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StriveTogether: Reinventing the Local Education Ecosystem

In September 2013, Jeff Edmondson, managing director of StriveTogether, was flying from Cincinnati, Ohio to San Diego, California to meet with Tad Seth Parzen, executive director of the City Heights Partnership for Children. Edmondson hoped that they could make additional progress on mobilizing the San Diego community to support the city's children through an innovative partnership. He also planned to spend time on the cross country flight contemplating some major challenges facing StriveTogether.

StriveTogether had emerged from The Strive Partnership (Partnership) in Cincinnati. Launched in 2006, the Partnership aimed to improve educational outcomes in Cincinnati and northern Kentucky by coordinating the actions of diverse community stakeholders—nonprofit service providers, school districts, government, parents, businesses, and others. The Partnership was founded on the belief that educational outcomes could improve beyond what the public school district could do alone by addressing the full range of a child's other needs—nutritional, medical, social, etc. To accomplish this, the Partnership focused the whole community on a shared set of outcomes that spanned a young person's life from "cradle to career." At the core of the model was the intense use of data at all stages of a young person's development to measure progress, determine which service provider programs (such as tutoring, pre-school and after-school activities) were effective in helping children, and steer resources toward spreading those practices across existing programs and systems. The expectation was that if all these other services were done well, educators would be better able to improve student outcomes, including reading and math scores.

Cincinnati's ensuing success on many indicators of student performance supported this hypothesis and had spurred other communities in the United States to test or embrace the StriveTogether approach. In 2011, StriveTogether's National Cradle to Career Network (Network) was created to assist these and other communities. Though the StriveTogether approach was well developed and articulated, it was challenging to implement and only recently embraced by communities outside Cincinnati. The framework could not be replicated in a cookie cutter fashion but had to be adapted to the needs and context of each community. Edmondson and others considered the framework's flexibility a key strength, but significant challenges made broad success difficult. Edmondson needed among other things to develop an effective training program for community-

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level employees; increase his own internal staff; and develop stronger data management capabilities at the Network level.

Parzen's City Heights Partnership had joined the Network in July 2013 and faced its own barriers to success. The City Heights neighborhood was the densest and most diverse community in San Diego. Nearly 40% of its adults did not have a high school diploma and 27% lived below the poverty line.¹ On some dimensions, the City Heights Partnership was making good progress toward its own cradle-to-career civic infrastructure. Soon it would publish its baseline student achievement report – an important milestone in implementing the StriveTogether approach, that provided the data against which future progress on student achievement metrics would be measured. Parzen had successfully engaged San Diego's local school district and nonprofit organizations. But he was making slow progress with the business community.

Much of Edmondson's upcoming meeting with Parzen would focus on how to broaden engagement and deepen impact in the cradle to career initiative and how to mobilize more business leaders to engage in San Diego. Edmondson knew that business leaders in other cities, such as Toledo, Ohio had embraced the StriveTogether approach eagerly. He wondered what lessons those cities might hold for San Diego.

Creating Collective Impact: The Strive Partnership

In 2006, Cincinnati had a large number of government and nonprofit programs addressing the needs of young people from cradle to career. These included everything from early childhood reading to career counseling. Programs tended to operate independently, even if they served the same needs for the same youth in the same geography. "The community was program rich, but system poor. For years, there were numerous programs designed to increase student achievement, but no underlying structure to combine resources and improve effectiveness," explained Edmondson. A series of cross-sector meetings helped community leaders recognize that this disjointed approach had failed to improve student performance and little hope existed that future results would differ. They realized that a new approach was needed that would coordinate the activities of service providers and shift the focus of the community from activities to outcomes results.

The Partnership was created in 2006 to develop a community-wide strategy for improving student outcomes. The founding members included the presidents of three local universities; the superintendents of school districts in Cincinnati and the nearby towns of Covington and Newport, Kentucky; business leaders, and civic and nonprofit leaders. These and other community stakeholders worked together to align the work of service providers to optimally serve the needs of young people in the area. "We believed from the outset that children would learn more effectively if we took a more holistic approach to understanding their unique needs," said Edmondson. This included not only a child's academic needs, but also the non-academic needs, such as nutrition, that impacted school performance.

As the approach took root, the Partnership's stakeholders formalized their work around four foundational pillars: shared community vision, evidence based decision-making, collaborative action, and investment and sustainability. These pillars became the core elements necessary to create the conditions for achieving results. In a series of meetings the Partnership's stakeholders also agreed to specific outcomes critical to a child's success such as kindergarten readiness. Collaborative action networks of practitioners involved in a similar stage of a child's development were also created to ensure there was progress in each outcome and spread best practices among service providers. (See **Exhibit 1a** for outcomes.)

For example, the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, as the lead convener for early childhood education in the region, convened practitioners and other stakeholders prior to the Partnership being formed to both build awareness in this area and highlight potential strategies. By working with the Partnership team, the United Way began to look more closely at the local data regarding what was having impact as opposed to just the national research. They found that having a certified teacher and a low student-teacher ratio were correlated to kids entering Cincinnati Public Schools more prepared, particularly students from low-income families. As a result, the United Way started working to ensure grantees had these characteristics.

Similarly, Cincinnati Public Schools realized they needed to focus on turning around their lowest performing elementary schools. In 2008 the district launched The Elementary Initiative to focus on expediting the pace of student improvement in the 16 lowest performing schools. Working with national and local partners, they realized improvement in 13 schools. One of the core aspects of this improvement was how the schools were using data to understand individual student progress and the external support services they received to augment classroom work. By working with the Partnership, additional local partners came together to help other schools—including parochial schools—learn from the 13 improved schools and take the practices they were implementing to scale. The Learning Partner Dashboard, an on-line system for integrating in-school and out-of-school supports, was one tool that emerged from this collective effort.

Attracting the Business Community The Partnership members understood the important role the business community could play if they became involved. While non-profits and government delivered the services to children, the business community played an important role in galvanizing community resources and contributing expertise. The United Way agreed to support the Partnership in several functions including encouraging business engagement through its strong relationship with the business community. “They depend on relationships with the business community for their revenue stream and are putting their credibility at risk by demonstrating their approval of the Partnership’s approach,” said Edmondson of the United Way commitment.

With five Fortune 500 companies based in the area, Cincinnati had a long history of business involvement in public education. However, executives were frustrated with the confusion and inefficiency that existed with the uncoordinated activities and the lack of outcome data of multiple organizations working to address the needs of Cincinnati’s children. With StriveTogether’s focus on results, the promise of increased efficiency due to stakeholders working together and the willingness of providers to share information, several key business leaders, including from Procter & Gamble and General Electric Aviation engaged with the initiative. “Having a few business leaders involved from the beginning who know there is no ‘silver bullet’ to improving educational outcomes and who appreciate the complexity of this kind of work helps tremendously to bring along their peers,” Edmondson explained. “In addition, just having business leaders show up was valuable. They brought a fresh approach and asked the seemingly ‘dumb’ questions that needed to be asked to move the conversation beyond typical education-speak,” he added.

Early on, business leaders provided the Partnership with financial resources as well as expertise, primarily in management, data collection and analysis. For example, GE Aviation recognized the applicability of Lean Six Sigma to improving processes in nonprofit service providers as well as in the

school districts.^a The company allocated employee time to train Partnership stakeholders to use this process improvement system.

“Six Sigma can be very complex and very focused on statistical analysis. We simplified it and adapted it for education,” explained Jeff Heslop, a GE employee and Master Black Belt in Six Sigma. “The leaders we trained really saw the value in Lean Six Sigma. What gets measured, gets done. The nonprofit stakeholders were a great help in translating terms that were better understood by the broader community,” added Paula Kollstedt, former manager of community and public relations for GE Aviation. The company spent three to four years conducting training, and then developed a toolkit to hand off to the Partnership for continuous learning.

“We like to say that the partnership moves at the speed of trust. The business community served as a critical accelerator when leaders stopped thinking about their role as bringing intelligence and money to the table, and instead saw their value as sharing their core expertise,” said Edmondson. Early on, Cincinnati business leaders learned to appreciate the distinct differences in addressing problems in the private sector compared to the more complex social sector. “Once they embraced and accepted that complexity, the business leaders learned to work within a collective impact approach rather than on standalone efforts,” added Edmondson.

Progress Within the first six years of the Partnership’s work, 89% of the education indicators that measured progress of the eight outcomes improved from the base year, including an 11% increase in kindergarten readiness, a 31% increase in 8th grade math scores, and an 11% improvement in college graduation rates. While the Partnership still had a long way to go to fully achieve its objectives, it was making measurable progress. (See **Exhibit 1b** for outcome results.)

Edmondson attributed much of the early success in Cincinnati to the ability of multiple stakeholders to work together and use data to drive continuous improvement in student performance. Despite this early achievement, stakeholders were constantly reminded of the challenges required to achieve long-term, sustainable impact. With no “silver bullet” or quick fix, success would mean a transformation of a complex system, and many years to achieve the desired results. While initial progress was slow, Edmondson believed that faster progress could occur. “Once The Strive Partnership approach was firmly rooted in the community, it would create the needed hospitable environment for experimentation and innovation, which would accelerate the pace of improvement in student achievement.”

Collective Impact Attracts Attention

The Partnership’s work in Cincinnati was getting noticed. In 2011, John Kania and Mark Kramer published an article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* about the work and named the approach *Collective Impact*. They described collective impact as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.”² The approach was based on “shared accountability and differentiated responsibility” among stakeholders.³ Each stakeholder had “a defined role in achieving a shared vision of improved outcomes for children...

^a “The central idea behind Six Sigma is that if you can measure how many ‘defects’ you have in the process, you can systematically figure out how to eliminate them and get as close to ‘zero defects’ as possible. To achieve Six Sigma Quality, a process must produce no more than 3.4 defects per million opportunities.” Source: General Electric Company, “What is Six Sigma? General Electric website, www.ge.com/en/company/companyinfo/quality/whatis.htm, accessed October 2013.

[and] allows data to drive their decisions about where resources flow, which interventions are scaled and upon which target populations to focus.”⁴ (See **Exhibit 2** for collective impact description.)

Kania and Kramer observed that the successful implementation of collective impact required an independent “backbone” organization with a dedicated staff. The backbone organizations provided funding and office space for the initiative and helped coordinate the activities of stakeholders.⁵ It did not deliver any programs. The Strive Partnership became the backbone organization for Cincinnati. (In Cincinnati, all the functions of the backbone organization were embedded in the Partnership. Other communities such as Toledo chose to divide these functions among different organizations.)

Founding the StriveTogether National Cradle to Career Network

The StriveTogether National Cradle to Career Network^b was launched in 2011 to help communities across the U.S. explore and implement collective impact. (See **Exhibit 3** for locations of network members.) “I consider the StriveTogether framework a new methodology, not a model or a program. Each community has different needs, and the framework provides a set of demonstrated best practices to achieve these,” said Edmondson, who assumed the role of managing director of StriveTogether and built a team of 18 employees. Within two years of its launch, the Network had 95 participating communities, 32 of which paid for strategic assistance from Edmondson’s team. Paid participation in the Network enabled greater access to the knowledge and understanding gained from participating communities around the country, and contributed about 35% of StriveTogether’s operating budget.^c (See **Exhibit 4** for select financials.) All of the 32 communities were in the early stages of planning or implementation, although communities shared a sense that they were on the right track to improve student outcomes.

To assist communities, Edmondson and his team developed a “Theory of Action,” a continuum of benchmarks necessary for a community to achieve cradle to career success. (See **Exhibit 5** for Theory of Action overview.) In order to join the Network, the interested community partnerships were required to first conduct the “Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure Assessment,” to identify and catalogue the existing community infrastructure. The assessment was not used to disqualify participation in the Network, but to serve as a platform from which to improve. Community partnerships had to achieve all of the “Exploring” benchmarks in the Theory of Action such as, convening the appropriate stakeholders, establishing a timeline, and selecting outcomes and a supporting organization before proceeding to the next level. Lastly, the leaders of a community’s partnership had to sign a Commitment to Quality, a pledge to uphold four components of quality. (See **Exhibit 6** for Commitment to Quality pledge.)

To no one’s surprise, the success of collective impact was highly dependent on local leadership. “As the framework moves into new communities the leader of the community partnership is fundamentally critical. She must be a good facilitator and project manager; possess strong analytical capabilities; and have the ability to communicate to multiple audiences. As someone once joked the only thing you don’t need to be able to do is walk on water,” said Edmondson.

^b www.strivetogether.org

^c Of StriveTogether’s total budget, 15% came from the KnowledgeWorks, and the remaining 50% from other funders such as: The Ford Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Lumina Foundation and Living Cities.

Given the national interest in the work to date, Edmondson knew the importance of seeing more sites advance to “Systems Change” and “Proof Point” – the final two steps of the Theory of Action – by the end of 2015. Edmondson explained:

It is critical that we have several communities demonstrate their power over the next couple of years. This will allow communities to draw from a greater number of interested stakeholders, and validate the potential of the framework to other communities. Our limiting factor has been staff, but even with plans to expand our human capital, we are more interested in going deep with sites we are currently engaged with to achieve the proof points we need. We are hesitant to add more sites without demonstrating strong success in our current communities, so we do not plan to take on more than a maximum of 38 sites.

A Strong Start in Toledo, Ohio

In 2008, Toledo and the region’s economy were heavily dependent on automobile manufacturing and suffered greatly during the U.S. recession that began that year. However, a swift diversification into clean technology helped the economy emerge from the recession more rapidly than many other manufacturing centers. The increased importance of high tech encouraged community leaders, such as Keith Burwell, president of the Toledo Community Foundation (Foundation), to ratchet up their emphasis on the need for quality public education to produce the skilled workers essential for the local economy. “The education model in Toledo, although not ineffective, had been shortsighted in many respects. There was an old mentality that students went to school to learn to read and write, and then went to work for one of the big three automotive companies, get on the line and make a good living. College was never considered a necessity,” explained Burwell.

Burwell met with the president of the University of Toledo and business leaders from the city’s three Fortune 500 companies to discuss how the Foundation and the broader community could work together to address the education deficiencies in Lucas County (the county containing Toledo). “Education is the opposite side of the coin for creating a vibrant business community. We all agreed things needed to change, and not just Band-Aid fixes,” said Burwell. Lucas County contained two urban and six suburban school districts. Many citizens in the area were below the poverty line and there was an intractable racial achievement gap. (See **Exhibit 7** for Toledo City School District demographics and education statistics.) “We had been performing at the typical average levels of urban education, but that was not good enough,” said Burwell.

Concurrent to Burwell’s activities, the Lucas County Family Council and the local United Way were discussing how their organizations could address the same educational issues. The three organizations began a joint discussion. Burwell explained:

Toledo had a nonprofit infrastructure that rivaled many other Midwestern cities in size, but the city had only half the population of most. For example, there were over 60 different tutoring programs across the county, many bumping into each other in the same school and one didn’t even know the other existed. We were adamant that we didn’t need more organizations providing more programs, but instead we needed to determine what was working and align these programs to produce even better results.

With a common set of objectives, Burwell and the leaders of the Family Council and the United Way set out to look for solutions. “We looked at several options, but our orientation led us to StriveTogether and a clear framework that relied on a data-driven, baseline model. It was exactly what we were looking for,” explained Burwell.

Toledo's Community Partnership In May 2013, the leaders of the three Toledo community organizations, having agreed to the StriveTogether approach, created Aspire, an independent limited liability corporation (LLC). Aspire had no direct connection to any of the founding organizations. The Lucas County Family Council, United Way, and the Toledo Community Foundation served jointly as support organizations. The three organizations signed a memorandum of agreement to formalize a multi-year funding commitment and also agreed to provide office space for Aspire.

Aaron Baker was appointed Aspire's executive director. He had extensive experience in education as a teacher, academic and administrator. Baker observed, "In addition to the administrative support I receive from the support organizations, I rely on these organizations as an advisory group. They help guide me to the most vital stakeholders that have long been dedicated to improving education." Within three months of assuming his role, nearly 300 nonprofit, education, and business leaders joined Aspire. "The stakeholders are really everyone in the community. The core group is ever evolving and I do not expect we will ever stop recruiting the 'boots on the ground' types," said Baker.

In June 2013, using baseline data, Aspire's Outcomes Committee, the Leadership Team and Operations Team identified the five most significant outcomes along the cradle to career continuum: children were born healthy; children entered kindergarten ready to succeed; children demonstrated grade-level proficiency in reading and math; youth were prepared for post-secondary education or training; and young adults enrolled in post-secondary education or training. The business community played a role in developing the five outcomes. "The original team came to the meeting with six to eight outcomes, but each had an 'and' statement leading to something like 22 actual outcomes. You could see all the business leaders underlining the 'and' statements and quickly raising their hands," said Michael Thaman, CEO of Owens Corning, a manufacturer of fiberglass and building products. He added, "I think we were able to add real value in pointing out to well-intentioned people, who were dedicated to the community, that you have to make choices and focus on those things that are going to have the most impact."

On July 23, 2013, Baker and the Outcomes Committee selected kindergarten readiness and high school graduation as the first two outcomes on which to focus. "This will assist us in identifying networks of organizations that are getting results and collecting data in these areas. Ultimately, each outcome will have specific networks working on it; however, because it is critical that we are prudent about our resources, and that we are thoughtful about how each network functions, it is best that we launch them over time," explained Baker in a letter to the community. The Aspire stakeholders also developed a series of indicators that would track progress of the selected outcomes.

Toledo Business Community Working together, Baker and Burwell had convinced business leaders to engage with Aspire. There was a long history of civic engagement to build on, but there was also frustration. "The major Toledo corporations had donated large sums of money to programs over the years, but they often did not know the full impact of their donations. They really saw Aspire as a way to help them figure out how to invest wisely," explained Baker. Burwell added, "The CEOs involved were not interested in serving on yet another Blue Ribbon committee. They had been investing in many organizations and programs and things were not working. They saw education as vital to the future growth of their companies, and they wanted results. They told me, 'the minute we just talk and don't actually do anything, we are walking out.'"

Thaman elaborated on past experiences with education programs. "Other programs like to engage business leaders in the community, but they tend to engage at the policy level and not the 'doing' level. These situations become political quickly. There are a lot of good intentions in the room, but

typically not a lot of data. I am generally not willing to show up symbolically, but if there is real commitment, I will show up," he said.

Since Toledo was in the early "Emerging" phase of implementing the Theory of Action, businesses in the community primarily engaged with Aspire at the strategic leadership level. Baker reported to a 22-member board of directors, many of whom were from the C-suite in their companies, and over half of whom came from the largest companies in greater Toledo. The business leaders regularly attended board meetings and did not appoint other executives to represent them. "Aspire's board members are prominent, and highly sought after by other nonprofit and community boards. Many of them have worked on education previously with organizations such as the United Way, YMCA, and the Boys and Girls Club," said Baker.

A number of companies provided assistance beyond strategic engagement. For example, Al Strouken, CEO of Owens-Illinois, the world's leading glass bottle manufacturer, offered his staff to train Aspire members on Six Sigma, as GE did in Cincinnati. Thaman also took his company's engagement a step further. "I found the StriveTogether presentation and approach much more aligned with the way corporations lead change. It had clear focus and clear goals and metrics. However, we realized a major challenge would be the acquisition of strong benchmark-level analytical capabilities. I knew those were capabilities we had among our employees so I agreed to provide Aspire a top Owens Corning resource to meet its objectives," he said. Thaman seconded an employee for 6 to 12 months to lead the development of data analysis capabilities at Aspire. Stakeholders from across the spectrum welcomed with enthusiasm these and other business efforts.

Challenges Burwell recognized the inherent need of sustaining business engagement to meet the long-term perspective of collective impact. CEOs often had relatively short tenures. However, he felt this risk could be hedged. "We are trying to make the StriveTogether approach so ingrained in a company that it does not matter who is leading. This certainly will not be easy, but Toledo has not had a board with this many CEOs in over ten years," he said.

Additionally, while there were a number of Toledo business leaders engaged in the initiative the involvement of education stakeholders remained more of a challenge. "I only have one educator on the board, so it's difficult to build the necessary trust to make change. There is still a sense from some educators that the business leaders are trying to fix them," observed Baker. The contrast of having an underperforming, predominately African-American student population, and an older, white male composition on the Aspire board mirrored some of the community issues. "Tensions definitely exist, but the partnership creates a space where people can talk truthfully and openly about racial issues. The focus on disaggregating data puts these issues in front of some business leaders who were previously unaware, and allows for conversations that otherwise wouldn't happen," said Colin Groth, director of strategic assistance for StriveTogether. Baker added, "I believe I was hired to act as a bridge between these two communities and prevent any tensions from causing a rift."

As of October 2013, Aspire and the Toledo community remained in the "Emerging" phase of the Theory of Action. There were barriers to overcome before Toledo would achieve the "Sustaining" phase. Burwell appreciated the complexities and difficulties of implementing the framework, and knew that new challenges would emerge. He remained convinced of the efficacy of the process. "We are not allowing implementation challenges to become a risk. There will be bumps along the way, but we will make the necessary money and human capacity available to address any cause of difficulty."

Collective Impact in San Diego, California

Parzen's involvement in San Diego began in 2009 when he was hired as executive vice president of Price Charities to oversee philanthropy and programming related to the healthcare, education and social services aspects of Price's City Heights neighborhood revitalization efforts. The charity, started by Sol Price, founder of the former Price Club warehouse retail chain, took an integrated approach to community improvement by focusing on multiple areas, including healthcare, education, and social services as well as housing, retail development, and other community necessities.

With a systemic orientation, Parzen believed in the potential of collective impact to improve education in City Heights and accepted the role of executive director of the City Heights Partnership.^d Parzen had many of the necessary pieces in place to achieve success. The education and civic communities respected Parzen's leadership capabilities, and the local United Way had agreed to serve as the supporting organization to implement the StriveTogether approach. The neighborhood already benefited from active involvement from San Diego's most respected philanthropic leadership, though these resources were not optimally used. "City Heights is super rich in resources, but unaligned resources. Great work is happening, but without cross-agency, cross-sector and cohesive youth strategy for the neighborhood outside of individual projects," observed Parzen.

As part of Network, Parzen benefited from the experiences and knowledge of other communities implementing collective impact, as well as the personal attention of Edmondson, who provided strategic assistance to the City Heights Partnership. San Diego Unified School District's (San Diego Unified) superintendent, Cindy Marten, was an active participant and served as City Heights Partnership's Leadership Table^e chair.

The City Heights neighborhood was more diverse than San Diego overall, with 40% of residents foreign-born. The densely populated neighborhood had a median income of \$37,600, well below the San Diego median of \$60,800.⁶ City Heights had a student population of 13,000, about 10% of San Diego Unified's total. English Language Learners made up 54% of the City Heights student body and virtually all were considered eligible for free or reduced lunch. (See **Exhibit 7** for Hoover Cluster demographics and education statistics.)

Parzen developed an ambitious vision for the City Heights Partnership and the implementation of StriveTogether's collective impact approach. If successful, Parzen planned to bring the framework to other disadvantaged San Diego neighborhoods. "If we can get this section of the region on track, thriving, learning at grade level, with young people capable of going on to do what they need to do in postsecondary education, then San Diego will have contributed to scaling an important framework for improving education. It will be a major contributor to making our regional workforce stronger," he said. However, Parzen needed to rally more community leaders to the goal of systemic change and convince them that the StriveTogether framework offered a viable path to achieve that goal.

San Diego Business Community While the San Diego economy relied heavily on the aerospace and defense industries due to the large U.S. military presence, the city was also home to two Fortune 500 companies: Qualcomm, a communications equipment company; and Semper Energy, a utility. There was also a large number of smaller companies in the biotech, cyber security,

^d Parzen directed the Partnership's initial focus on the Hoover Cluster of the San Diego Unified School District. According to the Partnership website, more than 50% of students living in the City Heights Neighborhood attended a school in the Hoover Cluster.

^e The Leadership Table was the policy and implementation advisory board to the City Heights Partnership for Children.

software development and clean tech sectors. With such a strong innovation economy, the business community recognized that a quality education for San Diego's young people would serve their and the community's interests. "There is no shortage of business community engagement in education programs. There is a collage of programs that each in their own right may be great, but they are very spread out and not necessarily well connected," according to Mark Cafferty, president of the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and a member of the City Heights Partnership's leadership group. He continued, "I believe businesses are frustrated with 'one off' programs and are hungry for something that can scale and make more systematic improvements."

But business and education leaders had an uneven history of working together, partly stemming from the business community's disappointment after Alan Bersin, San Diego Unified's superintendent was forced to summarily resign. The saga began in 1998, when, with the support of San Diego's Business Roundtable, Bersin was elected Superintendent. A former U.S. Attorney, he was charged with reversing a decline in student test scores by reconfiguring the school system. In previous decades, San Diego Unified had served a white, middle class community, but by the mid-1990s, children of color comprised 70% of the system's student population, and 66% lived in poverty.⁷ Under his "Blueprint for Student Success," Bersin rapidly instituted a broad set of reforms centered on improved teaching. Reading scores increased and progress was made towards reducing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students.⁸

Despite these successes, the hard-driving Bersin became a controversial figure. Although popular with the business community, his approach was much less so with San Diego's educators.⁹ In her book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Diane Ravitch described an environment so stressful that teachers literally became sick, a phenomenon they referred to as "Bersinitis." In January 2005, under extreme pressure from union leaders and others, Bersin stepped down as superintendent. Between 2005 and 2013, San Diego Unified had three superintendents. "Alan was one of those guys who was seen by the business community as just a remarkable leader, and there was significant pullback after he left. They have seen a lot of folks come and go since then," said Cafferty.

In June 2013, Marten took over as superintendent of San Diego Unified. The school board unanimously appointed her just one day after her predecessor announced his resignation. Cafferty and the business community expressed optimism for Marten. "I think there is something special about her story." Marten was deeply committed to public education and had begun her career as a teacher in San Diego before becoming the principal of an elementary school in the City Heights neighborhood. Marten reflected, "To get a great education, you shouldn't have to go to a private school, stand in line or win some sort of lottery to get into a charter school, or have your parents stand in line for 10 years to get into the Section 8 housing in a district with a good zip code. You should be able to live in the inner city where there is struggle and 100% poverty, and get a high quality education."

As principal, with support from Price Charities, Marten opened an on-site health clinic and day care center for the children at Central Elementary School. This provided a tangible example of how services could come together to serve school age children. Through this and other efforts she became a believer in collective impact, which she characterized as vital to improving education outcomes. "I could do all the education things and improve the quality of teaching and learning in every single classroom, but if the students weren't healthy, or the parents were deported or addicted or incarcerated or if the children had physical health needs that were beyond the scope of education, they couldn't achieve anywhere near their potential," she explained.

Her experiences as a teacher and principal informed her views of how educators could partner with businesses and other stakeholders. “I found way too many people coming into the schools trying to do things to us and trying to do things for us, which is disenfranchising, disempowering and disrespectful of our community. It would always sound good, but that attitude of ‘we’re going to come and save you’ doesn’t work. We wanted partners who were thoughtful and relevant around the goals that we were trying to meet,” she said.

Barrier to Business Engagement Despite the agreement of the business community to the importance of public education, gaining their active support proved more difficult than Parzen had expected. He struggled with how to overcome the barriers to engagement.

San Diego covered a large geographic area, which contributed to a more diffuse business community than in the more compact geographies of Cincinnati and Toledo. Those communities also had a longer history of civic engagement. In addition, the City Heights neighborhood was unfamiliar to many San Diego business leaders. “It’s a neighborhood that seems out of sight out of mind for a lot of the business community and I think because of that, getting business to dig deep in engaging with City Heights has been more challenging,” explained Cafferty. Vestiges of the business community’s disillusionment resulting from Bersin being forced out as superintendent remained for many.

Further, the business and education communities had vastly different cultures. Parzen reflected on these differences and the slow progress in bridging the gap. “It’s kind of like two rival tribes that start out as warring factions and end up finding that they have some interest in common, and so are starting to be able to talk together in a more productive way,” he said.

The Path Forward Parzen hoped the soon to be published City Heights Partnership’s baseline report would demonstrate the City Heights Partnership’s focus on metrics and results, and help get broader community engagement. “I believe the StriveTogether collective impact framework’s emphasis on data and outcomes will in the end appeal to the community and help bridge the gap, yet the challenge remains a real one,” he said. Parzen hoped the philanthropic leaders engaged in City Heights could help draw in support from the business leaders. “We’re hoping that through the United Way and its traditional orientation towards business leadership, we can develop the right relationships with business leaders and create a business advisory board of C-level people,” he said.

Parzen had begun to make initial inroads with the San Diego community, but the future remained less than certain. According to Cafferty, “Tad has elevated the dialog around business and education relationships, and it has garnered a level of interest and support I haven’t seen in a while.” Others, including Parzen himself, voiced more caution with the progress. “On a scale of 1 to 10, I think we are at a 4 on mobilizing the business involvement,” he said. Marten agreed, “Getting the business community involved in supporting City Heights has proved challenging.”

Parzen remained optimistic. “As soon as business sees it as an economic development strategy – that their business and the region are going to be better off by partnering in a productive way with education, actually rolling up their sleeves and doing the work together, then we’re going to get somewhere,” he said.

What to do

As Edmondson buckled his seat belt for landing, he thought about how important it was to get StriveTogether “right” on the ground in every community to create valid proof points. He realized

that this would require more and better support from the StriveTogether Network and had a few ideas about how to achieve that goal:

- Develop a training curriculum program to share best practices among key site-level staff, considering local talent was the number one determinant of progress in a community.
- Create a mechanism for communities to work collaboratively to solve similar problems and share solutions, as opposed to constantly soliciting assistance from the StriveTogether team.
- Consider requiring communities to complete the “Exploring” benchmarks before officially joining the Network so that the StriveTogether team could focus their resources on those communities best prepared for assistance.

Edmondson understood that StriveTogether would need additional resources in order to help the Network communities demonstrate the true potential of collective impact. His limited internal staff was stretched very thin and StriveTogether’s data management capabilities needed improvement. What else could StriveTogether do to support the 32 active communities? Edmondson knew that whatever strategy he followed to build StriveTogether’s capacities would require resources at an unprecedented level for this young organization. But, time was of the essence as opportunities were fleeting and communities needed to see progress to sustain stakeholders’ interest and commitment.

He had to put aside these critical organizational challenges. For the moment and the next day, he had to address the best way to broaden engagement in the San Diego community. Would the soon to be published baseline report and its data driven orientation sufficiently encourage the community? How could the City Heights Partnership better leverage its relationships with the United Way and the EDC? What else could the StriveTogether Network do to support the San Diego efforts?

Exhibit 1a Strive Partnership Outcomes for Student Success

Kindergarten Readiness Rates
 4th Grade Reading Proficiency
 8th Grade Math Proficiency
 High School Graduation Rates
 ACT Scores
 Postsecondary Enrollment Rates
 Postsecondary Retention Rates
 Postsecondary Completion Rates

Source: Company Document.

Exhibit 1b Outcome Results (Cincinnati Public Schools and University of Cincinnati)

Indicator	2013	Change Since (baseline year)	Change Since (previous year measured)	Current Target	Target Year
Kindergarten Readiness ¹	55%	11% (2006)	-2% (2012)	75%	2020
4 th Grade Reading ²	71%	16% (2005)	0% (2011)	84%	2011
8 th Grade Math ³	68%	31% (2005)	7% (2011)	72.3%	2011
ACT Composite Score ⁴	18.7	0.6 (2011)	0.6 (2011)	19.0	2011
College Enrollment ⁵	65%	7% (2004)	0% (2009)	70%	2011
College Retention Rate ⁶	86%	5% (2005)	-3% (2011)	90%	2019
College Graduation Rate ⁷	58%	11% (2005)	3% (2011)	75%	2019

Source: 2012-13 Strive Partnership Report Card, <http://reportcard.strivetgether.org/content/kindergarten-readiness-cincinnati>; <http://reportcard.strivetgether.org/content/4th-grade-reading-cps>; <http://reportcard.strivetgether.org/content/8th-grade-math-cps>; <http://reportcard.strivetgether.org/content/act-scores-cps>; <http://reportcard.strivetgether.org/content/college-enrollment-cps>; <http://reportcard.strivetgether.org/content/college-retention-uc>; <http://reportcard.strivetgether.org/content/college-completion-uc>, accessed October 2013.

Notes: The Strive Partnership chose high school graduation as one of the eight outcomes. The state of Ohio adjusted the method of calculating graduation rates, so historical data was not available. The 2010-2011 percent of students who graduated high school, using the new metrics, was 63.9%. The Strive Partnership set a goal of 95% by 2013.

- 1: A score of 19 or higher on the district's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment for Literacy (KRA-L) exam was considered prepared to enter kindergarten.
- 2: Cincinnati used the Ohio Achievement Assessment. The data represents the state level AYP (adequate yearly progress) targets.
- 3: Represents the percent of students at or above proficiency for math on the Ohio Achievement Assessment.
- 4: Represent the average ACT composite score of students in the Cincinnati Public Schools. The ACT, a national college admissions exam, is graded on a scale of 1-36.
- 5: Percent of students that enrolled in college at any time within 2 years of high school graduation.
- 6: First to second year college retention rates for student pursuing a bachelors degree.
- 7: Percent of student who graduate within six years of enrollment.

Exhibit 2a The Difference Between Collaboration and Collective Impact

The first is that in collaboration, we have historically come together to implement a new program or initiative. This is most often the case when we wanted to apply for or have been awarded a grant. When it comes to collective impact, community leaders and practitioners come together around their desire to improve outcomes consistently over time. The outcome serves as the true north and the partners can uncover the right practices to move the outcome over time.



This brings us to the second difference: using data to improve, not just prove. In collaboration, data is often used to pick a winner or prove something works. In collective impact, data is used for the purpose of continuous improvement. We certainly want to find what works, but the partners are focused instead on using the data to spread the practices across programs and systems not simply scale an individual program.

And last, collaboration is often about falling in love with an idea. Somebody may have visited a program somewhere and seen something they liked so they advocated to bring it to town. The core assumption in their efforts is that success elsewhere will be consistent with success right here. Collective impact is about advocating what those practices you know get results in your own backyard. The voice of community partners is leveraged to protect and spread the best of what exists right here and now instead of what one hopes would get results down the line.

Source: Adapted from Jeff Edmondson, "The Difference between Collaboration and Collective Impact," November 12, 2012, post on blog "Striving for Change," www.strivenetwork.org/blog/2012/11/the-difference-between-collaboration-and-collective-impact/, accessed October 2013.

Exhibit 2b The Five Conditions for Collective Impact

1. **Common Agenda** – All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
2. **Shared Measurement** – Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities** – Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
4. **Continuous Communication** – Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
5. **Backbone Support** – Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organization and agencies.

Source: Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania and Mark Kramer, "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work," Stanford Social Innovation Review, January 26, 2012, www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work?cpgn=WP%20DL%20-%20Channeling%20Change, accessed October 2013.

Exhibit 3 Location of StriveTogether Network Members

Source: Company Document.

Exhibit 4 Select Financials for StriveTogether^a

	2009	2010	2011
Expenses	\$4,585,389	\$3,255,439	\$3,264,480
including grants of:	\$779,617	\$1,144,004	\$675,753
Revenue	N/A	\$18,039	\$561,343
Total Income	\$89,454	\$2,510,764	\$3,230,593
End-of-Year Assets	\$1,090,979	\$1,146,946	\$2,104,972

Source: "Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax," Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service, Form 990, 2009, via GuideStar, p. 2, 34, <http://www2.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2010/311/321/2010-311321973-0738af0e-9.pdf>, accessed December 2013; "Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax," Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service, Form 990, 2010, via GuideStar, p. 2, 41, <http://www2.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2011/311/321/2011-311321973-0841d7a1-9.pdf>, accessed December 2013; "Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax," Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service, Form 990, 2011, via GuideStar, p. 2, 51, <http://www2.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2012/311/321/2012-311321973-096b2bc2-9.pdf>, accessed December 2013.

^a Data from 2009 and 2010 for Strive Partnership. Data from 2011 from StriveTogether Network.

Exhibit 5 Theory of Action

Strive has established a continuum of quality benchmarks called the Theory of Action for building and sustaining civic infrastructure. Across the continuum, there are four fundamental “Gateways” which signal a partnership’s progression toward becoming a Proof Point. By crossing through each Gateway, there is a greater likelihood for sustained impact and improvement over time. Some of the quality benchmarks most critical to success within each Gateway include:

EXPLORING	EMERGING	SUSTAINING	SYSTEMS CHANGE	PROOF POINT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-sector leadership table is convened around a cradle to career vision • Partnership selects community level outcomes and indicators for which to hold themselves accountable • An organization commits to provide key staff and operations to support the partnership to drive improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership collects, disaggregates and publicly reports baseline data on community-level outcomes • Partnership secures multiple years of funding to support operations and collaborative work • Partnership selects a continuous improvement process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners take action to improve the community level outcomes • Collaborative Action Networks are engaged and develop charters and action plans to improve community level outcomes/indicators • Community is mobilized to take action to improve community level outcomes/indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership puts in place comprehensive data system to collect and connect student level data across systems • Partnership engages in continual alignment of resources to impact community level outcomes/indicators • Partnership influences policies to enable and sustain improvement 	<p>60% of indicators consistently trending in the right direction</p>

These quality benchmarks are critical for ensuring a community transforms how they serve children. Most importantly, communities achieve population-level impact when the student indicators that were set by the partnership consistently trend in the right direction. As more communities successfully meet these quality benchmarks, we will collectively progress toward achieving our ultimate goal: supporting the success of every child, every step of the way, cradle to career.

The Strive Cradle to Career Network will guide by this Theory of Action. Members of the Network are communities that a) commit to work toward achieving these quality benchmarks, and b) actively participate in a community of learning and practice with their peers in which knowledge is shared and created. Together this Network will build shared value to advance the field of cradle to career collective impact.

Source: Company Document.

Exhibit 6 Commitment to Quality Pledge

..... **Commitment to Quality**

We engage with the Strive Cradle to Career Network in the "Commitment to Quality" to:

- Assess and share the progress of our partnership using the Theory of Action as a way to provide common understanding of our individual and collective progress toward building the cradle to career civic infrastructure that will lead to collective impact.
- Work in partnership with the Strive staff and our peers in other communities across the country and globe to refine the quality benchmarks so we can collectively own them for framing our work starting in January 2014.
- Build the necessary local data management infrastructure to collect, analyze, and report data at the community and practitioner levels to enable us to understand, in concrete terms, the impact of building civic infrastructure.
- Model a commitment to continuous improvement by sharing successes and failures related to how the partnership has applied learning in operations and implementation.

Partnership Director Signature _____

Leadership Table Chair Signature _____

Date _____

Source: Company Document.

Exhibit 7 Toledo City School District Demographics and Education Statistics

Number of Schools: 51
Total Students: 22,044
Male: 52%
Female: 48%
American Indian/Alaskan Native: 0%
Asian/Pacific Islander: 1%
Black: 43%
Hispanic: 9%
White: 40%
Two or more Races: 6%
Free Lunch Eligible: 68%
Reduced Price Lunch Eligible: 4%

Percentage of Students Scoring at Proficient or Above Level on State Exams (2012-2013)

Test	Grade							
	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	10 th	11 th
Math	61.7%	56.9%	42.6%	54.5%	52.5%	54.1%	69.7%	82.2%
Reading	69.5%	77.4%	54.1%	66.8%	67.1%	71.4%	79.0%	89.6%
Science	n/a	n/a	37.8%	n/a	n/a	39.8%	61.0%	76.4%
Social Studies	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	64.7%	83.0%
Writing	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	76.9%	91.0%

Four-Year Graduation Rate (State Average): 64.6% (81.3%)

Five-Year Graduation Rate (State Average): 70.2% (82.4%)

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, "Search for Public Schools," <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/index.asp>, accessed October 2013; "Toledo City School District 2012-2013 Report Card," <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/District-Report.aspx?DistrictIRN=044909>, accessed October 2013.

Note: Demographic data was not available for Jesup W. Scott High School.

Note: Only one year of data was available because previous district results were under review by the Ohio Department of Education after findings by the Auditor of State in 2011.

Exhibit 8 San Diego Unified School District, Hoover Cluster, Demographics and Education Statistics

Number of Schools: 12
Total Students: 8,868
Male: 52%
Female: 48%
American Indian/Alaskan Native: 0%
Asian/Pacific Islander: 11%
Black: 10%
Hispanic: 75%
White: 2%
Two or more Races: 2%
Free Lunch Eligible: 94%
Reduced Price Lunch Eligible: 3%

Percentage of Students Scoring at Proficient or Above Level on State Exams (All Grades)

Student Group	English Language Arts				Mathematics			
	2011	2012	2013	Change. From base ('09)	2011	2012	2013	Change. From base ('09)
Total	38.6%	42.3%	42.4%	8.4%	38.7%	42.4%	44.4%	9.8%
Female	42.7%	46.5%	46.6%	7.8%	38.8%	42.2%	44.2%	9.1%
Male	34.5%	37.9%	38.4%	8.8%	38.6%	42.6%	44.5%	10.5%
Black	38.1%	41.7%	38.5%	5.3%	35.8%	38.4%	39.0%	7.8%
Asian	27.8%	35.6%	32.7%	6.8%	41.2%	42.4%	41.4%	5.2%
Filipino	54.5%	71.4%	47.1%	-17.2%	45.5%	64.3%	70.6%	25.8%
Hispanic	36.8%	40.1%	40.7%	9.2%	36.6%	40.3%	42.9%	10.5%
Indochinese	58.5%	53.7%	56.3%	7.8%	54.9%	58.3%	58.0%	6.1%
Nat. Amer.	45.5%	n/a	n/a	n/a	45.5%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Isla.	24.0%	38.1%	44.4%	16.7%	28.0%	50.0%	33.3%	11.1%
White	52.7%	58.9%	55.8%	3.8%	45.0%	48.5%	50.4%	7.6%
Multiracial	52.2%	47.0%	51.8%	n/a	39.1%	43.1%	48.7%	n/a
Eng. Learn.	22.0%	24.6%	24.9%	5.0%	36.9%	38.7%	41.1%	9.0%
Eco. Disadv.	38.6%	42.3%	42.4%	8.4%	38.7%	42.4%	44.4%	9.9%
Gifted	65.9%	67.6%	67.9%	3.2%	65.1%	68.6%	71.4%	13.0%
w/ Disab.	15.0%	16.6%	14.9%	5.3%	19.5%	22.1%	23.6%	5.6%

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, "Search for Public Schools," <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/index.asp>, accessed October 2013; San Diego Unified School District, Office of Accountability, "CST Summary Reports-2013," <http://www.sandi.net/Page/1584>, accessed October 2013.

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