
THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW AMERICAN SCHOOLS

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This chapter covers the evolution of NAS, both planned and unplanned. It offers more precise statements of NAS's goals and theories of action over time. It also provides details into decisions NAS made and why. Perhaps most importantly the chapter covers where NAS is now headed.

The information presented here was pulled from previous reports by RAND, especially Glennan (1998). The original work itself is based on the following data sources: document reviews; attendance and observations at NAS and design team meetings from 1991 through 2001; interviews over this same period with NAS, design team leads, district leaders, and NAS consultants about NAS's decisions and progress.

This chapter is organized around important decisions and actions associated with each phase of NAS activities as outlined in the introduction Figure 1.1 and Table 1.1. It covers the following:

- The NAS whole-school design concept;
- Activities during the RFP phase;
- NAS's decision to reduce the number of teams at the end of the development phase;
- Activities during the demonstration phase and NAS's decision to further reduce the number of teams;
- NAS's development of a scale-up strategy given what had been learned;

- The selection process wherein NAS chose 11 teams for funding;
- The selection of scale-up partners;
- Scale-up activities and experiences; and
- The current status of NAS.

NAS'S WHOLE-SCHOOL DESIGN CONCEPT

NAS was established in 1991 as a nonprofit funded by the private sector to create and support design teams. Some concepts of a design were already clear at that point. Its core premise was that all high-quality schools possess a de facto unifying design that allows staff to function to the best of their abilities and that provides a consistent and coherent education instructional program to all students. NAS thought the best way to ensure that lower-performing schools would adopt successful designs was to create design teams to develop “break the mold” designs that could be readily adopted by communities around the nation. A design “articulates a school’s vision, mission, goals; guides the instructional program; shapes the selection and socialization of staff; and establishes common expectations for performance and accountability among students, teachers, and parents” (Glennan, 1998, p. 11).

It is important to make clear here that NAS was different in many respects from other types of reforms in that initially it did not want design teams to target specific populations, grades, or schools with peculiar characteristics. The designs were to cover grades K–12 for all schools and students.¹

The design would be comprehensive, covering all aspects of the school and all students within the school. The design would provide coherence to the usually fragmented set of programs schools offered. Much of this would be done by carefully aligning high standards for all students with matched assessments, curriculum, and instruction. Some aspects of existing schools would disappear; others would gain precedence. But, whatever the mix, it would provide a coherent

¹Early debates about the choice of developers or teams indicated concern for one particular design based on these grounds (RW) intended to develop a design for high-poverty, elementary schools only. Despite these misgivings, the design was accepted.

vision for administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students to follow on a path toward constant organizational improvement. These notions are contrasted with those of past programmatic approaches in Table 2.1.

Other of NAS's guiding principles were derived from its involvement with the private sector:

- The design developers (known in NAS as design teams), while needing some initial investment funds, would transition within three to five years to self-sufficiency based on fees for services provided.
- Schools adopting designs might need some initial investment funds, but sustaining design implementation would not incur additional costs over the normal operating budget.
- These efforts were expected to have immediate impacts. The private sector sponsors wanted results in the form of many schools adopting designs and showing improved student performance within a five-year period. At the end of five years, NAS was to go out of business.

NAS, with some understanding of the ambitiousness of its goals, planned a phased approach to its mission to see whole-school reform take root across the country. These phases, shown in Figure 1.1 and in Table 1.1 in Chapter One included an RFP and selection period, a development phase, a demonstration phase, and a scale-up phase.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The founders of NAS sought to both develop designs and support their spread throughout the country to schools seeking the means for significant improvement. NAS held a competition through an RFP process that brought in nearly 700 proposals from existing teams in

Table 2.1
Comparison of Whole-School Design-Based Assistance with Traditional Means of School Reform

Elements of Reform	School-Level Reform Using Design-Based Assistance	School-Level Reform Under More-Traditional Conditions
1. Development of a school vision	Starting point is choice of design; evolves through implementation. High standards for all required.	Not required. Reform typically centers on component of school program.
2. Focus of reform effort	The entire school. Seeks to create team with shared responsibility for high outcomes.	Usually subject matter or grades—sometimes governance, e.g., site-based management.
3. Duration of reform effort	Intense initial effort lasting 2–3 years, but reform is continuing process.	No set time.
4. Sources of technical assistance	Initial assistance largely from design team. Long-term assistance from sources deemed most effective by school.	No set pattern. Frequently provided by school district or local teachers college. Training sometimes provided by program vendors.
5. Source of curricular materials	Varies. Some design teams provide detailed materials; others provide frameworks for curriculum development; others use commercially available materials.	No set pattern. Frequently provided by school district or local teachers college. Training sometimes provided by program vendors.
6. Strategy for sequencing assistance	Strategy for sequencing actions is explicit. Design teams have different approaches.	None.
7. Conception of professional development	Professional development is integral to design. Implementation of design results in professional development. Network of like schools is key source of expertise.	Tends to be responsibility of individual staff member. Often dependent on district staff development policies.

Table 2.1—continued

Elements of Reform	School-Level Reform Using Design-Based Assistance	School-Level Reform Under More-Traditional Conditions
8. Organization of staff	Integral to design. Some transitional roles defined. School revises organization and staffing structure to meet its needs.	Tends to be function of district rules. Divided along disciplinary or programmatic lines.
9. Measurement of progress of reform	Benchmarks established by design team or by school with design team guidance.	Not usually explicit.

universities, to districts attempting reforms, to newly formed teams from private for-profit groups. NAS imposed several conditions on the designs and their associated teams:

- In creating designs, teams should not be limited by the constraints facing “real” schools in real districts, but rather let their imaginations develop truly innovative and provocative ideas.
- Designs had to enable all students to meet high standards. Designs geared toward a particular subgroup were not acceptable.
- The design should be adaptable to local circumstances. As stated in the proposal, “This is not a request to establish ‘model’ schools. The designs must be adaptable so that they can be used by many communities to create their own new schools” (NASDC, 1991, p. 21).
- While it was accepted that the designs would require funds to implement in a real school, the long-term costs of operating a design-based school should not be greater than those for operating an average school.
- Teams had to commit to a scale-up phase starting in 1995 where they would promote their design in schools across the country. A specific criterion for judging designs was “potential for widespread application and the quality of plans for fostering such application” (NASDC, 1991, p. 35).

Table 2.2 shows the general principles that NAS held at the beginning of this effort.

Table 2.2
Original NAS Principles and Concepts

Principle	Description
Private Funding	Initially, the effort was privately funded and supported—it was not a local or federal government policy or mandate. Ideally, schools and districts would enter into a relationship with a design team on a voluntary and well-informed basis.
Whole School	Designs were to be for “whole schools.” This notion had two parts. First, the designs would be coherent, thoughtful sets of school-level policies and practices. The adoption and adept use of coherent, inter-related, and mutually reinforcing practices would be the antithesis of the fragmented programs and idiosyncratic teacher practices often found in schools. In addition, designs were to be for all students. They were not special programs targeted on specific populations to be added to the school’s repertoire.
Adaptive Approach	NAS designs were not supposed to be perspective molds for model schools to ensure uniformity of practice. Designs were to adapt to local conditions and were to enable local communities to create their own high-performance schools.
Design Teams	Teams were deliberately created organizations of experts. NAS intended that teams would develop coherent designs and then work with schools in further ground-level product development to perfect those designs. Later, they would promote the use of their designs in schools across the nation. Nearly 700 potential teams responded to the RFP. The 11 initially chosen were mostly private nonprofit organizations connected to universities or research organizations. The exceptions were one for-profit firm, two districts, and one nonprofit without a research or university connection.
Multiple Designs	There was no one best school design, but many, depending on the needs of individual schools. Multiple teams would be supported, allowing schools a choice of designs.
Reasonable Costs	While it was understood that transforming schools might require investment funding, the operating costs of the schools after transformation were to be equivalent to those for the “typical” school in that community. In other words, “break the mold” designs were to be no more costly in daily operation than other schools, making them affordable to all districts.

Table 2.2—continued

Principle	Description
Market Driven	NAS would not be a self-perpetuating organization. From the beginning, it planned to “go out of business” after accomplishing its purpose. One consequence of this was that design teams had to become financially self-sufficient over time, creating their own client base to support their work. Thus, teams over the five-year time line to which NAS originally committed (1992–1997) would need to transform themselves from visionaries, to product developers, and finally to entrepreneurial organizations.

NAS DESIGN TEAM SELECTIONS

While NAS received nearly 700 proposals, only about 30 were responsive to the RFP. Those reviewing the proposals thought that most simply did not offer new approaches or pay attention to the NAS concept of design. The impression left was that most proposals were recycled requests for funding of existing programmatic approaches.

The 30 responsive proposals were considered carefully and potential awardees were asked to present their proposals to NAS in more detail. Eventually NAS selected 11 proposals for funding. These proposals and the associated teams are briefly described below. These descriptions date back to the time of the proposals. As the design teams have changed along with their designs, these paragraphs do not adequately or accurately describe design teams and designs today. The point of this chapter and the next is to examine some of the reasons behind the extensive changes that took place.

Authentic Teaching, Learning and Assessment for All Students: Newton, Massachusetts. ATLAS (or AT) was proposed by a team headed jointly by Ted Sizer, Howard Gardner, James Comer, and Janet Whitla. The design assumed that high-performing schools were not possible in the current bureaucratic structure. The design aimed to change the culture of the school to promote high institutional and individual performance through: (1) helping students acquire valuable habits of heart, mind, and work; (2) helping students develop deep understanding; (3) using only activities that are developmentally appropriate; and (4) creating a

community of learners. The design required the establishment of a semiautonomous feeder pattern of high school, middle school, and elementary schools and significant development of a committee structure within schools and across schools. It did not prescribe standards or curriculum.

Audrey Cohen College: New York, New York. AC (now called Purpose-Centered Education: the Audrey Cohen College System of Education) was proposed by the College for Human Services in New York City led by Audrey Cohen. It emphasized adoption of a developmentally appropriate, transdisciplinary curriculum based on semester-long units focused on particular purposes for learning—not subject area. For example, kindergarten was dedicated to “We build a family-school partnership” and “We care for living things.” Embedded in each purpose were content areas and essential skills. Semester-long purposes were to be generated by the design team along with significant guidance for curriculum development. But, teachers developed their own curriculum. Each purpose culminates in a constructive action taken by the class to serve the community. These purposes and actions become the guiding principles for the organization of the school.

Bensenville New American Schools Project: Bensenville, Illinois. The Bensenville project was proposed by the Bensenville School district in Illinois by a team that included union members, government leaders, business owners, parents, and others. It called for a complete rethinking of the classroom so that the entire community would serve as a campus. The instruction would be hands-on and project based, taking place at sites throughout the community. A Lifelong Learning Center would provide assessments of all community members’ health and learning needs.

Co-NECT: Cambridge, Massachusetts. CON was proposed by the private for-profit firm Bolt, Berenek, and Newman with support from other partners such as Boston College. It focused on creating a school environment through the ubiquitous use of technology that would motivate children through interdisciplinary projects that extended outside the classroom walls. The design called for autonomy of the school and planning and budgeting by houses or grade levels within the school.

Community Learning Centers: Minneapolis, Minnesota. CLC was proposed by a coalition of education groups led by Public Schools Incentives, a private not-for-profit educational group. This design covered children from birth to 21. It was based on full school autonomy similar to that provided to charter schools using a contractual vehicle to maintain autonomy and accountability. It emphasized project-based learning, authentic assessments, and a student-led curriculum. It called for school-level provision of health and social services in community learning centers.

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound: Cambridge, Massachusetts. EL was proposed by Outward Bound, a private nonprofit organization and led by Greg Farrell. It wanted to take the ideas espoused by Outward Bound and apply them to schools. These ideas included an interdisciplinary field-based curriculum, personalized instruction, and more-authentic assessments. Children would be in groups of no more than 25 students per teacher with the same teacher for three years. Schools would have no more than 350 students. Teachers would be required to develop their own curriculum. This curriculum would be largely in the form of long-term interdisciplinary projects known as expeditions with significant student choice as to topic and work. The projects would lead to authentic student products upon which their learning could be judged.

Los Angeles Learning Centers (LALC), now Urban Learning Centers: Los Angeles, California. ULC was proposed by a coalition of the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Los Angeles Educational Partnership (LAEP), the University of California–Los Angeles, the University of Southern California, and others. It was to be led by LAEP. The design called for the creation of preK–12 schools that provided for student educational, health, and social services needs. Each child would have mentors: community members, other school children, and teachers. Teaching would be thematic and project based with teachers developing curriculum. The design would develop and use its own standards. Students would be in small groups.

Modern Red Schoolhouse: Indianapolis, Indiana. MRSH was proposed by the Hudson Institute, a private not-for-profit organization. The design team would create a set of unique standards to be adopted by all its schools. Schools would adopt Core Knowledge

curriculum in the elementary grades and use Advance Placement-type curriculum in the higher grades. The curriculum would be a mix of styles, with a significant increase in interdisciplinary units developed by teachers. Students would be in multiage, multiyear groups and have Individual Education Compacts that articulated personalized education programs. Student records, lessons, and assessments would be managed by a schoolwide computer system and teachers would use this to help manage personalized instruction as well as share curriculum units. The school would require complete autonomy from district control and parental choice of school.

National Alliance for Restructuring Education: Rochester, New York. NARE (now America's Choice) was proposed by the National Center for Education and the Economy and led by Mark Tucker. The design team promised to create New Standards for schools that included important workplace skills and that were matched to a set of assessments against which student progress toward the standards could be measured. The schools would have increased autonomy under districts and states that fundamentally restructured their education system along lines proposed in the Total Quality Management literature. But, students would be expected to meet the New Standards as assessed in the design team-developed system. Teachers would develop curriculum and instructional packages after learning about the New Standards and being exposed to best practices. Health and social service resources would be provided at each campus.

Odyssey Project: Gaston County, North Carolina. The design was proposed by the school district of Gaston County. The design team leader was the head of research and development for the district and all team members were employed by the school system with one exception. The design addressed needs of children ages 3–18 by including extensive interventions in preK years. The early interventions might include: prenatal monitoring and education for the mother; monitoring and diagnosis of preschool children to enable early interventions, parenting training, and nursery school and kindergarten. It proposed year-round schooling, use of Paideia instructional strategies, a high-technology environment, multigrade grouping, school-level provision of social services and health care, and required community service. Curriculum and instruction would

be “outcomes based” and geared toward developing the multiple intelligences of all students.

Roots and Wings: Baltimore, Maryland. RW was proposed by the Johns Hopkins Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, St. Mary’s public schools, and the Department of Education for the State of Maryland. It covered only elementary grades. The roots part of the design would ensure that all children got coordinated, relentless attention to core academic areas from birth and onward. The design started in schools with the existing Success for All reading program and then incorporated two new components: one for math and the other for social studies and science. The overall design would develop all curriculum and detailed instructional practices for everyday use. The team would train teachers in its use. Schools would provide extended day care, health and family services, tutoring, site-based management, and parental choice.

DEVELOPMENT PHASE AND THE DECISION TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF TEAMS

In 1992, the 11 teams were awarded contracts for a year of further specification and development of concepts. NAS indicated that specification and development was to have three important parts.

First, in that year, teams were to work their original 50-page proposals into the full range of ideas and materials needed by schools and districts to understand and implement the designs. NAS expected that the outcome of this phase would be a full and rich set of materials for each design describing for laymen and practitioners what they needed to do to set the design in motion in their schools or providing them with the actual materials to be used as in the case of a team-developed curriculum. The teams were to move past rhetoric and provide the substantive materials for implementation.

Second, teams had provided very little in the way of implementation strategies in their original proposals. NAS indicated this time was to be used by teams to develop their implementation approaches and to outline plans for Phase 3 as indicated above. For example, teams were to specify how schools would choose to align with a design; training regimes for teachers and principals; how schools would

afford the design; and plans for the acquisition of needed materials and technology in schools.

Finally, NAS expected the teams to articulate how each intended to promote the goal of national diffusion of the designs and to indicate their ability to do so. NAS carefully warned teams that traditional means of presentation to research groups at national conferences was not what it had in mind.

Note that at this point in time, NAS has given relatively little thought to its theory of action; it had focused primarily on ensuring that design teams developed their own theories of learning. The upper third of Figure 2.1 shows NAS's theory of action at this point. Simply put, designs would be developed, schools would adopt them in some unspecified manner, and this would result in improved student outcomes.

By the end of the development year, NAS was experiencing funding difficulties (Glennan, 1998). It was uncertain as to whether it would have significant funding to proceed through its full initiative as originally planned. It began to look for ways to reduce its funding commitment. The most obvious were to reduce the number of teams or to reduce the average amount given to teams. It was fairly clear by the time of the decision to proceed to the demonstration phase, that NAS intended to cut teams. The question was: What would be the basis for that decision?

To help in this regard, NAS set out on fact-finding missions to understand the extent to which teams had made progress in the three areas indicated above. At this time NAS was a comparatively small organization, with only a handful of staff. It therefore had to rely on external help. It sent teams of NAS staff, RAND staff, and members of the NAS Educational Advisory Committee to visit design teams and assess them according to criteria developed by NAS.² Notes from these missions were assembled and reviewed internally by NAS. Design teams were also provided with opportunities to display, discuss, and present their progress verbally to NAS in extensive meetings. With these data, NAS moved to make its decisions.

²NAS created a group of educational advisors to act in a consultative capacity when called upon. These included policy experts, principals, teachers, and university professors.

RAND MR1498-2.1

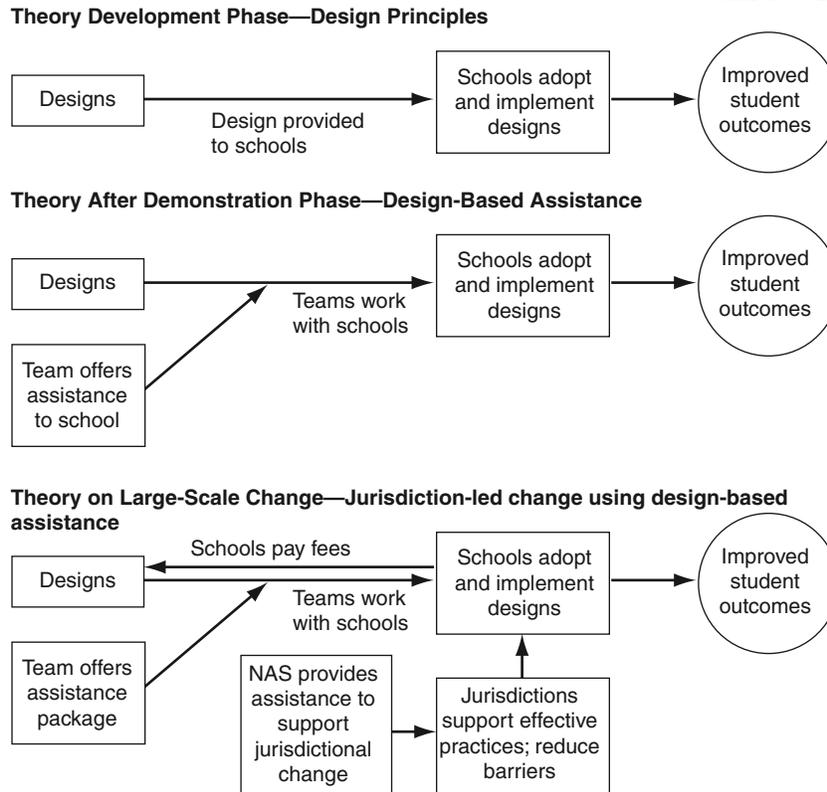


Figure 2.1—New American Schools’ Evolving Theory of Action

In general, the review showed that most teams were well behind in their development. Some had struggled to develop a complete set of standards and assessment. Many had not completed this, nor had they gotten to the development of curriculum. Others who had adopted an existing set of standards struggled to develop the matched curriculum. RAND review indicated at the time a need for significant further development by all the teams (Bodilly, 1996; Glennan, 1998).

Two teams, Odyssey in North Carolina and Bensenville New American Schools Project in Illinois, could be characterized as having “district based” or invented designs and “district led” teams. The proposals came from and were led by district personnel and focused on how those districts would reform themselves. Both proposals included ideas about “break the mold” schools, but they were centered in and peculiar to those districts’ needs. Other design teams could be characterized as external providers (not part of the governmental structure of local education) or had a significant group of external providers leading the design.³

During the development year both of these district-led teams became embroiled in local political battles that centered on the designs (Mirel, 1994; Mickleson and Wadsworth, 1996). In both cases the district initiatives had led to reactions by forces against some of the constructs of the designs or against the manner in which the district had tried to accomplish change.⁴ For example, some teachers and parents accused the central office in Gaston, North Carolina, of not allowing them to participate in the creation of the design and not allowing opportunities to hear their views about some of the constructs of the designs. NAS’s fact-finding indicated that in both cases the districts had not effectively led the initiatives so as to build stakeholder support of the design. In both cases it was clear that the design could not go forward given the level of political antagonism evident from important constituencies. NAS’s review of materials developed indicated that district staff time was being taken up in these political battles and not in the further specification and development of the design parameters.

NAS’s reading of the proposals for development and diffusion for these two teams concluded that the district-led teams did not understand NAS’s intentions concerning national scale-up or simply

³LALC was also “district based,” but with a difference. The district was one of several partners to the effort. The teachers’ union, a major not-for-profit reform group, and two universities were also co-partners. The not-for-profit evolved into the lead of the team. In this way the design was not tied exclusively to the dictates of the central office, rather it was an attempt of several actors to combine forces for reform.

⁴In one case, the unions became set against the design. In another, conservative religious groups were actively set against implementation of the design in their community.

did not choose to follow those intentions. The scale-up proposals focused on presentations at conferences and mailing of materials about the district-led efforts. They did not deal with how the design team would support implementation in other districts. In contrast, other teams talked of moving to schools throughout the country and of a strong implementation support system.

In June 1993, NAS dropped the two district-led teams and proceeded with nine teams that were not connected exclusively to specific districts or led exclusively by district personnel. NAS would no longer have teams whose ability to develop the design would rest so heavily on the team's ability to navigate the dangerous waters of local politics in a single district. In short, the lesson learned was that district-led designs were politically untenable and unscaleable.

The impact on the portfolio was straightforward. NAS would not support design teams led by a central office, nor would it support designs that were not transferable to schools or districts around the country. NAS would support only design teams that were external to the local governance structure. Only those teams that were serious about scale-up outside a "home" district or locality were acceptable.

THE DEMONSTRATION PHASE AND FURTHER REDUCTION IN THE TEAMS

The demonstration phase (from July 1993 to July 1995) was to be used by design teams to demonstrate that their concepts could be implemented in real schools and to work with schools to adapt the designs as needed for scale-up. In addition, the design teams were to submit business plans for expansion and scale-up at the end of this period by which NAS would judge their readiness to proceed. Clearly, all needed to do further development work in this phase as well.

A considerable grant from the Annenberg Foundation relieved some of NAS's budget constraints. But, NAS had a very business oriented board that had wanted to bring more business-like practices to schools. It emphasized the ability of teams to show performance and financial independence. In keeping with its business oriented philosophy, the board made clear to the NAS staff that it was not interested, and never had been, in promoting a group of financially de-

pendent organizations. It insisted that the scale-up phase would include a move to fee-for-service by the teams. Thus, the NAS staff was encouraged to use its best judgments to delete teams that could not show an ability to deliver on the promises of the design, that had a limited potential market within the United States, or that could not show an ability to become financially independent from NAS.

NAS again set up a fact-finding team. The fact-finding team included NAS staff and members of the NAS Educational Advisory Committee. In addition, RAND reports on progress were used to assess each team's situation. At this time, RAND reported that the teams showed a great deal of variation in approach, stability, and ability to scale up (Bodilly, 1996). Four teams appeared to be able to implement their designs, while four others were having more difficulty. In addition, NAS staff's review of the business plans submitted by the teams indicated that several teams were not taking the switch to fee-for-service seriously. Several also did not address the issue of scale-up in a manner deemed acceptable by NAS.

CLC was identified as facing serious implementation challenges and also appeared to be reluctant to expand in a manner that NAS deemed acceptable. CLC had always been closely aligned with the charter school movement in Minnesota. It wished to expand, at least for the time being, only within the confines of Minnesota under the charter school laws of that state. From NAS's point of view the charter school focus limited the market of CLC, as did the state-based focus.

LALC (now ULC) was identified as being relatively behind in its development. At this point in time LALC was experiencing a leadership turnover and had not completed its design work. It was in a situation similar to the two district-based designs dropped earlier. It had strong ties to the central office and union, which were partners to the effort. It was very focused on solving the educational problems in the Los Angeles school district. And, its design development had suffered from the difficulties involved in building a collaborative effort among partners driven by local political concerns. It could not commit to a scale-up strategy outside of Los Angeles for several years, until it completed its design work. Later, it planned to remain within the Southern California area or near western states. By committing to this limited geographical area the LALC design team

argued it could potentially reach a significant percentage of the school-age population of the United States and serve its target population of urban schools.

In July 1995, NAS removed CLC from its portfolio. It provided funding to LALC to complete its development, but did not invite it to be part of the NAS scale-up strategy. It offered to reconsider later whether LALC was ready to join the NAS scale-up initiative. Neither team would be part of the scale-up movement into partner jurisdictions in fall 1995. De facto, this removed the last of the district-associated teams from the portfolio (LALC) as well as one associated with the laws of a particular state (CLC).

As a final footnote to this progression, LALC continued its own development, eventually transforming itself into ULC. It further developed its materials through strong stable leadership and began to expand to districts within the Los Angeles basin. It continued to attend NAS conferences and meetings. It matured to the point that in 1997, NAS decided the team was ready for full participation in scale-up. It is now considered a fully participating NAS team. However, LALC/ULC did not take part in NAS's district scale-up strategy and did not expand outside of its original jurisdictions until very recently.

LESSONS AND THE STRATEGY FOR SCALE-UP

At the same time as NAS was considering its scale-up strategy, NAS leadership turned over for the third time. John Anderson, formerly of IBM and the Business Roundtable, became president of NAS. His thinking seriously guided the scale-up strategy. Anderson, through his own experiences and from growing evidence from the RAND work in the demonstration phase, was convinced that design teams had to become independent of NAS and that districts and states had to provide a supportive environment for the design concept to thrive.

The RAND work on the demonstration phase indicated that demonstration sites were having difficulties implementing the designs (Bodilly, 1996). One of the strongest lessons learned from the RAND work during the demonstration phase was that designs, by themselves, could not transform schools. Schools needed significant amounts of professional development, technical assistance, and ma-

terials geared to the design to implement. RAND found that sites that had received significant assistance from design teams progressed further in implementation. It coined the term “design-based assistance” (Bodilly, 1996) to capture this phenomenon.

Discussions at NAS led to the adoption of this notion as an important part of the package that design teams would offer during scale-up. Design-based assistance became a key component of the NAS initiative and distinguishes it from the more traditional approaches to school reform. Such design-based assistance includes:

- Giving schools a choice of designs with which to partner;
- Specified designs that clarify both the end outcomes for the school and also intermediate implementation steps;
- Assistance by the teams to the school in the form of professional development, training, materials, conferences, networks, and curriculum and instructional packages; and
- Payment by the school to the teams for these services.

Thus NAS emphasized the role of the external agent in enabling whole-school transformation, but also richened that role substantially. That enrichment would be supported by fees-for-services. This change in the theory of action is contained in the middle section of Figure 2.1.

Experiences in the demonstration phase also pointed to the need for a more supportive district infrastructure to aid implementation. NAS began to understand that school transformation could not occur unless there was strong district support. The concept of a supportive environment as developed by NAS included: school-level autonomy on budget, staffing and curriculum and instruction; high standards that matched those of the designs and matched assessments; significant sources of professional development funding and technology; systemic support for community services at the school level; and public engagement in educational reform (Bodilly, 1998; NASDC, 1997). These concepts had considerable overlap with the NARE dis-

trict-level strategy.⁵ Indeed, NARE and its advocates had heavily influenced Anderson and NAS in their thinking.

Another lesson learned by NAS, or beginning to be learned, was the extent of investment funding a school might need in order to implement a design. This varied among teams from \$40,000 to \$150,000 per year for three years (Keltner, 1998). Going into the scale-up period, the exact amounts were not known, but it was obvious that schools or districts would need access to significant discretionary funds to adopt designs using a fee-for-service basis.

Given the above, NAS decided on a strategy of scale-up in a limited number of districts with which it could work closely to support its designs and scale-up strategy.⁶ It imposed four ideas on design teams.

- Teams would have to work in districts NAS chose and that were presumably supportive of the design concept (offered a supportive environment as defined above).
- NAS would oversee the process of choosing those districts and guiding the initial school selection process.
- Multiple designs would work within a single district.
- The teams would charge fees for design-based assistance. Not only would schools “buy” the design, more importantly, they would buy the services of the teams to help them implement the designs (design-based assistance).

This final addition to the theory of action for NAS is shown in Figure 2.1 in the bottom section. Here the emphasis is on how NAS would promote scale-up of the design-based assistance concept.

⁵While NAS rejected the district-led teams, it did not reject the need for a strongly supportive district environment. The NARE team was not district led. It was like the other remaining teams, an organization external to the school systems in which it worked. However, unlike the other teams, it had developed state and district concepts for a supportive environment.

⁶Design teams were also free to partner with schools outside of the NAS-selected districts.

SELECTION OF SCALE-UP PARTNERS

In a closed RFP process, NAS sent letters to 20 or so districts asking if they were interested in partnering with NAS in the scale-up phase. If so, the district was to apply in the form of a brief proposal for a partnership. NAS offered \$250,000 per year for two years to each jurisdiction chosen. In each proposal submitted by jurisdictions, each claimed to have a history of significant restructuring and pledged to create an even more supportive environment for school transformation.

It should come as no surprise that the districts that responded to NAS's request for partners generally had one of two things in common. They were in states that had adopted or were moving to adopt standards and accountability systems that required districts to show improvement on students' assessments or were otherwise branded as low-performing districts within their states. Or, they tended to serve students from poverty backgrounds and had significant numbers of schools designated for schoolwide programs under Title I.

Title I is the largest federal education program, providing more than \$10 billion annually to support school intervention and strategies for improving the learning opportunities of students at risk of education failure.

A critical change embedded in the reauthorization of Title I played a crucial role in providing impetus and support for the whole-school reform movement and NAS in particular. The 1994 reauthorization expanded the opportunities for schools to use Title I money for schoolwide programs to integrate services, strategies, and resources for comprehensively reforming the entire institutional program to meet the educational needs of all students in the school (the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act, see U.S. Department of Education, 1993; American Association of School Administrators, 1995; Borman et al., 1996; Wong and Meyer, 1998). Schoolwide programs, available for funding since 1988, allow high-poverty schools to use Title I money, combined with other federal, state, and local funds, to improve their entire educational program. The 1988 changes allowed this schoolwide designation for schools serving populations of students with 75 percent or more eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The 1994 language expanded the schoolwide category to

schools serving 50 percent or more of the students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch.

This gave a very specific set of schools the impetus and the discretionary funding needed to adopt design-based assistance: low-performing schools with significantly high levels of students from poverty backgrounds.

NAS chose ten jurisdictions to work with based on the proposals submitted: Cincinnati, Dade County, Kentucky, Maryland, Memphis, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Antonio, San Diego, and a collection of five districts in Washington state. These partners really came from two different pools: NAS and NARE.

NARE, during its conception, development, and demonstration phases, had already entered into agreements with several different jurisdictions. It believed that individual schools could not implement and sustain design concepts by themselves. NARE thought that schools needed a network of other schools and districts working together to sustain changes. Given this district-level approach, NARE developed partnerships with several districts and states including Arkansas; Vermont; New York; Rochester, New York; White Plains, New York; San Diego, California; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Kentucky; and Washington state. These partnerships predated the NAS jurisdiction strategy and in fact were the philosophical basis for that strategy. These NARE jurisdictions already had multiple schools implementing the NARE design in 1995. NAS worked with several of these original NARE jurisdictions, in concert with NARE, to make them NAS's partners as well. These included San Diego, Pittsburgh, Kentucky, and Washington state.

NAS meanwhile, representing the seven teams, entered into negotiations with six jurisdictions (that had not been NARE districts) during this time frame: Cincinnati, Dade, Maryland, Memphis, Philadelphia, and San Antonio.

NAS soon found that it had partnered with primarily urban districts with very challenged student populations and schools that had histories of being low performers. The Kentucky and Washington state schools are the exceptions. Several of the states involved had moved or were moving toward high-stakes testing regimes. This encouraged low-performing schools to search for the means to improve their test

scores. It was exactly the combination of low performance and high poverty that allowed and impelled most of these districts to partner with NAS. They had performance problems, they had federal resources to devote to fixing it, and they had strong incentives to address their performance shortfalls. NAS appeared to be a solution that fit this market need.

SCALE-UP EXPERIENCES, 1995–1998

NAS worked with these jurisdictions for three years. As discussed by Glennan (1998), NAS's choice of districts was less than ideal, in part because the demographic and performance characteristics of the schools would be a challenge for the designs—some of which had not been developed in these environments.

More importantly, these districts, despite their rhetoric, had not in large part adopted the reform strategy outlined by NAS as supportive of whole-school designs. To remedy this situation, NAS promised the teams it would work with the districts to build a supportive environment. It proposed to aid, in some unspecified ways, partnering districts to provide more coherent and cohesive support for design-based schools (Glennan, 1998).⁷

This new strategy and role combined with the portfolio reduction to produce the following strategy of complex interactions necessary for success:

- Design teams would provide design and assistance to schools;
- NAS would market the designs in a set of districts that had stated they were willing to work with NAS and design teams toward a supportive environment, but were primarily motivated by a need to increase student test scores in low performing schools quickly;
- Districts would work to become more supportive of designs and design-based assistance; and

⁷As the years have gone by, NAS has aided districts in different ways. In particular, it has published a series of “How to” papers by various NAS staff and consultants offering guidance.

- Jointly, teams, NAS, and districts would develop a new system of education supportive of designs and improved student performance.

A major issue that immediately arose concerned how to measure progress in NAS schools. The districts were held accountable by state-mandated tests—usually standardized, multiple-choice exams. However, several design teams had spent considerable effort in searching out or developing more-authentic assessment systems and had developed standards and curriculum in a matched set with their authentic assessments.

In negotiations with NAS, the districts were demanding. The districts wanted the schools to be held to the standards in the districts and to be held accountable to the mandated state tests. Furthermore, districts stated that significant improvement would need to be made within three years or the districts would not continue with the designs. NAS promised, on behalf of the teams, that the schools adopting designs would use the state-mandated standards and assessments and produce dramatic results within three years.

Much of the rest of this book examines the lessons learned from this scale-up experience in more detail. NAS and the design teams struggled to implement their designs in these districts. In general, the teams quickly had to adopt their designs for the students and teachers in these districts (see Chapter Three) and struggle with fully implementing them when districts provided neither sufficient funding nor other supports needed by the teams or schools (see Chapter Four). The remaining chapters will explain the difficulties involved, the lack of strong implementation, and the need to revise the designs to deal with the populations of teachers and students being served. In the end about half of the NAS-related schools implementing designs did not show strong progress on state-level assessments in large part because designs were never implemented well enough to enable the schools to show progress (see Chapter Four).

The bottom line is that by 1999, most of the districts involved were no longer actively partnering with NAS, many schools had dropped the designs, and indications were that the design teams working in these districts had not been able to produce the results desired by the districts and schools. Despite this lackluster record, NAS persevered,

took the lessons on the need for a supportive environment to heart, and made further strides in developing new concepts for education reform.

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM AND THE NEW NAS

NAS had started with a mission to go out of business after the scale-up phase. This decision had been postponed and reconsidered. In 1998, the NAS board decided to grant NAS further life by reconstituting it with a new board. In October 1998, a new board of directors and new CEO of the board were instated at NAS. The old NAS whose purpose was to develop designs was dismissed. A new NAS was created to promote design-based assistance and whole-school reform nationwide.

One of the major coups in this regard is the outcome of advocacy on the part of NAS, and other backers of the design approach, to establish further sources of funding for designs and design teams. NAS presented its views and lessons learned to staff of the U.S. Department of Education and Congress in 1997, when they deliberated language that would provide a source of funding for schools attempting whole-school reform. NAS was successful in getting some of its views incorporated into the federal program.

Budget authorization language in November 1997 furthered the implementation of comprehensive, whole-school reforms by establishing the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRSD) program, also known as the Obey-Porter legislation. The conference report acknowledged eight NAS designs, along with about ten others, as comprehensive school designs that were illustrative of the concept being promoted. These appropriations committed \$145 million to be used to help schools develop comprehensive school reform based on reliable research and effective practices. The majority (83 percent in fiscal year [FY] 98 and 77 percent in FY99) of the funds are committed to Title I schools. Part of the money (\$25 million in FY98 and FY99) was available to all public schools, including those ineligible for Title I, as part of the Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE) program. Approximately 1,800 schools will receive at least \$50,000 per year for three years under the CSRSD program, beginning in FY98. There was an increase of \$75 million for FY00 (\$50 million in Title I/Section 1502 funds and \$25 million in FIE funds) over the \$145

million appropriated for FY98 and FY99, which will allow 1,000 additional schools to undertake comprehensive reform (see Kirby et al., in review; <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform>). In FY02 the appropriations had grown to \$130 million.

This congressional language and the supporting documents clearly recognize several NAS contributions in the realm of school reform. The language of “comprehensive school reform” recognizes the NAS idea of whole-school reform based in a design. The financial package promotes the idea of an external agent supported by fee-for-service as an essential pathway to school improvement. The language embedded in supporting Department of Education documents echoes the notion of a supportive district environment. The ideas and concepts developed by NAS and others have found widespread acceptance through this program, and are having a growing impact in the field.

NAS now uses CSRD funding and the schoolwide provisions of Title I to support growth. Currently NAS encourages implementation of comprehensive school approaches in 4,000 schools through the implementation of designs with assistance from NAS teams. In addition, it has added several teams to its portfolio: Accelerated Schools Project, the Leonard Bernstein Center for Learning, and Turning Points. ULC, formerly LALC, is once again a full partner.

The New NAS

The CSRD program has in some ways lessened the need for NAS. Design teams no longer need the protection of NAS to grow. However, NAS now has announced four new goals (for more information see <http://www.newamericanschools.org>). The following paragraphs represent NAS’s current program of activities.

Goal 1: Encourage the development of quality approaches, products, and services. NAS now attempts to promote quality products in several ways.

- In 1999, NAS convened a blue ribbon panel of educational and business leaders from across the geographic and political spectrum to develop a set of national guidelines of quality. Today

these guidelines are available to help educators, parents, and others make decisions about an array of educational programs.

- In early 2001, NAS announced the creation of the New American Schools Development Network to identify and develop innovative educational products and services. The network is intended to help these education entrepreneurs to move beyond a few pockets of excellence and access the expertise and the resources they need to touch the lives of more and more students.
- The Education Entrepreneurs Fund, the financing affiliate of New American Schools, supports the NAS Development Network by making strategic investments in education providers producing quality products and services that can be delivered to large numbers of schools and students. The fund fills the capital gap in social investment by making loans to and investments in high-quality social enterprises that are often hard-pressed to access capital through traditional financial channels.

Goal 2: Create and support environments conducive to continuous school improvement. NAS now offers an array of consulting services through the New American Schools Services Network that is supposed to provide “end to end” assistance for states, districts, and schools working on comprehensive school improvement strategies. The NAS Services Network delivers its services through two client-focused divisions and three service area divisions: State and District Services; Charter and Contract School Services; Accountability and Evaluation Services; Special Education Services; and School Funding Services.

Goal 3: Share the latest research, best practices, and networking with schools. NAS has made plans to establish its own in-house, research arm called the Center for Evidence-Based Education and to continue its outreach efforts to share best practices and network with schools. It proposes to conduct applied research on the use of school improvement strategies in schools and at the state and district level. The center also intends to support the development of effective leaders for quality reform and promote the use of proven approaches to school improvement nationally.

Goal 4: Inform the national agenda through research and results. Since its inception, NAS has advocated for policies at all levels of

government that support and enhance quality improvement strategies under way in schools. Its intent is to continue this tradition, using the best research and proven results to influence and shape decisionmaking by the public and private sectors as they seek solutions to help students reach their greatest potential.

SUMMARY

This brief overview of NAS's history parallels the findings from the literature cited earlier on external change agents. The design teams changed over time as NAS learned from its experiences, but NAS made forward progress in developing the teams and enabling them to function in a marketplace it helped grow through advocating federal funding. The most pivotal points in the evolution were:

- The early decisions to eliminate four designs that were not interested in NAS's goal of national scale-up or design teams as external assistance providers. This reemphasized NAS's view that schools and districts are likely to need outside help in reforming and that NAS teams would offer that type of assistance using a school-level focus. It also sent a signal that NAS meant business and was willing to make tough decisions such as paring down its portfolio to meet its goals.
- The recognition of design-based assistance as an essential concept in meshing NAS's theory of learning to its theory of action. NAS learned and then supported the concept that designs by themselves are not enough. Schools need significant assistance to implement designs and teams should provide this assistance.
- The development of the scale-up strategy. This development recognized the importance of district-level reform and a pre-existing supportive environment.
- The press for funding sources for teams based on fee-for-service. NAS thought schools and districts would be willing to pay for effective, externally developed design-based assistance and design teams could operate and implement their designs in a competitive, fee-for-service market. This market-based approach proved to be unique and important in shaping the federal government's approach to reforms.

- The advocacy for a CSR program. This activity moved NAS away from advocating solely for its design teams, and began its current program of advocating for whole-school reform more generally.
- NAS's consistent press for maintaining the quality of design services. NAS has held to this throughout in a unique manner, which is different from other education intervention developers. The notion that design teams should be held accountable for providing high-quality services and helping to improve student performance has led to increased performance over time.

Overall, NAS has had an influence on the education reform movement well out of proportion to its size. To this day, it remains a small organization with a handful of staff committed to the idea of whole-school reform. Nevertheless, NAS has contributed several important concepts to the reform debate by developing and promoting the growth of several design teams and their designs. It has also helped to spawn an educational reform movement embedded in the federal government's CSR program.