StriveTogether Collaborative Improvement

Collaborative improvement includes four elements:

**Equity**
Changing systems to improve outcomes for every child drives the work. We focus explicitly on race equity and equity for youth and families living in poverty. We tailor strategies that connect people to opportunity, remove structural barriers and eliminate disparities.

**Results Count™**
Pioneered by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Results Count™ helps leaders and groups move from intention to action by building the following leadership competencies:

- Being results based and data driven, honing their ability to take aligned actions to advance a population-level results agenda;
- Acting on disparities to address equitable opportunities, recognizing that race, class and culture affect outcomes and opportunities for vulnerable children;
- Using themselves as an instrument of change, believing that individual leaders are capable of exerting influence across systems and sectors to move multiple stakeholder groups and serve as catalysts for positive change;
- Honing adaptive leadership skills, understanding that deep system reform and complex community change happen only when leaders can employ skills to impact key stakeholders’ values, beliefs and habits; and
- Collaborating with others, understanding that the capacity to build group consensus enables leaders to align their actions and administer resources strategically in service of advancing results.

**Continuous Improvement**
Centered around Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) continuous improvement cycles, we use the simplest of tools and protocols that support communities from identifying results they want to achieve to quantifying improvements and spreading successful practices. At the heart of this practice is an unwavering commitment to using data — quantitative and qualitative — to understand the impact of strategies or practices. This component of the approach also encourages communities to consider opportunities to adopt, adapt or abandon efforts based on their results.

**Human-Centered Design**
This user-centric, creative problem-solving approach provides tools and techniques for engaging the people you are trying to impact by authentically involving them at every step in the process. It also provides resources on how to collect, analyze and use qualitative data to inform action and refine processes.
Collaborative improvement is used by government, foundation, nonprofit, school district and other leaders as well as by those working directly with youth and families like case managers, health care workers and teachers. The process includes eight steps where participants ask questions, apply tools, develop strategies, analyze results and more.

### Applying Collaborative Improvement in Salt Lake City, Utah

Collaborative improvement shifts the focus from an individual organization to multiple organizations working together on systems-level challenges. Through the process, communities build a common language and approach to using data for improvement. This builds trust and impact.

In Salt Lake City, Utah, StriveTogether and the United Way of Salt Lake and StriveTogether held seven learning sessions that included six teams from three school districts. Teams included parents, school staff and AmeriCorps volunteers. Teams learned how to use collaborative improvement tools and shared what was working and not working. When teams discovered that students with disabilities didn’t feel like they belonged in school, the teams tested different strategies to increase the sense of belonging. They applied what they learned and developed strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Between January and November 2017, United Way of Salt Lake and StriveTogether held seven learning sessions that included six teams from three school districts. Teams included parents, school staff and AmeriCorps volunteers. Teams learned how to use collaborative improvement tools and shared what was working and not working. When teams discovered that students with disabilities didn’t feel like they belonged in school, the teams tested different strategies to increase the sense of belonging. They applied what they learned and developed strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism.

As a result of their efforts, chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities decreased significantly from the prior school year compared to the average of other students. At the same time, more third-grade students began meeting and exceeding the benchmark for reading proficiency — from 8% to 17%.

This work also built an improvement culture among Promise Partnership staff and community partners. The work continues as they tackle chronic absence in six school districts and apply collaborative improvement to other community-level challenges like food insecurity and the social service sector.