



StriveTogether®

Every child. Cradle to career.



Progress Report for StriveTogether's Racial Equity Planning Team

Letter From the CEO

In an equitable world, the success and well-being of children from cradle to career would not be determined by where they live or how they are racialized. It is this vision for a better future together that drives our work with a national network of communities.

We know that achieving racial equity is essential to helping every child succeed in school and in life. In January 2019, we asked members of StriveTogether's Cradle to Career Network to help us strengthen our commitment to racial equity during a six-month planning process. Equity is one of the most critical components of our five-year strategic plan, and I am incredibly grateful to the network members who embarked on this journey with us.

At StriveTogether, we see racial equity as both a value we must deeply live and as an outcome we must achieve to realize our vision. Our organization is dedicated to operationalizing the racial and ethnic equity and inclusion that we seek to advance in nearly 70 communities across the country. Meaningful equity work requires not just change but transformation — a thorough shift in organizational practices, norms, culture and composition, from hiring and recruitment to daily management and more.

This work is hard, messy and complex — and requires healing, reconciliation and a commitment to anti-racist policies, practices, attitudes and actions. Our resolve comes from the simple belief that every child has value and promise.

The Network has mine and the entire StriveTogether team's commitment to move this work forward with rigor and accountability. Although we have accomplished a tremendous amount since this past January, we are just beginning the next phase. We are continuing the work of building an inclusive organization and of learning along the way. We look forward to partnering with more of the Network over the next several years. I also promise to regularly communicate about our efforts, starting with this progress report.

Thank you again for your incredible dedication to this important effort. I am honored to be on this journey with all of you.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Blatz
StriveTogether President and CEO

Executive Summary

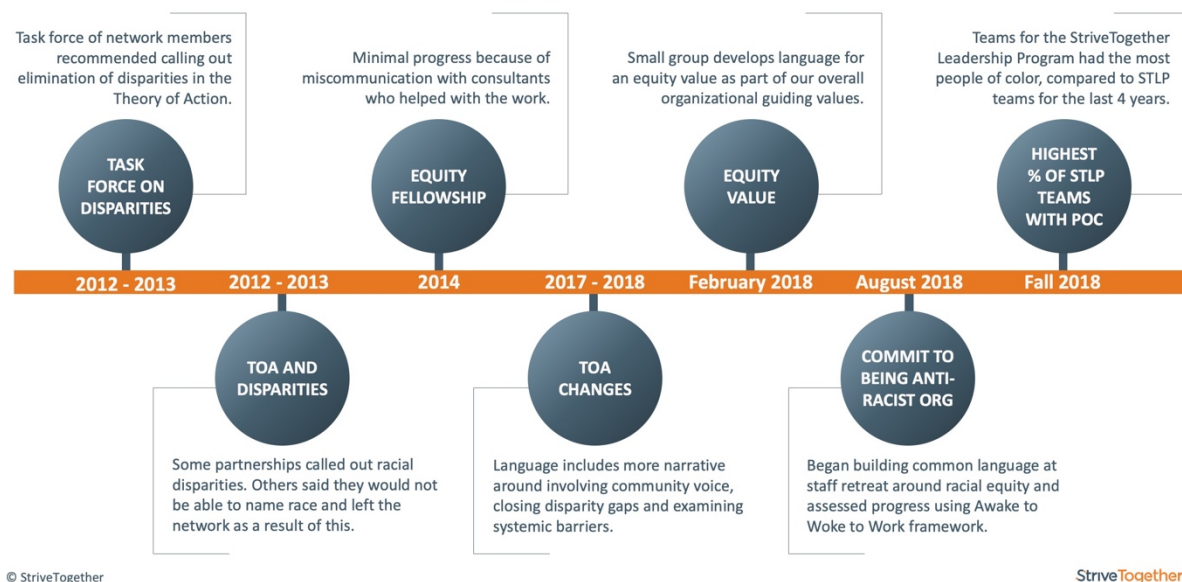
StriveTogether is a national movement with a clear purpose: helping every child succeed in school and in life from cradle to career, regardless of race, zip code, ethnicity or circumstance. We refuse to settle for a world where a child's potential is dictated by the conditions into which they are born, so we work together to break down barriers, change systems and improve lives.

In partnership with nearly 70 communities across the country, we provide coaching, resources and rigorous approaches to create opportunities and close gaps in education, housing and so much more. We use data to illuminate problems and solutions, tackle tough conversations and deliver impactful results for 13.7 million children and counting.

Our commitment to equity began in 2012, when a group of network members recommended calling out elimination of disparities in the StriveTogether Theory of Action™. Our theory of action has gone through a few revisions since then to include more criteria around involving community voice, closing disparity gaps and examining systemic barriers.

Like most others who are on this journey, ours has also been one of starts and stops and many lessons. However, without them, we wouldn't be here today.

StriveTogether Racial Equity Progress



The more formal part of our equity journey began soon after we adopted equity as one of our core organizational values in February 2018. In 2018, we declared our commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization. Staff have joined us at different stages and bring unique life and professional experiences that inform and advance our efforts.

We have a lot of hard work ahead of us. Our immediate next steps include:

- Adopting our first racial equity statement as an organization and as a network
- Implementing the recommendations made by the network Racial Equity Planning Team through an intentional implementation phase starting in January 2020
- Launching a blog series about our racial and ethnic equity work with the Network and our parallel internal efforts at StriveTogether
- Recruiting additional network members to join the implementation phase of the work
- Looking at internal capacity and resources to ensure we support the implementation phase.

Some of this work may be completed in phases due to resource limitations, but StriveTogether is committed to full implementation. We will proactively and publicly strive to recognize, reveal and dismantle structural and institutional racism within our organization and in the work that we do across the country. Our goal is the success of every child, no matter where they live or how they are racialized.

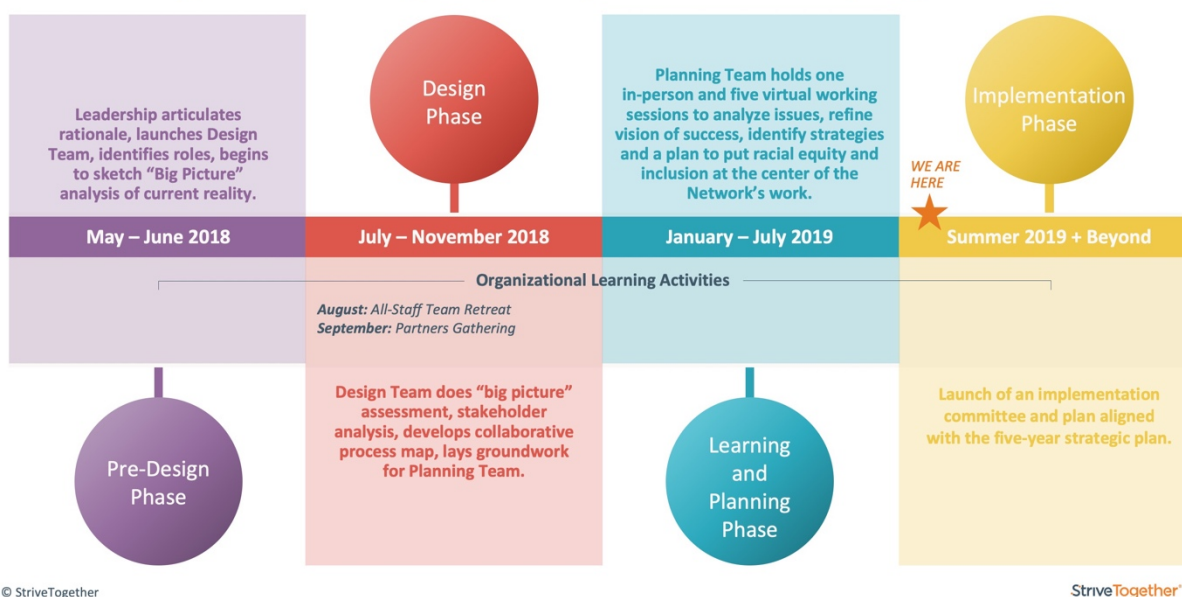
Stages of Progress

The first stage of this work took place in May 2018, when we formed a design team of StriveTogether staff to lay the groundwork for the planning team. The initial team analyzed the current reality of our organization and the Network as well as developed a map and timeline for a collaborative process moving forward. This work continued through November 2018 and was done in partnership with an equity consultant, the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC).

In January 2019, with support from the IISC, we launched the second stage — the Racial Equity Planning Team with members from the Cradle to Career Network and StriveTogether board and staff members. The planning team was established to address one key question: What can we do now to ensure gaps are closing and systems are transforming for children and youth of color? Members met six times between January and July, including a two-day, in-person session in Cincinnati, Ohio, to refine our vision for success, identify strategies and contribute to a plan that puts racial equity and inclusion at the center of our work.

The purpose of the planning team was threefold: a) identify key barriers faced by network members; b) prioritize policies and practices needed to address those barriers; and c) develop an action plan to support equitable results. With this in mind, planning team members divided into four groups — each one aligning their work to a pillar from the StriveTogether Theory of Action™.

Road Map to Building Capacity for Racial Equity



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The **Shared Community Vision Group** created a racial equity statement and recommended edits to the theory of action to better embed racial equity throughout. The equity statement was shared at the Cradle to Career Network Convening in September for feedback.

The **Evidence-Based Decision-Making Group** created a framework for collecting and reporting data on racial disparities, and has codified guidance for avoiding deficit framing when communicating outcomes and disparities.

The **Collaborative Action Group** created guidance for working with adjacent sectors and engaging community voice and identified collaborators in service of racially equitable outcomes.

The **Investment and Sustainability Group** focused on ensuring racial diversity and inclusion of staff and boards as partnerships progress through the theory of action. Members of this group proposed creating resources to support partnerships in ensuring racial equity with staff recruitment, retention and compensation.

Over six months, each work group and the planning team as a whole made great progress in developing a shared language, prioritizing issues and articulating desired results and strategies for achieving them. They produced several deliverables and recommendations, creating a solid foundation for moving this work forward. Along the way, members built a team of champions to advocate for the hard work still ahead — champions who provide expertise, diverse perspectives, support and accountability from across the Network.

The planning team's deliverables include:

- A racial equity statement
- Recommended changes to embed racial equity into our StriveTogether Theory of Action™
- A guidance document for advancing racial equity in evidence-based decision making, including preliminary identification of new and revised indicators of success
- A guidance document for avoiding deficit-based framing
- A working definitions document
- A preliminary toolkit of racial equity resources
- A team with the experience of working toward success while balancing results, process and relationships
- A positive experience within the planning of talking about racism and disparities and working on issues together

Through the planning process, the following have also gotten underway:

- Tools identified for assessing the baseline status of network members regarding racial equity work
- Racial equity messaging and content integrated into planning for the Cradle to Career Network Convening
- Exploration of racial affinity groups at StriveTogether
- Development of a hiring guide

In early 2020, we will launch the Implementation Task Force for Racial Equity and Inclusion to further develop and carry out a plan that aligns with our five-year strategic plan. The next stage of the work — the implementation phase — will build on the work of the planning team. The deep change we are seeking is, at a minimum, a five-year process.

Throughout the implementation phase, StriveTogether will continue convening work groups aligned to our theory of action pillars and our strategic plan. This will necessitate identifying priorities and sequencing them over the years, taking into account organizational capacity, which activities best build on each other and what else is happening at StriveTogether and across the Network. We are committed to supporting our racial and ethnic equity work together with staffing and resources, and to ensure that the StriveTogether team members dedicated to these efforts have adequate capacity and authority.

Recommendations to Implement Racial Equity and Inclusion from the Planning Team and IISC

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION 1

Make equity central to the work of StriveTogether Network.

Identified needs	Implementation steps
<p>StriveTogether Theory of Action™ does not explicitly call out racial equity beyond disaggregation of data.</p> <p>Outcomes data is important but not sufficient for transforming systems for children and youth of color.</p> <p>Race equity is not lifted up appropriately in the assessment processes.</p> <p>Many network members are still focused on universal and small scale versus targeted and system-level strategies.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explicitly embed racial equity in the StriveTogether Theory of Action™. 2. Identify ways to use and communicate data to assess progress by tracking systemic-, structural- and institutional-level data, not just outcomes data. 3. Bring in more voices and lived experiences of young people to inform the work of the Network. The people most impacted by the systemic racial inequities we are targeting have a critical perspective that would inform policy, programs and outcomes. 4. Develop guidance for "go/no go" steps for work group strategies focused on eliminating racist structures. 5. Integrate and operationalize race equity in StriveTogether assessments.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION 2

Communicate to engage a broader coalition and build momentum.

Identified needs

For broader audiences, we have to rethink our frameworks and “insider” references. Our language can be intimidating and alienating for individuals not steeped in our work. An over-reliance on jargon also can stifle “outside the box” thinking.

A critical aspect of embedding racial equity into our work is to become more intentional about what it means to be inclusive. This includes reflecting on and reevaluating how our current day-to-day ways of talking and working support or discourage broader participation.

Implementation steps

1. Explicitly embed racial equity in the StriveTogether Theory of Action™.
2. Build shared language and understanding across the Cradle to Career Network (racial equity statement and working definitions).
3. Introduce best practices for avoiding deficit-based framing when presenting disaggregated data and facilitating discussions about academic disparities.
4. Use consistent messaging and accessible language — be mindful of how we use frameworks and language to be as inclusive as possible.
5. Develop and implement a communication plan to maintain regular and consistent communication to keep staff and the Network fully informed of progress.
6. Identify, engage and support champions across StriveTogether and the Network and elevate their visibility.
7. Regularly solicit feedback for both buy-in and accountability (e.g., surveys, focus groups, annual convening, conference calls, etc.).

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION 3

Build capability in those leading this work to support their ability to engage, enlist and empower others in leading for race equity.

Identified needs	Implementation steps
<p>Partnerships need support to build staff capability in leading for racial equity.</p> <p>Resources and supports are needed on the ground to maneuver political challenges in leading for racial equity.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deploy common racial equity tools and resources to support network members to move toward adoption of racial equity practices. 2. Build staff capacity and capability to lead this work by providing hiring, retention and training supports to network members. 3. Survey network members to identify the supports they believe will be most helpful to each partnership, both in terms of content and delivery. 4. Develop menu of training (including peer-to-peer), technical assistance, grants and other incentives for partnerships (develop baseline data and organizational assessments). 5. Integrate racial equity in the Investment and Sustainability pillar of the theory of action related to funding and financial sustainability. 6. Launch ongoing affinity groups supported by StriveTogether (likely through a partner organization whose expertise lies in facilitating and leading diversity, equity and inclusion conversations)

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION 4

Lead by example with parallel internal work, sharing progress and lessons publicly.

Identified needs	Implementation steps
<p>Network members are interested in learning from StriveTogether’s journey in leading this work.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deploy common racial equity tools and reflect on ways to shift organizational culture to align with racial equity values and hold shared responsibility as the Implementation Task Force for Racial Equity and Inclusion. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Allow time and space for relationship building and for people to bring their whole selves to this work. 2. Acknowledge and process the human and emotional toll of this work, particularly for those most committed to the work (most often people of color). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Assess workloads, build racial equity into individual work plans and identify needed supports. b) Create space for being in community and learning together. c) Get support from organizational leadership to prioritize these efforts, in ways that are sustainable for those carrying the work.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION 5

Allocate appropriate resources and capacity to make measurable progress and hold accountability.

Identified needs

Implementing our plan for racial equity and inclusion requires resources and capacity. When people are constantly stretched thin with workloads, it undermines some of the values we are attempting to promote. It can be a setup for burnout on the part of those most committed to the work (more often people of color).

Implementation steps

1. Build implementation plan strategies and activities to correspond to strategic plan timeframe.
2. Determine sequencing by taking into account capacity and how activities build upon each other as well as leveraging other work and activities going on in the organization and the Network.
3. Assemble an Implementation Task Force for Racial Equity and Inclusion with network members who add specific expertise and perspective (e.g., communication or data).
4. Assign StriveTogether staff to the implementation task force and ensure they have the capacity to support this work.

Next Steps

Proposed Implementation Task Force Structure

To provide oversight during the implementation phase, two members of the StriveTogether leadership team will serve as strategy leads and co-conveners internally. They also will ensure accountability throughout the process and align the Network and StriveTogether internal work with the strategic plan.

When the Implementation Task Force for Racial Equity and Inclusion launches in January 2020, with members from the Network and the StriveTogether team, the full group will meet every two months and the four work groups will meet monthly. StriveTogether CEO and President Jennifer Blatz and a leader from the Network will serve as co-chairs for the implementation task force, consisting of 15-20 Network and StriveTogether staff participants who will make annual commitments in this capacity.

Each work group will co-chaired by a StriveTogether staff member and a network member. The groups will take on the work of revising the StriveTogether Theory of Action™ and developing and identifying supports for the Network. The implementation stage of this work will require an ongoing commitment of staffing and resources from StriveTogether, including a StriveTogether co-chair, a project manager for each work group and ongoing communication support to keep the staff and Network updated.

These StriveTogether co-chairs, in partnership with the strategy leads, will ensure that implementation occurs in a timely basis and that team members are engaged in the process. To efficiently operationalize the co-chair role, we are recommending StriveTogether employees who are more closely related to the particular group they are leading. This will create synergy in the work and subject matter expertise as it relates to implementing solutions within the Network.

The StriveTogether co-chair will provide overall project leadership. To support facilitating this process, we also are looking to have a StriveTogether project manager and communication support for each work group.

Sequence of Activities Through 2024

Year 1 (2020)	Adopt shared language, revise the theory of action to make it race equity explicit, finalize processes and supports to center equity in data, launch network affinity groups, identify five to seven network sites as “pilots”
Year 2 (2021)	Survey staff and network to identify types of support that will be most helpful; develop menu of training (including peer-to-peer), coaching,

	grants, other incentives and supports; offer ongoing webinars, convenings and workshops to increase skills in network members, develop tools and a space on the Partner Portal to house them and curated resources; create a hiring guide and resources for network members
Year 3 (2022)	Launch training modules to support network staff in leading for racial and ethnic equity as well as funder tools and training
Year 4 (2023)	Ongoing organizational learning activities and support and development of training modules
Year 5 (2024)	Full integration of the implementation plan created by the Implementation Task Force for Racial Equity and Inclusion

The parallel internal work at StriveTogether includes:

Year 1 (2019)	Shared language, understanding and racial equity strategy development; establish baseline for organizational culture and climate measures
Year 2 (2020)	Establishment of a racial equity scorecard and policy development; ongoing organizational climate measurement
Year 3 (2021)	Organizational culture measurement and ongoing organizational learning activity; continue building coaching support and internal competencies
Year 4 (2022)	Ongoing organizational learning activities and support and development of training modules
Year 5 (2023)	Full integration

Communication and Network Engagement Strategy

StriveTogether also will create a comprehensive communication and network engagement strategy and plan, with a calendar for the year. This will inform how we regularly communicate about this work through a variety of methods including:

- Ensure all communications align with racial equity statement
- Weave racial equity change work and thinking woven into all StriveTogether messaging
- Solicit input and feedback at each critical step, in multiple formats
- Have regular blogs and webinars
- Include learning resources in the News You Can Use newsletter for network members
- Solicit input and feedback at each critical step, in multiple formats
- Elevate the visibility of those already doing effective racial and ethnic equity work in the Network
- Leverage peer influence, e.g., role alikes, to have consistent and ongoing equity-focused discussions

Conclusion

StriveTogether has been on this journey since we became a national network. The roadmap has never been straight and the work has never been easy, but equity has been at the heart of our work from the beginning. We know we must be vigilant and relentless in continuing our parallel internal work to ensure we are truly advancing racial and ethnic equity within our organization and within ourselves. As a network of nearly 70 communities committed to a racially equitable and just world for every child, we believe our specific work positions us to be effective and impactful. Change is possible when we work together for youth and families.

Appendix

Racial Equity Planning Team Composition

Network Participants

Name	Organization
Michael Applegate	Bright Futures Education Partnership of Monterey County (CA)
Julia Baez	Baltimore's Promise (MD)
Mark Bobb-Semple	The Albany Promise (NY)
Kayla Brooks	Seeding Success (Memphis, TN)
Marquice Clark	Spartanburg District 7 (Spartanburg Academic Movement – Spartanburg County, SC)
Bill Crim	Promise Partnerships of Salt Lake (UT)
Sonia Dominguez	E3 Alliance (Central TX)
Diana Huynh	The Road Map Project (South King County and Seattle, WA)
Delia Kimbrel	ImpactTulsa (OK)
Jessica Lewis	ROC the Future (Rochester, NY)
Christian Paige	Seattle-based poet, speaker and educator
Dan Ryan	All Hands Raised (Portland, OR)
Dr. Juliet Schiller	Marin Promise Partnership (CA)
Matt Snyder	Higher Expectations for Racine County (WI)
Michelle Walker	Generation Next (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN)

Staff Participants

Board
James Bell , Board of Directors
Sue Lehmann , Board of Directors
Staff
Jennifer Blatz , President and CEO

Bridget Jancarz, Chief of Staff

Ritika Kurup, Senior Director of Learning and Activation

Monroe Nichols, Director of Network Growth

Dawn Raftery, Director of Communication

Kevin Sansberry II, Vice President of People, Values and Culture

Sajah Woods, Former Accounting Specialist

Paige Umberger, Senior Manager of Network Events