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The CO Manifesto

Why do we need a complementary school?

The public school system is in crisis. As a result of structural inertia and a blatant lack of quality control, many students' potential is being wasted year after year. While the need for education reform is widely acknowledged, actual change is slow to come or even moves in the wrong direction.

The reason for this is not a lack of knowledge. Today, thanks to empirical education research as well as insights from the psychology and neurology of learning, we have quite a good idea of **what a better school could look like**. However, these results are rarely acted on. This is true for both the public school system and most alternative schools, many of which are remarkably resistant to innovation, preferring instead to cling to philosophies or ideologies from a century ago. Even in those cases where alternative schools do

offer better options than public schools, however, they are too expensive for most parents to afford.

Rather than waiting for top-down public education reforms or building yet another expensive parallel system, we are creating **a network of small, agile complementary schools** to make up for the deficits of the established education sector. Thanks to their lean structure, compact curricula and cooperation with experts and businesses in the community, these schools can be much more affordable than most existing private schools. Complementary schools enable students to acquire knowledge and skills that are usually neglected, without necessarily "giving up" on the public school system and thus closing off further educational careers.

What does a complementary school offer?

In our present model, an initial **two-year orientation phase** (grades 7-8, ages 12-14) offers focused training of neglected skills (such as legal education, health, risk competence and autonomous knowledge acquisition), as well as practical projects designed to give students insights into and hands-on experience with a wide range of professions and human endeavours. Following that, students can either make an informed decision to choose one of the further education paths offered by the public school system, or continue on to the optional **one- or two-year focus phase** to prepare for their specific careers using the school's resources.

The core staff of the school consists of **a team of coaches** who support and guide the students' learning process. They also prepare workshops in collaboration with local **experts** working in different fields and professions. These workshops can range from in-school debate/Q&A sessions to hands-on projects at the experts' place of work.

Our structure as a **micro-school** with no more than 30-50 students allows us to be highly flexible and personalized. In case of greater demand, we will encourage the formation of other micro-schools

rather than expand the existing school. Among the benefits of this structure is our **flexi-time model**, based on results from sleep research and the psychology of learning, with core hours between 9am and 1pm, four days a week. We also allow parents to schedule their child's time out of school on an individual basis, within limits, instead of sticking to traditional school holidays. In particular, we do not recommend taking nine successive weeks off between school years.

Both our methods and the structure of our school are based on the **best empirical evidence** available to us. Rather than take any of this as perennial wisdom, however, we constantly evaluate and improve every aspect of our school. Short evaluation cycles and a culture of innovation also enable us to experiment with novel methods and share our experiences. We are committed to a **radical "open source" policy**: all of our conceptual work, our workshop plans, teaching materials etc. as well as the results of our evaluation processes are published for free online. Through complementary schools, we intend to **improve education for everyone**, not just the few who can afford it.