

Building the Case:

Communicating the Importance of a Cradle to Career Approach in Your Community



Strive Together

Every child. Cradle to career.

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In the early stages of building a cradle to career civic infrastructure advocates, often have trouble sharing the value launching their partnership to the community. Building the case for the launch is important to garner community buy in and engage potential partner organizations and businesses.

This resource was developed to help advocates of cradle to career partnerships build a case for change in their local community by answering four of the major questions that they face when starting to communicate about building their partnership:

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Thank You!

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What is the StriveTogether Approach?

The StriveTogether approach

The StriveTogether approach to education reform is one that requires communities to come together to hold themselves collectively accountable for student success from cradle to career and to continuously improve their support to children by letting data drive action and decision-making. This is NOT a program, but rather an approach to bring a community together around a common vision and organizes itself to identify what gets results; improves and builds upon those efforts over time; and invests the community's resources differently in order to increase impact. This approach is unique in a few ways:

- **Cradle to Career & Every Child**

StriveTogether believes that education is a lifelong experience that begins well before a child ever steps foot inside of a classroom and continues long past a cap and gown commencement and that the opportunity for education success is the right of every child. The StriveTogether approach brings together cross-sector community leaders and practitioners, at various points along the education pipeline to improve outcomes for all kids. The only way to reach the goal of success for every student is to approach education with a cradle to career mindset while making intentional efforts to eliminate locally defined disparities that might inhibit a student from achieving.

- **Contextual & Asset Based**

The StriveTogether approach is referred to as a framework rather than a model because implementation depends on the local context and assets in a community. StriveTogether's framework for building civic infrastructure is adaptive in that there are some specific elements that, based on experience, have been determined as necessary to support this work effectively. How a community puts those elements into place, however, looks distinctly different. Building upon a communities existing assets, the StriveTogether approach helps identify ways to mobilize those assets to improve education outcomes based on a community's own unique strengths and challenges.

- **Data-Driven & Continuously Improving**

StriveTogether places a laser-like focus on achieving measurable goals and outcomes; however, StriveTogether encourages the use of data not just to measure progress, but to continuously improvement. In the education domain, data is often used to punish or reward individual schools and districts; StriveTogether holds that data should be used as a tool to identify areas for improvement and success, ultimately ensuring that partners invest in what works.

- **Grounded in the Community**

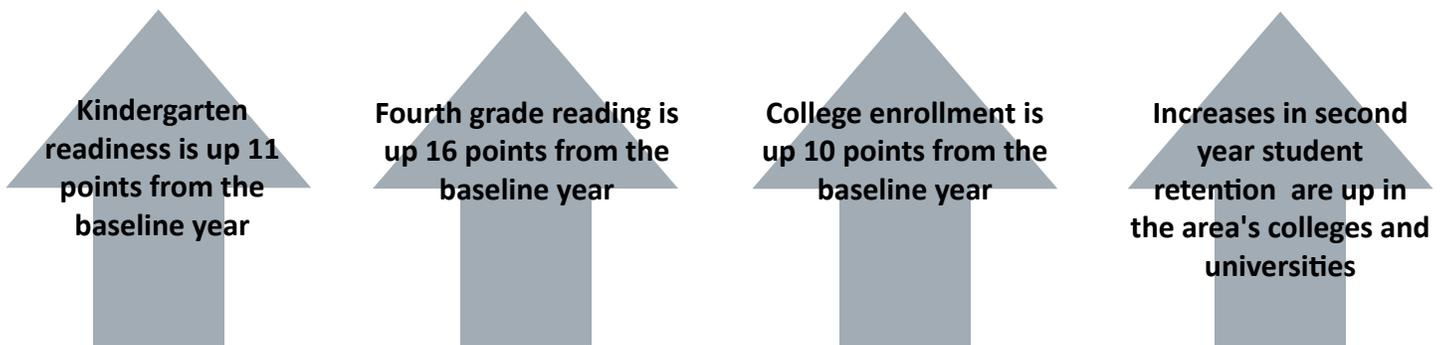
A central premise of the StriveTogether approach is that this work requires the collective effort of an entire community to really achieve the systems level and institutional change necessary to support every child from cradle to career. The work of a partnership must be grounded in the context of the community by engaging a broad array of community voices through building awareness and information sharing; involving and mobilizing the community towards improvement; and co-developing solutions and strategies with community members.

Is it Working in Other Communities?

Rooted in the success of The Strive Partnership...

StriveTogether is rooted in the success of The Strive Partnership: a cradle to career, collective impact partnership in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. The partnership is made up of community organizations and businesses committed to changing the same educational outcomes in the community. A survey of the partnership's members was taken in 2011 revealing that most members felt that they had a vested stake in the impact of the partnership, that the partnership led to a greater use of data, that the partnership helped align resources around what worked and that the partnership helped improve community-level outcomes.

With the survey results in mind, The Strive Partnership noted positive improvements in areas such as kindergarten readiness, standardized testing and college retention. Consider just a few of the following statistics:



And in partnerships around the country

While The Strive Partnership is certainly one of the more mature partnerships in the Network, it is not the only collective impact partnership to have experienced progress toward cradle to career civic infrastructure. Consider the following examples from communities around the country:

Public Policy Win-The Commit! Partnership

“Commit!, the cradle to career partnership serving Dallas County established a bi-partisan Advocacy Council to develop a policy agenda that supported the work of the partnership. Specifically, the Council has created an agenda focusing on two pieces of legislation, both of which will improve Commit!’s ability to gather data that can be used to improve education outcomes. The first is a bill that will add a multi-dimensional tool to the approved list of kindergarten readiness diagnostic tools. This tool will expand the scope of traditional literacy tools and give districts the option of using state assessment funds to assess social-emotional development, language and communication skills and physical development. The second piece of legislation, involves strengthening the state’s Education Research Centers to better support the use of P-16 longitudinal data. Commit! representatives testified at hearings during the legislative session with the full backing of the partners and has helped build momentum for moving these critical policies.”

Is it Working in Other Communities?

And in partnerships around the country

Closing the Opportunity Gap-All Hands Raised

“*All Hands Raised, the cradle to career partnership serving Multnomah County (Portland, OR) used local data to identify an opportunity gap impacting students of color, particularly Latino, African American American Indian/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander students. To address this gap All Hands Raised placed racial equity as the partnership’s top priority and joined with the local Coalition of Communities of Color to launch the Eliminating Disparities in Child and Youth Success Collaborative, made up of the six superintendents from the county’s school districts and cross-sector, cross-cultural community leaders. The Collaborative developed and implemented two strategies. The first focuses on conducting assessments inside the respective school districts and member organizations to examine each organization’s practices related to racial equity. The assessments guide the development of tailored equity plans unique to each organization. The second strategy seeks to ensure an explicit and enduring commitment to equity within each member organization through facilitating the development and adoption of an organizational equity policy. This comprehensive, systemic approach builds upon recent efforts within the Portland Public School district which have helped to narrow the opportunity gap on several priority indicators, including 3rd grade reading, 9th credits and attendance, and graduation rates.*”

Funding for Impact-Promise Partnerships of United Way Salt Lake

“*With the isolated, programmatic funding model not achieving the population-level impact so desired, United Way of Salt Lake, the anchor entity for 7 Promise Partnerships in the metropolitan Salt Lake area, worked tirelessly with its board and donors to agree on a strategy that would enable a shift in funding focus to support specific neighborhoods where data demonstrated that education gaps were most significant. With leadership and support from United Way of Salt Lake, partners work collaboratively to set goals for their community, share and track data results and align programs and resources to support improvement in the areas that need it most.*”

StriveTogether’s role

StriveTogether facilitates the connection of communities across the globe who are working to build cradle to career partnerships through the Cradle to Career Network. This Network provides the forum in which communities can share lessons learned, successes, and challenges with each other, as well as a way for communities to access new and innovative tools to enhance their work. With the help and knowledge of over 90 Cradle to Career Network members, StriveTogether has designed a Theory of Action that acts as a guide by which communities can organize existing assets and identify gaps in order to create their own unique civic infrastructure as quickly as possible.

Does Our Community Need This?

Making the case for change

Mobilizing a community to take action and come together around a cradle to career vision, usually requires communication around opportunities to improve. Many partnerships have termed this communication ‘making the case for change’ or ‘communicating a compelling need’ and it looks different in every community.

Identifying the Need-Generation Next

“*Generation Next, the cradle to career partnership serving the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, used data to create a compelling need and sense of urgency for mobilizing the community on the issue of education equality. Minnesota consistently ranks as one of the top state education systems in the nation, consider:*

- 74% of fourth-graders read at or above a basic reading level (National average is 67%).
- 81% of eighth-graders read at or above a basic reading level (National average is 77%).

(source: 2013 NAEP test scores, National Center for Education Statistics)

Because of these rankings, the general population often assumed that education was not an issue in their community and sometimes denied claims otherwise. In actuality, despite top rankings, Generation Next disaggregated local data to find large opportunity gaps (about 30 points for third grade reading and eighth grade math) between white students and those of color. Using this information, Generation Next presented this information to the community and successfully engaged community stakeholders into action.”

Using data to create a sense of urgency

Using data to establish this case can help a partnership describe their region in a manner that substantiates their claims, helps identify achievement gaps and instills a sense of urgency within the community. Charts and infographics (graphical displays of information) are more engaging and can make information easier for readers to understand. Below are examples of how different partnerships have used data to express a sense of urgency for the work to the community and resources to how to use data in a visually interesting way.

Examples of how communities have used data visually to create a sense of urgency:

Commit!
Engaging in the Early Stages

Commit!
How to Use Data and Still
Make Friends

All Kids Alliance
Greater Houston Pipeline

Does our Community Need This?

Tale of caution from the road

While data can be a crucial element to building a sense of urgency and community engagement; context, background information and clarity are essential for successful communication of data. A member of StriveTogether's Strategic Assistance Team shared an anecdote: around this:

A mid-sized city was exploring forming a cradle to career partnership. Those in favor of the partnership gathered state and local level data about the state of the school systems to make the case for the need for the partnership; but they presented their findings at community meeting with little context or background to the data. Community members had a strong reaction; however, it was one of anger and frustration. Instead of galvanizing the community to change the civic infrastructure to better support education, the community turned to blaming the schools for the failure. The anger and blame from the community alienated the educators and created an environment unsuitable for the immediate creation of the partnership.

To avoid situations like this, it is crucial that the data used to make the case for building a partnership be:

- **Accurate**

It is important that the data used is accurate. Accurate data is data that is collected consistently and with logical collection methods. The collector of the data is also an important piece of information. Credible sources of data add validity to the case. If the data collection frequency and methods as well as the collector are unknown, it can cause serious validity problems and the foundation of the case that is being built can be undermined.

- **Clear**

The data to present the case must be clear. The measures being used must be clearly understood and communicated. This is especially important when using data collected from a state or national source. Those building the case must know what the data represents and how to relay that meaning in a clear and visually interesting label so that those viewing the data know what it is that they are looking at.

- **Contextual**

When presenting data it must be presented in context. The central premise of cradle to career infrastructure is education is not just about schools, but the community supporting children as a whole. By examining data and disaggregating it, those wanting to form a partnership have the opportunity to present the whole picture to their community and identify areas for community input and cooperation. When data is presented in a vacuum it can sow seeds of anger and mistrust, especially of schools and districts.

How Do We Get Others Onboard?

Identify the audience

Once the case is built, it is time to tell the story to the community. However, the community is not one homogenous entity, but rather, a collection of distinct audiences who have different motivations and reservations about joining or supporting the partnership. Identifying the audience and then tailoring it accordingly is the first step to effective communication. When in this process it is important to consider the following:

- What should the audience take away?
- What does the audience care about?
- What level of knowledge does the audience have (are they subject matter experts or relative novices)?
- What engagement opportunities are available and what kind of communication medium makes sense (one pager, op-ed article, blog, etc)?

Use the examples below to help you tailor your messages

Motivations and Reservations of
Key Stakeholders

Communicating the Value of the
Partnership and Key Messages

Tell your partnership's story

Launching a brand is the cornerstone of communication with the community. A brand is more than a name and a logo; it is the partnership's identity and story. A brand reflects the image held in the minds of multiple stakeholders. By establishing a strong brand partnerships have an opportunity to:

- Control the messaging around the organization
- Build relationships with other community organizations
- Build credibility and trust
- Bring a greater range of people to the table
- Connect with donors, supporters and those assisted

Use the resources below to help tell your story:

Commit!
Who are you? Knowing
Your Story and
Communicating Effectively

KnowledgeWorks
Equity Triangle

Stanford Social
Innovation Review
article on branding for
nonprofits

How Do We Get Others Onboard?

Elevator speech

An elevator speech is a brief (30 seconds or less) explanation of the work the partnership does and some call to action or further discussion of the work. The message should be simple and concise enough so that someone who is completely unfamiliar with the work of the partnership can understand what it is that the partnership does. The language should also be inviting and engaging to capture the interest of the listener. Finally, the use of jargon or organizational speech should be kept at an absolute minimum.

A Sample Elevator Speech

- The purpose of the partnership.
 - XYZ Partnership seeks to support children in this community from the time they are born until the first day of their career.
- The problem the partnership is solving
 - The data has indicated that the students living on the wrong side of the tracks are not performing as well as their peers from other track locations.
- The solution the partnership can offer
 - By building on existing resources from across the community and using data to identify and fund what really works, we can improve conditions in 5 key areas that will help all students not only academically but emotionally and socially as well.
- The way that the person can help
 - We are holding a meeting at the library on Oak Ave. on the 22nd of this month to find out how the community thinks we can help the kids. I would love it if you could come.

Language to consider including in your elevator speech

Data driven
Continuous improvement
Building on existing resources
Funding what works
Cradle to career

StriveTogether

Every child. Cradle to career.

For more information visit www.StriveTogether.org