

GRANT REPORT

cradle to career community challenge



2020

pushing through chaos to

LEAD THROUGH RESULTS

StriveTogether[®]
Every child. Cradle to career.

The twin pandemics of the public health crisis and racial injustice this year have pushed the Cradle to Career Network™ in ways that we hadn't experienced before. Network partnerships have demonstrated agility in adapting to community needs by leaning into their roles as data experts, conveners, racial equity champions and policy advocates.

While 2020 has been an unexpectedly challenging year, partnerships across the Network have met the challenges boldly in their continued work to improve cradle-to-career outcomes. This report shares some highlights from the Challenge Fund communities.

themes across the

CRADLE TO CAREER NETWORK

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With the sudden onset of the pandemic and resulting school closures, followed by continued instances of racial injustice, the Cradle-to-Career Network has adapted to emerging needs of their communities. While systems transformation has remained the North Star, the strategies to get there had to be adapted during this crisis and the ways of measuring progress in the interim will also change.

The key themes that have emerged across the Network in 2020 are:

- 1** Partners' roles in their communities as data experts, conveners, and policy and equity advocates positioned them to be well-equipped to meet **crisis response** needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many partnerships created resource mapping tools and convened local partners virtually to coordinate local responses.
- 2** With school buildings closing, the **digital divide** became one of the key challenges in ensuring equitable access to quality education. A key role network partnerships have played is of mapping their communities to identify gaps in access and leading advocacy efforts to address the divide.
- 3** Disparate impact of the pandemic on communities of color, coupled with the long-overdue national reckoning with structural racism, has allowed network members to mobilize their communities around **systems transformation** in a stronger way. Specifically, a number of communities are looking at ways of shifting the system through policy and advocacy efforts.
- 4** **Sustainability**, both financially and in terms of leadership transition, has been a significant challenge for partners, especially in the shifting economic landscape.
- 5** **StriveTogether's support** through grantmaking, coaching, technical assistance and intentional focus on students of color has moved communities to accelerate progress.



PLAY SHORT VIDEO

lessons from the Opportunity Fund Partnerships

[Click to watch:](#)





Every child. Cradle to career.

Stories of Impact

SUCCESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

NORTHFIELD PROMISE



NORTHFIELD, MN

Actions:

Northfield Promise addressed the digital divide and challenges around food insecurity in their community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Tableau to create heat maps showing areas where students did not have food or internet access, Northfield Promise used real-time data to address these needs. The maps guided food distribution route planning and were shown to local internet providers to target areas that still needed to be connected to the internet.

Results:

Northfield Promise staff helped non-English-speaking families access the internet by providing translation services. By May, 98 students from 73 families received internet access, allowing 100% of Northfield Public Schools students to access the internet. Once all students could access remote learning, the partnership tracked data concerning student engagement and online attendance, allowing educators to check in with those students requiring additional supports.

Takeaways:

The partnership's ability to quickly respond to their community's needs during COVID-19 is largely due to its commitment to hiring and maintaining a racially and linguistically diverse staff reflective of the communities the partnership serves. COVID-19 amplified the need for inclusive hiring practices to support the engagement of all families. Additionally, the partnership's dedication to data-driven learning through the Tableau Foundation Fellowship allowed their data staff to use data consistently and effectively, as outlined in [this article](#) published by Tableau.



100%

of students now have internet access



98 students served



73 families served

stories of impact: covid-19 response

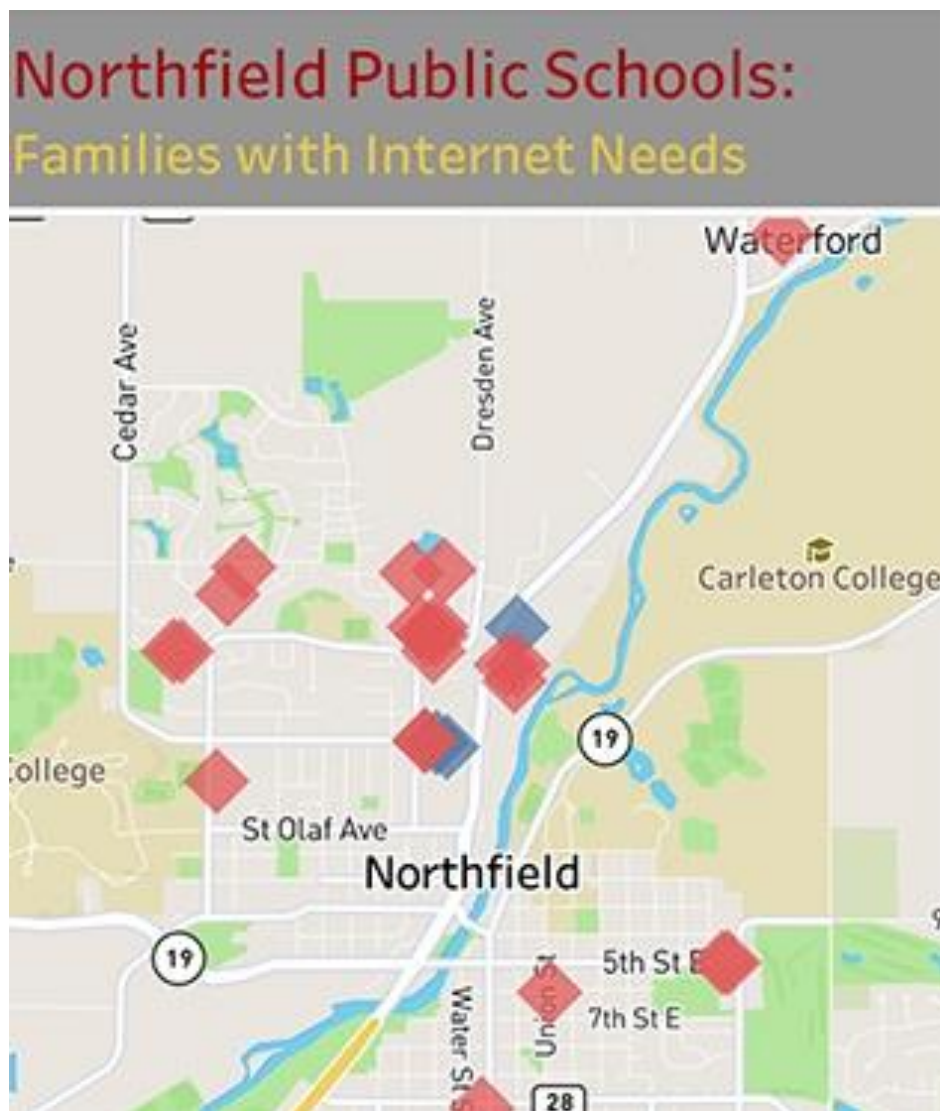
NORTHFIELD PROMISE

OPPORTUNITY FUND



NORTHFIELD, MN

Map of students without internet access to plan community response



100%

of students have
internet access



98 students
served



73 families
served

BALTIMORE'S PROMISE



BALTIMORE, MD

Actions:

Baltimore's Promise served as the administrative backbone of a group of 16 funders in the Baltimore Area comprising the [COVID-19 Response Funding Collaborative of Greater Baltimore](#). The Collaborative's intent was to streamline grant requests and create a single point of entry for nonprofits meeting critical needs during the pandemic to make requesting and receiving funds faster and easier.

Results:

The Collaborative raised \$4.29 million through their efforts. As of May 2020, \$3.48 million had been disbursed to 144 different nonprofits. The partnership used data from local 211 call centers to determine where funds were most needed. Funds were then distributed in the Baltimore area to support a variety of needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Takeaways:

Previous work of Baltimore's Promise as convener of the Summer Funding Collaborative enabled them to easily pivot to support the community response to the pandemic. Their expertise as conveners led to the doubling of funders and amount committed by the Collaborative in just over three weeks, while their role as data experts made them an ideal group to determine where those funds were needed.



\$4.3m
raised



\$3.5m
disbursed



144
non-profits served

stories of impact: system-level strategies

PROMISE PARTNERSHIP OF SALT LAKE

Actions:

Promise Partnership of Salt Lake co-led an effort to secure increased funding for full-day kindergarten for Salt Lake children. These funds were intended to be targeted toward children whose scores on kindergarten entry assessments indicated a need for more intensive kindergarten services. Promise Partnership of Salt Lake achieved this win through strong relationships, use of data, ongoing conversations with leadership and a strong coalition within the education community that advocated for early childhood education. Unfortunately, with the onset of the pandemic, all new funding appropriated at the end of 2020 general session was overturned in a special session convened to address the impact of COVID-19.

Results:

When new funding was overturned in a special session convened to address the impact of COVID-19, Promise Partnership of Salt Lake protected \$5 million of the original \$10 million in new funds to support full-day kindergarten through their advocacy efforts. This funding will provide access to full-day kindergarten for nearly 3,000 more students.

Takeaways:

While most programs received budget cuts due to COVID-19, still expanding the full-day kindergarten program at this time highlights the fact that Promise Partnership of Salt Lake's advocacy efforts have impacted legislators about the importance of early childhood education.

OPPORTUNITY AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FUND



SALT LAKE, UT



secured funding for
full-day kindergarten

protected **\$5m**



out of \$10m
due to COVID-19



3,000

More students in full-
day kindergarten

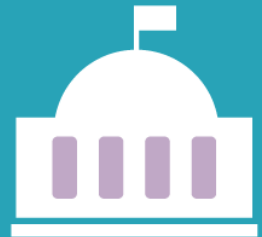
stories of impact: system-level strategies

GENERATION NEXT

ACCELERATOR AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FUND



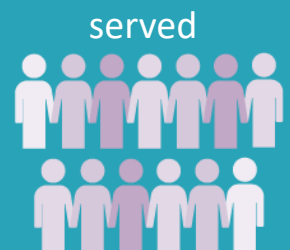
MINNEAPOLIS, MN



informed and outlined work
for state policy makers



launched a webpage
with timely resources
that served families



13

community partners

Actions:

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Generation Next took an opportunity to inform state policy makers about their work and the importance of their role. Generation Next, as part of the Education Partnerships Coalition (EPC), sent a [letter](#) to elected officials outlining their work and offering to provide assistance in various areas such as coordinating community-wide efforts for relief, providing community education, administering grant dollars or providing culturally-relevant outreach to Black, Indigenous, People of Color families.

Results:

Generation Next launched a [webpage](#) with timely resources for families from 13 different community partners, including information on food distribution, childcare and learning at home resources. In response to their letter to elected officials, Generation Next was invited to present in a COVID-19 response webinar series for state and local education leaders. They shared about the EPC, local collective impact efforts, and the work they were doing in response to COVID-19.

Takeaways:

Generation Next is continuing to make the case for the value of cradle-to-career partnerships to sustain funding by demonstrating how partnerships supported youth and families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

stories of impact: system-level strategies

BOSTON OPPORTUNITY AGENDA

OPPORTUNITY (effective
7/2020) AND STRATEGIC
INITIATIVE FUNDS



BOSTON, MA

Actions:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, emergency child care centers were allowed to open to provide child care at no cost for essential workers. However, child care centers faced a major funding gap in opening centers with reduced capacity. To address the gap in funding between what the state allotted and the actual cost of child care, [Boston Opportunity Agenda](#) worked with the Mayor's Office of Women's Advancement to secure \$545,000 from the city's resiliency fund. They also led the application process and distribution of the funds.

Results:

Boston Opportunity Agenda was able to leverage existing work and relationships to create child care spaces for more than 900 children. Their established role as a partner in education in Boston allowed them to support child care centers during the pandemic, and they will continue to do so during the recovery phase. They are focused on how to rebuild the business model for child care, as child care institutions are facing the challenge of new extensive regulations with no change in funding.

Takeaways:

In their response, Boston Opportunity Agenda exemplified the need for partnerships to support local ecosystems, not just their own sustainability. Because the partnership understood systemic policy and the funding landscape, they could build on connections and trusting relationships with decision makers to secure funding for their community instead of only advocating for funding for themselves.



\$545K

secured funding for
childcare centers for
essential workers



900 more child care spaces
created with funding



leveraged existing
relationships and partnerships

stories of impact: community co-development

BETTER TOGETHER

ACCELERATOR AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FUND



REDMOND, OR

Actions:

Better Together has had success in previous years creating a container for parents of Latinx students to come together, build community and share needs and concerns. In 2020, they leveraged what they had learned to build a space for Indigenous families to come together in a culturally relevant way through Talking Circles. When the pandemic hit, they shifted the Talking Circles to a virtual model, allowing families to share experiences and needs related to COVID-19. The talking circles were truly family led, as Better Together staff allowed participants to lead the conversations and determine if and when to raise concerns with school districts.

Results:

The Talking Circles and the partnership's focus on engaging students and families authentically is creating trust. As a result, Better Together is learning of specific needs from different groups of students and can (with permission) work with other partners to support the needs of their diverse student population. Better Together learned through the Talking Circles that Black, Indigenous and students of color, who previously struggled with behavioral, emotional or other issues, are now thriving in a virtual environment. They are feeling more safe and happier in their home environment.

Takeaways:

The partnership found that some community members are hesitant to speak up and ask for what they need, fearing they will be asking for too much. Better Together is exploring how to elevate these voices and have conversations with school leaders about how families feel. The success of these initial Talking Circles has led Better Together to work on developing more Talking Circles in rural communities.



created virtual
Talking circles



led by families



explored how to
elevate community
member voices

stories of impact: community co-development

ROAD MAP PROJECT

OPPORTUNITY FUND



SEATTLE, WA

Actions:

The Road Map Project places a high priority on amplifying community voices. The Road Map Project actively worked to intentionally model what it looks like to be an anti-racist organization. They created space for Black, Indigenous and people of color community members to design and lead and called on White community members to join in the work. The Road Map Project evaluated data from a survey created by community youth to inform decision on returning to school this fall.

Results:

Results from the survey indicated that youth are concerned about more than just education. They are also concerned about the economy, diet, mental health and housing. Additionally, the Road Map Project's focus on community engagement allowed the Community Leadership Table (the Road Map Project's leadership body comprised of community members) to engage in advocacy and communication efforts with local government and philanthropic organizations in identifying gaps and opportunities to distribute response funds during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Takeaways:

The Road Map project realizes that while people are now more aware of systemic racism, it is their job to model what anti-racism looks like. Partnerships must complete their own internal racial equity work to model it for their communities. Furthermore, to meaningfully engage community members in co-design of solutions, partnerships must go beyond information gathering or consultation with community members but rather invite them in to be part of decision making and power sharing.



amplified
student voices



community leadership
table was activated to
influence local response to
COVID-19



invited community
members to make decisions
and to share power

stories of impact: community co-development

ROC THE FUTURE

ACCELERATOR FUND



ROCHESTER, NY

Actions:

ROC the Future worked for years to emphasize the expertise of parents in identifying and implementing strategies to improve outcomes in their community. They created the Parent Engagement Collaborative Action Network (PECAN) to help recognize parents as leaders. This spring, they convened the PECAN with more than 80 parents, providers and organizations joining to discuss needs related to the pandemic.

Results:

This summer, as protests erupted across the country in response to the police killing of Black people, parents began to organize in Rochester. Hundreds of parents and community members called on Rochester City Council to demand police removal from schools. When it came time to vote on the contract between Rochester City School District and armed police, the groundwork laid by Roc the Future to engage institutional leaders and parents and The Children's Agenda (Roc the Future's backbone) efforts to create community momentum led to [successfully removing police from schools](#).

Takeaways:

Rochester was able to achieve such a large-scale win for children because of the groundwork that had been laid for years by partners like ROC the Future. Parents were easily mobilized to advocate for change when the opportunity arose. Amplifying parent voice is essential when working toward systems change.



created Parent
Engagement Collaborative
Action Network (PECAN)



80

parents, providers
and organizations



ended the contract for
armed police in schools



PLAY SHORT VIDEO

community co-development of solutions stories

[Click to watch:](#)



stories of impact: building a culture
of racial and ethnic equity

ImpactTulsa

Actions:

ImpactTulsa developed the [Child Equity Index](#) in 2018, a data-driven tool and resource for Tulsa-area school districts and community partners to understand student need as it relates to residential environments. To ensure education was accessible to all students in Tulsa during the COVID-19 pandemic, ImpactTulsa furthered this work by creating internet access maps by census tracts, which revealed significant disparities in access in low-income communities and communities of color.

Results:

School districts used this information to adapt their remote learning plans, but for more long-term solutions, ImpactTulsa worked with the [local internet company](#) to lower rates to \$9.95/month per household and create an opt-out-only plan for eligible households to create more equitable systems for their community. Through ImpactTulsa's continued partnership with local school districts, [Tulsa received CARES act funding](#) from the state that will provide high-speed internet coverage for up to 20,000 public school families that lack an internet subscription for free during the next 12 months.

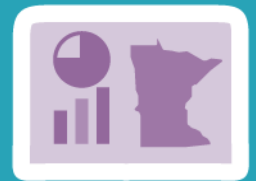
Takeaways:

ImpactTulsa used existing and new data to enable partners to make more equity-centered decisions. They realized that while their work has shifted, their mission and values remain the same.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FUND



TULSA, OK



created internet
access maps which
revealed disparities



lowered local
internet rates this spring to

\$9.95



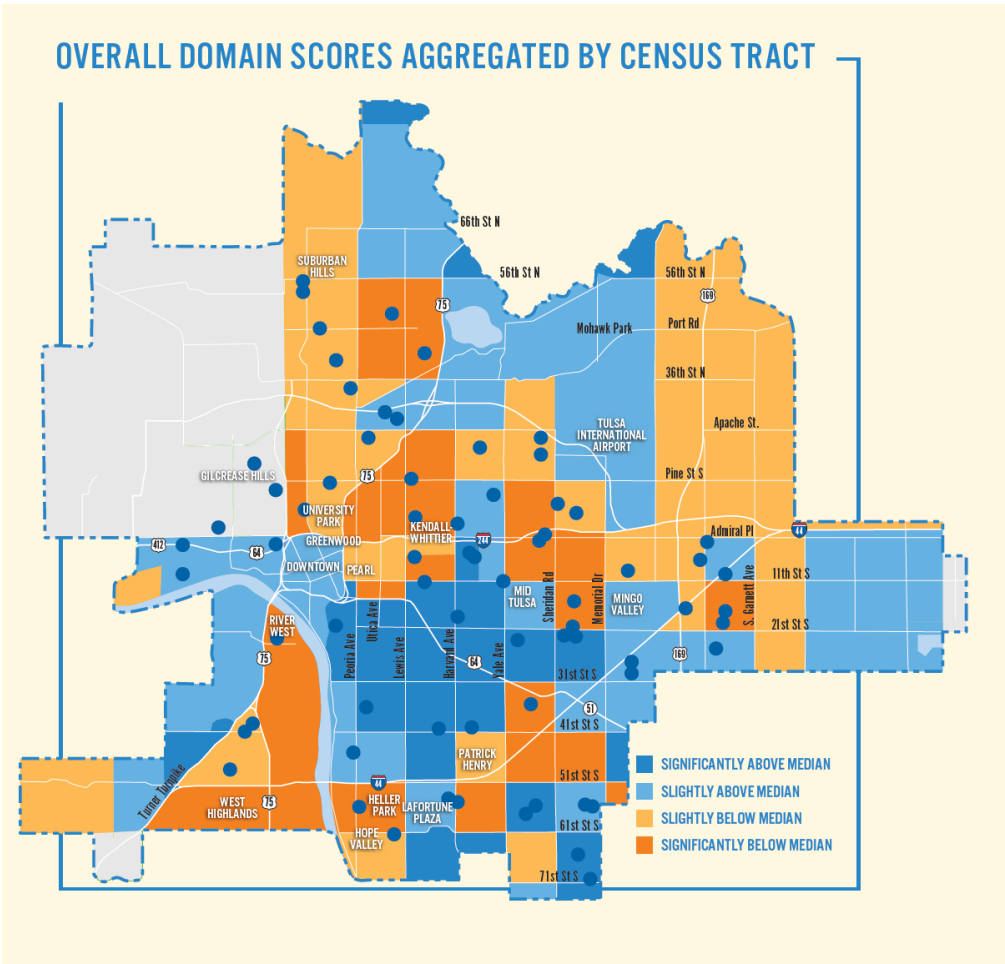
20,000

families will receive internet
access

stories of impact: building a culture
of racial and ethnic equity

ImpactTulsa

Child Equity Map



STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FUND



TULSA, OK



created internet
access maps which
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internet rates this spring to

\$9.95



20,000

families will receive internet
access

stories of impact: building a culture
of racial and ethnic equity

UP PARTNERSHIP

Actions:

UP Partnership focused on pursuing an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through a communitywide [equitable recovery pledge](#), emphasizing community voice and aligning resources through fiscal mapping. As of June 2020, 24 board members, two city government leaders, and 63 institutional leaders and community members signed the equitable recovery pledge. To amplify community voice, UP Partnership virtually convened 40+ students across seven school districts to discuss common challenges with a State Board of Education representative. Additionally, their Alignment Taskforce identified funding gaps and made recommendations for a more equitable use of funds.

Results:

UP Partnership is monitoring the results of their equity efforts through a [tracking template](#) focused on the areas of resource distribution, leadership development and shifts in rules and process. This document tracks results from the nonprofit, education, government, business, justice, health and faith sectors. This tracking tool allows the partnership to see where efforts are aligned and where gaps still exist.

Takeaways:

UP Partnership realizes that now is the time to make changes to advance equity for all youth and families in Bexar County. Their experience as conveners and equity advocates has allowed them to take on this leadership role in their community.

OPPORTUNITY AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FUND



SAN ANTONIO, TX



created a community-
wide equitable
recovery pledge



signed by

63

institutional leaders and
community members



convened **40+**
youth virtually across
seven school districts

stories of impact: building a culture
of racial and ethnic equity

UP PARTNERSHIP

OPPORTUNITY AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FUND



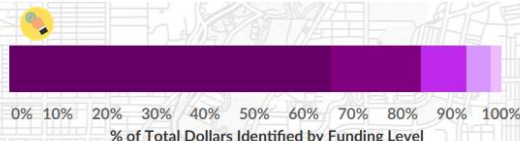
SAN ANTONIO, TX

Fiscal Maps to Support Equitable Recovery Pledge



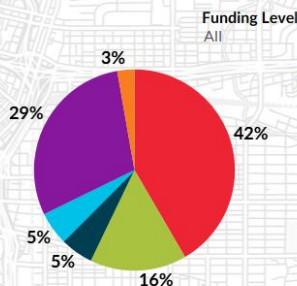
\$419,672,904

Total Dollars Identified
for Youth Services & Programs



Primary Outcome Area:

Safe and Stable	\$123,747,910
Healthy	\$22,188,629
Connected	\$22,370,290
Career-Focused	\$65,335,727
Academically Prepared	\$174,580,522
Successful in College	\$11,449,827

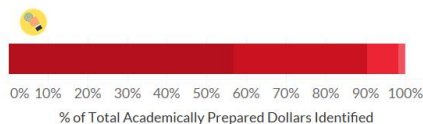


Funding by Outcome: Academically Prepared

Young people have the academic skills necessary to
be prepared for life beyond high school.

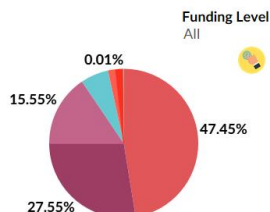
\$174,580,522

Total Dollars Identified
for Academically Prepared Outcomes



Primary Service Type:

GED	\$20,000
Tutoring	\$100,000
General College Readiness	\$10,583,156
Early Childhood Education	\$48,098,640
General Early Childhood Services	\$27,148,490
Tutoring/Homework Help	\$2,764,630
Reading Literacy	\$2,951,241
General Academic Support	\$82,843,572
General STEM / STEAM Activities	\$70,794



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wide equitable
recovery pledge



signed by

63

institutional leaders and
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convened **40+**
youth virtually across
seven school districts

stories of impact: building a culture
of racial and ethnic equity

TRI-COUNTY CRADLE TO CAREER COLLABORATIVE

Actions:

Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative (TCCC) led the conversation around equitable school redesign in Charleston. They collected survey data from stakeholder groups including parents, teachers, childcare providers and nonprofit leaders. TCCC convened a steering committee of community leaders to support the design of an equitable return to school. The survey data highlighted that stakeholders were most concerned about internet access, mental health/social-emotional learning for teachers and students, and the effect of limited childcare and early childhood education on parents' ability to return to work.

Results:

TCCC's steering committee is implementing several strategies to address these concerns. They are partnering with other organizations to make internet access available to areas that currently do not have it, raising awareness about current early childhood education issues, partnering with a statewide social-emotional learning entity and coordinating with local funders to drive resources into neighborhoods and local organizations. Additionally, TCCC is developing a partnership with Charleston RISE, a grassroots movement whose goal is to empower local parents to demand an excellent education for all Charleston students.

Takeaways:

While TCCC successfully engaged adult community members in their school redesign plan, they acknowledge the need to amplify youth voice more. They know that many community members are exhausted by the number of surveys being distributed, so they are considering different strategies for continuing to gather input and feedback from students, parents and the community on a return to school.

ACCELERATOR FUND



CHARLESTON, SC



made internet accessible



raised awareness about
early childhood
education issue



coordinated with local
funders to drive resources
into neighborhoods and
local organizations in need

lessons learned:

PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES

partnership stability in light of COVID-19:



53
of 68 network
partners completed
financial survey



66%
2/3 of the network
have applied for PPP loan



1/3 have less than
3-months of cash reserves



69%
have concerns in scarcity of
resources, increased needs
and shifting priorities

Challenge:

Partnership stability and financial sustainability are even more fragile considering COVID-19, which is a threat to progress.

In April 2020, 53 of the 68 network members completed a [survey](#) on the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following themes emerged from the survey:

- Nearly two-thirds of the Network have applied for PPP loan support, and a little more than one-third of organizations have less than three months of cash reserves, suggesting partnerships may need emergency funds in Q3
- While most partnerships are experiencing increased flexibility in existing grant agreements, 69% expressed that their greatest concern around revenue is the impact from scarcity of resources, increased needs and shifting funder priorities.

Partnership Example:

Higher Expectations for Racine County in Racine, WI, receives most of their funding from local corporations. The current state of the economy due to COVID-19 has jeopardized those corporations' revenue generation, which has in turn affected funding for the partnership. To operate more sustainably, the partnership is exploring the option of a third-party vendor/partner to take on some of their accounting and human resources functions.

Learning:

As we enter an economic recession triggered by the pandemic, grants from StriveTogether will need to be flexible to allow partnerships to be responsive and to weather the storm of the current economic climate.

lessons learned:

PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES

learning wins during COVID-19:



of the network has utilized
the StriveTogether portal



new portal
users



156

Zoom licenses
purchased



Used across
partnerships

Challenge:

Convening communities in a way that meaningfully includes youth and family voice has become even more challenging during the pandemic.

With work shifting to virtual spaces, partnerships experienced two key challenges in engaging youth and families:

- The digital divide severed relationships with many families and youth who do not have internet access.
- Technical infrastructure and facilitation skills of the partnerships themselves were not set up for virtual engagements at the start of the pandemic.

Partnership Example:

Because of their Boston Family Engagement Network, Boston Opportunity Agenda has strong relationships with community-based organizations and parent leaders. However, despite having such strong community relationships, the partnership has shared that COVID-19 has slowed down their work to build a parent leadership pipeline in Boston.

Learning:

StriveTogether's expertise with technology and virtual facilitation skills are a unique value add that is relevant to share with the Network in successfully engaging youth and families virtually. The Partner Portal has served as an excellent resource for partnerships to access these supports and learn from their peers across the Network. Since the start of the pandemic, 82% of the Network has utilized the Portal and 231 new users have been added to the platform. Additionally, StriveTogether paid for 156 Zoom licenses across 34 partnerships to support partnerships' ability to virtually convene.

lessons learned:

PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES

Challenge:

Leadership transitions, particularly at the executive level, can be challenging for a partnership's sustainability. While some changes lead to an opportunity to accelerate progress, change in leadership often also results in loss of critical relationships with key stakeholders and funders locally, adding a significant threat to sustainability of the partnership and its work.

Partnership Examples:

- As of July 2020, [Cradle to Career Cincinnati](#) has a [new backbone organization](#), the YMCA, and a [new Executive Director](#). Both of these significant transitions make stability challenging in the current environment.
- After transitioning from being a White-led to a Black-led organization, the [Road Map Project](#) (South King County/South Seattle, WA) is explicitly leading with race and centering community in every aspect of the work, including internal efforts to become a more anti-racist organization.
- Similarly, Spartanburg Academic Movement (Spartanburg County, S.C.), has also transitioned from White to Black leadership as they hired a [new executive director](#) in June.

Beyond the difficulties of simply transitioning to new leadership, these partnerships may face more systemic funding challenges as research has shown significant disparities in the philanthropic funding of Black-led organizations compared to White-led organizations. Specifically, [Bridgespan and Echoing Green found](#) a \$20 million funding gap between White-led and Black-led early-stage organizations.

Learning:

Partnerships benefit from detailed transition planning to ensure leadership transitions occur without halting their important work. With regards to sustainability, financial support from the national Network will help maintain local buy-in, as national dollars encourage local funders to believe in the work of partnerships.

lessons learned:

PARTNERSHIP CHALLENGES

Challenge:

Disruptions in the academic year caused by the pandemic have led to loss of outcomes data this year. In the absence of data for the 2019-2020 school year, partnerships will experience gaps in trend data.

Learning:

The loss of outcomes data offers an opportunity to stop over-reliance on student-level outcomes data and use this moment to prioritize collection and reporting of systems-level indicators.* Adoption of systems-level indicators will be an opportunity not only for the Cradle to Career Network, but also the broader field, as it will help reframe data communication and analysis that blames disparities in outcomes on students and their families and instead push for accountability in systems.

A Network-led Racial and Ethnic Equity Team is working on [identifying a menu of indicators](#) the Network could collect to supplement outcomes data, compiling lessons learned and developing guidance and training to support this work. Five Challenge Fund partnerships — Higher Expectations for Racine County, Northfield Promise, Promise Partnership of Salt Lake, The Commit Partnership and UP Partnership — are involved in developing this guidance.

****Systems-level indicators** are defined as a measurement (both qualitative and quantitative) that reveals inequities in how resources, decision-making power and opportunities are distributed to inform policies and practices within institutions, organizations and programs that are interdependent and/or related.*