

Coherence by Design

A Message from the CEO



The social contract at the heart of American education is broken. From the beginning, the promise was straightforward: work hard, get an education, and you'll have a chance at a better life. And it held—though not for everyone. Over the past fifty years, we have all worked to extend that promise to every young person—to increase access, open doors, raise graduation rates, and broaden pathways to college. The work mattered. It still does. And it isn't finished.

Today, even in those circumstances where we have succeeded in expanding access, we are living in the space between what it promises and what it actually delivers. More students than ever hold credentials, that's true. But too few have the capability those credentials were supposed to guarantee—the ability to think critically, adapt to complexity, build a career, navigate an economy that demands more than any before.

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TNTP's research over the past decade has been building, study by study, toward this conclusion. In 2018, we discovered that the system still wasn't giving all students what they needed to succeed—high-quality instructional materials, strong instruction, deep engagement, and teachers with high expectations. We published *The Opportunity Myth*, and the field mobilized. Yet as schools began to act on the findings, we saw something we couldn't ignore: even when young people received those crucial resources, many, especially those growing up in poverty, still weren't achieving the economic and social mobility that education promises. Strong academics mattered, but they weren't enough on their own.

Paths of Opportunity took us beyond academics alone. We identified the five interconnected factors that drive mobility: a strong academic foundation, certainly, but also career-connected learning, social capital, personal support, and civic engagement.

The Opportunity Makers then showed us that we can better leverage existing resources to catch kids up: more than 1,300 schools produced extraordinary results by committing to belonging, consistency, and coherence, making every element of the student experience work together so that learning compounds over time. That body of research changed what we measure, what we build, and what we believe young people deserve.

It also revealed the limits of what we knew. We could demonstrate what works—in individual schools, under the right conditions, with exceptional commitment. But the access-capability gap is not a school-level problem. It is a systems-level crisis. And closing it requires systemic solutions that make coherence inevitable everywhere.

That is what TNTP has set out to build: the conditions that make capability possible at scale. We organized our strategy around three integrated priorities: building coherent student experiences, bridging education to career, and harnessing AI to amplify human potential. Our goal is ambitious: 50 million students on a measurable path to mobility by 2035.

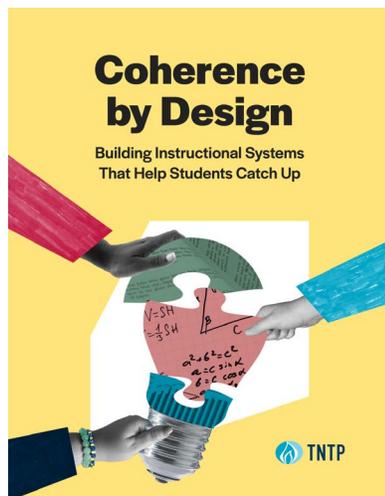
But it starts with instructional coherence—and that is what this paper takes on. It makes visible what too many students experience every day, names the forces that keep fragmentation in place, and offers district leaders a concrete path forward.

If we're asking the field to build this infrastructure, we have to show them the blueprints. That is what this paper does.



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Coherence by Design: Building Instructional Systems That Help Students Catch Up

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