

# Innovation Processes and Preparing for Change in Early Education

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## Introduction



**Henry Wilde**  
**CEO and Co-Founder**  
**Acelero Learning and Shine Early Learning**

- Special Assistant to Marian Wright Edelman, Children's Defense Fund
- Deputy Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
- Ascend Fellow and Pahara Fellow at the Aspen Institute
- Harvard College, Harvard Business School



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# Our Mission



**To bring a relentless focus on positive child and family outcomes to close the achievement gap and build a better future for children, families and communities served by the Head Start program**



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# About Us

**Acelero Learning is made up of three units, dedicated to closing the achievement gap**



*Directly-operated, federally-funded Head Start programs in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Nevada and Wisconsin*

- Started in 2005
- Serves ~5,000 children
- \$70M directly managed HS, Pre-K, and CC subsidy funds

Proving ground for innovation and impact



*Program management support for newly launched Head Start programs*

- Started in 2014
- Serves ~4,000 children
- \$41M in partner annual HS grants

Dedicated to creating enhanced direct service model for new or expanding Head Start grantees



*Provides hands-on training, technical assistance, access to proprietary tools to existing Head Start programs*

- Started in 2012
- Serves ~25,000 children
- \$189M in partner annual HS grants

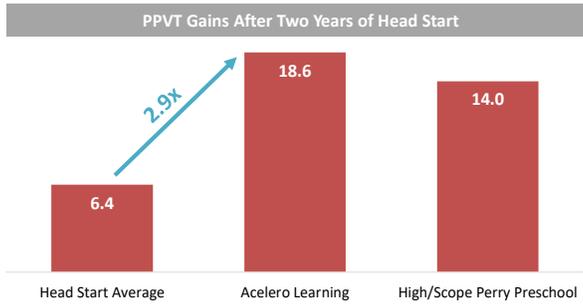
Dedicated to help others implement different aspects of Acelero model



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## Track Record of Outcomes

- Gains after two years of Acelero Learning Head Start program are nearly 3x those of Head Start average on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (“PPVT”).
- These are among largest known gains for a Head Start program.



Source: NIEER

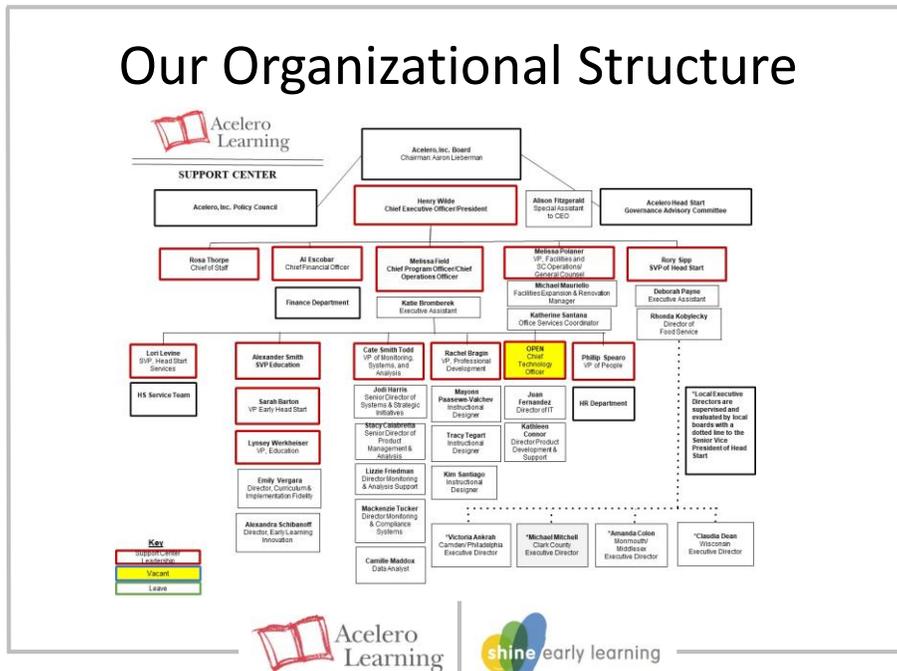


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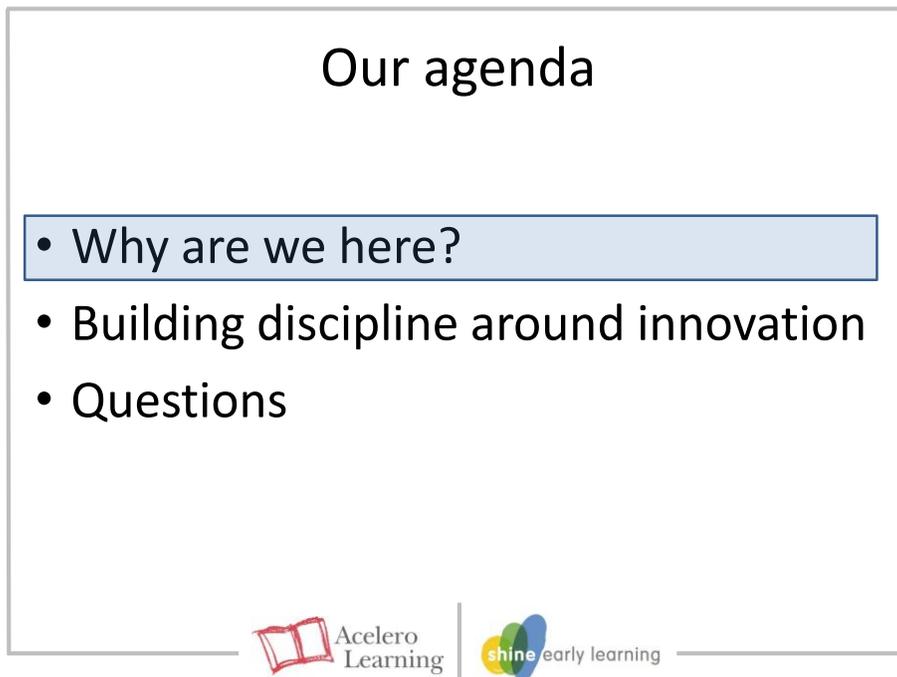
## Recognition



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## Head Start laboratory for innovation

“The notion of Head Start as a national laboratory also fit my philosophy. I have always thought of Head Start not as a static program, but as an evolving concept. Head Start should be a model of the very best and most innovative in child and family services.”

– Dr. Edward Zigler, Head Start founder



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## Do we *need* to innovate?

“The studies confirm the overall lack of empirical support for the effectiveness of the two most widely-used pre-k programs, High Scope and Creative Curriculum, based on rigorous standards.”

- Brookings Institute study, 2017



“Free play or flash cards? New study nods to more rigorous preschool.”

- Headline in the New York Times in May 2017

“After 50 years, Head Start struggles with uneven quality.”

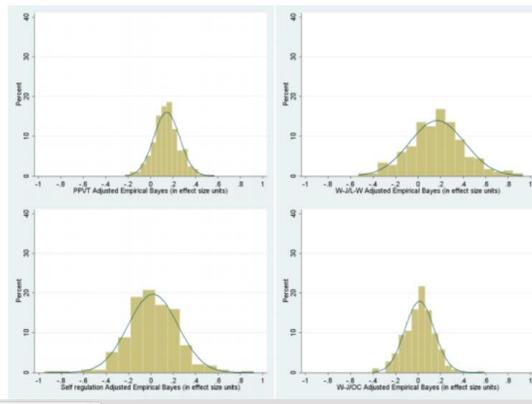
- Headline from National Public Radio in December 2016



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## Head Start Performance Bell Curve

Inferred cross-site distributions of Head Start ITT effect sizes by outcome measure



“Nonetheless, the present findings clearly indicate that there is substantial cross-site variation in ITT effects of Head Start on important child outcomes. In addition, these findings strongly suggest that for at least the three outcome measures with near-zero grand mean effect size estimates (oral comprehension, externalizing, and self-regulation), Head Start centers range from substantially more effective to substantially less effective than their local alternatives.”

(Weiland, Michigan, 2015)



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## Our agenda

- Why are we here?
- Building discipline around innovation
- Questions



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First of all...  
How do we define innovation?

“Innovation is change that  
creates a new dimension of  
performance.”

-Peter Drucker



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What used to happen at Acelero Learning?

*We made lots of missteps...*

- No beta testing
- Inconsistent knowledge capture
- Confirmation bias
- Staff felt swung from one side of the boat to the other
- Did not understand our own variation



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## Ask yourself...

- Have you ever tried to roll out a new idea, a new practice, a new methodology – and it did not go as well as you had hoped?
- What happened?
- What did you learn from it?



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What did we do about it?



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## Acelero Learning's Innovation Process 1.0



Year 1



Year 2



Year 3

- Launch multiple pilots for each **strategic priority**
- Measure effectiveness and identify implementation barriers through a consistent process
- Repeat **successful** pencil pilots, not **all** pencil pilots
- Solidify implementation processes and tweak to increase effectiveness
- Choose one Innovation for broad roll-out across all four delegates



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## We instituted this *Pencil* pilot process

Pilot opportunity identified that aligns with Strategic Priorities

*Initiated by local program or Support Center*



Pilot Application Developed

*Jointly between local program and Support Center*



Metrics Evaluated

*By Monitoring, Systems, and Analysis Team*



Application Approved

*By local Executive Director, Chief Program Officer*



Pilot Launched



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And hoped that the majority of Innovations would be driven by those closest to the children and families we serve

The image contains two photographs. The left photograph shows the exterior of a brick building with a colorful mural and a sign that reads 'CONCORD PHILADELPHIA HEAD START'. The right photograph shows the interior of a laboratory with blue benches and white equipment. A large red 'X' is drawn over the laboratory photograph.

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### First Formal Evaluation Published July 2017

**2016-2017 INNOVATIONS EVALUATION**

*Final Report*

*July 2017*

**COACHING: INCREASE FREQUENCY OF COACHING**

Average Monthly Coaching Sessions Per Advocate

Category	Group	all other CC
FA	0.76	0.63
HDA	0.97	0.67

Family Advocates in Group pilot centers received 21% more coaching sessions, and Health & Disability advocates received 45% more coaching sessions than other advocates in their delegate.

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## What did we learn?

1. We need a way to test even more rapid cycle innovations
2. The “funnel” needs to function as designed
  - CPO wanted to cancel some pilots and narrow the funnel, but had a hard time balancing that with emotional reaction in the network
3. Pilot Ownership
  - Only 49% of teachers and advocates feel that “New ideas and ways of doing business are encouraged”
  - Only 7/19 pilots were initiated at the local level
  - None of the applications came from line staff
4. Pilot volume too high with uneven representation
  - 19 chalk/pencil/pen pilots is too many for the network and MSA to handle
  - It is unclear if we are piloting the right number of options for each priority
4. Timing of Pilot process is challenging



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## Innovation Process 2.0



1. We added a Chalk phase for rapid cycle innovation
2. We stepped up our communication
3. We created an Innovation Review Board to:
  - Systematize participation of line staff
  - Manage the funnel



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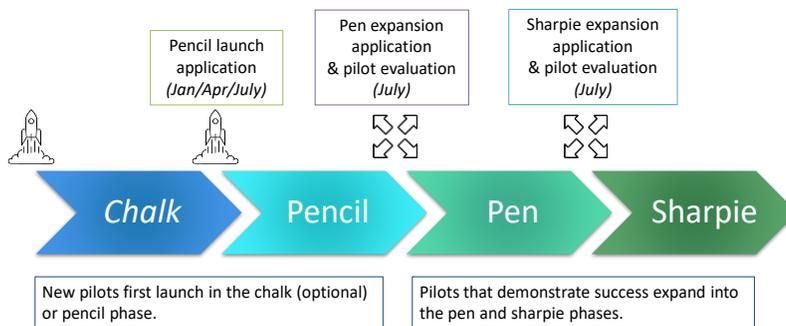
## Innovation Essentials 2.0

	Level of dissemination	Incorporation of staff input demonstrated via...	Application approval	Launch or expansion period	Sponsor updates submitted	Evaluation mechanism
<b>Chalk</b>	2 or fewer classrooms/ locations	Informal; collaborative planning & execution	n/a	Sponsor-owned	n/a	Sponsor-owned
<b>Pencil</b>	2-8 classrooms/ locations	Launch application	by IRB, in Jan/April/July	November-March	January April	Evaluation family metrics + sponsor-presented data
<b>Pen</b>	8+ classrooms/ locations & 2 delegates	Expansion application	by IRB, in July	November-March	January April	Evaluation family metrics + sponsor-presented data
<b>Sharpie</b>	Network-wide	Expansion application	by IRB, in July	Start of program year	January April	Incorporated into overall Program Evaluation
<b>Willow</b>	Varies; usually network-wide	Informal; collaborative planning & execution	n/a	Varies; usually start of program year	January April	Individualized



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## Pilot Process



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## Who makes the decisions?

The *Innovation Review Board* meets three times a year to review and approve all pilot applications.

### Key Stats

- 7 members
- 4 delegate members - teacher, family advocate, center director and coordinator
- 3 senior members of the grantee
- Managed by the Vice President of Monitoring, Systems and Analysis

### Network wide benefits

- Balance of power shifts towards line staff - four delegate members vs. three from grantee - majority rules
- More accountability to a process vs. approving a colleagues application
- Pilots are ultimately strengthened by "on the ground" review process

### Local benefits

- Each of the delegate members can act as an ambassador to other delegate staff
- Increased knowledge of the process and excitement to participate in it
- Increased awareness of the process and better understanding of why decisions are made



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## What are the IRB's deciding factors?

### Pencil

- Theory of change
- Impact of change
- Engagement of delegate sponsor
- Evidence that teachers and advocates were involved at the application phase

### Pen

- Best evidence of impact on intended metric (report created by VP of MSA)
- Ability to engage multiple delegate sponsors
- Evidence that teachers and advocates were involved in evolution of the pilot

### Sharpie

- Success in multiple delegates with different conditions
- Evidence of impact on intended metric (report created by VP of MSA)
- Substantial proof that the change will also ultimately impact child outcomes
- Overwhelmingly positive feedback from teachers and advocates involved at the Pen phase (Early Adopters for Change Management)



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## How do we gauge success?

- Impact
- Scalability
- Employee Opinion
- Retention



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## Sample of 2017-2018 Pencils



**Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey (ACES):** use scores on an external tool to better identify and support families who have been exposed to high-levels of trauma

**Advocate Success Rubric 2.0:** use a simpler, shorter, and more streamlined Advocate Success Rubric and process

**Coaching Menu:** offer center directors varying types of coaching options for supporting teachers

**LENA:** deploy wearable technology that measures language exposure in classrooms and use the resulting data to inform coaching

**HITEC:** leverage an online video-coaching platform



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## Sample of 2017-2018 Pens



**Center Manager:** add a center-level leader to support operations

**Group Coaching:** replace individual advocate coaching with peer-to-peer feedback in small groups

**iStartSmart:** deploy child-facing games to gather assessment data electronically

**Live Coaching:** use bug-in-ear technology to allow center directors to coach teachers in real time

**myIGDIS:** adopt a streamlined and simplified tool and process for ongoing assessment of children by teachers

**Small c Coaching:** reduce full coaching cycles to bimonthly, and supplement with informal coaching activities



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## Ask yourself...

- Are you testing any innovations in the 2018-2019 year? (It is okay if the answer is no!)
- As you think about the process you have undergone to prepare, what do you think your biggest challenge will be?



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What could go wrong?  
Change must be *managed*.



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## Solicit authentic participation



- Create opportunities for staff to contribute to the work – with their ideas and insights
- Create space for staff to share feedback
- Ensure feedback is taken into account in refinements and process



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## Communicate effectively

After the training, we sent the team an email with a plan for rolling out the change. We even highlighted the rollout date for the change.

**Why is everyone so surprised that this is happening?!**

- ✓ Repeat important messages 5 -7 times
- ✓ Individualize and target content
- ✓ Send messages from the appropriate influencer
- ✓ Vary communication methods



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## Anticipate resistance

Unaware of why the change is needed

Impact on understanding of current role

Previous experiences with poorly managed changes

Lack of visible support and commitment from managers and senior leaders



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“My program is stuck in its ways,  
and we are not getting better.”

How do we become more innovative?



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## The Innovator's DNA

“We were intrigued to learn that at most companies, top executives do not feel personally responsible for coming up with strategic innovations. Rather, they feel responsible for facilitating the innovation process. In stark contrast, senior executives of the most innovative companies—a mere 15% in our study—don't delegate creative work. They do it themselves.

But how do they do it? Our research led us to identify five “discovery skills” that distinguish the most creative executives: **associating**, **questioning**, **observing**, **experimenting**, and **networking**. We found that innovative entrepreneurs (who are also CEOs) spend 50% more time on these discovery activities than do CEOs with no track record for innovation. Together, these skills make up what we call the innovator's DNA. **And the good news is, if you're not born with it, you can cultivate it.**”

-Jeffrey H. Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen



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## Discovery Skills

- 1. Associating**
  - the ability to successfully connect seemingly unrelated questions, problems, or ideas from different fields
- 2. Questioning**
  - constantly ask questions that challenge common wisdom
- 3. Observing**
  - scrutinize common phenomena
- 4. Experimenting**
  - actively try out new ideas by creating prototypes and launching pilots
- 5. Networking**
  - meet people with different kinds of ideas and perspectives to extend their own knowledge domains



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## Ask yourself...

- Which of these skills you do best? How do you do it?
- Which would you like to work on?



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## Conclusions

- Innovation is required if we hope to achieve our collective mission
- You do not have to invent a new wheel
- Develop a disciplined process
- Solicit authentic input, communicate effectively, and manage resistance
- Cultivate the innovator's DNA



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