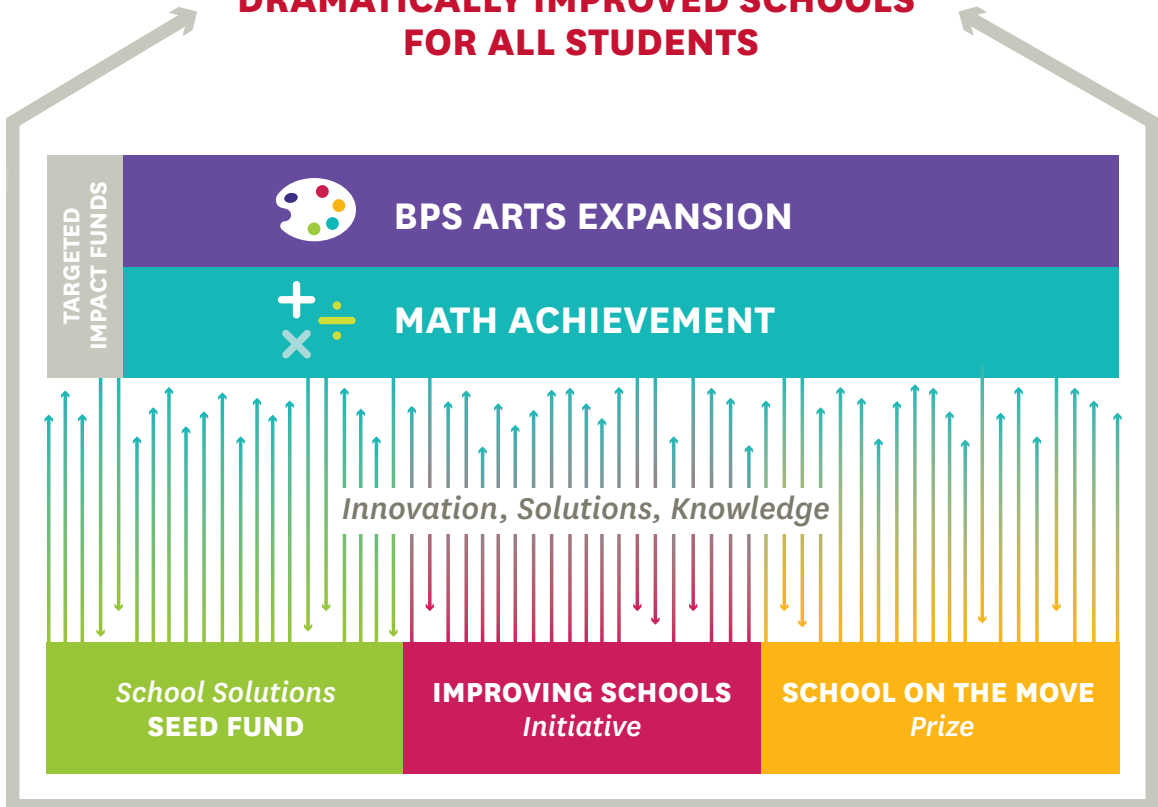
Since our founding in 2002, EdVestors has worked to address the core question we face in urban education: ***What must we all do differently in order to do better on behalf of all students?***

EdVestors works to strengthen school effectiveness so a quality education is available to every student in Boston. To do this, we tap the ingenuity already present in our city's schools, non-profits, neighborhoods and institutions so that we can take a problem-solving approach to meeting challenges. We borrow good ideas that are working elsewhere, generate new ideas where needed, and think cre-

atively and strategically when putting good ideas into practice. We invite a wide and diverse network of stakeholders to collaborate. And we share what we know and learn about how schools change, paving the way for more schools to make more progress.

In the 21st century, we need the talents and contributions of all learners to enrich our communities. If we fail to act boldly on behalf of all students, Boston will miss out on developing the talent that keeps us a city of inventors and innovators.

DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED SCHOOLS FOR ALL STUDENTS



EdVestors provides seed funding for a wide range of emerging school improvement ideas through the School Solutions Seed Fund; we develop demonstration projects and disseminate best practices through the Improving Schools Initiative and the \$100,000 *School on the Move Prize*; and we drive

citywide, systemic change at scale aimed at increasing school quality through our Targeted Impact Funds, including BPS Arts Expansion and our next phase of work launching this year to increase student achievement in math.

*“The complexities of the education landscape require a multi-faceted approach to improving schools. We know that systemic change that benefits all students is possible when we employ three key levers: **strategic philanthropy, education expertise and tactical support** to help good ideas and innovative solutions move to effective implementation in our schools.”*

LAURA PERILLE, PRESIDENT & CEO, EDVESTORS



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MANNING

ABOUT THE SCHOOL SOLUTIONS SEED FUND

The School Solutions Seed Fund is a new and nimble investment pipeline to support frontline educators and their best ideas for improving schools. The Seed Fund launched in 2014 as the next generation of our Urban Education Investment Portfolio. It is designed to offer educators an open call for problem-solving, experimentation and innovation in schools. Each year, EdVestors will make initial Seed Fund investments of \$10,000 to up to 10 promising ideas, with a smaller number of projects receiving larger, longer-term investment based on early success and the potential for impact.

The Seed Fund allows EdVestors to hear from experts we trust — teachers and school leaders — about common challenges that are slowing progress in schools. Their ideas for overcoming challenges bring unparalleled ingenuity and pragmatism to the conversation. With flexible resources and tactical support

from EdVestors, they are empowered to put their plans into action, to learn and reflect, and to share their struggles and successes with a community of like-minded educators.

Investing in on-the-ground solutions is an essential part of EdVestors' approach to strategic philanthropy. The Seed Fund pushes us to think beyond what we already know about how schools change, to be open to new ideas, and to find even more transformative ways to work on behalf of all students. Borrowing lessons from the financial world, over the years EdVestors has built a diversified philanthropic portfolio, with a mix of investments across initiatives, some in proven approaches that create steady school improvement, and a smaller percentage of Seed Fund investments in higher-risk, untested approaches that have the potential for impact.

CORE ISSUES IN URBAN EDUCATION

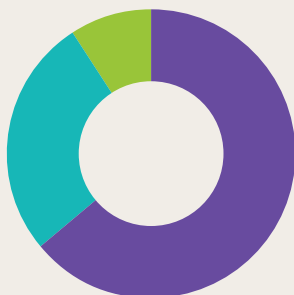
This year, three themes emerged through our open call for solutions in the Seed Fund cohort, pointing to core issues that urban schools continue to grapple with:

- » Supporting high quality teaching
- » Meeting the needs of all students
- » New approaches to teaching and learning

This year’s Seed Fund initiatives cover all corners of the city and reach students of all backgrounds and abilities. They pilot promising solutions to address persistent issues, including new ways to integrate technology in the classroom, and improved strategies for serving students of color, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities, all of whom face stark achievement gaps in Boston. Finding more effective ways to serve these student groups is essential to EdVestors’ mission of improving educational outcomes for all students in every school.

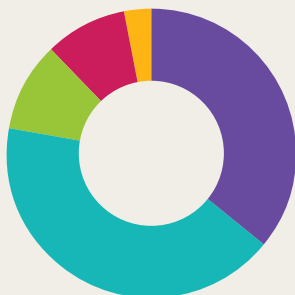
THE SEED FUND SUPPORTS:

A variety of school types



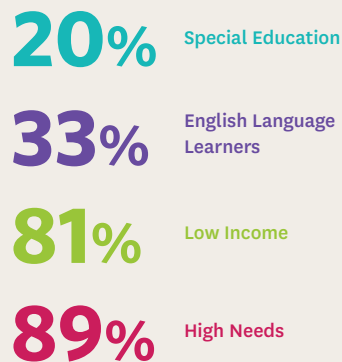
- Traditional BPS District 60%
- BPS Pilot 30%
- Commonwealth Charter 10%

Students of all backgrounds



- African American 36%
- Latino 42%
- Asian 10%
- White 9%
- Other 3%

Students with diverse needs



Neighborhoods across Boston

- Brighton
- Charlestown
- Dorchester
- East Boston
- Fenway
- Hyde Park
- Jamaica Plain
- Roxbury

CHARLESTOWN HIGH SCHOOL

Digital Peer Observation

The Challenge

Education scholars agree that teacher quality is the most important school-based factor affecting student achievement. And yet, teachers infrequently observe their colleagues in action or reflect on issues of practice together. Due to school schedules, few teachers spend time in classrooms that aren't their own. This is a substantial missed opportunity for teachers to learn from one another and collectively improve their practice.

The Solution

Seven Charlestown High teachers are conducting peer observations via video, tapping into the potential of rich and deep learning that can occur among teachers working together. Partnering with a facilitator from Tufts University, the use of video gives the group flexible space and time to observe one another, and to analyze and reflect on the recorded lessons to identify ways to increase student learning.

The Potential

Video-taping lessons is a potentially scalable strategy for providing teachers the opportunity for self-reflection and feedback from colleagues which is critical to improving instruction.

CURLEY & MURPHY K-8 SCHOOLS WITH TEACH PLUS

Teachers as Experts on Common Core

The Challenge

In a statewide survey, Teach Plus found that teachers are enthusiastic about the rigor of the newly adopted Common Core standards, despite feeling a lack of adequate support to fully implement these standards. Teachers expressed a desire for deeper, more intensive professional development associated with Common Core, a preference for teacher-led trainings, and the importance of opportunities to collaborate with their peer teachers on issues of practice.

The Solution

Through its Core Collaborative program, Teach Plus engages highly effective teachers already knowledgeable about Common Core and trains them to facilitate learning for fellow teachers. This spring, up to 30 teachers from the Murphy and Curley Schools are participating in 15 hours of rigorous peer-led professional development to build content knowledge and stronger teacher practice.

The Potential

This project has the potential to change planning and delivery of teacher professional development in a school-based learning environment of peers.



“If you want to solve the pressing problems in our school system like the achievement gap, what you should really do is go to the teachers.”

LINDSAY SOBEL,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TEACH PLUS

THOMAS EDISON K-8 SCHOOL*Boston's First Digital Academy***The Challenge**

Like many urban schools, the Edison strives to design instruction that responds to the diverse needs and learning styles of all students. Digital technology is a promising tool to make learning more engaging and personalized, though most teachers and school leaders need additional support, knowledge, and devices to effectively integrate technology in classrooms.

The Solution

An in-house technology coach from the National Center for Time & Learning is supporting a cohort of six Edison teachers as they experiment with technology in the classroom, build skills, select digital tools for school-wide implementation, and troubleshoot challenges. School leaders are working on new ways to support teachers to shift their thinking away from traditional instruction and more fully harness the power of blended learning, mixing teacher-supported instruction with technology.

The Potential

This pilot could illuminate a pathway for more existing schools to transform into digital academies, with tailored student learning at their core.

ORCHARD GARDENS K-8 PILOT SCHOOL*Innovations in Digital Literacy***The Challenge**

Traditional, paper-based K-8 literacy instruction doesn't reflect how many of us read: through digital text viewed on screens. A recent survey found that more than half of 8-16 year olds prefer reading on a screen, with just 32% preferring print. Digital



“The world is constantly changing and our students live in the world — they don’t live in our schools. We need to be able to adapt, meet students where they are and take advantage of all the exciting things happening in technology and in teaching and learning.”

**MEGAN WEBB, PRINCIPAL,
ORCHARD GARDENS K-8 PILOT SCHOOL**

technology presents rich opportunities for schools to better serve diverse learners, both as readers and creators of content, yet many schools have yet to shift their culture and instruction away from paper-based learning.

The Solution

Teachers and school leaders seek to align practices with the realities of how students read, while also expanding personalized learning interventions that digital technology affords. A subset of classrooms will pilot using e-readers while teachers and school leaders assess the instructional changes, professional development and other tools necessary to support expanded technology use school-wide.

The Potential

This pilot will generate knowledge on how schools can transition from paper-based learning to digital technology, bringing instruction in line with the world outside the classroom.

JASON GALLAGHER, PRINCIPAL,
HARVARD-KENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



“If we keep doing the same things with the resources we have and it’s not working, we need to try something new to reach our goals and support our students. It’s great that EdVestors is willing to take that chance with us.”

HARVARD-KENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Developing Lifelong Readers

The Challenge

Third grade is a pivotal moment in education, when students must shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Fundamental skills required to become lifelong learners are built during the first and second grades, which means that students who are behind in the third grade will likely struggle to keep up for the rest of their schooling. Notably, these struggling readers are four times less likely to graduate from high school than their proficient-reading peers. Across Boston Public Schools, just over one-third of students can read proficiently by the end of third grade.

The Solution

The Harvard-Kent School is providing personalized instruction for struggling learners in the first and second grades using individual and online supports. MGH Institute graduate students serve as reading specialists to identify and address each student’s unique knowledge gaps. MGH Institute faculty will also provide professional development to teachers to support their implementation of new approaches for increasing literacy among early learners.

The Potential

For many years, Boston has struggled to get the majority of students reading proficiently by third grade, and creative solutions such as the Harvard-Kent’s offer new options for tackling the issue.

JOSEPH LEE K-8 SCHOOL

A Closer Look at Interventions

The Challenge

Urban schools often struggle to meet the diverse learning needs and styles of their students within limited classroom time. Research shows many students need — and succeed with — personalized learning interventions. Yet with an ever-growing universe of available interventions, schools struggle to know which ones to use or how to best align various interventions for student success. An effective strategy requires a strong menu of interventions, effective implementation, flexible time, and student and parent interest.

The Solution

With the addition of a personalized learning block within the school-day, Lee students can consistently access learning interventions that target their unique knowledge gaps. School-wide, the Lee staff is evaluating which existing interventions work well, identifying areas where new interventions are needed, and researching innovative interventions for potential implementation. In addition, teachers and parents are collaborating to generate ideas for increasing parent participation in supporting students’ specific educational needs.

The Potential

While serving as a model for an effective school-wide intervention approach, the Lee will also create a toolkit of teacher-vetted strategies that can be shared with other schools to drive student success.

**PATRICK J. KENNEDY
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**
ELL Acceleration Clinic

The Challenge

Like many urban schools, the P.J. Kennedy serves a student body that is overwhelmingly low-income and learning English, with many students at the lowest levels of English proficiency. A new student enters the P.J. Kennedy roughly every three weeks and needs time and support to adjust to the school culture and classroom setting.

The Solution

The P.J. Kennedy School is offering an intensive acceleration clinic for students with limited English language proficiency. The acceleration clinic provides small group tutoring around basic language development and equips students with the skills to communicate their needs, ask for help, and persist in their education.

The Potential

English Language Learners are one of the fastest growing groups of students in Boston, many arriving throughout the school year. Finding more flexible and intensive ways to support English language development and more quickly orient students to the school community is essential to launching these students on a pathway of long-term success.

KIPP ACADEMY BOSTON ELEMENTARY
Robotics & Engineering in Kindergarten

The Challenge

A strong foundation in math and science not only prepares students for a wide range of careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields, but also increases the likelihood of college persistence. Young learners also need opportunities to develop the critical thinking skills that are essential for academic and life success.

The Solution

KIPP Academy Boston Elementary is designing activities for the youngest learners to build their collaborative problem-solving skills by engaging them in a high-tech/high-touch combination of robotics and structural engineering design. Using BeeBots robots and large blocks, students learn to program the robots to navigate increasingly complex physical obstacles, working in teams to overcome setbacks.

The Potential

As more fields require a problem-solving mind set and the ability to work collaboratively, KIPP's experiment serves as a guide for building a strong sequential STEM program starting with our youngest learners.

**EMILY DOBELL, PRINCIPAL,
KIPP ACADEMY BOSTON ELEMENTARY**



“When we’re working with kindergartners, we call ourselves programmers and engineers. We hope that bringing these experiences to our students will mean they will consider those careers as opportunities for themselves later.”

NEW MISSION HIGH SCHOOL

Supporting Young Men of Color

The Challenge

Disparities in access, opportunity, and achievement persist for Black and Latino males. Graduation rates for these young men continue to lag while rates of suspension and expulsion outpace those of females and males of other racial and ethnic groups. In a city where 78% of Boston’s male students are Black or Latino, a new vision and approach for educating our male students of color will be essential.

The Solution

New Mission’s Project *Ochendo* looks at the institutional and historical barriers that impede the academic, social-emotional, and eventually, post-secondary success of young men of color in Boston. Through asset-based mentoring, tutoring, college coaching and Rites of Passage programming for about 30 male students, Project *Ochendo* seeks to empower these young men to assume ownership of their education pathways, and develop resiliency to overcome obstacles that stand in the way of their success.

The Potential

An asset-based approach to supporting Black and Latino males that builds on the strengths and values they bring to their schools and communities must be a mainstay of all urban school districts serving a diverse student body.

FENWAY HIGH SCHOOL WITH SOCIEDAD LATINA

Culturally Relevant Classrooms

The Challenge

Students of color make up 86% of the BPS student body and Latinos are the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in Boston. Latino students in Boston also have the lowest 4-year high school graduation rate and highest dropout rate. Research shows that culturally relevant teaching is essential to youth success, as it supports positive cultural identities, resiliency, and higher levels of engagement, and yet many students feel that their cultures and languages of origin are not represented or valued in traditional school settings.

The Solution

Fenway High and Sociedad Latina have partnered to pilot *Quien Yo Soy*, a culturally relevant curriculum to provide more Latino students in BPS with opportunities to see their cultures and languages represented at school. Evaluation of the pilot will examine the impact of culturally specific instruction on student learning and engagement.

The Potential

This project will create a model for an effective, culturally relevant curriculum and make the case for expanded cultural learning opportunities across the city.

LISSETTE CASTILLO,
TEACHER, FENWAY HIGH



“We make sure that our students don’t check their cultures and languages at the door. They are academic tools that teachers need to learn to use in the classroom.”

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2014 PRESENTATION OF THE PHILIP H. GORDON LEGACY AWARD

Pictured are: Laura Perille, President & CEO, EdVestors; Jacob Levkowitz; Beatriz McConnie Zapater, Head of School, BDEA; Sandy Gordon; Barbara Levkowitz; Michael Douvadjian, Co-Founder, EdVestors

Philip H. Gordon Legacy Award

2014 AWARD WINNER: BOSTON DAY AND EVENING ACADEMY

At last year's Showcase, the inaugural Philip H. Gordon Legacy Award went to Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA), an alternative high school that has had great success re-engaging some of our city's most disconnected youth.

BDEA is a BPS in-district charter school for students who are at least 16 years old and two or more years behind grade-level. The school's nationally-recognized competency-based model assesses students' knowledge, gives them credit for what they have already learned, and allows teachers and students to target specific gaps in a student's education in order to successfully complete a course — rather than requiring all students take the same courses based on age and course progression.

The \$50,000 Gordon Legacy Award has enabled BDEA to share its competency-based instructional model with two additional alternative education programs in Boston, effectively connecting more off-track youth to the opportunity to earn a diploma. BDEA teachers and administrators have provided training through a week-long summer institute and

regular coaching and support to Charlestown High School and ABCD University High teachers. This has enabled both schools to align their teaching and assessment practices with Common Core standards using a competency-based approach. Next year, BDEA and its partner schools will go even deeper with these practices, and explore replicating their model at another school. These partnerships demonstrate the power of sharing best practices to increase the success of Boston's most vulnerable youth.

ABOUT THE PHILIP H. GORDON LEGACY AWARD

EdVestors is proud to salute our late co-founder, Philip H. Gordon, for his many contributions to the field of urban education and philanthropy through the Philip H. Gordon Legacy Award. The annual \$50,000 Award recognizes an important school improvement effort that will help level the playing field in education so that every student has the chance to succeed.

Visit www.edvestors.org/invest to make a gift to EdVestors in support of Boston students.