

# DEEP DIVE

## LIFELONG LEARNING: CRADLE TO CAREER

JUNE 2020

CONTRIBUTION 1 OF 2

### AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PARADIGM SHIFTS TO ENABLE LIFELONG LEARNING

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CONTRIBUTION 2 OF 2

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# AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PARADIGM SHIFTS TO ENABLE LIFELONG LEARNING

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Large scale disruption such as we've suffered in recent weeks and months, presents both danger and opportunity. The dangers are obvious, life and death threats including economic catastrophe, job loss, housing instability and homelessness, lack of access to quality health care and personal safety threats. At the same time, dramatically raised public consciousness on matters of equity and social justice do present opportunities for change ranging from minor technical and symbolic tinkering to major paradigm shifts.

This is a complicated time in our nation's life. Not only are we coping with the losses and uncertainties of COVID-19, but national consciousness on matters of racism and police brutality has suddenly skyrocketed. Talk of change is in the air everywhere. Yet at the same time, people have been traumatized and are recovering from the loss, anger, frustration and anxiety brought about by COVID-19 and the recent murders of George Floyd of other innocent Black men and women. Some changes need to be immediate and are already happening, literally overnight. Others will take more time. The education sector, for example, has been traumatized by the school closings. It needs to recover its equilibrium before becoming open to embracing life-changing paradigm shifts. Nonetheless, now is the time for urgent, thoughtful contemplation of the ways in which this moment can be turned into a movement for major paradigm shifts. This is the time to call together all voices to envision changes which will, for example, eradicate childhood poverty, attack racism in all its forms, and improve the quality of our systems of child development and education to dramatically increase the well being and educational achievement and attainment of those who our education has least well served. The window for change will not be open forever and those who seek to take advantage of this moment for substantial system change must be prepared.

## SEVEN MAJOR SHIFTS FOR CONSIDERATION

### **BUILD CRADLE-TO-CAREER SUPPORT SYSTEMS TO ENABLE LIFELONG LEARNING**

If we are to prepare all of our children to fulfill their promise and be successful in work, citizenship, and family life, then we need to attack poverty and its insidious effects on families and children. Many other nations have long ago concluded that there is both a moral obligation and an economic imperative to have systems of universal health care, early childhood education, paid family leave, housing stability and access to nutritious food as minimum requirements for family stability and children's well being. Without addressing these challenges, it will be virtually impossible for schools, as we know them, no matter how significantly reformed, to be successful in doing what our leaders have appropriately asked schools to do: educate every child to high levels.

Given the rapidly and continuously changing requirements of 21st century work and democracy, nations will have to cultivate human talent as never before. To be successful in this century requires continuous learning through all stages of life. Continuous learning from the earliest stages of life to mature adulthood should be the norm if our citizens and society are to adapt to the changing economic environment and prosper in coming decades. Individual citizens and the entire society have a shared interest in lifelong learning. For individuals, the benefits are obvious starting with "the more you learn, the more you earn." There are clear ethical reasons to commit to having every child be given a fair chance to realize their full potential, but we have economic imperatives that necessitate educating our population to the maximum degree so that our nation can prosper and remain competitive in a 21st century, high-skill, high knowledge economy.

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We also desperately need a highly educated, media literate citizenry capable of discerning truth, recognizing evidence, and engaging in sophisticated analytical thinking. We need a much higher percentage of our citizenry to be motivated and prepared to actively participate in the civic life of our challenging democracy.

In coming years, human capital will be more important than ever to the prosperity of both our democracy and our economy. America has a long way to go in building a robust, nimble human capital development system to help our young people reach their full potential. Now is the time to redesign and rebuild.

As a starting point, we will need to reconceptualize society's simplistic idea of education. We must shatter the myth that our current K-12 education system is the great equalizer, single-handedly creating an equal opportunity society in spite of unprecedented inequality in income and wealth. It's a noble ideal, but the data over more than a century clearly prove that schools alone, even when substantially reformed, are too weak an intervention to deliver on the promise of giving all children a fair chance to succeed. It's a myth. Now, we must move from an old-fashioned, schoolhouse-bound model of child development and education to a system of robust, flexible learning opportunities coupled with basic supports available from birth through adulthood.

Our current K-12 school model consumes only 20 percent of a child's waking hours between the ages of 5 and 18. That's far too limited a strategy for schools to be expected to achieve world class standards and equalize achievement in a country with huge and widening gaps of income, wealth, and access to opportunity and social capital. Much more attention needs to be paid to equalizing children's access to the support and opportunities that pervade the 80 percent of affluent children's waking hours but are unavailable to their disadvantaged peers. Social mobility is steadily declining in the United States, and our systems of child development and education must be strengthened to reverse this insidious trend.

Our current, somewhat sentimental ideas about schooling have severely constrained our conception of education. We need to break down the barriers of time and space that lock us into the narrow confines of schools by preparing for an education system that provides learning opportunities literally anytime, anywhere. We now have

the technological tools and internet availability to do this even if, in the education sector, we haven't yet learned to use those tools very effectively. As we develop ed-tech facilities and capacity, we can begin to consider how we alter the structure and strategies of in-person education to maximize the value of critical learning relationships by creating structural and incentive changes to deepen and extend learning opportunities. Schooling conducted face to face, in person, at least in part will always be with us, but it needn't be the entirety of what we consider education.

A place to start building a new conception of education is in our utilization of time. We could begin by acting on the strong research evidence showing that access to summer learning matters: those who get it surge forward, those who don't fall back and suffer learning loss. Access to summer learning is generally controlled by family wealth and social capital. Instead, we should be designing a system in which summer learning and enrichment are available to every child, not just to those fortunate enough to receive access through the accident of birth and family wealth.

The same applies to learning opportunities after school, weekends, and holidays. It's time to bury our agrarian school calendar and substitute flexible, year-round learning (see [Chiefs for Change](#) and the [Texas Education Agency](#) for recent proposals on this topic). It's time to have a school schedule that reflects the realities of American family life in the 21st century. A 19th century approach to the use of school time won't do it.

Schedule changes are a prerequisite but not a substitute for major shifts in curriculum and instruction to deepen and broaden access to high quality, engaging learning opportunities. To do all of this, we'll need to contemplate changes in teacher roles and schedules, new educational personnel, utilizing part-timers and community members while modularizing various elements of the curriculum and other learning opportunities.

We'll need to much more aggressively partner with individuals and organizations in our communities who care about, and have capacity and experience, in supporting and educating young people. Education and child development can no longer be seen as the exclusive responsibility of the school system. Entire communities need to become involved in addressing the needs of young people by providing the learning, support, and

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opportunities children require to become full, contributing adults. Our local communities are closest to the young people and chock full of talented individuals, experienced youth, and community-serving organizations which can contribute to building, together with the school system, high-functioning cradle-to-career pipelines and lifelong learning systems that take full advantage of community assets.

Finally, we'll need to move beyond school boards to shape and govern a lifelong learning system. Our current systems of governance are too fragmented. Having separate boards for early childhood, K-12 and higher education to say nothing of health and employment means that our human development system is siloed, not integrated or comprehensive, not user-friendly and readily accessible to youth and families. Another problem is that these governance sub-systems are frequently so heavily influenced by various constituencies that children's interests take a back seat. Our governance systems need to be more representative, broader in scope, and more seriously engaged in matters of policy, accountability and connecting with the community.

New cross-agency governing bodies such as [Children's Cabinets](#) and "backbone" organizations should be created to design and implement cradle-to-career support systems, overseeing formal and informal systems of education, and systems of support and opportunity needed to assure that all children are prepared to succeed. Creating a "children's cabinet" and a robust coordinating organization offers a powerful solution to the challenge of educating all children to high levels. A children's cabinet is an action-focused, executive-level collaborative body that brings together agencies and organizations to create a coordinated agenda for children.

The children's cabinet is the lynchpin of the cross-sector collaboration, with responsibility for identifying top priorities and common goals, defining the role each entity can play in achieving them, developing strategies for carrying them out, tracking progress towards the goals, leveraging new resources, holding parties accountable for making progress, and communicating this progress to the public.

A variety of cabinet models exist. We favor cabinets led by a mayor, which include the superintendent and representatives from other entities with responsibility for or interest in children's education, opportunity, and

support. Creating a children's cabinet has both practical and symbolic value. When agency heads, community leaders, philanthropy heads, and other executives join the cabinet, it signals the high priority the community's leaders are putting on the welfare of its children. Structurally and programmatically, cabinets reshape the way communities serve children by bringing together leaders across sectors to make children's success a community-wide responsibility rather than one that rests primarily with schools.

Many powerful organizations across the country have worked on designs to advance some version or various aspects of the lifelong, holistic, integrated support vision described above. A few examples are [StriveTogether](#), [Communities in Schools](#), the [Coalition for Community Schools](#), [Children's Aid Society](#), [Harlem Children's Zone](#), [Say Yes to Education](#), [The Forum for Youth Investment](#), the [Social Genome Project](#), and the [Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink](#). These, and many others, are pointing the way to the theory, practice, and evaluation of a "broader, bolder" conception of what needs to be done to guarantee that every childhood has sufficient education, support, and opportunity—in short, every child has ready access to a real pathway to success.

### PROFESSIONALIZE FULL ACCESS, HIGH QUALITY, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Lifelong learning, as a right, should begin at birth. For years, brain science has shown that early childhood experiences significantly impact longer term health, educational, and economic outcomes. The evidence is still incontrovertible: the most highly leveraged investments in education come in early childhood when children's brains are growing, developing and vulnerable. Yet, the early childhood sector is the least adequately funded, least accessible, and least professionalized component of our education system. The closures of childcare centers due to the pandemic and the new safety requirements will mean many underfunded centers will close, making the already financially strapped sector even more fragile. The gaps in access and quality are well-known and seldom addressed. Early education teachers and personnel are woefully underpaid and, consequently, staff turnover in this field is unacceptably high while attracting talent to the field is extremely challenging. States struggle to promote quality improvement systems yet the lack of staffing continuity and general underfunding of the sector makes it difficult to enact high standards of quality.

Chronic, gross underfunding of this sector is the central problem. To wit, the most influential paradigm shift in this sector would be to raise teacher salaries and place them on a par with those of K-12 teachers. However costly, salary parity would bring about a sea change in the field. Secondly, early childhood, because of the shaky state of its finances, is too often thought of as important for 3-5-year-olds, but as a luxury from ages 0-3. While 80 percent of childhood brain growth occurs before age 3 and approximately half of children living in poverty in the U.S. begin school unequipped with foundational knowledge and skills, we do not have policies and supports to create anything approximating full access to the necessary supports and development interventions in the earliest years.

These are also the years in which children's brains are highly susceptible to trauma. We know that the fewer adversities a child experiences, the more likely they are to develop into a healthy adult. Much more protection and prevention work needs to be done with this age group, not only for the children, but also for and with families of our youngest people. Trauma sensitive schools and other related organizations will be essential in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Organizations like [Turnaround for Children](#) have provided strong leadership in the theory, science and practice of trauma sensitive practices and learning environments.

To advance this field overall, greater federal, state and local funding and policies are needed as are philanthropic investments. Community organizations, like Children's Cabinets, can provide leadership, coordination and advocacy for the appropriate policies and investments. The business community has been a powerful ally and champion for increased attention and funding to the early childhood sector.

Some promising examples of proven policies and programs include maternal health care, paid family leave, and home visiting programs.

- **Maternal Health Care:** Without access to health care, a mother is less likely to receive the prenatal health support that enables healthy births. Access to health care must be a universal right.
- **Paid Family Leave:** The United States is one of the only countries in the world—and the only OECD member—that does not require businesses to offer paid maternity leave to employees. Longer

maternity leave is associated with a reduction in post neonatal and child mortality.

- **Home Visitation:** High quality home visiting programs have proven to be effective in improving positive health and educational outcomes for children and parents. As an example, one of the most effective early childhood support programs is the [Nurse-Family Partnership](#), which helps young first-time moms-to-be starting in early pregnancy and continuing through the child's second birthday. Another program with an impressive track record can be found at [HIPPI International](#). For thought leadership in this domain, the [Center on the Developing Child](#) (Harvard) has done extraordinary work. Forty years of research evidence shows that these kinds of programs yield significant reductions in child abuse and neglect, reduction in ER visits, and fewer behavioral and intellectual problems in children at age six.

### INTEGRATED, PERSONALIZED EDUCATION AND SUPPORT

Perhaps the biggest shift of all would be to discard our factory system, "one size fits all", mass production approach to education, replacing it with one that meets each child where they are and gives them what they need to be successful inside and outside of school. Such a personalized, customized approach begins with each child being seen and understood by adults within the education system, with families and educators coming together to decide what that child needs both inside and outside of school in order to thrive, achieve well being, and be successful. This approach would require major restructuring of the existing systems, moving to a case management model, more like a medical system. It requires a mindset that distinguishes equity from equality and focuses on a fair system that is responsive to each child. Equality is giving every child the same, while equity is giving each child what they need to achieve success.

This kind of customized system requires great cultural sensitivity given the diversity of our country. This will be a major reach for the education system, but is a prerequisite for educating each child to his or her full potential.

A personalized system is not exclusively, or even primarily, focused on academics, but also takes into account social and emotional learning and children's widely varying circumstances outside of school. Such considerations, in themselves, are a major shift for our education systems.

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However, this is not the work for schools alone, because schools generally do not have the scope or capacity to solve pressing, out of school challenges that impede student learning. In consequence, schools, operating on their own with a predominantly academic mission, have definitively proven not to have the capacity to equalize opportunity for young people in the United States. Mountains of data attest to this, not least of which are the data that persistently show the correlation between children's socio-economic status and their educational achievement and attainment. Our only hope of breaking this iron law correlation is an individualized strategy that customizes education, opportunity, and support to meet the unique needs of each child.

A paradigm shift to personalization, to individual success planning for each child, will require a community-wide, comprehensive system beginning with integrated student supports i.e. coordination between the education system and a wide array of child and youth-centered partners who deeply and regularly collaborate to meet young peoples' needs.

Integrated student supports (ISS), a concept that has been in use for decades, was further described in a book entitled "[Broader, Bolder, Better: How Schools and Communities Help Students Overcome the Disadvantages of Poverty](#)," which my colleague Elaine Weiss and I published in 2019. We describe how various communities are coming together to offer children the kinds of supports and opportunities that are always available to children born into privilege, but often denied to disadvantaged children. ISS envisions a system in which every child receives the nurturance, health care, support, and stability they need to come to school every day ready to learn. Further, ISS pushes to provide students the kind of out of school learning opportunities in summer and after school that are not equitably available. The basic theory of action is that until we do for all children, in the way of opportunity and support, what those of us who have privilege do for our own, then there is no hope of schools, by themselves, preparing all children for success.

Personalized [Success Plans](#) (Harvard's [Education Redesign Lab](#)) tailored to each and every young person are an especially promising strategy, and there is a growing body of research about their impact. These personalized plans are tools as well as processes for capturing the full range of strengths and needs of children and youth in order to connect them with tailored, seamless, and equitable

services and opportunities. Conceptually, the plans represent our commitment to meet all children and youth where they are and give them what they need, inside of school and out, to be successful.

Practically, Success Plans are logical tools with which to build new systems focused on *individual* needs. The development of Success Plans for each student is a major undertaking with serious implications for staffing, data gathering, and privacy to name just some of the biggest challenges, but the benefits to students, teachers, and families are substantial. Strategically, the adoption of a student success planning approach signals the end of the factory model of education and the start of an era in which each child is seen and matters.

### EQUITABLE ONLINE LEARNING

The COVID-19 crisis has catapulted a reluctant education sector into the 21st century world of educational technology. We've always been laggards when compared to the private sector or medicine. Now, it's time for catch up. Whether students physically return to school in the fall or not, we've now been forced to recognize the power and potential of online learning. We now have to transition from the early stages of emergency adaptations we have seen this spring, to effective, intentional best practices to be implemented in the fall.

In order to do this, we'll need to get everyone the equipment they need to participate online, then every student's home will need wifi/internet access. Districts will need to make informed decisions about platforms, applications, and curricula to be delivered online and teachers will need training. Families will need technical support to get hooked up and educational guidance in how to best support their learners. Finally, we'll need tutors, curators, and other new educational role players to support the operation of a 24/7, 365-day learning system. This is a heavy lift and will not be fully accomplished by the fall, but necessity has dictated progress, and the field is already making headway.

It's impossible to overstate the impact of the sudden, profound shift to online learning brought about by COVID-19. The genie is now out of the bottle in the world of education, and it's a safe prediction that things will never be the same. The advent of online learning will open up a vast array of opportunities, while at the same time presenting school systems, teachers, families, and students with an overwhelming number of choices about

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technical and substantive education matters—choices many will not have the capacity, information, expertise, and experience to make. National organizations, federal and state governments, and entrepreneurs of all kinds can be helpful in curating the choices and supplying evidence to help key players make informed decisions. District leaders are going to have to commit to a substantial investment in professional development to help teachers, many of whom have limited experience in this area, to adapt to, and ultimately embrace, new tools and modalities.

This embrace of contemporary educational technology must be guided by relentless attention to all the dimensions of equity raised by greater reliance on technology. All of the dimensions of tech adoption, from equipment, to internet access, to training and support, to parental capacities and access, to technical assistance, have the potential to either close or widen the “digital divide.” Great care must be taken to close that divide and use these new tools to create a better, fairer distribution of learning opportunities.

A sequenced acceptance of educational technology is a multi-year process and requires thoughtful staging. Demands will be high in the near term for school systems to shift from the emergency tech adaptations made in the face of a precipitous crisis, to a more intentional embrace of best practices and the development of a permanent, integrated system of educational technology. These changes won't happen overnight, but, in time, they will have a profound effect on learning possibilities and access to opportunity for children all across the country.

Not only will the delivery of education change, but the content will change (see section on Deeper Learning) while new challenges such as nurturing the relationships at the heart of education will be front and center. Thought leaders in this domain include [Summit Learning](#), [School of One](#), the [Christiansen Institute](#), the [Florida Virtual School](#), and [Next Generation Learning](#).

### DESIGN FOR NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS

The biggest casualty of COVID-19 school closings has been relationships between students and their peers and educators. Top priority must be given this fall, whether schooling is conducted in person or online, to designing our education systems to prioritize high quality, interpersonal relationships. Education, as reflected in the Mandarin language, is about teaching and nurturance.

Our current education system is populated by teachers who care deeply about nurturance, but generally the structures and incentives of the system ignore the necessity of relationships. A paradigm shift in this area will require new roles for teachers and staff, new, more flexible personnel, changes in accountability measures to also prioritize students' well being and connectedness, as well as changes in structure, particularly in middle and secondary schools, where current structures often work against quality relationship formation. No student should go through a school year anonymously. Practices like 1:400 guidance counselor to student ratios, teachers seeing 150 students a week, students juggling six or seven classes at a time must be reconsidered and replaced.

Each child needs an educator advocate who follows that child for the duration of their experience in a particular school. Secondary school homerooms should all be converted to “advisories,” periods of time when teachers and students interact for a few hours each week on respective journeys through the education system, their challenges, their families, their hopes and needs as they navigate through the turbulent waters of adolescence in a changing society. Teachers crave deeper relationships with their students and tools like success plans provide processes for permanently building those relationships.

Extracurricular activities are critical also. They are often the chief motivators drawing young people to school and should be prioritized, rather than cut the moment budget pressure increases. These activities from sports to music to community service are powerful means for building student confidence and motivation. They are also ideal venues for developing high quality, working relationships between students, their peers, and the adults in their communities. Through intensive, extended engagement, students will draw strength and resilience from their relationships with peers and educators.

This emphasis on nurturing high quality educational relationships, especially mentoring and advocacy for each individual student, is not just a response to this crisis but a necessary, permanent reform to our education system. This need will also increase in direct proportion to our utilization of remote learning tools and processes.

### FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

For too long, the education system has, with some notable exceptions, given lip service to the importance of family engagement. In reality, most schools, most of

the time, regard family engagement as a “nice to do” secondary or tertiary task. In the worst cases, schools sometimes ignored family engagement altogether, trivialized it by over focusing on parents’ attendance at meetings, or simply regarded family involvement as a nuisance. Suddenly, the COVID-19 crisis has irretrievably thrust families into the very center of the education equation. While educators have long recognized that families are the first and long-term teachers of the children, too little has been done to enlist the partnership of parents in the educational mission of the schools. With all children learning at home in the fourth quarter of this academic year, we’ve learned that if a “one size fits all” approach doesn’t work very well for students, it works even less well for families because of the wide variability in family circumstances, home environments, parent/guardian availability due to job requirements, language barriers, technology familiarity, and general education background.

There is an urgent need now to establish mechanisms of communication, relationship-building, guidance, support, and technical assistance—all targeted toward helping parents to be effective supporters and nurturers of student learning. Family empowerment needs to be a top priority for leaders, school accountability systems, and educator training. Many challenges of language and culture exist in this field, and cross-cultural competency for educators will be of paramount importance and should be essential parts of pre-service and in-service training. Again, in this area, we are blessed by examples of many schools which already have fully engaged, parent partnership programs. There are also outstanding examples of individuals and organizations from the [National PTA](#) to Karen Mapp (Harvard) and her [Dual Capacity Framework](#) to [1647: Connecting Families & Schools](#), the [KIPP Schools](#), and many more who have long track records in trying to build effective school-family partnerships. Now is the time for a breakthrough in this area. Now is the time for genuine, communicative, collaborative partnerships between educators and parents.

The kinds of changes being proposed here are generational in nature, just as the opportunities and interventions designed to achieve equity and excellence in education must be extended over generations. Those working on family centered, multi-generational support and development are leading the way in a broader concept, beyond a simple school-based strategy, for

assuring the health and well being of students by recognizing and acting on the idea that in order for the child to flourish, the family must be healthy and stable. Interventions targeted at parents and guardians are critical. The work of the [Northside Achievement Zone](#) (Minneapolis) and [EMPath](#) is exemplary in this field.

### DEEPER LEARNING

The core of the education portion of child development is, and should continue to be, teaching and learning. However, our current models of curriculum and instruction have proven, well before the current crisis, not to be effective with significant proportions of our students. The advent of large-scale online learning has only compounded the need for radically redesigned approaches to curriculum and instruction. There is no shortage of theory, research, and best practice examples to inform this shift, but a shift must happen. Students need to be engaged, to be connected, to experience rigor and relevance in their schoolwork. For too many children, that’s not happening now.

It’s time to enhance student agency in learning, to individually customize curriculum and instruction, to focus on real world applications of knowledge and skill, employing projects, simulations, and utilizing students’ local environments. As mentioned above, it’s time to be intentional about creating environments and incentives for building meaningful, ongoing student-teacher relationships and positive group and team-building dynamics among students. All the while, education needs to be substantially increasing the emphasis on the interpersonal and social emotional skills employers are now demanding. Organizations and models to lead the way in this kind of work are virtually unlimited: Jal Mehta’s work on “[Deeper Learning](#)”, [Jobs for the Future’s](#) initiatives on career pathways, [Year Up](#), [The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading](#), [CASEL’s](#) framework on social and emotional learning, [Big Picture’s](#) experience in community-based and project based applied learning, [High Tech High](#), mastery learning, [Next Generation Learning](#), the [Center for Curriculum Redesign](#), [BELLxcel](#), [Summit Learning](#), [Teach to One](#) and countless others can point the way.

Teaching will change dramatically with the advent of online tools and platforms. Teachers will need extensive professional development opportunities in order for them not only to transfer their curricula online, but, even if school is in-person, to learn how to use the tools of

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technology to enhance instruction and extend learning opportunities to students in non-school hours. Our schools are generally well behind the curve in adopting 21st century tools for instructional purposes. Now is the time to surge forward.

Professional development will also be required for teachers to develop new curricula, applied learning opportunities, parent engagement strategies, personalized student success plans, and strategies for nurturing student relationships. New approaches to staffing and scheduling, and more flexible, nimble professional structures must be developed. This kind of professional learning will take time, and must be teacher led, designed by and for teachers, but drawing on the expertise of early adopters, experts, and tech leaders from other sectors. These changes in teacher role and practice are essential for any of these paradigm shifts to work, but in order for changes in roles and practice to happen, schools must emphasize learning for the adults every bit as much as for the children.

It is time to envision significant shifts in how the delivery of education is organized. Once again, the current crisis creates a “necessity is the mother of invention” moment. With schools for the foreseeable future operating in limited and interrupted ways because of the COVID-19 threats, schools and entrepreneurs are already contemplating the modularization of education, offering new packages of content in new ways, contemplated by educators in different roles. Math education might come through one channel, while science education comes through another. One sub-contractor might specialize in arranging virtual internships while another might develop a set of online simulations. Organizations like [City Year](#) with national service corps members might supply talented young, aspiring educators to be the connective tissue between schools, teachers, and families, offering support on everything from internet connections to off-site tutoring. On the other hand, states might strengthen already promising efforts to offer state-wide classes by some of the top teachers to be curated and supported locally by resident teachers and aides. Building on the experience of innovative online providers like [Southern University of New Hampshire](#), K-12 educators can begin to redesign a system for the future, one that will have value and endurance well beyond the current crisis.

### LEADERSHIP

In order to take advantage of these opportunities,

we will need leadership. We must have leaders with a special blend of traits and skills including courage, social justice values, persistence, interpersonal skills, empathy, listening, imagination yielding vision, trust, and political acuity to move an agenda of change.

Especially important will be:

#### *Vision*

Leaders will bring clarity to the challenge of system redesign, seeing that poverty, race, and disadvantage matter and must be addressed; that schools alone are not enough to provide children with equal opportunity; that a new social compact is needed between communities and families; that society has paramount moral and economic imperatives to educate all children, and all means all, to high levels; that our ideals of excellence and equity are not being realized, but could be if we created a system intentionally designed to achieve that equal opportunity society. Throughout the process of change, the vision must sustain our ideals of an excellent and equitable society that prepares all its children for work, citizenship, family life, lifelong learning, and personal fulfillment.

#### *Strategy*

To build an equal opportunity society which levels the playing field between those who enjoy the learning benefits of privilege, financial, and social capital, and those who don't is a monumental challenge and will require sweeping changes and highly effective strategy. Such a system resembles a cradle-to-career pipeline with highly functioning, core, component systems of early childhood, K-12 and post-secondary education. These subsystems must be full-access and high quality. Wrapped around the core pipeline are complementary systems of support and opportunity that make it possible for each child to have what they need to show up to school each day throughout the K-12 years “ready to learn” and to take full advantage of an optimized schooling system. Strategy selection will be key to making all this happen.

#### *Timing*

Leaders will need to know what to do and when to do it. Leaders will understand when the opportunities for change present themselves and when the people are too weary and traumatized to consider change. They will know that trust is essential to moving change, that change often means loss, shedding old ways, and that addressing the anxiety of embracing new ways and

creating safety for those willing to do it is essential. This is especially true in a time of crisis such as the present.

### CHALLENGES

To make any, let alone several of these changes, will require attention not only to the leadership characteristics mentioned earlier but also to an array of potential challenges and potential impediments. Among them:

#### ***Scarce, highly contested resources***

Needs are urgent in all fields of government and human endeavor right now. The competition for scarce resources will be fierce and the economy is likely to be struggling for some years to come. Taxpayers and policymakers will have agonizing decisions to make about budgets. While some believe that significant change is best precipitated in times of recession, when organizations are forced to do more with less, others worry that the lack of financing for capacity building and program development will guarantee that recovery looks a lot like a restoration of the status quo. It will be impossible to generate the necessary resources to assure equitable systems for all children to succeed without changes in tax policy. Philanthropy should not be funding basic services and supports in our society.

#### ***Focused attention, urgency***

Like financing, public attention is a scarce and valued commodity. Urgent needs for rebuilding the economy, bringing back jobs, attacking racism and police brutality, homelessness, food scarcity, criminal justice reform, and health care, to name a few, will compete for the public's attention with the redesign of our child development and education systems proposed in this paper. Furthermore, we cannot have an effective education system if the population's basic human needs are unmet. Education should not be competing for funds with children's and family's health care or nutrition. However, human capital development systems, which is what our outdated school systems are, urgently need attention. We must recognize that building human capital is an essential long-term investment for which today's leaders must make a compelling case in order to focus the public's near-term attention on these needs.

#### ***Adult interests***

There is always some measure of both overlap and tension between the interests of children and the interests of adults when considering fundamental

change in basic systems. The biggest enemy of reform is complacency and the inertia of the status quo, the tendency of reform to be modestly incremental and complement existing structures, interests and power relationships within existing systems. To overcome resistance from change that arises from virtually all constituencies in the education and human development sector, leaders must create a compelling value proposition for working differently and a safe environment that allows people on the front lines to embrace change. For example, the kinds of paradigm shifts described above will require unprecedented levels of flexibility, imagination and innovation from both management and labor unions in education.

#### ***Governance and accountability***

Big shifts involving big changes in "business as usual" and significant investment of public resources will require oversight, reconsideration of governance mechanisms, and new tools for assessment and accountability. For example, it would be worth examining whether our existing structures for governing the work of educating and developing children are best suited to the kind of lifelong learning, holistic view of child development advanced in this paper. To take the schooling system alone, saying nothing about all the child welfare agencies, our governance mechanisms are generally fragmented into early childhood, elementary and secondary, and higher education silos. Wouldn't it make more sense to create an overarching governance system providing oversight and integration that is consistent and complementary across all levels? Or, wouldn't it be better, as suggested above, to have local children's cabinets, in every community or region to coordinate policy, resources and programs to optimize healthy child development and effective education?

At the level of service delivery, many of the proposed paradigm shifts would require new, different, more refined instruments of assessment and evaluation which would serve as the basis for a broader and deeper accountability system. In education, for example, there is a growing awareness of the need to nurture children's social and emotional development, to enhance their interpersonal skills which are essential to workplace success, to strengthen their relationships to teachers and mentors and their capacities to work in groups as they will in future jobs, yet we lack valid and reliable assessment tools to measure how schools are contributing to children's growth in these and other areas. To be sure, there is

promising national work going on in organizations like [CASEL](#) and [PEAR](#) on these topics, but the state of the art is early stage and adoption of these tools is the exception rather than the rule. We continue to need ever more sophisticated tools for measuring students' academic progress, for both diagnostic and accountability purposes. However, to shift the paradigms, we'll need a much more robust system.

It will be especially challenging to develop evaluation tools to measure the "value-added" of our formal institutions of child development and education in terms beyond relatively simple measures of academic achievement. For example, what kinds of tools and protocols would be necessary to measure how and to what degree a particular school effectively cultivates strong working relationships with parents, high levels of student engagement, and successful student teamwork on applied learning projects? How do we determine whether each child has an effective adult mentor/counselor or whether student advisories are adding value? Ultimately, how do we do a much better job of determining the degree to which our schools are preparing our young people to be successful in college and career, allowing them to attain at least middle-class status by middle age? Assistance in the area of evaluation can be found at the [Center for Education Policy Research](#) (Harvard).

### **POLICY, POLITICS, AND PUBLIC WILL**

Many of the paradigm shifts proposed can be advanced in various ways by existing policies such as Medicaid or the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). At the same time, changes in existing policies will also be required. For example, the return to school will necessitate significant shifts in ESSA policy about assessment and accountability. Some established policies make room, if thoroughly examined, for a number of the kinds of changes envisioned in this paper, as do various state and local policies. Leaders at all levels commonly under-utilize their own existing powers to make change because the resistance to change is often formidable and usually has political costs. At the same time, new policies will be required to enact many of the contemplated paradigm shifts, and in order to engineer such policy changes, leaders will have to be thoughtful and strategic in crafting language and building coalitions to support the kind of sea changes that will bring our education and human development systems into the 21st century.

The COVID-19 crisis coupled with the George Floyd murder and aftermath have revealed profound and disturbing realities to the general public, creating a moment of opportunity for change and advancing equity. True leaders will know how to seize this opportunity to make change, whether it's as simple as guaranteeing that every family has the education technology and internet access to make online learning an effective strategy for all, or whether it's as complex as assuring that all of our citizens, especially our children, have access to quality health care and nutrition.

All of these endeavors will require the building of public will. Organizing and listening to the public, the parents, students, and community members, the presumed beneficiaries of the proposed paradigm shifts, will be an essential departure point. Incorporating their perspective in final policy products is imperative. People support what they help create.

There are natural and deep constituencies for some of the proposed changes while others will be met with stiff opposition. Not everyone agrees, for example, that schools have any business in developing children's social and emotional capacities in spite of employers' insistence that these skills matter. Opponents will complain of government overreach. Others will fight for the interests of adults, of privilege, of race, of jobs, money, and other prerogatives. Skillful leadership and widespread public demand can overcome such resistance, but not without deep strategic thought and organizing. The kinds of changes proposed here will only be successfully implemented if they are made top priorities rather than incidental things to accomplish. Adopting measures like these will require visionary leadership, the kind we have seen in our work, and in communities all across this country.

There are numerous thought-leading organizations in the policy and finance space. To name just a few: the [Learning Policy Institute](#), [Education Resource Strategies](#), the [Center on Reinventing Public Education](#) (University of Washington), the [National Center on Education and the Economy](#), the [Children's Funding Project](#), and the [Center for Educational Equity](#) (Columbia). One state which has taken the lead with some exemplary legislation is Maryland and its Springboard for Maryland's Future. Indicative of the political challenges facing bold policy making, the bill has not been signed by the Governor, but it has substantial political support throughout the state.

### CONCLUSION

Meeting these challenges is the stuff of leadership. We desperately need leaders to envision, embrace, and enact a bold new agenda for preparing our young people to be successful in work, citizenship and life.

Each of the potential paradigm shifts described in this paper will require monumental effort to enact. Any one of these changes would have a substantial impact on young people's prospects for success. Taken together, any combination of multiple shifts has the potential to dramatically magnify the positive impact on children.

To conceive of learning as lifelong, to bolster a neglected system of early education, to approach our children as unique individuals and customize education to meet their particular needs, to deepen learning by making it more engaging, student and project centered, to intentionally cultivate and celebrate relationships between students and their teachers, to meaningfully engage families for the first time ever, and to embrace and capitalize on the tools of technology—all of these shifts, taken together, would revolutionize education and child development in the United States. These paradigm shifts would provide the foundation for migrating our outdated, outmoded system away from its early 20th century roots and into the bright light and new challenges of the 21st century.

Through it all, we must firmly fix our sights on building a system that is both excellent and, above all, equitable. We cannot do this without taking into account factors like poverty, racism, special needs, immigration, and the challenges of learning English. We can do far better than what we are doing now. This crisis gives us an unprecedented opportunity to seize the moment and create a movement to redesign our strategies and structures for developing and educating our children. Let's not miss the opportunity and revert by defaulting to the status quo ante. Let's move forward!

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# SPRINGBOARD FOR EQUITABLE RECOVERY & RESILIENCE IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS AMERICA: LIFELONG LEARNING FROM CRADLE TO CAREER

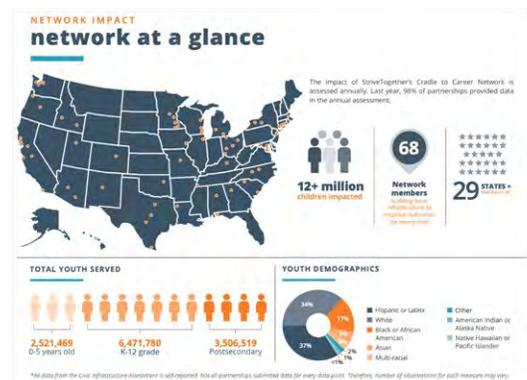
## DEEP DIVE 2 OF 2

[StriveTogether](#) is building a world where a child's potential isn't dictated by race, ethnicity, zip code, or circumstance. We are a national movement that advances equity and justice for over 12 million young people, cradle to career. In partnership with nearly 70 communities across 29 states and Washington, DC, we work upstream to dismantle the cycle of inequitable outcomes by redesigning the systems that were not designed to support the success of Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Communities of Color across the country.<sup>1</sup> We are a network of community leaders, justice fighters and systems changers striving toward a shared vision of upward economic mobility. Partners include youth, families, residents and community leaders in government, philanthropy, business, education, early learning, employment, housing, health and human services. Our network members close disparity gaps and improve outcomes for young people.

The movement began with a group of local leaders in Cincinnati in 2006 who forged a community-wide partnership to build a new civic infrastructure to organize how they worked. They developed shared accountability for a vision that improved results for every child, cradle to career. StriveTogether was founded in 2011 to support a network of communities across the country that all want the best for every child.

Through the Cradle to Career Network, these communities use a common approach,<sup>2</sup> challenge each

other, share their expertise and show what's possible when we work together.



### CURRENT STATE

In a better world, the well-being of children would not be shaped by where they live or how they are racialized. Instead, youth and families would thrive in healthy, safe communities.<sup>3</sup>

We know racism is the root of many problems across the country. Communities are situated differently in relation to well-being and opportunity. Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian communities each have their own experiences of racism.<sup>4</sup> Intersectionality is crucial to equity work.<sup>5</sup> The different identities we hold overlap and affect how we experience discrimination. Examples are race, ethnicity,

1 For more information about StriveTogether and our impact, visit <https://www.strivetogether.org>

2 The common approach used by all members of the StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network is the Theory of Action™, available here: <https://www.strivetogether.org/what-we-do/theory-of-action/>. It was evaluated by a third-party evaluation firm, Equal Measure, which found clear and consistent patterns of civic infrastructure development across diverse partnerships in accordance with the Theory of Action: [https://www.strivetogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ST-Evaluation-Executive-Summary\\_Final-for-Discussion\\_14June19.pdf](https://www.strivetogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ST-Evaluation-Executive-Summary_Final-for-Discussion_14June19.pdf)

3 Excerpted from the StriveTogether Racial Equity Statement: [https://www.strivetogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racial-Equity-Statement\\_March2020.pdf](https://www.strivetogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racial-Equity-Statement_March2020.pdf)

4 For more information about Opportunity Structures, review resources from the Othering & Belonging Institute, including the Othering & Belonging Framework: <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/othering-belonging-framework-analysis-fair-and-inclusive-society-communities-creating-opportunity>

5 For more information about intersectionality, review resources from Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, including Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mapping-margins.pdf>

## LIFELONG LEARNING: CRADLE TO CAREER | DEEP DIVE 2 OF 2

class, gender identity and sexual orientation. We must take into account their cumulative effect to understand the complexity of prejudices people face. Otherwise, efforts to remedy inequities in one group could perpetuate injustice toward another.

Research has consistently shown that where children live significantly impacts whether they prosper and thrive as adults. Data from [Opportunity Insights](#) reveals stark nationwide variation: children raised in neighborhoods experiencing extreme poverty in Memphis, Tennessee, go on to make just \$16,000 a year as adults while children from families of similar means in Minneapolis suburbs made four times as much as adults.<sup>6</sup> Even within communities, disparities are vast. In the heart of Chicago, Illinois, residents of predominantly black West Garfield Park can expect to live to age 69 while residents of the Loop, just a 15-minute train ride away, can expect to live to age 85, according to Virginia Commonwealth University on mapping life expectancy.<sup>7</sup> In poverty-stricken pockets of rural America, children face higher infant mortality rates, have limited access to essential education and health resources, and experience adverse childhood experiences, as outlined by analysis by [Save the Children](#).<sup>8</sup>

COVID-19 has unmasked long-standing inequities in our communities. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and communities facing extreme poverty are suffering the brunt of the pandemic because of structural and institutional racism leading to inequities in systems like education, employment, health care, housing, environmental conditions, and food security. The need to transform systems and provide immediate relief to support youth and families and create a more equitable future for everyone has never felt more urgent.

In communities across the country, common factors are contributing to inequities. Across diverse contexts of partnerships within the [StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network](#), common themes are emerging regarding the disruptions and anticipated long-term impacts of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of young people, cradle to

career:<sup>9</sup>

- Digital divide: Many communities lack access to devices and broadband internet, leading to limited ability for children to navigate remote learning opportunities.
- Child care: Child care is only being provided for essential workers. Child care and early learning centers are at risk of not reopening, creating a gap in quality early learning.
- Health care: Black and Latinx families are at higher risk of fatal illnesses and many will not seek medical treatment because of historic inequities within the health care system.
- Food security: Many students depend on schools for two meals every day, but with schools closed, they risk going hungry.
- Housing and income: Unbanked and underbanked families are at risk, as are families with high levels of mobility.
- Language access: Non-English-speaking families have even more difficulty accessing support like internet access, educational resources, and mental health services.
- Undocumented status: Families that are undocumented are not receiving supports they need to stay safe and healthy, including stimulus checks.
- Learning loss: Due to the digital divide, competing commitments (like caring for siblings or working) and reduced teacher effectiveness, students of color and students experiencing poverty are falling further behind academically.

In response to these common factors contributing to inequities, cradle-to-career partnerships are serving as change agents in crisis:

### **TAKING UP THE ROLE OF CONVENER TO REDUCE DUPLICATION OF RELIEF EFFORTS AND ALIGN AND TARGET SUPPORTS TO POPULATIONS**

6 This is just one of many data points from Opportunity Insights highlighted in the New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/01/up-shot/maps-neighborhoods-shape-child-poverty.html>

7 For more information on Virginia Commonwealth University's series of life expectancy maps, visit <https://societyhealth.vcu.edu/work/the-projects/mapping-life-expectancy.html>

8 For more details, read Save the Children's report, Growing Up in Rural America, the U.S. complement to the End of Childhood Report: <https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/global/reports/2018-end-of-childhood-report-us.pdf>

9 For some examples of how cradle-to-career partnerships are responding to the COVID-19 crisis, read <https://www.strivetgether.org/insights/collective-impact-partnerships-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>

### IN OUR CIRCLE OF HUMAN CONCERN.

In Tacoma, Washington, [Graduate Tacoma](#) quickly partnered with the local Urban League to establish an [online hub](#) to share resources on everything from food and housing assistance to at-home activities with community residents. [E3 Alliance](#), which serves Central Texas, is working to mobilize volunteer mentors and tutors to support graduating high school seniors as they prepare to transition to postsecondary opportunities.<sup>10</sup> This isn't just a recovery response—the region intends to grow and accelerate this practice in the future to ensure all young people have the guidance and resources they need when making a major life transition.

### USING DATA AND STORIES TO AMPLIFY RACIAL INEQUITIES EXACERBATED BY THIS CRISIS

[ImpactTulsa](#), in Tulsa, Oklahoma, leveraged their role as data experts and built on earlier work on a [Child Equity Index](#) to create internet access maps by census tracts. The team supports school districts in using this data to adapt their response to make education accessible to all students.

In collaboration with the local school district, [Northfield Promise](#), in Northfield, Minnesota, used Tableau to [create maps](#) of students without internet access and maps of lower-income neighborhoods to guide food delivery route planning. With data at their fingertips, teachers and district staff can target outreach to students.

### WORKING WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES TO CREATE LASTING CHANGE

Engaging young people and co-developing strategies has stayed core to [Baltimore's Promise's](#) approach amidst the crisis. In Baltimore, Maryland, young adults connected to the [Grads2Careers](#) program have served as ambassadors to ongoing projects and provided input on evolving strategies, while getting support and mentoring. Baltimore's Promise compensates these young leaders for their time by using Cash App instead of gift cards.

In San Antonio, Texas, [UP Partnership](#) is actively engaging young people in its organizational structure to center their voice and experiences in policies and strategies.

<sup>10</sup> Learn more about the work of E3 Alliance through this case study: <https://www.strivetogether.org/our-impact/case-studies/e3-alliance/>

<sup>11</sup> Learn more about the work of Promise Partnership of Salt Lake through this case study: <https://www.strivetogether.org/our-impact/case-studies/promise-partnership-of-salt-lake-city/>

<sup>12</sup> As of June 1, the coalition of partners includes StriveTogether, The Center for the Study of Social Policy, Enterprise Community Partners, Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Ounce of Prevention Fund, The Educare Learning Network, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Strong Prosperous and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC), Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) and Results for America. More partners will be joining the coalition in the coming weeks.

The partnership hired two youth interns who inform the decisions of [Our Tomorrow](#), a network of young people across San Antonio building power and policy to shape the future they want to live in. These interns play a key role in infusing intergenerational leadership across the partnership by advising on matters of strategy, hiring and communications.

### INFLUENCING INVESTORS TO ALIGN RESOURCES AND ADVOCATING FOR POLICY CHANGE

[Partners for Education at Berea College](#), which serves 54 rural counties in Appalachian Kentucky, is advocating with partners for federal legislation, the Success for Rural Students and Communities Act of 2020. If successful, the legislation will increase enrollment and completion rates, advance rural economic development, promote economic growth and foster innovation.

[Norwalk ACTS](#) in Norwalk, Connecticut, has been building relationships across the community and with funders. Now, Norwalk ACTS is leveraging those relationships to connect funders with service providers who need support. They are using data collected through surveys and weekly calls to make strategic connections to sustain community organizations.

In addition to designing and implementing the state of Utah's emergency child care program, [Promise Partnership of Salt Lake](#) is leading a state task force to create a stabilization program for the child care sector so that there is a transformed and more resilient system in place for the long haul.<sup>11</sup>

To support the long-term sustainability of efforts like these, StriveTogether is working in solidarity with a broad coalition of partners<sup>12</sup> to advance an [Equitable Recovery Pledge to Transform Systems and Advance Racial and Ethnic Equity](#). This broad, cross-sector coalition of local decision-makers and municipal leaders in government, philanthropy, business, education, health and human services advance this Equitable Recovery Pledge for the well-being of children, families and community members, centering People of Color and creating solutions together, with particular attention to the Black, Indigenous, Latinx,

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and Asian communities that continue to be harmed by oppressive systems and wide inequities. We are dedicated to the principles outlined by [PolicyLink's Principles for a Common-sense, Street-smart Recovery](#) to build an inclusive economy and equitable nation that works for all by:

- Centering racial equity.
- Putting people first.
- Investing in community infrastructure.
- Building an equitable economy.
- Protecting and expanding community voice and power.

### CHANGING COURSE FROM CURRENT TO FUTURE STATE

To support the development of more just and equitable systems and structures as we navigate a path out of this crisis, we must address and acknowledge the unique expertise, assets, and needs of each community. We must break down policies and power structures that fail youth and families of color. Racial and ethnic equity is necessary to help every child succeed in school and in life. This requires a commitment to anti-racist policies, practices, and behaviors.

It will take concerted, aligned efforts to improve at a national level. When leaders at all levels, across all sectors, align actions centered in community experience toward systems transformation, we can advance social, economic, health, and racial equity and achieve results at scale. We cannot settle for going back to normal. Normal for many people means living paycheck to paycheck. Normal means waiting to seek medical care because you cannot afford to get sick. Normal means worrying more about where you and your children will sleep tonight than helping them complete their schoolwork. Normal was never good for many of us and COVID-19 is only making conditions worse for People of Color and those living in poverty.

Our ultimate vision is systems transformation and upward economic mobility: a fundamental and institutionalized shift away from policies, relationships, resources, and power structures that burden youth and families of color, as well as youth and families experiencing poverty, with the goal of achieving the result of equitable well-being at the population level for every child, cradle to career.

### PIVOTAL MOVES FOR ACTION IN THE NEXT 24 MONTHS

To begin the work to accelerate a more equitable recovery, three pivotal moves are critical:

#### **LISTEN to and work with youth, families and community members to center lived experiences in our recovery response to support equitable, healthy and resilient communities**

Many express the desire to authentically work in partnership with the community from, “Nothing about us without us,” to “We must do work with—not for... or to—the community.” It’s critical to enable youth, families, and other community members to create the vision of success and drive decisions and solutions that achieve it. But what will it take for families and young people to create the future they want to see, supported by institutions? What does it look like to create the structures and processes that enable systems leaders to work alongside the community? What does it take to shift and share power over resources, time, and funding?

For too long, youth and families have been left out of decision-making tables, despite the fact that the people most impacted by problems have some of the best solutions. The first step toward shifting power to community leadership is engaging the community and co-creating with the community. For example, the [National Institute for Children's Health Quality's](#) roadmap for authentic community engagement<sup>13</sup> requires authenticity; the prioritization of place, people, and practices; and willingness to give up power.

In Rochester, New York, [ROC the Future](#) created a Parent Engagement Collaborative Action network (PECAN) to build a coalition of parent advocates who identify priorities and co-design solutions. Parents serve as consultants and are compensated for their engagement. In late April, more than 80 parents, providers, and organizations attended an online session to discuss the support and resources needed as partners continue to adjust to the pandemic crisis. Parent leaders are reviewing data from a needs assessment completed by more than 100 parents to assess gaps in what families need.

<sup>13</sup> Learn more about NICHQ's Roadmap for Authentic Community Engagement: <https://www.nichq.org/insight/roadmap-authentic-community-engagement>

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In Central Oregon, [Better Together](#) focuses on supporting Latinx student success through the Latinx Success Initiative,<sup>14</sup> a community group focused on solutions for Latinx students. The work is led by families, creating a space for families to say what they want. Leveraging the Student Success Act's \$2 billion investment to Oregon schools to hold districts accountable for connecting that investment to community input, Better Together conducted 36 community listening sessions in affinity spaces and surveyed more than 2,000 parents and guardians, students, and their families to learn about their experiences in Central Oregon's school district. The team publicly shared results to drive action towards strengthening equity and inclusion in schools for underrepresented communities.

In Charleston, South Carolina, [Tri-County Cradle to Career](#) is working to bring diverse voices and experiences to work collaboratively in local outcome-based action networks. The partnership has worked to shift from "planning for" communities to "planning with communities to solve problems." This approach ensures that firsthand, lived experiences guide the development of solutions. Based on community perspectives, Tri-County Cradle to Career is developing a resource connector database to share information on the quality of community services to mitigate barriers to access, such as transportation and geographic isolation.

Across the country, [Our Turn](#) mobilizes, amplifies, and elevates the voices of students in the fight for education equity. Through organizing campaigns, leadership development, and national voice, young people channel their power to spark a new movement for justice.

To support bright spots like these, local, state and federal partners can play a role in creating the enabling conditions for communities to move from tokenistic community engagement to authentic collaboration and co-development of solutions. This could include:

- Creating the enabling conditions for authentic youth and family engagement
- Investing in local cradle-to-career intermediary

<sup>14</sup> Learn more about the Latino Success Initiative at [http://bettertogethercentraloregon.org/find-your-role/latino\\_success/](http://bettertogethercentraloregon.org/find-your-role/latino_success/)

<sup>15</sup> Learn more about the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Results Count leadership approach with the Introduction to the Results Count™ Path to Equity: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/introduction-to-the-results-count-path-to-equity/>; to learn more about the application of Results Count, read this article on the Proof of the Power of Results Count: <https://www.aecf.org/blog/strivetogether-proof-of-the-power-of-results-count/>

<sup>16</sup> Learn more about the use of data in Memphis through this case study about Seeding Success: <https://www.strivetogether.org/our-impact/case-studies/seeding-success/>

organizations to convene spaces that center lived experiences of youth, families, and residents

- Supporting evidence-based strategies and interventions like universal home visiting, high-quality early learning programs and parent leadership institutes

**NAME the systemic factors that produce racial inequities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and use data—disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender and geography—and stories to influence system leaders to take action to address disparities**

Today's systems are not broken. They are perfectly designed to perpetuate inequities in the lives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and youth living in extreme poverty. The silos that continue to exist among sectors must be dismantled if we are to chart a course towards more equitable well-being for every child, cradle to career. The [Annie E Casey Foundation's](#) Results Count™ approach<sup>15</sup> encourages leaders to examine and attend to systemic factors that perpetuate uneven results, factoring in historic and structural inequity and bias.

The StriveTogether [Theory of Action™](#) requires cradle-to-career partnerships to disaggregate data by key factors like race and ethnicity, to use data and community voice to understand the root causes of disparities, and to take action at the systems and the practice levels to advance more equitable outcomes. When leaders take data-driven actions grounded in the historical factors contributing to racial inequities, it is possible to advance equitable opportunities.

In Memphis, Tennessee, [Seeding Success](#) aligned community resources, data, and policy to get better results for children. They supported Memphis students by supporting organizations that work with students outside of school.<sup>16</sup> They established data collection processes that could be used by all these organizations and yielded more accurate data and then used that data to improve programming. Chronic absenteeism reduced by 27 percent across 15 schools and 59 percent more students were assessed at the end of summer reading programs.

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In Multnomah County, Oregon, [All Hands Raised](#) regularly brings together school community teams—comprised of teachers, counselors, principals, social workers, youth/family advocates, culturally-specific organizations and industry representatives—to use data to identify, measure, and evaluate concrete practices and interventions that improve results for kids. Interventions that work are systematically communicated to the entire school community and across districts, partner organizations, and leadership bodies to inspire scale.

In Wisconsin, [Milwaukee Succeeds](#) and [Higher Expectations for Racine County](#) collaborated to increase post-secondary enrollment and completion rates for students of color. The partnerships brought together 18 higher education institutions into a regional alliance, collaborating to create a data dashboard that provides a first-ever regional picture of postsecondary completion, disaggregated by race, gender, age, and income.<sup>17</sup> As a result of this project, higher education institutions in Wisconsin are taking a deep look at their internal policies and adapting high impact practices from the [Complete College America](#) national network.

To support bright spots like these, local, state, and federal partners can play a role in creating the enabling conditions for communities to collect and connect real-time data, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and economic status, across sectors. This could include:

- Creating the enabling conditions to make data work for students, drawing from the [Data Quality Campaign's](#) four policy priorities:<sup>18</sup>
  - Measure what matters.
  - Make data use possible.
  - Be transparent and earn trust.
  - Guarantee access and protect privacy.
- Investing in local cradle-to-career intermediary organizations to publicly disaggregate data, galvanize cross-sector action, and build the capacity of local partners to use data for continuous improvement.

- Supporting evidence-based strategies and interventions that have evidence of improving outcomes and closing disparity gaps for children and families.

**CATALYZE ACTION to mobilize cross-sector partners to shift resources, policies, relationships and power structures; implement targeted strategies to align resources to youth and families of color; and advance equitable outcomes from cradle to career**

When we describe our work as giving every child every chance to succeed, people often default to the image of a classroom or a schoolhouse. We must think bolder and more creatively to ensure leaders align actions in ways that make a meaningful contribution to better results for every child, and we must work to address the barriers that contribute to racial inequities and block access to opportunity. This includes practicing targeted universalism,<sup>19</sup> directing supports to youth and families facing the greatest barriers because of the color of their skin, and acknowledging that a rising tide will not lift all boats.

Too often, people can feel paralyzed by the scale of the complex challenges we're up against—structural racism, misogyny, oppression, white supremacy culture, capitalism—you name it. The challenges our youth experience are bigger than any one sector to address. We know we can achieve more by working together than apart to end inequality. This is why we align to the same vision and agenda to ensure every child has every opportunity to succeed.

In Chicago, Illinois, [Thrive Chicago](#) used data to identify a priority population of opportunity youth—young people aged 16 to 24 who are not connected to education or employment. They brought key stakeholders together, including local city and county government officials. Prior to this effort, no funds were allotted for this population. Now, an estimated \$15 million has been shifted in public funding to be directed towards opportunity youth, with over \$1 million specifically allocated in the city's budget to

<sup>17</sup> Learn more about Wisconsin's Higher Education Regional Alliance and view their comprehensive data dashboard: <https://www.herawisconsin.org/regional-data-dashboard/>

<sup>18</sup> Learn more about the Data Quality Campaign's four policy priorities to make data work for students: <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/why-education-data/make-data-work-students/>

<sup>19</sup> Learn more about targeted universalism through this video and these primers from the Othering & Belonging Institute: <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeted-universalism>

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Reconnection Hubs,<sup>20</sup> dedicated spaces for opportunity youth to access coaching and supports and to connect to community programs to address their specific needs around education and employment. As a result, over 300 young people have been connected to education or employment.

In Bridgeport, Connecticut, [Bridgeport Prospers](#) and community partners are building an ecosystem of supports to increase the number of infants and toddlers on track for success in school and life by age 3 that is centered around care and support for parents. The Baby Bundle initiative<sup>21</sup> provides the tools needed to build a coordinated, systematic approach to supporting pregnant women, infants, toddlers, families, and other primary caregivers. Core to the Baby Bundle's approach is establishing connections between existing programs. With new linkages, partners can increase effectiveness and coordinate to pursue funding opportunities.

In Dallas, Texas, [The Commit Partnership](#) created a broad statewide coalition with other Texas-based cradle-to-career partnerships to advocate for a landmark school finance bill. House Bill 3<sup>22</sup> will ultimately invest as much as \$6.5 billion in equitable funding to support Texas learners, including an increase in per-pupil funding for students experiencing poverty and English language learners, as well as investments in full-day pre-K, in college and career readiness, and investments in high-quality teachers.

To support bright spots like these, local, state and federal partners can play a role in creating the enabling conditions for equity-centered cross-sector collaboration. This could include:

- Creating the enabling conditions and incentives for cross-sector collaboration and the implementation of targeted strategies and anti-racist policies and practices that invest in children and families and build an economy that works for everyone.
- Investing in local cradle-to-career intermediary

<sup>20</sup> Learn more about Thrive Chicago's Reconnection Hubs for Opportunity Youth via this case study: <https://readymag.com/u18654686/1310194/>

<sup>21</sup> Learn more about Born Healthy and Ready at Three, Bridgeport's initiative to support infants, toddlers and their families, visit this innovation brief from the National Collaborative for Infants & Toddlers: <https://www.thencit.org/see-whats-working/innovation-brief-creating-an-ecosystem-of-supports-for-infants-toddlers-and>

<sup>22</sup> Learn more about House Bill 3, which was made possible by advocacy led by Texas cradle-to-career partnerships: <https://commitpartnership.org/advocacy/house-bill-3>

<sup>23</sup> Color of Change has outlined eight key components of policy change needed as The Black Response to COVID-19, including changes to government oversight, prison systems, work life, personal life, home life, small business, health care and democracy access. Learn more at <https://theblackresponse.org/covid-19-resources/>

<sup>24</sup> Learn more about the Road Map Project's Community Leadership team: <https://roadmapproject.org/action-teams/community-leadership-team/>

organizations to convene and catalyze action to mobilize cross-sector partners to shift resources, policies and practices.

- Supporting evidence-based strategies and interventions across sectors, including early learning, pre-K-12 education, postsecondary learning, child care, public health, housing, transportation, food security, small business development, public safety, and more.<sup>23</sup>

### BIG IDEAS FOR TRANSFORMATION IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS

If we listen to and work with youth, families, and community members; name systemic factors and use disaggregated data; and catalyze action across sectors to shift resources, policies, relationships, and power structures, then we can start to truly transform systems: to shift power and increase the participation and leadership of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color to lead the pathway toward long-term resiliency and equitable well-being.

[As shared by Bernadette Merikle](#), the executive director of the Road Map Project in South Seattle/South King County, Washington, "When we rebuild, we cannot go back to the way things were. We must resist the comfort of what was, and forge new paths to what can be—a society where young people can reach their full potential and be supported wholeheartedly, where community leadership paves the path towards a more equitable future, where race is a joy-filled experience instead of another traumatic storyline."

Walking the talk, the Road Map Project made a shift to having a community-led leadership team,<sup>24</sup> replacing the leadership table that historically included superintendents, funders, and education advocates. To support partnership strategy, the [Road Map Project](#) sought to intentionally engage those most impacted by practice and policy when developing a report called Start

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With Us: Black Youth in South King County and South Seattle report and the accompanying Forum for Black Student Success.<sup>25</sup> This initiative developed out of the partnership's disciplined disproportionality work. These efforts are early steps toward a sustained shift in power to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color across the region.

In San Francisco, California, the [Mission Promise Neighborhood](#) was formed as a response to the displacement pressures and academic achievement gap facing Latinx students in the historically Latinx community of the Mission District. The Mission Promise Neighborhood's Parent Council advocated for the Latinx Resolution for the San Francisco Board of Education,<sup>26</sup> requiring San Francisco Unified School District to hold itself accountable for working with the community and using data to close the achievement gap for Latinx students. Parents led this charge that resulted in structural change for Latinx students across San Francisco.

These early examples show what's possible when communities create the conditions for advancing racial equity, including authentic co-development of solutions with youth and families, and systemic and targeted strategies to achieve equitable well-being. The signals of progress and signs of success we seek include:

- Youth are at the center of all the systems that shape opportunity in their community.
- Black, Indigenous, Latinx and People of Color are heard, valued and elevated for their power and authority.
- Youth voice, community wisdom and community assets are centered in decision-making processes.
- Our frameworks, approaches and shared outcomes are guided by our understanding of equity.
- Leaders have a deeper understanding of equity and their role in creating change.
- The racial and ethnic composition of staff—particularly leadership—represents their communities.

- Policies are adopted and/or amended to create better opportunities and outcomes for youth and families.
- Restorative practices are in place to repair harm and restore relationships.<sup>27</sup>

To support bright spots like these, local, state and federal partners can play a role in accelerating the shift in power required for systems transformation. This could include:

- Creating the enabling conditions for increased participation and leadership of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color in government agencies and boards
- Investing in local cradle-to-career intermediary organizations to shepherd local efforts toward systems transformation and galvanize cross-sector partners to shift resources, policies, and practices
- Supporting evidence-based strategies and interventions that have evidence of improving outcomes and closing disparity gaps for children and families

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure these pivotal moves and big ideas accelerate healing, recovery, and overall well-being for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Communities of Color, we must work to:

- Center People of Color and create solutions together, with particular attention to the Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities that continue to be most harmed.
- Operationalize equity to get better results for those affected by oppressive systems.
- Increase participation and leadership of Black, Indigenous, Latinx and People of Color.
- Understand the history and legacy of systemic racism, colonization and xenophobia, especially how racist institutions, policies, practices, ideas, and behaviors give an unjust amount of resources, rights, and power to white people while denying them to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of

<sup>25</sup> Learn more about the Road Map Project's efforts to amplify the perspectives of young people, check out Start With Us: Black Youth in South King County and South Seattle and Let Us Succeed: Student College and Career Aspirations

<sup>26</sup> Learn more about the Latinx Student Resolution, read this op-ed in the San Francisco Examiner: <https://www.sfoxaminer.com/opinion/latinx-resolution-commits-sfusd-to-closing-the-achievement-gap/>

<sup>27</sup> These results are drawn from StriveTogether's Racial Equity Statement: [https://www.strivetgether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racial-Equity-Statement\\_March2020.pdf](https://www.strivetgether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racial-Equity-Statement_March2020.pdf)

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Color.

- Challenge policies that perpetuate oppressive systems and inequities.
- Foster learning and dialogue about key concepts including racial and ethnic equity, cultural, structural, and institutional racism, and white privilege.<sup>28</sup>

Every child—regardless of race, ethnicity, zip code or circumstance—should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Every child. No exceptions. We have the opportunity to change what’s possible for our kids by putting them on the path to economic mobility. Together, we must use our collective power for youth and families to end inequality and advance racial and ethnic equity to achieve economic mobility for every child, cradle to career.

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### RESOURCES

[StriveTogether Theory of Action](#)

[StriveTogether Racial Equity Statement](#)

[Equitable Recovery Pledge to Transform Systems and Advance Racial and Ethnic Equity](#)

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<sup>28</sup> These results are drawn from StriveTogether’s Racial Equity Statement: [https://www.strivetgether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racial-Equity-Statement\\_March2020.pdf](https://www.strivetgether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Racial-Equity-Statement_March2020.pdf)