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The Nike School Innovation Fund: Scaling for Impact in Oregon Public Schools

After leaving a meeting on April 2, 2015 with Oregon's top school superintendents, the state's Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, and one of the state's biggest philanthropic partners, Vanessa Wilkins (Harvard Business School 1997 graduate) was feeling the pressure of the opportunity and challenge ahead. Twelve months into her role as Director of the Nike School Innovation Fund (NSIF), Wilkins was faced with developing a strategy that would scale NSIF's efforts to improve student achievement from three school districts in Oregon to the entire state.

Founded in 2007, NSIF was Nike's community impact effort designed to support innovation in schools, targeted toward early learners and school leadership development in the Portland, Hillsboro, and Beaverton public school districts that surrounded Nike's World Headquarters in Washington County, Oregon. Many Nike employees and executives have children in the public schools in the Portland region and Nike had a long history of partnership with local area schools. The educators who attended the 2016 meeting inquired about how Nike planned to expand their work throughout the state to reach all students. Wilkins left the meeting thinking about that same challenge.

Wilkins recognized that implementing and scaling the work would be all the more difficult because of the breadth and variety of Oregon schools. There were 197 school districts in Oregon, 140 of them rural, and out of those 140 rural districts, a significant majority were considered remote and characterized by dwindling enrollment and limited resources.¹ The districts ranged in size from four students in Ashwood to 46,181 students in Portland. Wilkins knew that for NSIF to have state-wide impact, they would need to scale their program in order to reach these remote schools with historically underserved populations.

As the new Director of the Nike School Innovation Fund, one of Wilkins' key priorities was to develop the scale plan. She had many options for scaling that included trying to serve all schools statewide, making the programs available to schools in the state via open source, or scaling key program components. In the wake of that status meeting, Wilkins wondered which strategy would

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meet the education needs of students in Oregon while also satisfying Nike and its stakeholders' and partners' desires for impact.

Background

While most states fund their education systems through levying sales tax, Oregon was primarily dependent on the state income tax and local property taxes to fund the state's education budget. Specifically, the state collected revenue from Oregon residents and distributed it in an equalization formula to school districts to ensure quality education throughout the state.

In the early 2000s, the United States was in the midst of a recession. Given its method of taxation, Oregon was one of the last states to climb out of a recession. Oregon education funding was in deep decline, as tax revenue declined with the recession. With less education revenue, the system was in crisis. In addition, Oregon ranked second-worst in the nation for their high school graduation rates. This was especially true for students of color, those who lived in poverty, and English Language Learners. Twenty percent of Oregon's students were chronically absent, and 70% of high school students expressed a lack of motivation to attend school. This steady decline caused new Nike executive Julia Brim-Edwards to wonder: How could Nike have an impact on the "students in [their] backyard" who were not "graduating with skills for success?" Since its founding in 1964 as Blue Ribbon Sports, Nike had grown to the state's largest Oregon headquartered company. It had always been a close partner with local public schools and many Nike employees were alums or parents of public school students. As Nike looked to sharpen its focus on how it could support its local headquarter community, local public schools were a natural focus area. In response to the state's funding challenges, Brim-Edwards resolved to champion a Nike-led effort to help support students and schools and develop programs to address the achievement gap with dollars and human capital.

The Nike School Innovation Fund

Nike had a reputation for its belief in the power of sport to unleash human potential and build community, and its employees were reportedly passionate about making a difference in their communities. So when Nike learned about the local education challenges in Oregon, Nike employees began to innovate solutions that could have a positive impact for students and their schools. NSIF was the brainchild of Julia Brim-Edwards, Nike's Senior Director of Operations, World Headquarters, and Public Engagement. Brim-Edwards, a Portland Public Schools graduate and parent of three students who attended the schools from 1998 to 2016, had served on the Board of Education for Portland Public Schools (PPS) from 2001 to 2005. Brim-Edwards said that she was driven to run for the school board initially because of the serious challenges facing the district:

Our public schools and students face serious challenges: A crumbling infrastructure, lead in the water, and other safety issues; a leadership transition, divided board, and an unsatisfactory graduation rate. As a graduate and a parent, I was inspired to run. Public schools are the cornerstone of our community. We can't let them down.

Brim-Edwards understood the local education political landscape and had two decades of public policy experience at the state and federal level. She had served as Press Secretary for the US Senate Finance Committee and Director of Communications for the Oregon Speaker of the House before launching Edge Consulting, a consulting and campaign management firm. As a Board chair and leader, Brim-Edwards successfully led a turnaround of Portland Schools during the 2003-04 school year.² As she was wrapping up her tenure on the Board, she was offered a job at Nike in 2004 and quickly learned that the state's education problems were a frequent discussion point at the company: "Employees who

were parents in public schools reached out [and] wanted to know how they could help,” Brim-Edwards explained.

Education in the state of Oregon was also important to Nike’s senior leaders. Famed Nike co-founder Phil Knight graduated from Portland Public Schools. Brim-Edwards began to think that there was an opportunity for Nike as an iconic homegrown company to play a role in helping improve Oregon’s local schools. That same school year (2003-04), in her role as a school board member, Brim-Edwards had supported bringing on the Portland Public Schools’ new superintendent, Vicki Phillips. Phillips was candid with Brim-Edwards about her struggle to build a cohesive leadership team at the district.

I like to fill [my] leadership team [with] very divergent thinkers. [...] I believe that when you have that kind of diversity of perspective, you get more powerful conversations and decisions going. [...] Nike has a lot of experience around what it means to create high-performing teams.

In 2006, Brim-Edwards, working with the corporation’s Community Affairs team, approached Nike CEO Mark Parker with the idea of creating a new fund and investing in the three largest school districts in Nike’s World Headquarters region. He encouraged Brim-Edwards to pull together a cross-functional team of Nike employees along with Phillips to think about “how we could support public schools in an authentic way [...] that helps and supports their mission.” In particular, Parker impressed on the team that this be more than a financial contribution, that the power of Nike’s human capital and its executive talent could be a unique and innovative way for the company to support public schools in the region. The team spent six months thinking about the ways the company could help improve academic outcomes in the Portland, Beaverton, and Hillsboro public school districts, as these districts served the majority of the 6,000 Nike employees in Oregon at that time (100,000 students collectively).

Motivation was important to Brim-Edwards. From her experience working on the Portland Public Schools Board of Education, she knew that many businesses could have self-serving motives underneath their apparent altruism. “We were often offered to have ‘help’ from a variety of businesses that were more about what their own commercial interests were versus what the school district’s needs were. [Nike] wanted to make sure that our work with districts really supported the core mission of our public schools’ partners.” As they were building the initiative, Brim-Edwards and the Nike team asked the leaders of the three school districts – starting with Portland Superintendent Vicki Phillips – to co-create multi-year initiatives in their districts based on student needs and that could be supported with both funding and engagement from Nike leaders.

In January 2007, Nike announced a five-year commitment to invest \$9 million in Oregon’s school system with the new Nike School Innovation Fund (NSIF). It was the largest business investment in public schools in Oregon’s history.³

The stated mission of the NSIF was to:

1. Invest in education as the driving force behind a productive society.
2. Invest in Nike’s backyard.
3. Partner with districts to create innovation in schools.
4. Leverage Nike talent and dollars.

Nike School Innovation Fund 1.0 (2007–2013)

On January 10, 2007, Nike CEO Mark Parker, Julia Brim-Edwards, and Superintendent Vicki Phillips held a large community event to officially kick off the NSIF. During the press conference, Parker emphasized that innovation was Nike’s “lifeblood” and that the company was committed to supporting the major school districts that served Nike’s families in pursuing creative ideas to improve education outcomes. Parker also shared that, in addition to public school funding, Nike leaders would lend their time and “expertise” to serve as thought partners for school and district leaders. In one-on-one executive partnerships with school leaders’ roles, Nike employees would share leadership strategies and best practices learned from their own work experience at Nike. The new NSIF would reach about 100,000 students in the three aforementioned school districts. “Our hope,” said Parker, “is that innovative practices springing out of this fund will reach thousands more [...] across Oregon and beyond.”⁴

The community launch of this new initiative also inspired others in the organization to support the NSIF. Nike executive Heidi O’Neill was in the audience during the community kick off and followed up with Brim-Edwards, offering to help. O’Neill had been with Nike for nearly 10 years rising through the ranks from a Director of Marketing to the Vice President and General Manager of the Global Women’s Division and the Women’s Training and Fitness Division to President of Nike Direct. O’Neill shared, “I was looking for an opportunity to get involved. When I heard Julia speak, I said, ‘I want in ... how can I help?’” O’Neill soon after became part of the NSIF leadership team.

Brim-Edwards and O’Neill began their work by visiting the Portland, Beaverton, and Hillsboro school districts, participating in listening tours where they met with each district’s administration to gain a deeper understanding of the district and their persistent student achievement and operational challenges. Based on their conversations, Nike identified building leadership capacity and improving teaching and learning, as the priority.

Building Leadership Capacity, Improving Teaching and Learning

The NSIF assisted in funding the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the superintendents from Portland and Beaverton school districts, and state and district leadership teams to participate in Harvard’s Executive Leadership Program for Educators (ExEL) over several years. ExEL was a joint program between Harvard Business School (HBS), Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), and Harvard Kennedy School of Government (HKS). In ExEL, the NSIF, the state, and the school districts agreed to focus on building coherence across the districts’ systems, staffing and strategy, through improvements in administrative and instructional leadership. To do this work, Nike brought the districts together to identify common themes and problems of practice around persistent achievement gaps. Portland chose an HGSE initiative called Data Wise to help them take a data-driven approach to this work and drive continuous improvement in teaching and learning. As an outcome of the work they did with ExEL and Data Wise, the participating Oregon educators and NSIF selected two areas of programmatic focus, which they called The Early Learners Project and The School Leadership Project.

The Early Learners Project

The Early Learners initiatives were two-to-four-week summer literacy program targeting at-risk students designed to help prepare pre-school students for a successful kindergarten experience and to close the achievement gap. The goal was to prevent these students from losing some of the achievement gains made during the previous school year. The program focused on students ages four to six.

The School Leadership Project

The School Leadership Project focused on how to create schools and districts as systems that centered on the instructional core: students, teachers, and content. School teams created school-based strategic plans using student data, identified gaps in achievement, and from there, created improvement plans. Based upon these plans, the teams then collaborated and observed one another and also tracked student progress. Over 75 principals and 250 teachers and school leaders enrolled.

Leadership Development: Nike Leaders Program

As part of the School Leadership Project, NSIF focused on leadership development within Nike through the Nike Leaders Program. Heidi O'Neill, a leader of the core programmatic team, was tasked with creating, building, and developing the Nike Leaders component of NSIF, which consisted of Nike executives who would work as "thought partners" with principals in the three Oregon districts. O'Neill approached building this team of Nike executives as she had approached team-building within Nike. Specifically, she developed a profile of the kind of business leader that could effectively work in tandem with a principal to help solve school-wide problems. O'Neill recounted:

I wanted the [Nike leader] team to include high-profile leaders at Nike. They're listeners, they're good team players, and frankly, we identified Nike leaders that all had been hugely successful. We wanted [people to look at] the opportunity to work with NSIF [...] as an honor. The invitation to be part of this team came personally from CEO Mark Parker.

As Nike embarked on their NSIF 1.0 strategy for 2007 to 2013, they leveraged the diversity of their Nike leaders to serve as partners and mentors to the districts' leaders. NSIF also specifically supported school leaders of color with the goal of helping these individuals advance within the leadership ranks of the district. This was important in districts like Beaverton and Portland where their student bodies were becoming more diverse, while their administrative staff remained largely white. One district administrator reflected, "[The Nike Leaders Program] created and enhanced our narrative around the importance of diversity as an asset and honoring multiple perspectives. This work helped us to define who we were as a district and connected it back to our classroom environments." This focus on diversity allowed administrators to think about how their schools were preparing students of color "to be the next set of leaders."

Nike leaders, who were tapped to partner with school leaders, came from across the company and brought diverse and powerful leadership insights and expertise to their work. As part of the work with districts, NSIF was always clear with school leaders that they weren't experts in education but that they would share strategies and leadership skills from Nike that could be leveraged in the school environment to support students. Strategies included: team building, effective communication, strategic planning, out-of-the-box ideas, and storytelling.

NSIF 1.0: Outcomes & Learnings

As the partnership with the three districts rolled out, Brim-Edwards and O'Neill agreed that they would measure NSIF's effectiveness with quantitative student-focused data and qualitative data that showed the impact on teachers and their practice. In the process of working with the three districts, one of the major outcomes from the NSIF partnership was the cross-collaboration between those districts. Nike brought the superintendents and their leadership teams together several times a year to collaborate and discuss how they could support each other. The superintendents and their teams shared best practices and identified common cross-district challenges around the achievement gap. At some of these meetings, said Brim-Edwards, "[we] identified solutions that had the potential to be scaled to improve students' outcomes throughout the state." As NSIF engaged with top national experts, Brim-Edwards realized that the Nike name could open doors for educators: "If you're in Beaverton School District or Hillsboro School District, you may not be able to reach out and access somebody at Harvard. Or you might not be able to pick up the phone and call a lead grant funder. But we could". They knew that moving forward, they could use the Nike brand to build relationships on behalf of the local districts, building social capital as well. Additionally, as NSIF's work in school districts spread, Nike began to receive phone calls from other leaders throughout Oregon who wanted to partner. As NSIF's reach and positive reputation grew, O'Neill felt that the Nike Leaders needed to deepen their understanding of the educational landscape and content.

In response, Nike, in collaboration with local educators, developed a pre-service training for Nike Leader executives that included education vernacular and an overview of the state's education system, including areas of opportunity and constraints, which were not part of the Nike business context. As Brim-Edwards described the opportunities available to Nike as a business:

If we want to build a great shoe here at Nike, our designers [...] can go around the world and pick the very best material and make that shoe. They've got the best innovators, the best material [...]"

Nike recognized that in its business context they had the luxury of defining their target customer and using their resources to develop the best products, whereas public schools and students did not have those same options. Yet, schools were tasked with educating all students at all levels and that teachers and principals were doing that with limited resources. Brim-Edwards wanted to ensure that Nike leaders kept this in mind as they partnered with school administrators to think through how to go about helping all students succeed in school and beyond.

In July 2011, the Nike School Innovation Fund's promising success led to an invitation to President Obama's Business Round-Table on Education. O'Neill represented Nike at the session at the White House. Following the event, O'Neill began to think about how Nike, through NSIF, could inspire other businesses to invest in education by sharing its partnership model.

There is an opportunity for Nike to have a network impact. It could be bringing businesses together to share models of how we support education. I wonder how can we open source some of the work that we've all done [with NSIF], create a network impact of the work [in education] and learn from each other.

By the end of NSIF (1.0) in June 2013, Nike leaders showed a deeper understanding of the public school context and, in particular, how to cultivate and inspire teachers to be leaders within schools. O'Neill felt that the outcomes she saw had the potential to improve education in Oregon and beyond. Working with the districts, there were a number of teachers who initially said they had no interest or experience in school administration. O'Neill shared that after spending six months with a

Nike leader, these same teachers said they felt significantly more prepared for leadership positions. Some district leaders responded in the following ways:

The partnership has forced us to question our practices and given us permission to ask if what we are doing is best for kids. It's given us permission to think differently.
-- Assistant Superintendent of Beaverton Schools

The cycle of inquiry work has created fundamental change in this building. It [was] not part of our culture to ask what the data shows and how we will shift instruction to serve the students and achieve results. -- Hillsboro Principal

In June 2013, NSIF completed the initial five-year investment in the Beaverton, Portland, and Hillsboro school districts. Nike then brought in ECONorthwest, a team of outside consultants, to assess NSIF's impact in these districts. They conducted interviews with teachers, superintendents, and administrative teams that had been involved in the program. Their findings were overwhelmingly positive: 100% of the 250 teachers and 75 principals in the three districts surveyed by an outside evaluator found Nike's involvement beneficial; the promotion rate of the teachers who took the program was 40% higher than the promotion rate of other teachers in the districts. Five teachers who participated in NSIF went on to become principals, and three Nike leaders went on to serve on the Beaverton and Portland school boards. (See **Exhibit 4**.)

Ultimately, the consultants recommended the following to Nike:

- Focus partnership efforts on improving education leadership and increasing school districts' strategic capacity.
- Standardize the various NSIF programmatic components, including Nike Leaders Program engagement, in order to scale it across districts within Oregon.
- Encourage schools to develop ideas that can have a transformative impact on increasing student learning outcomes and then scale those innovations via open source.

Preparing for NSIF 2.0 (June 2013–January 2015)

Until 2013, NSIF had been primarily led by two leaders – Brim-Edwards and O'Neill – who had other full-time jobs at Nike. Brim-Edwards and O'Neill were both promoted within Nike, taking on more responsibility, and as such, it was time to tap a new leader who could build and nurture the work of NSIF through its next phase. Their shared vision was to make NSIF stronger, scalable, sustainable, and measurable. As Brim-Edwards and O'Neill looked to the future, they knew that they needed to bring on a full-time dedicated staff member to work on what they had begun to call NSIF "2.0."

Vanessa Wilkins

After Brim-Edwards wrapped up the lessons learned from NSIF's first five years, she and her team went back to Nike CEO Mark Parker for approval to continue Nike's investment in NSIF, which they felt required dedicated focus and support. Specifically, they recommended and received approval to hire a director to design the next iteration of the NSIF and manage its day-to-day operations to include the Nike Leaders programs. After a six-month search, Vanessa Wilkins, a veteran nonprofit executive, filled the role in April 2014. Prior to Nike, Wilkins had served on several education-related boards and task forces and had founded Partners in Scale, a consulting company that works with

nonprofit and education organizations globally. Brim-Edwards thought Wilkins, a native Oregonian and a product of the state's public schools with a Harvard MBA, was a perfect match for the job.

Nike School Innovation Fund 2.0 (January 2015–2017)

Wilkins was charged with launching a new fund focused on high schools that would be both scalable within Oregon and replicable beyond. Wilkins' goal was to standardize the program, expand NSIF's grants statewide (beyond the three districts surrounding Nike's headquarters), and "open-source" innovative work so that businesses or schools anywhere might replicate or leverage it. Wilkins was empowered to develop a strategy and plan to achieve these goals. (See **Exhibit 3**.)

I kept trying to remind myself, "You just have to do something. Pick a course," Wilkins reflected. We had six months of looking at national models, talking to Nike leaders, talking to superintendents, talking to people within the program, just sort of trying to understand [...] the background. Now I had to draw on these data to deliver against our vision.

Wilkins noted that while NSIF 1.0 supported students primarily in grades K–8, it did not leverage Nike's expertise and insights about teens. And even though the school communities were enthusiastic about Nike's work through NSIF, their high school graduation rates remained an issue. Wilkins shared, "We thought [that] if we focused our energy on high schools, we could have more impact. One of our core principles at Nike is to edit the scope of any initiative to amplify results."

Wilkins officially kicked off the new NSIF strategy in January 2015. Nike created two tiers of school partners that determined Nike's level of involvement. The first tier was comprised of the "All Star" schools, schools that had been part of the Nike 1.0 program. Nike continued to support these eight schools with Nike Leader partnerships. Almost all of the "All Star" schools were located in Nike's immediate three-district partnership with Beaverton, Hillsboro, and Portland district schools. The second tier was composed of new school partners who would receive professional development for teachers and an AVID college advising elective class for first-generation college students with ongoing local support.

The three components that comprised the NSIF 2.0 Strategy were Teacher Training (Impact), the Nike Leaders Program (Innovate) and Future You (Inspire).

"Impact": AVID Program and Teacher Training

Multiple teachers, principals, and administrators Wilkins had spoken to identified AVID, a global nonprofit organization as "the best professional development for teachers." They believed that once implemented, AVID would have the power to change the culture of Oregon schools. With approval from Nike leadership, Wilkins chose to address their first strategic goal and support teachers as change agents by hiring and partnering with AVID. AVID's mission, said Wilkins, "was to use effective teaching practices to help close the high school achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society." Through direct NSIF grant awards, schools and districts would be able to implement AVID. The partner school districts and NSIF believed that this would lead to ensuring that every student in the state had access to a well-trained teacher, thus improving student outcomes statewide.

Implementing AVID at the high school level included funding for training teachers from all disciplines in instructional best practices and an AVID college-preparation elective for high school students. In 2014, administrators in Beaverton schools decided to implement the AVID program district-wide in all 17 of their middle and high schools. Nike, through NSIF, supported the effort with additional funding and was able to expand the training to 800 teachers--40% of the district. Seeking to increase support for this effort, Wilkins met with Martha Richards, the Executive Director at the James L. and Marion F. Miller Foundation; to share Nike's plans to launch a new grant program supporting AVID implementation in 100 Oregon high schools. As Wilkins reflected,

The state had a budget shortfall [...] Nike could not do this work alone, and we believed other partners would help achieve stronger outcomes, so I started sharing our work, saying, "Hey, we are investing in teaching training in Oregon schools statewide. I want your organization to know about it". [The Miller Foundation] was the first to partner with us.

The Miller Foundation had previously provided grant funding to support AVID in a few schools, but they did not see a way to truly scale the program in Oregon given the cost. When Richards learned more about Nike's plans, she was intrigued by the opportunity to partner in a much larger statewide initiative and agreed to launch a grant program for middle schools in collaboration with NSIF's high school grants. The Miller Foundation board approved \$2 million over three years to fund 25 middle schools that could feed into NSIF's high schools. Richards shared:

We had discovered in our foundation work the need to catch students as they [fell] out of a very leaky [school] pipeline, making sure that they transitioned from sixth to ninth grade. We were funding a lot of programs to address this problem. Knowing that there was going to be significant interest in AVID from Nike made it much easier for us. [...] There's rarely the ability to fund the capacity for teacher-requested programs like AVID statewide.

Nike allocated \$1.6 million in NSIF grants to support all of the initial costs for 50 high schools statewide to implement AVID college readiness strategies and courses. In January 2015, Nike announced the NSIF grant application. This included questions on school data regarding graduation rates, poverty, and historically underserved populations as well as short-answer questions designed to evaluate the school and district's readiness to implement AVID's college preparation program. Nike budgeted for 50 schools and received 87 applications. The school grant recipients were selected by Nike's NSIF team based on the application criteria, factoring in location, poverty, and graduation readiness and input from AVID as well as the Miller Foundation. Wilkins reflected:

The first year, three of us--myself, Julia Brim-Edwards, co-founder, and Sabreena Cook, NSIF Project Manager--took the lead in reviewing all of the applications. We tried to include whole districts so that the teaching practices would be sustainable and scalable. In Beaverton, Portland, and Hillsboro, we funded district-wide teacher training.

After Nike's first selection round, Wilkins and Cook met with Richards to align Miller's middle school grantees with the NSIF's high school grantees. The hope was that supporting district feeder patterns would allow AVID teaching strategies to take hold and spread across a district, thus providing more consistent expectations for students as they moved from middle school to high school. The Miller Foundation also provided funding for 30 middle schools, and together, with the NSIF, they approached the Oregon Community Foundation, another local education funder, who agreed to fund an additional five high schools and one middle school. Collectively, these efforts brought the partnerships total to 86 schools--55 high schools and 31 middle schools--and added another foundation partner to the initiative.

Scaling AVID Teacher Training Statewide

Though NSIF, the Miller Foundation, and the Oregon Community Foundation supported teachers to access the AVID college readiness experience, it was still not enough to reach all 26,000 teachers in the state. NSIF funded 2,000 teachers over three years to travel to AVID’s Summer Institute in Denver, Colorado to learn proven and effective teaching strategies and instructional practices to increase student learning and outcomes.⁵ NSIF’s strategy here was threefold: First, go deeper with individual NSIF partner high schools to ensure every teacher in the building received AVID instructional training, which had been proven to increase student outcomes.⁶ Second, promote entire districts to adopt these best practices. And third, provide any teacher interested in professional development access to AVID’s curriculum, strategies, and resources—regardless of whether or not theirs was an AVID school. As one Beaverton educator noted:

We believed that if [AVID] strategies are taught in every content classroom every day, every period, then all kids have access to those high-quality instructional strategies. We really want great teaching in every classroom. Nike has pushed us as adults to really embrace this idea of all kids can be scholars in the same way that all people can be athletes.

After two years of teacher training, however, achievement gaps persisted. Nike leaders understood that this was a long-term effort¹ that would not be reversed in a two-year timeframe.⁷ During NSIF 2.0’s second academic year (September 2015 to June 2016), Wilkins revised the application process to include one application for new applicants and one application for renewal applicants that asked current partners about the program’s impact. “Applicants shared that they had seen an increased sense of student belongingness and more students participating in leadership programs,” said Wilkins of the application responses. “We received double the number of applicants and accepted 71 school partners. In year three, for the 2016–2017 school year, all 71 schools from year 2 renewed, and NSIF accepted 28 new school partners.” By year three, there were grantees across 50 districts.

“Innovate”: Nike Leaders Program

The NSIF 2.0 strategy focused on innovation by extending Nike’s success pairing business leaders with high school teams to give principals and teachers the freedom and resources to innovate. Nike prioritized 12 high schools close to its World Headquarters, which allowed Nike Leaders to be more hands-on and to have easy access to the principal leaders. Wilkins explained:

There are only 18 comprehensive high schools in our immediate three-district partnership area. We have expanded beyond that already, but the ability to deliver real impact is a key consideration for us. Geographic distance, for example, could become a barrier. Right now, we’re very focused on the existing relationships.

Once NSIF dispersed the school grants, they began training new teams of Nike Leaders for NSIF 2.0. Since the first group of Nike Leaders had completed two to five years as thought partners with principals in NSIF 1.0, Wilkins had to start the recruiting process from scratch. Working with Keith Houlemard, the NSIF Executive Sponsor and VP, GM Running, Wilkins identified a short list of seasoned Nike executives from across Nike’s apparel, retail, and legal divisions. These executives had demonstrated leadership success within Nike. Like CEO Mark Parker before him, Houlemard

¹ AVID’S report *AVID Implementation in Oregon, Year in Review 2016*, developed to provide NIKE an overall summary of what is transpiring with AVID in Oregon (in support of the overall goal of successful implementation of AVID statewide) gave Nike confidence in the progress of AVID implementation, the road ahead for future implementation and the positive impact on achievement gaps over time.

personally invited 12 employees on Wilkins' short list to join the Nike Leaders Program in NSIF 2.0. All 12 accepted.

On March 18, 2015, Nike Leaders were trained in a half-day session with education experts, partners, and Nike Leaders who had participated in NSIF 1.0. The training ended with an information session and social event with 21 school principals and 12 Nike executives. Houlemard and Wilkins put the Nike Leaders in groups with principals for an interactive exercise to get both school leaders and Nike Leaders talking about key priorities and challenges. 12 schools made successful partnerships. To accelerate implementation of new concepts that came out of the strategic planning done collaboratively by the school leaders and NIKE leaders, each partnership had the opportunity to pitch NSIF leadership for a \$20,000 grant in addition to the funding received to implement NSIF to support their work.

Two weeks after the 12 Nike Leaders were selected and trained; Nike invited 86 school partners--comprised of superintendents from 22 districts along with 50 principals and 100 teachers--to their world headquarters for a two-day program kickoff and leadership training. Nike welcomed the school teams with a short Q&A with Keith Houlemard and Terry Porter, a beloved former Portland Trailblazer and current college coach, in Nike's Stanford Theatre. Afterwards, superintendents were invited to speak to school teams from their districts to kick off the training and then join a roundtable discussion of the vision for this work. 20 superintendents from across the state outlined a vision to collectively build a college-going culture in Oregon. As Wilkins recalled,

It was a superintendent roundtable [...] that set the vision for our work in NSIF 2.0. One of the superintendents [was part of a] very small district, where she's [...] a teacher, the principal, and the superintendent.

To illustrate the vision and next steps for all, the aforementioned superintendent used a baseball diamond analogy, a seemingly fitting visual given the collaboration. "She drew a baseball diamond," Wilkins explained: "First base is school-wide. Second base is district-wide. Third base is state-wide. Fourth base is 100% graduation [rates]. With [this] first meeting, the superintendent noted, we're rounding first right now." Optimistic about the vision, Wilkins along with the Superintendents also grappled with the challenges ahead--in particular, how to leverage AVID's best practices to help all Oregon students, regardless of where they attended school. (See **Exhibit 7**.)

"Inspire": Future You

While Nike was considering how to scale AVID's best practices to change outcomes for all kids across the state, a new NSIF initiative called "Future You" that used Nike's brand and marketing ability to help teachers better engage and inspire students and create a student-centered communication and marketing plan for each school. It was developed with Beaverton High School in response to their efforts to better understand student motivations and help them plan for their future. "Future You" aimed to inspire students and teachers to think bigger about their personal future and to equip NSIF partner schools and teachers with the tools to help students unleash their unique potential. After working with Beaverton High School to bring these ideas to life, NSIF hosted a workshop for 10 partner schools in Beaverton to develop their own student-centered voice and communications plans. Nike provided its school partners with its proprietary teen insights research that included Nike survey data on what motivates teens. "In education, we don't readily have access to this type of data," said David Nielanik, Southridge High School principal, "Nike is the number one preferred brand for teens. I knew I could learn something from them to improve how we talk to students."

Through "Future You" workshops, Nike Leaders worked with their partner schools to develop a point of view and voice for each school. (See **Exhibit 10**.) Nike marketing executives then offered the

schools a Communications 101 class where they laid out how Nike communicates for big events (e.g., how Nike would approach a product launch) and how they differentiated their messaging for various audiences (i.e., business, technology, sports, consumer, and media). Wilkins shared:

It was Nike's hope that helping educators better understand their own students and then articulate how [they] could authentically help those specific students would lead to a powerful shift in how schools operate.

The workshops ended with schools developing a strategy that they could use to better articulate what they believed in and what they distinctively had to offer their students, parents, and teachers.

Leveraging the support of his Nike Leader partner and the teen consumer insights from Nike's research team, Principal Nieslanik created a communications strategy for how Southbridge High School would create an environment centered on student choice, placing students in charge of their future. "We invited students and parents to come learn about the high school. We used the information we learned from Nike to shape our narratives for parents." (See **Exhibit 9**.) "Because of rezoning, 40% of my students will be new next year. I plan to use the Nike insights at a family welcome night. It will be the first impression that we make on students and families new to the district." Following the "Future You" sessions, a confidential survey revealed a shift in principals' beliefs regarding the importance of innovation over the prior year's survey. Wilkins shared, "In 2016, principals questioned how Nike defines innovation and how it [can] increase student achievement. In 2017, principals recognized the importance of innovation in preparing students to be successful."

NSIF 2.0 Outcomes & Learnings

By the beginning of 2017, NSIF made progress toward the goal of giving all 375 Oregon high schools access to AVID's best practices through the collaborative efforts of Nike, the foundation partners, and the Oregon Department of Education. By this point, NSIF had reached 57% of the state's high school population with 99 school partners. (See **Exhibit 5**.) While the number of schools increased, Nike and its partners did not see a straight path to reaching all schools. Explained Salam Noor, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction:

To take everything to scale, you would need a lot more resources contributed from a lot of different partners. "Statewide" here implies that all districts around the state would have [*sic*] access to [NSIF] resources and programs. When we say "statewide," it means everybody has access. How they get there varies from place to place. We leveraged [NSIF Funds] to get resources from the legislature to expand statewide.

Developing individual teachers to meet the growing demand for leadership within schools seemed like a path with strong potential. Wilkins realized that individual teachers in every school could likely benefit from AVID's professional development. "We are exploring ways to make [AVID] best practices available to any teacher anywhere, regardless of whether they are part of an NSIF school," she said. "[But] we are still figuring out an approach to statewide scale." During NSIF 2.0, Wilkins met every six months with Noor and local foundations to share updates and discuss the expansion plans. Said deputy superintendent of the Oregon Department of Education Noor:

The Nike School Innovation Fund provided tremendous access to those resources. I've been to some of these schools, and I have seen how [AVID] has actually transformed the whole school culture and how it has truly instilled this sense of purpose and urgency. When you talk to parents, they say, "My kid is an AVID kid." When you see kids, they talk about how it has transformed their educational experience.

As the Miller Foundation's three-year grants came to an end and NSIF closed its 3rd round of one-year grants, Nike had to determine the next steps for NSIF, especially in terms of sustainability.

Nike School Innovation Fund 3.0

As Wilkins considered options for the NSIF 3.0, she had multiple competing priorities. Current NSIF School partners were requesting continued support. In addition, Wilkins had received requests from districts across Oregon to expand the program. Nike executives asked that the strategy include quantitative results, including developing a scorecard to measure key student-focused goals to assess NSIF's impact on student achievement. Nike hoped it could use this evidence to inspire other businesses to follow a similar strategy when making educational investments.

As NSIF 2.0 completed its "start-up phase", Wilkins needed to set a plan in motion for long-term sustainability of the program. There was expanded support for NSIF across Nike including many employees who were contributing to NSIF in varying capacities and levels of commitment. While Wilkins could leverage these resources, she was the one fully dedicated employee and NSIF was under her direction. This included the consideration of expanding NSIF and teacher training statewide which would require resources beyond what current partners provided.

Furthermore, Oregon was facing a new financial crisis with a budget shortfall of \$1.6 billion.⁸ By many accounts, schools and districts throughout the state were poised to experience significant layoffs. Many existing programs were likely to be cut and others scaled back. While the state of Oregon contributed matching funds for AVID professional development in NSIF 2.0, there was no budget for future training. Salam Noor elaborated:

The State had set aside some money for accelerated learning, and in the 2016 sessions, we started to engage with legislators about AVID. We had one legislator, in particular, that was really impressed with AVID. One of his districts was implementing AVID. We were able to direct some of those resources towards AVID, but that was a one-time investment [...] We need to continue to work with the legislature to see if they'd be willing to allocate some resources.

"We are working with AVID to scale the programs teacher-to-teacher," explained Wilkins. "I am not sure how this work will be impacted with the budget cuts. We need to think differently about how to give all teachers training in these best practices." Taking all of these challenges into consideration, Wilkins outlined an approach to scale that included the consideration of three key areas: 1) training all Oregon state teachers in AVID; 2) identifying specific program components to scale; and 3) providing schools open access to NSIF program materials.

Option 1: Ensure that every Oregon high school has AVID-trained teachers

Wilkins learned through conversations with superintendents that most Oregon teachers stayed within the state even when they left for new teaching opportunities in other districts. By focusing on individual teacher training, NSIF could ensure that regardless of movement and turnover, a school would be more likely to have teachers properly trained in the AVID pedagogy. This scaling option presented a challenge for AVID executives. The AVID business model was built on district-specific contracts and membership that provided school-based training of teachers. Once trained, teachers were able to draw on the AVID resources so long as they were employed by a school that was an AVID member. If a teacher changed schools they would lose access to AVID training and materials unless the new school was also a member. A focus on individual teachers would require that AVID change its

model-- instead of licensing its content to a school district, they would need to develop an individual license that would follow each teacher throughout his or her career.

We are always exploring new ways to serve our teachers and students including the possibility of certification for teachers, said Sandy Husk, CEO of AVID. While outside of our model, Vanessa and I agreed piloting ideas like this in Oregon would be beneficial.

Besides the challenge of altering AVID's business model, Wilkins also had to consider the issue of funding. Even if she could convince AVID to change its model, state or private funding would be needed to train all of Oregon's 26,000 teachers.

Option 2: Unbundle NSIF programming and scale specific key components

Wilkins believed that the Nike Leaders Program was part of NSIF's "secret sauce", as the commitment of the Nike Leaders, their diverse background, and how they brought Nike's culture of innovation into their NSIF experience enhanced NSIF and made it distinctive. One principal noted:

I've been blown away by the quality and the attentions of my Nike leader and the integrity of this school innovation fund. You'll see companies who will write a check but the ongoing support hasn't been there. When it's just dollars, it gets spent and it goes away and there's nothing that's sustainable. The work with my Nike leaders has enriched our conversations to move our school forward.

Though schools from across the state were interested in being paired with a Nike executive, the majority of Nike executives were based in the Portland region. Using Skype or FaceTime as a communication method between Nike Leaders and schools could solve this problem, but preserving the quality of the experience and personal connectivity between the Nike Leaders and their partner schools was important to this part of the program. Some of that personal connection might be lost in the virtual environment.

Additionally, the participating Nike Leaders were already balancing their full-time work commitments with their passion for and partnership with their NSIF partner schools. Adding distance could create new challenges and pull on resources (e.g., time). Intentionally, they had kept the Nike Leader partnership program small by design, with only 12 partnerships, so they could sufficiently support the innovative pilots coming out of the program. Wilkins worried about the potential negative impact scaling up would have on the program's quality.

Option 3: Make NSIF materials available via an open source platform

Nike considered how to leverage technology to scale NSIF and increase its reach statewide. Wilkins considered compiling the "Future You" curriculum and program materials, along with an outline and program overview for the Nike Leaders programs, to make them available to any school free of charge via an open source platform. This option would allow more schools to have access to impactful NSIF curriculum and materials, allowing for the programs to scale easily without extra costs. This approach would hopefully allow the program to scale without compromising the Nike Leaders Program. However, scaling the content would mean less quality control. "Future You" was a new concept, and going open source so early in its development might detract from its ability to

demonstrate impact. AVID could only stand behind its results if it had trained teachers, and thus, the organization was hesitant to give schools access to its materials without proper training.

As Wilkins pondered her scaling options, she knew that any one of them would require other thought partners and contributors. Throughout her time at Nike, informal teams and other champions had helped to move the NSIF initiative. She wondered who else could contribute to this next phase for NSIF and help achieve statewide impact. “I am scheduled to present to Nike executives in July on the progress of the fund and the future NSIF 3.0 strategy,” she said. “I haven't figured out what that would mean. We need to figure out how to scale.”

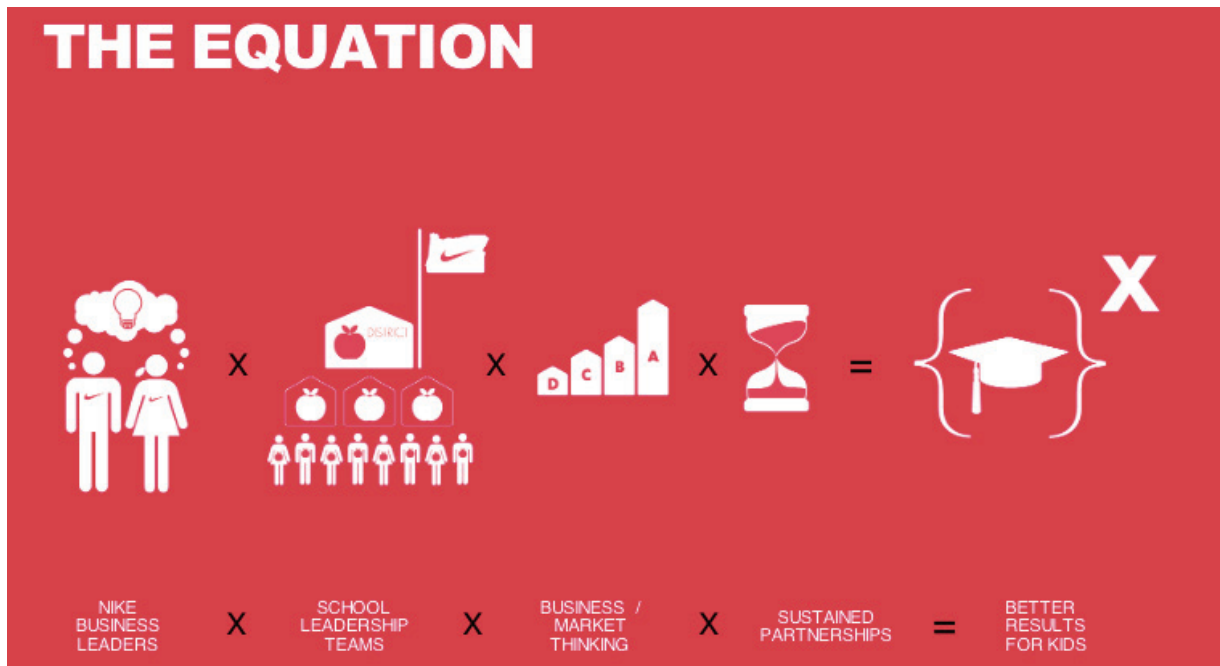
Exhibit 1 Nike School Innovation Fund (NSIF) Timeline

November 2004	Julia Brim-Edwards joins Nike as Director, US States & Local/Western Canada, Government & Public Affairs; also serves as Chair/Member of Board of Education, Portland Public Schools (PPS)
June 2006	Brim-Edwards approaches Nike CEO Mark Parker to invest in PPS
July 2006	NSIF collaborates with superintendents in Portland, Beaverton, and Hillsboro to co-create the programming for the Nike School Innovation Fund
January 2007	Nike announces a five-year commitment to invest \$9 million into Oregon's school system, first grants to school districts made; Heidi O'Neill tapped to join as an Executive Sponsor and recruits first team of Nike Leaders
June 2007	Launch of the Nike Leaders Program
September 2007	First full year of Innovation Grants made to Portland, Beaverton, and Hillsboro school districts for Early Learner programming and School leadership training; external evaluations; Nike leaders paired with schools
July 2011	Invitation to President Barack Obama's Roundtable on Education
May 2013	Nike concludes NSIF 1.0 Programming
April 2014	Vanessa Wilkins joins Nike as the Director of the NSIF
Summer 2014	Wilkins researches best practices nationally and gathers feedback from internal and external stakeholders
October 2014	NSIF Selects AVID as professional development partner
Fall 2014	Wilkins socializes plans for NSIF 2.0 internally at Nike and externally with prospective community partners
November 2014	NSIF secures partnership with James F. and Marion Miller Foundation
December 2014	NSIF opens statewide grant cycle for 50 public high schools for AVID training
February 2015	The Oregon Community Foundation joins NSIF funding grants to 6 additional schools for AVID training
March 2015	NSIF and Miller Foundation announce grants to 50 high schools and 30 Middle Schools for AVID training NSIF 2.0 training for Nike employees in the Nike Leader Program
July 2015	Future You - Insights and Innovation Meeting at Nike WHQ for Partner schools and their Nike Leaders
February 2016	Meyer Memorial trust joins the partnership, funding teacher training.
Spring 2016	Oregon legislature dedicates funding to support 50 additional high schools to implement programs such as AVID

- April 2016 Superintendent roundtable -“Oregon Model” for AVID statewide
- February 2017 NSIF announces 1.5 Million to 100 Oregon high schools, culminating 5 NSIF grants to local schools over 3 years

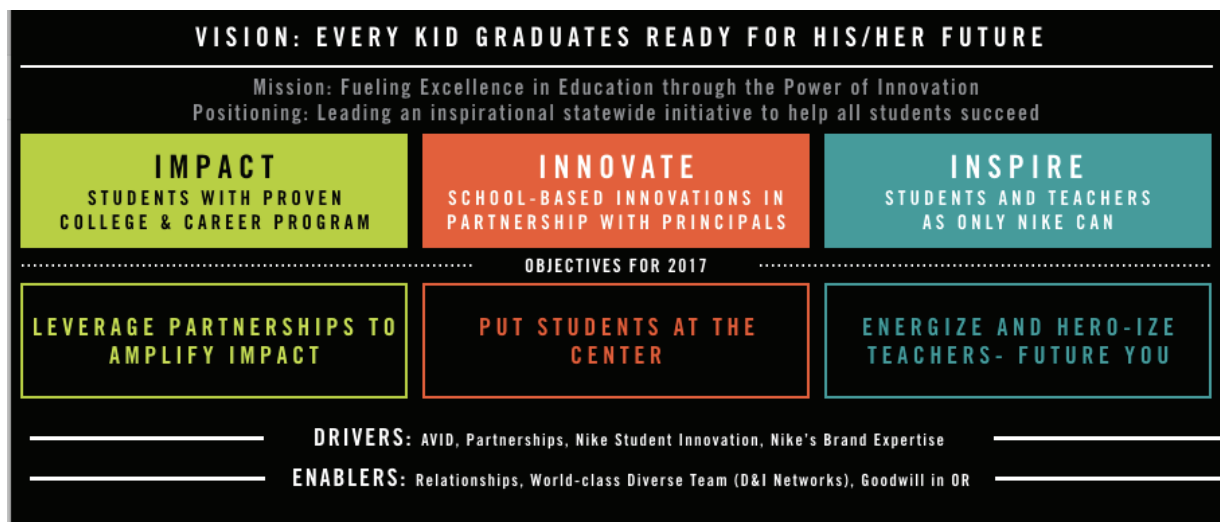
Source: Nike School Innovation Fund.

Exhibit 2 The NSIF 1.0 Theory of Change



Source: Nike School Innovation Fund.

Exhibit 3 The NSIF 2.0 Theory of Change



Source: Nike School Innovation Fund.

Exhibit 4 NSIF 1.0 Outcomes

- The NSIF reached 100,000 students annually in Beaverton, Hillsboro, and Portland Public Schools.
- The program increased strategic leadership capacity at the school and district levels.
- The program created a diverse aspiring administrator pipeline for future school and district leadership opportunities.
- Fourth-grade students at NSIF program schools showed significant improvements on the 2010 state writing assessment in comparison to 2009 results, exceeding district gains in 75% of cases.
- Over the course of Hillsboro's four-week summer early learning program, 85% of students maintained or improved their reading scores.
- In Portland Schools, 91% of teachers said they saw themselves as instrumental leaders as a result of the NSIF work. Teachers who participated in the NSIF program were more likely to be promoted to leadership positions (23% versus 15% of non-NSIF teachers).

Source: Nike School Innovation Fund.

Exhibit 5 NSIF 2.0 Outcomes

- Nike administered \$5 million in direct grants to Oregon schools.
- 100 schools received Nike grants reaching 57% of all high schools and serving 104,000 students in Oregon. Nike engaged 3,400 Oregon teachers.
- The number of 9th graders who were on track to graduate increased by 5.5%. The number of 9th grade students of color and low income students increased by 9.3%.
- 88% of seniors who had teachers trained by AVID met the college entrance requirements for four-year universities. There is virtually no difference among different racial and ethnic groups.
- More than 70% of seniors with the AVID Nike Partnership took at least one AP, IB, or dual enrollment course.
- An average of 66% graduates in NSIF partner schools enrolled in a two or four-year college or university the year after high school graduation, compared to 62.7% of Oregon students who attend college.

Source: Nike School Innovation Fund.

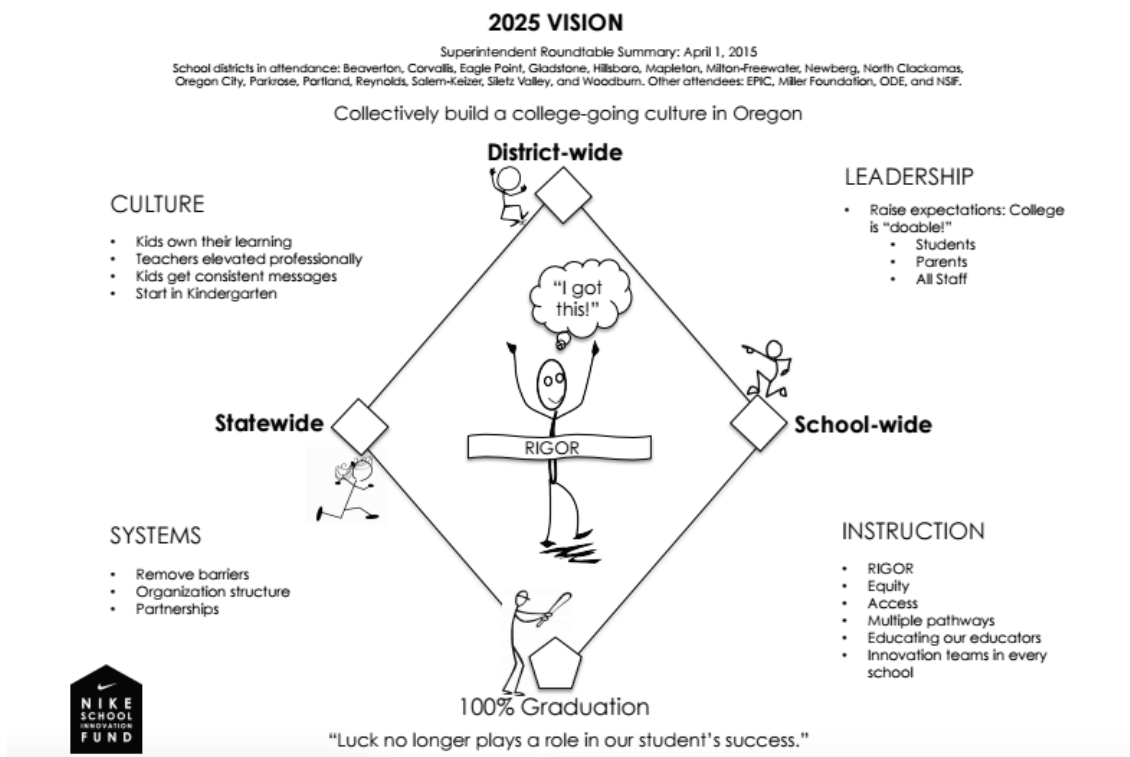
Exhibit 6 Nike Community Impact Overview

About Nike Community Impact

Nike believes in the power of sport to unleash human potential and build community. Nike fuels this belief through Made to Play, its commitment to getting kids moving through play and sport so that they can lead healthier, happier and more successful lives, and by providing opportunities for more equal playing fields for all. Through initiatives like the Nike School Innovation Fund, Nike is helping to fuel excellence in education in Oregon schools to engage students and support teachers to help all students realize their potential. <https://communityimpact.nike.com/>

Source: Nike Global Community Impact.

Exhibit 7 2015 Superintendent Roundtable Summary: The 2025 Vision



Source: Nike School Innovation Fund.

Exhibit 8 NSIF Partnership Graphic

Teams of Teams



Source: Developed by casewriters from interviews.

Exhibit 9 “Future You”: Southbridge High School Parent Communication

SOUTHRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TOGETHER

Our Shared Vision:

EMBRACE
Academics, Creativity, Relationships, Diversity
INSPIRE
Involvement in the local and global community
EMPOWER
Innovation and life-long learning

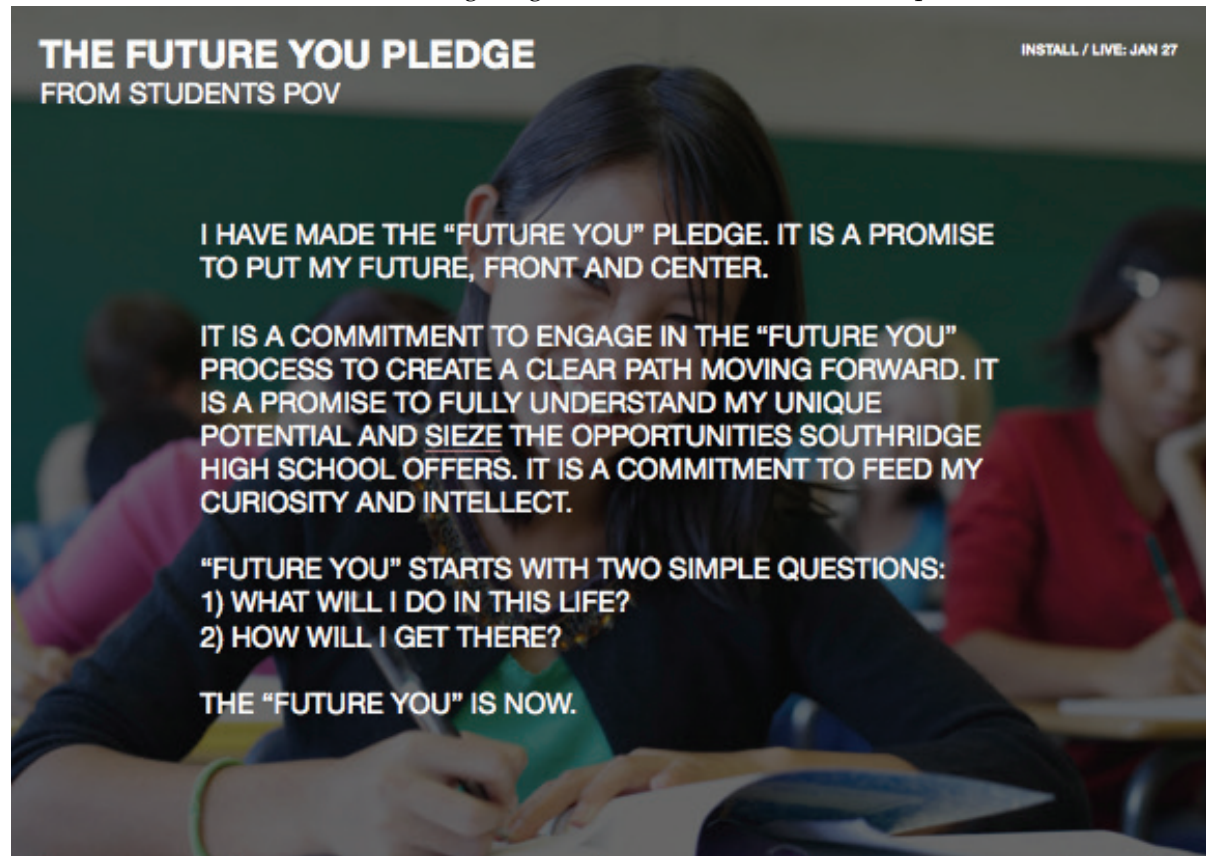
Our Mission:

Develop compassionate graduates who think critically and creatively, embrace life long learning and responsible citizenship, and who learn from and appreciate the connection between our school, community and the world.

Our Shared Core Values:


- Graduation for all in preparing for post-high school success
- Safe, respectful, welcoming, and spirited school culture
- Authentic learning experiences in a varied, challenging, innovative, curriculum
- Meaningful engagement in our community
- A learning culture valuing passion, collaboration, perseverance and individual growth
- An awareness and appreciation for diversity, equity, and international perspectives

Exhibit 10 “Future You”: Southbridge High School Communication Examples



Source: Nike School Innovation Fund.

Exhibit 11 Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Fact Sheet




SNAPSHOT

AVID—Advancement Via Individual Determination, established in 1980, is implemented in 46 states and 16 other countries or territories.

Today...

60,000+

TRAININGS PROVIDED



IMPACTS NEARLY

1.5 Million

STUDENTS ANNUALLY

AVID's College Readiness System: 

- Trains educators to make learning more effective by providing engaging, rigorous, and collaborative classrooms
- Engages all faculty and staff to drive student success
- Develops resilient, lifelong learners through academic and social support
- Increases rigor and raises student achievement
- Creates a college-going culture schoolwide

In 2015-16 AVID Served...

5,600+


K-12 SCHOOLS

66%

LOW-INCOME
(free or reduced-price lunch)


AVID (2016). AVID secondary data collection. N = 403,630 (Electronic Database).

SECONDARY STUDENTS (GRADES 6-12)



- 52% Hispanic
- 20% White
- 17% Black
- 7% Asian
- 4% Other

AVID Class of 2016*—93% completed four-year college entrance requirements



IMPRESSIVE RESULTS FOR EVERY SUBGROUP OF STUDENTS	94%	94%	93%	93%	92%
	Asian n = 2,632	Black or African American n = 5,065	Hispanic or Latino n = 24,311	White (non-Hispanic) n = 8,023	Other* n = 2,748

* Other includes American Indian or Alaska Native, two or more races, and declined to state. AVID (2016). AVID senior data collection. N = 42,428 (Electronic Database).

AVID closes the achievement gap for ALL students.

AVID is a nonprofit organization that provides educators with proven, real-world strategies to accelerate the performance of underrepresented students so that these students and all students across the entire campus succeed in college, career, and life.

10/28/2016

www.avid.org

2016 AVID Elective Seniors' Impressive Results:

94%

reported plans to attend a postsecondary institution: 63% to a four-year college, 31% to a two-year college.

84%

reported taking at least one rigorous course (e.g., AP®, IB®, Dual Credit, and/or Cambridge®).

AVID (2016). AVID senior data collection. N = 42,428 (Electronic Database).

Source: AVID website: www.avid.org/_documents/AVID_Snapshot.pdf.

Endnotes

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- ⁶ Report: AVID Implementation in Oregon: Year in Review 2015-2016
- ⁷ Report: AVID Implementation in Oregon: Year in Review 2015-2016
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