

# WE MADE A PROMISE



School-Community  
Collaboration,  
Leadership, and  
Transformation  
at Promesa Boyle Heights



Annenberg  
Institute for  
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY



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## ABOUT TIME FOR EQUITY

Over the past four years, AISR has partnered with the Ford Foundation on the Time for Equity project. Time for Equity builds the capacity of schools, districts, communities, and partner organizations to improve educational opportunities in the nation's most underserved school systems through expanded and reimagined learning time. Our work so far has included the development of twenty-four indicators that school communities can use as "yardsticks" to measure and refine their efforts to create expanded and improved learning opportunities for young people; a scan of the Los Angeles Education Ecosystem that preceded this report; and a forthcoming study on teacher knowledge, ownership, and leadership in Los Angeles. These resources can be found at <http://timeforequity.org/> and <http://annenberginstitute.org/what-we-do/projects/time-equity>.

## ABOUT THE ANNEBERG INSTITUTE

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University (AISR) is a national policy research and reform support organization that collaborates with school districts and communities to improve the conditions and outcomes of education in America. Through three program circles of work – District & Systems Transformation, Community Organizing & Engagement, and Research & Policy – AISR helps these stakeholders join forces and establish sustainable systems that ensure excellence, equity, and social justice for all students, especially in urban, high-poverty communities. This work is grounded in the vision of a "smart education system," that is, a high-functioning school district that collaborates with cross-sector community partners to provide a comprehensive web of opportunities and supports for students, inside and outside of school.

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*Front cover:* Parent volunteers provide snacks for students at Mendez High School's career day, March 2016.

*Inside, p. 9:* Mendez High School's career day, March 2016. Left to right: Deycy Hernandez, Angel Villaseñor, Anna Peak, Nelson Hernandez, Iliana Garcia. All are Promesa Boyle Heights staff except Anna Peak, who is from partner organization Communities in Schools.

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## Purpose of the Study

We learned about the work of Promesa Boyle Heights in the spring of 2015, as we were conducting interviews for a scan of the Los Angeles *educational ecosystem*.<sup>1</sup> The ecosystem scan investigated the ways in which partners throughout Los Angeles were collaborating around particular educational approaches – community schools, Linked Learning, and Promise Neighborhoods – including how work was being coordinated and aligned to better serve students (Potochnik and Romans 2015). Promesa Boyle Heights emerged as an example of a neighborhood-level ecosystem that worked to deliberately develop relationships, coordination, and alignment across multiple partners to benefit young people and families, an approach that has seen positive, measurable outcomes as a result. At the core of Promesa’s mission is the substantive engagement of parents, youth, and residents as key stakeholders, decision-makers, and owners of the work. This level of community ownership is too often missing in collaborative education efforts, but it lays crucial groundwork for ongoing support, sustainability, and success.

Given the increasingly complex challenges facing school districts and communities, “straightforward solutions do not exist,” and no single agency, organization, or social sector can take on these challenges alone (Henig et al. 2016). Cross-sector collaboration shows great promise for collectively developing and implementing solutions, but “collaboration is very hard work, on an institutional level as well as a personal level” (Henig et al. 2015, p. 40), and sites engaging in this work can benefit from the experience of similar efforts. This study was conducted with the hope that an exploration of the processes, structures, and belief systems of Promesa Boyle Heights, as well as the lessons learned by the collaborative, would be of value to those working to foster meaningful collaboration across the educational ecosystem. We hope that we have synthesized these lessons in a way that will prove useful to the field,

while also capturing at least a portion of the dedication, passion, hard work, and heart that have driven the Promesa Boyle Heights effort, and that will no doubt bring continued progress as the collaborative’s work expands.

## Guiding Frameworks and Methods

Our research was informed by two key frameworks: *collective impact* and *smart education systems*.

### Collective Impact

Kania and Kramer (2011) define collective impact as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (p. 36). They emphasize that collective impact initiatives are distinct from collaboration in general, given that they involve a centralized infrastructure and dedicated staff, as well as a structured process that leads to the five key conditions of collective impact: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support.

In the collective impact framework, an “anchor organization” provides leadership, staffing, and a commitment to engaging and supporting the partnership over the long term (StriveTogether 2016).

<sup>1</sup> We define the educational ecosystem as the interconnected network of individuals and organizations who work to provide educational opportunities and support for student success across a system. The network may include schools, school districts, and staff; students, families, and communities; community organizing groups; education agencies and non-profit organizations; elected officials, advocates, and media; foundations and private investors; and researchers.

According to Kania and Kramer (2011), the anchor organization hosts the “backbone structure” of the partnership, since “creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative” (p. 40).

One emerging critique of collective impact initiatives is that they often omit necessary analyses of equity and power based on characteristics such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, without which they cannot properly “address longstanding disparities and achieve equitable outcomes for everyone” (Williams & Marxer 2014, p. 3). Even Kania and Kramer, who wrote the seminal piece on collective impact in 2011, recently acknowledged that “the five conditions of collective impact, implemented without attention to equity, are not enough to create lasting change” (Kania & Kramer 2015).

Similarly, collective impact efforts often fall short in terms of meaningfully engaging grassroots voices – those most affected by the issue at hand – both in defining issues and in identifying and implementing solutions. As one critic wrote, “Coalitions without grassroots voices are very likely to create solutions that do not meet the needs of the people most affected by them and treat people disrespectfully in their community change process” (Wolff 2016). Although “collective impact” is a relatively new term, similar place-based strategies to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families date back more than a century in the United States. A wealth of literature reveals that genuine community engagement in such initiatives has been rare, while acknowledging that initiatives have little likelihood of success without these grassroots voices (Auspos & Kubisch 2004; Annie E. Casey 1995, 2002, and 2013; Halpern 1995; Jackson 2008; Fisher 1977; Stone et al. 1999).

Promesa Boyle Heights sets itself apart from many other collective impact initiatives by embedding racial and economic equity and grassroots engagement through all aspects of their work. Highlighting the values and practices of this effort elevates these strategies to ensure that equity and community voice are central to new efforts in the field and to demonstrate that sustainable change is possible.

## Smart Education Systems

In a framework developed by AISR, a smart education system is one that includes multiple and substantial cross-sector partnerships between district, community, and the public and private sectors that work to achieve educational equity for all students.<sup>2</sup> Smart education systems focus on broad outcomes for youth and families; keep students, families, and communities at the center of the work; share accountability across the system; create strategies for addressing power differentials among stakeholders; and bring the work systematically to scale (Rothman 2010). A fully functioning smart education system remains a largely aspirational goal, but several communities in the United States and internationally are working toward building systems that embody essential components of this vision.

## Methods

To learn more about the perceptions of stakeholders involved with Promesa Boyle Heights, we facilitated a series of interviews driven by the following research questions:<sup>3</sup>

- What are the conditions, practices, and strategies that foster sustainable collaboration among schools, school systems, partner organizations, and communities to improve equitable opportunities and outcomes for students?
- How do these conditions, practices, and strategies overlap with the collective impact and smart education system frameworks?
- How can parents, students, and residents be effectively engaged as key stakeholders and leaders in a collaborative education reform effort to achieve equity for all students?

<sup>2</sup> See <http://annenberginstitute.org/who-we-are/smart-education-systems>.

<sup>3</sup> More information about the methods used in this study can be found in Appendix A.

# Background and History

## Boyle Heights

Boyle Heights, located on the eastern edge of Los Angeles, is one of the city’s oldest and most densely populated communities. Covering 6.5 square miles, it is separated from downtown and the greater Los Angeles area by the Los Angeles River and several freeways, contributing to its unique geographic challenges and its small-town feel. Demographically, Boyle Heights has seen significant changes over the years. In the 1950s, Boyle Heights was racially and ethnically diverse, with Jews, Latinos, Russians, Yugoslavs, Portuguese, and Japanese immigrants living in the community. By 2000, 94 percent of the neighborhood was Latino, including Mexican Americans, Mexican immigrants, and Central American ethnic residents.<sup>4</sup> According to many of our interviewees, the neighborhood is again changing demographically, and gentrification has become a notable concern (Aron 2016). Residents of Boyle Heights face numerous educational and economic challenges, placing the area in the top 10 percent of Los Angeles County’s 272 communities with high educational and income risk factors, which include limited job and economic growth opportunities, decreasing access to affordable and safe housing, and low graduation rates.

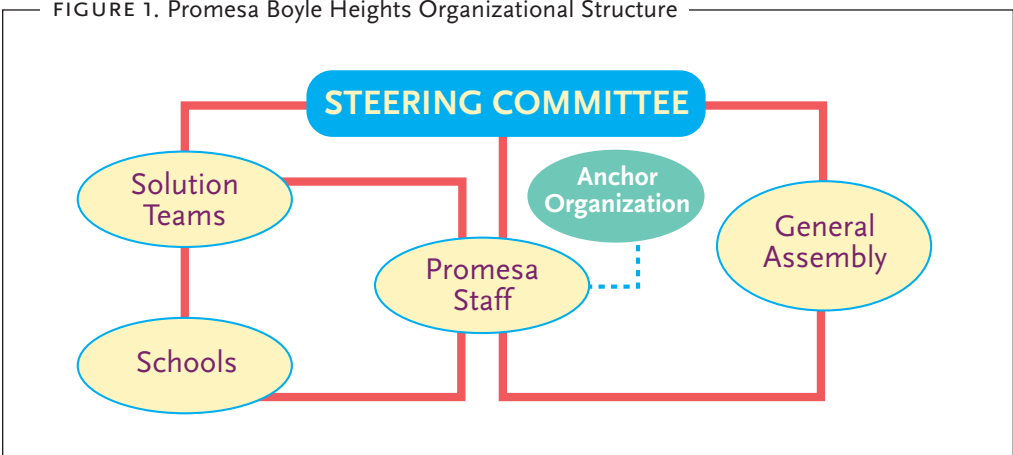
Despite the challenges faced by residents, Boyle Heights has a long, rich history of activism and collaboration and a distinct sense of community culture and pride. Once defined through public perceptions of struggling schools, gang violence, and dilapidated infrastructure, Boyle Heights has become an example of how residents and organizations can collectively build

power, align resources, and work together to address critical issues in their community. The community has pressed for and won important battles, including the opening of new schools, improvements in infrastructure, commitments for school-based wellness centers, and significant increases in graduation rates. For example, Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School opened in 2009, partly in response to community pressure to alleviate overcrowding at nearby Roosevelt High School.

## Promesa Boyle Heights

### OVERVIEW

Promesa Boyle Heights is a collective of residents, youth, schools, and community organizations united in lifting community voices and working together to transform conditions and improve opportunities for students and families. As shown in Figure 1, the governance structure is built around community leadership and collaboration, with a consensus-based General Assembly at the core of decision making, overseen by a Steering Committee that also supports Solution Teams and Promesa’s staff (see Appendix B).



<sup>4</sup> See <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/boyle-heights/>.

The Promesa vision is centered around three premises:

- Every child has an opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed from cradle through college and career;
- Families can live a stable, healthy, and fulfilling life; and
- Every individual is empowered to act and create a more just and interdependent community.

Promesa’s theory of change (see Figure 2) is predicated on the belief that by strengthening community leadership and capacity, building a strong and coordinated continuum of academic and wellness support, focusing on key transition points, and providing additional targeted supports for children and families, the collaborative will dramatically increase college and career readiness for students and transform the Boyle Heights community.

In addition, Promesa’s theory of action requires:

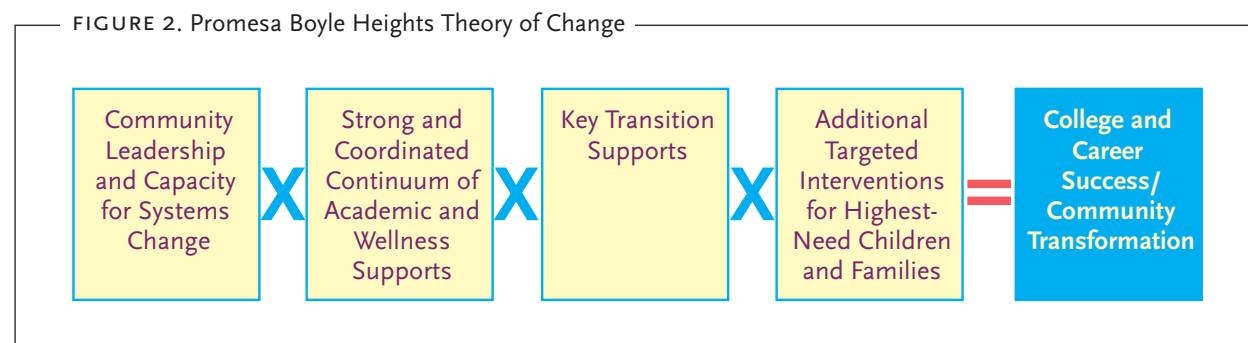
- Including youth and adult residents as leaders;
- Launching and scaling proven solutions aimed at improving outcomes for individual students and families as well as the conditions, systems, and practices of schools and community; and
- Leveraging and integrating institutional, business, philanthropic, and local and national partnerships and assets.

Promesa believes that to create effective, authentic, and sustainable changes, all members must take ownership of and accountability for the vision, theory of change, and theory of action.

## HISTORY AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

The collaborative builds on a legacy of community organizing in the neighborhood, with a social justice focus. Several community organizations in Boyle Heights – including InnerCity Struggle, Boyle Heights Learning Collaborative, East LA Community Corporation, Union de Vecinos, and Proyecto Pastoral – had a long history of working together and possessed common visions for community change and the value of engaging residents in identifying priorities and implementing solutions. In addition, several of these organizations had a focus on education. In 2009, on the heels of being selected to be part of the California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative, these organizations came together to apply for a half-million-dollar Promise Neighborhood planning grant, which they subsequently received.

Promesa’s vision came via a two-year planning process that brought together hundreds of adult residents, youth, community organizations, schools, and other allies to reflect on the gains and remaining challenges in the community. The partnership surveyed more than 4,000 residents of Boyle Heights and also brought residents together to plan in General Assembly meetings. Ultimately, they developed and prioritized short- and long-term goals and strategies that were informed by residents’ lived experiences, needs assessment, and research on evidence-based practice. During this process, Proyecto Pastoral agreed to be the anchor





organization for the collaborative, as partners felt that it had the strong infrastructure needed to build and sustain the work.

In 2011, Promesa Boyle Heights learned that, despite scoring highly, they had not been awarded a Promise Neighborhood implementation grant. According to an interviewee, in the wake of this news, both partner organizations and residents agreed, “We made a promise. We didn’t do this for the grant; we did this for our children. So we have to find one way or another to do it.” Seizing upon the momentum they had built in the community, partners recommitted to moving their plans forward and working to raise resources to sustain the work in the long term. Critically, Proyecto Pastoral committed to continue funding the Promesa director’s position until additional grant funding was secured.

Absent the millions of dollars that a Promise Neighborhood implementation grant would provide, the collaborative was forced to refocus its initial efforts. This new focus produced “spark projects” – small, tangible, high-impact projects fueled by partner commitment and targeting agreed upon outcomes, primarily focused on academics and wellness. One initial project was the academic spark program at Mendez High School, which aimed to improve graduation rates by focusing on seniors at the highest risk of not graduating. Partner organizations took the lead on various pieces of the work, and their efforts paid off; as a high percentage of students receiving partner support and intervention graduated, the work expanded to other grades, and graduation rates began to increase schoolwide.

Mendez High School emerged as a strong partner in Promesa’s initial efforts, and since 2011 Promesa’s impact at Mendez has been reflected in the following student outcomes (see Appendix C):

- Increased four-year high school graduation rates – from 48 percent in 2011 to 88 percent in 2015;

- Increased college readiness<sup>5</sup> and college-going, in 2016:
  - 52 percent of students applied to a four-year college
  - 40 percent of students were accepted to a four-year college
  - 98 percent of students planned to attend a four-year or community college;
- Increased attendance; and
- Increased scores on state testing.

In 2013, Mendez became the most improved high school in California, with a gain of seventy-six points in the Academic Performance Index (API) (Romo 2015), the last year this state index was calculated to measure the academic performance and growth of schools.<sup>6</sup> And in recognition of Promesa Boyle Heights’ work at Mendez High School and the school’s outcomes, in September 2015 the partnership was named one of the Bright Spots in Hispanic Education by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.<sup>7</sup>

With the help of resources from funders including AT&T, the California Community Foundation, and First 5 LA, Promesa has continued to deepen its academic and wellness work at Mendez High School, expand to Hollenbeck Middle School and Roosevelt High School, and move into a new focus area of early childhood education through the Best Start East LA initiative. The findings presented in this report reflect primarily on the first several years of implementation, from which Promesa seems primed to expand even further, coming ever closer to the cradle-to-career vision that grounded the collaborative’s initial promise to the community.

<sup>5</sup> We use two research-based college readiness indicators here: completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and being on-track to complete a set of coursework required for admission to the University of California, so-called “A-G requirements.”

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/>.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/list/hispanic-initiative/bright-spots.html>.

## Findings

### Core Values and Goals

Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. (Kania and Kramer 2011).

In earlier research, AISR highlighted the importance of a shared vision in successful partnerships between school districts and external organizations, including community-led umbrella or intermediary organizations such as Promesa Boyle Heights (Annenberg Institute 2013). In interviews with Promesa stakeholders, we heard a shared vision for thriving students, schools, and community. This vision begins with holding high expectations for students' long-term academic success – starting with high school graduation – and ensuring that youth have the necessary social, emotional, psychological, health, and economic supports for that success. Additionally, the shared vision includes community well-being as a whole: education, safety, employment, and health.

Underlying this shared vision are several interrelated core goals and values:

- Building Boyle Heights residents' power, capacity, and confidence;
- Community members articulating and advocating for their needs;
- Bottom-up, community-driven, and inclusive structures and practices; and
- Collaboration with a range of partners.

A core Promesa value is building Boyle Heights residents' power, capacity, and confidence, born out of a social justice mindset and tied to the larger political landscape of Boyle Heights. There is a feeling of being supported, that community members matter. This collective power, capacity, and confidence helps foster the goal of community

members articulating and advocating for their needs and believing they have the support and expertise to do so in a unified way. As such, the approach is by design not top down, but bottom up, community driven, and inclusive. This is evidenced in the leadership, structures, and practices (such as decision-making and communications) that drive Promesa's work and create a community-rooted foundation for sustainability. The collaborative, community-led visioning and planning process for Promesa's initial Promise Neighborhood application, for example, exemplified this value from the outset.

Stakeholders value and demonstrate an investment in the community; a commitment to the community; experience in the community, much of it lived; and even a love for the community:

I mean, there's an agenda, but it's an agenda that's rooted in love for the community, and that the community should really be the driving force. And that all of our young people deserve amazing opportunities career-wise, educationally. That their kids, when they have kids, deserve great opportunities. And that the others in our communities deserve opportunities as well. From housing and schools, the folks in Boyle Heights should be taken care of, because they matter. (School-Based Leader/Staff)

Promesa also has as a core value of collaboration with a range of partners, and not just in the education space. That collaboration is built through trust, mutual respect, and reciprocity. Said one community-based organization (CBO) partner: "The collaboration with partners is one of our values. Alone we recognize that we can't do everything we want to do and that each of our organizations touches that ecosystem in a different way and that if we can come together in a coordinated effort, we will have greater impact." A significant aspect of this core value is the intentional accessing and aligning of resources in order to achieve the shared vision and goals for the community and its students.

We discuss each of these core values and goals in further detail throughout this report, starting with a piece that undergirds both collective impact and smart education systems: collaboration with a range of cross-sector partners.

## Partner Collaboration

[Promesa] dispel[s] the myth that when organizations try to get together to work for a common goal that it doesn't work, that organizations are self-contained and basically they have their own set of goals and [are] too busy to buy in to a larger goal. . . . In other words, it can be done. (Community Partner)

We asked interviewees about the characteristics and practices that have enabled the partnerships facilitated through Promesa Boyle Heights to be successful, and to have an impact on Boyle Heights schools and community despite limited resources. Several of these are linked to the core values discussed above, particularly the development of a shared vision and efforts to create a collaborative environment that is open, transparent, and inclusive. Four additional foundational elements of partner collaboration emerged strongly in the data:

- A focus on relationships;
- Supportive and engaged school leaders;
- Skilled backbone staff working to align and coordinate partners; and
- Using data to determine and act upon priorities.

### A FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS

Promesa's core partners – organizations such as Proyecto Pastoral, InnerCity Struggle, and the East LA Community Corporation; longstanding school leaders and staff at Mendez High School; and ten-year LAUSD Board of Education member Monica Garcia – have built relationships that run long and deep. Terms used to describe these relationships included camaraderie, trust, reciprocity, and respect. One participant noted: “It has never been a question of, ‘Are we going to work together?’ It's more of a question of how and what do we need to be able to draw down resource opportunities for the neighborhood.”

However, even given the deep history among several key organizations, relationships are not something that the collaborative takes for granted. As noted earlier, several of the core organizations that were instrumental in Promesa's development are community organizing groups. Research on successful organizing efforts points to the crucial role of building both intimate relationships and broader social capital to develop the power needed to transform individuals, communities, and institutions (Warren & Mapp 2011; Oakes, Rogers & Lipton 2006; Bobo, Kendall & Max 2001). These principles are not only central to Promesa's work with parents and residents but also have an impact on the ways in which Promesa staff interact with school personnel and community partners. Deliberate effort – and significant time – is spent building strong new partnerships and sustaining existing relationships, even when areas of disagreement emerge or resources become scarce.

Promesa's relationship building is intentional, and organizing tools such as one-on-one meetings are used to structure initial interactions that ideally grow into deeper, sustainable relationships. One staff member explained that these meetings are “not just like, ‘Hey, this is who I am, this is the program,’ but really getting to know each other as people is super important.” One-on-one meetings are also used to maintain relationships with existing partners when tensions arise, when staff transitions occur, or when individuals appear to become less engaged.

One source of tension is the different lenses and analyses that partners may bring to the work. One community partner noted:

We have service providers who, their analysis of what needs to change is . . . about the services, and it's about helping people make better choices and decisions. And we have partners whose lenses are of organizing. And we need to make sure the schools are addressing the needs of students and change the laws and the policies. So when you're bringing them together, there is often clash and conflict.

In addition to one-on-ones, community techniques such as restorative practice conversations are used to address these kinds of tensions when they arise, exemplifying how Promesa staff models the values and practices that the collaborative espouses in school and community work. As one participant noted: “We are able to address situations when there is discord. . . . We have the personal relationships to address it. And we also have the institutional relationships.” Thought is also given to where partners might best contribute to the collaborative, given their various lenses and alignment with Promesa’s core values. For example, a partner who doesn’t believe strongly in the role of residents as decision-makers may not be a good fit for governance structures such as the Steering Committee or General Assembly, but could implement school-based strategies or services as part of a Wellness Team.

It is also noteworthy that, in our interviews, we heard that Promesa helps to cultivate a marked lack of competition among partner organizations, many of which are small community-based organizations that could potentially be vying for limited resources or access.

#### SUPPORTIVE AND ENGAGED SCHOOL LEADERS

As one community partner stated, for successful collaboration in the educational ecosystem, “there has to be a willingness on the part of the organizations and there has to be a willingness on the part of the school district or the schools involved in that neighborhood, the neighborhood schools. Because you can’t create that synergistic relationship without there being willingness on both parts.” In their school partnerships – one more established (Mendez) and two emerging (Roosevelt and Hollenbeck) – Promesa has found school administrators who understand and believe in the community school model and collective impact, who “blur the lines between community and school,” and who cultivate a culture of collaboration. (See Appendix D for more on Promesa schools and Appendix E for more on the community school approach.)

Promesa found what one interviewee described as the “perfect partner” in Mendez High School and its principal, Mauro Bautista. Several interviewees noted that Principal Bautista lives in Boyle Heights and his children attend Mendez, and one said, “The investment is above and beyond what you could ask of a principal.” His values and those of the school align with Promesa, and Mendez has embraced the community school ideology. Because commitment, alignment, and trust were strongest with Mendez from the outset, the school became the focus for Promesa’s early efforts. As one interviewee said,

The reason why [initial spark projects] focused on Mendez was that even though the other schools also made a commitment to moving forward, for them it was still, like, that ambiguity. It was hard. Where in Mendez, the relationship was stronger, they were willing to just, okay, let’s think it through. Let’s have several meetings where we don’t know where this is going to go, but we’re willing to just go there.

While tensions do emerge, the trusting relationships between leaders at Mendez and Promesa have enabled openness to ideas and solutions that may push against approaches historically taken by school leaders. Alternatives to punitive discipline and strategies for working intensively with students at the highest risk of not graduating were areas of greater “discussion,” and perhaps disagreement. However, a community partner noted that Principal Bautista, “[has] been very open to discussing and open to struggle, and has been willing to see a new way, and understand. . . . It’s been both our commitment to work through that process, and his as well, the school’s as well.”

Interviewees were hopeful about expanding the work into other schools, including Roosevelt and Hollenbeck, but acknowledged the challenges of replicating Promesa’s work in different school contexts. Mendez, as a new school, was able to build a collaborative and open culture from the ground up. In contrast, cultures may be entrenched at older

schools such as Roosevelt and Hollenbeck, and staff may be understandably wary of new collaborations, having seen initiatives, partnerships, and administrations come and go. While the administrative teams at Roosevelt and Hollenbeck were noted to be aligned to Promesa's goals and very supportive of the effort, building trust with staff and different sets of partners takes time, as does building understanding of Promesa's role. As one Promesa staff member commented: "Promesa has very little funding, and we're not direct service providers. . . . So even for some folks, thinking about that, [it's] who are you? What do you do?" The replication of successful tools piloted at Mendez, described in more detail below, has helped staff such as school counselors start to see the value that Promesa brings.

#### SKILLED BACKBONE STAFF WORKING TO ALIGN AND COORDINATE PARTNERS

When we asked about Promesa's successes, more than two-thirds of our interviewees mentioned its ability to facilitate the coordination and alignment of community partners at the school level, with a deliberate focus on leveraging resources to maximize impact for students and families. This ability, which is linked to Promesa's use of the community schools approach, sets Promesa apart from many other community-led, place-based initiatives, which often struggle to interface with schools in a meaningful way (Kubisch et al. 2010). Central to Promesa's capacity in this area is a cadre of skilled backbone staff whose roles are fully in service to the partnership. Several of these staff members are embedded in schools; currently, three Promesa staff members serve as full-time community school coordinators (one each at Mendez, Roosevelt, and Hollenbeck), and a community wellness organizer works with partners in multiple schools.

School leaders and staff emphasized partner coordination and alignment as an area of need, and valued Promesa's role and approach. Beyond understanding which partners are in the school and what



they're doing, other critical factors were Promesa's work to collectively develop partners' shared understanding of the vision and needs of the school as a whole and investigate in a coordinated way how each partner is addressing those needs. One school leader noted: "It's kind of sexy [for partners] to be [on a school campus]. But the work that you do isn't always aligned to the vision of the school, isn't always making the big dent that it could."

Promesa staff have implemented structures to "create a space" for partner collaboration, with staff capacity and tools to support it. Primary among these structures are regular Wellness Team and Academic Partner Team meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity to reinforce schoolwide vision, goals, and initiatives; share and analyze schoolwide data (in addition to individual student data that partners receive for their caseloads); discuss which students are being served with which services; and collectively identify needs and gaps and strategize to develop solutions.<sup>8</sup> The team meetings also work to build community and mutual support among partners, with a purpose. One participant said:

I attended my first Wellness Meeting and got to really see all these organizations that I know students are a part of, but I don't think

<sup>8</sup> For sample agendas from these meetings, see <http://annenberginstitute.org/publications/we-made-promise>.

we're ever in the same room to really be talking about, like, let's talk about data. Let's look at suspensions. Let's hear from the [school leader]. . . . *I think it allows greater conversations between partners, but also is what we're doing impacting [the school] in the best possible way? Are we making an impact?*

School leaders and staff noted that the meetings also serve as an accountability mechanism, to help ensure “that our goals are aligned, and . . . that partners are doing what they said they were going to do.”

Several interviewees noted the key role played by backbone staff in maintaining momentum, generating a high level of investment from partners, and moving the work forward – even when it requires “pushing” school, community, and district stakeholders. One partner noted: “As we know, momentum can easily dissipate if there's not those individuals or those entities that are saying, ‘We have to continue this. Let's move this forward, and let's just move past how tired we are sometimes, but we can do this.’” Additionally, school and community partners spoke with great respect about the skills and capacities of Promesa staff. Some of the terms used to describe staff both individually and collectively included “masterful facilitator,” “great listener,” “some of the most dedicated folks that I know,” “extremely humble,” and “brilliant.” One system leader told us: “You don't find inconsistency . . . from Promesa as a collective. It's always the same. You don't have an off day where somebody's being bossy or talking over or poorly facilitating or anything like that. It's always solid and consistent.”

Promesa's staff is also representative of the Boyle Heights community. The majority of staff are Latinx and Spanish speaking, and many have ties to Boyle Heights and to the families who live there. This is also true of many partners from CBOs. These ties may be direct – for example, a grandparent who lived in Boyle Heights – or the result of similar experiences and histories, including immi-

grating to the United States as a youth. One staff member told us, “Part of the reason why I'm so passionate about nonprofit work and working in communities like mine is because that's my personal experience as well.” This personal connection, as well as an approach that is rooted in both community organizing and systemic change, helps contribute to the staff's versatility and effectiveness. One school partner noted that a Promesa staff member “is willing to meet with a group of forty people and strategize around how we have the impact, but [is] also willing to get on the phone with forty parents, and forty kids, and make sure their needs are being met. [Promesa] really models both of those.”

#### USING DATA TO DETERMINE PRIORITIES

In addition to its initial visioning work, Promesa has used community conversations and surveys to ensure a focus on areas of need, as articulated by those most affected by issues. For example, the Wellness Team at Mendez collected nearly 1,000 surveys from students, parents, and community members, which have guided the team's work and plans for the school's wellness center.

Using school and student data to make decisions is central to the work of the Academic Teams, and Promesa staff have collaborated with school counselors to create original tracking tools that give a clear view of students' need and progress. These tools, including trackers for graduation and student participation, document which students are on- or off-track for graduation and the number of credits students are behind, and provide schoolwide data on which students are being served by which programs. These data help to identify cohorts of students who would benefit from extra supports, allow partners to collectively strategize on interventions, and provide a baseline for tracking progress.

As an added benefit, these data provide school leaders and Promesa staff with the information needed to ask partners to stretch to better meet the needs

and priorities of the school and students. One school-based interviewee said:

[We] began to strategize around what are some Spark projects, what are some short-term projects, long-term projects, some places where, okay, you are grant funded to do *this*, but could you actually do *that*. Kind of the pivot. Because what you do is great, and what we need is *this*. So getting folks to step a little bit out of their bread-and-butter work, and take on collective work that has an impact in a place where we need its impact.

One interviewee characterized it as “maximiz[ing] our partners to help them think about how this collective effort will benefit all of us at the end. It’s not just about our individual deliverables, but how can we support overall,” noting that these practices have led to helpful changes in partner programming. Initially developed at Mendez High School, the tracking tools have been replicated at Roosevelt as well. Tracking tools help to identify needs and drive strategies to address them, but interviewees noted that follow-up – particularly ensuring that students are getting services based on referrals – presented a challenge and continues to be an area where Promesa is trying to develop more efficient systems.

## Parent and Resident Voice and Leadership

“I have very little, but here I can tell that I have a lot to give.” (Parent Leader)

Promesa’s approach to engaging parents, youth, and other residents comes out of a strong community organizing framework, which acknowledges that those most affected by an issue must have a central role in addressing it – work is done “with” communities, not “on behalf of” them (Renée & McAlister 2011). Community members are seen as assets, and the many kinds of knowledge within the community, including those rooted in lived experiences, are respected and valued. Work thus moves from community “involvement” or “engagement” to shifting long-standing power relationships and

building collective power to achieve meaningful, equity-focused changes in policy and practice (Warren & Mapp 2011). One Promesa partner said, “It is not only about how a parent get[s] more connected to a school, but how a parent, a student, a household member build[s] up their involvement in the community so that it is supporting the student, but at the same time it is impacting the policies that make it challenging for that student to be successful.”

## OUTREACH AND RECRUITMENT

Many education initiatives struggle not only with engaging parents and residents in a sustained way, but with simply getting parents to the table, or even to a meeting. Several of Promesa’s core partners brought skill and experience in grassroots organizing and engagement, as well as an existing base of parents, students, and residents, which has been a great asset to the work. As one system leader noted: “I think it’s just remarkable. [Promesa] can turn people out at any time of day, any day of the week.”

Building and sustaining a meaningfully engaged group of community members is something that takes concerted time and capacity – an ongoing investment on the part of Promesa’s partners. One member of a partner organization discussed the outreach process – from door knocking, to getting an individual’s name and contact information, to following up with invitations to events and meetings, to phone calls, as involving “at least three [components] – one that gets them to commit or not, then follow up on the reminder, then the event.” A parent confirmed the efficacy of organizers’ consistency and persistence:

And, let me tell you, I think perseverance is very important. Because I, personally, have had to – they’ve called to invite me to a meeting. And I say, “Yes, I’ll be there.” But, for one reason or another, I don’t go. And, the next time, they call me again. And, again, for some reason, I don’t go. But they keep calling, and calling, and even though I say yes, I don’t go.

And they keep calling me until, one day, I say, “All right, this time, if I have anything [else] to do, I’m going to skip it.”

Communication strategies such as flyering and promoting events on social media are also used to get the word out to community members, but personalized outreach and relationship building most often yield the best results.

The Promise Neighborhood planning phase, which was supported by multiple funders, enabled Promesa’s partner organizations to hire additional organizers to support the work, bolstering capacity for outreach and sustaining community engagement. Partner organizations’ long-standing presence in the community, combined with their desire for authentic community involvement, has also been important. One parent noted: “We also trust the people who work at Promesa. That’s also important, right? The people who run this. . . . They are people who have won our trust and our admiration.” Some of this trust can be attributed to concerted efforts to build inclusive spaces and remove barriers to participation by, for example, ensuring that translation and free childcare are available at meetings and events, and scheduling meetings at times that are accessible for parents.

#### COMMUNITY ROLE IN GOVERNANCE

Another unique element of Promesa Boyle Heights is its governance structure (see Appendix B), which reflects the collaborative’s core values of grassroots leadership and collective action, and incorporates into its core community leadership, team learning and dialogue, mutual accountability, and commitment to fostering trusted connections among residents, schools, and organizations. The structures in place work to ensure that once parents come to the table, they are provided with engagement and leadership opportunities that are substantive and meaningful, and that drive Promesa’s work in a very real way. As one interviewee noted: “The beauty to it is

that we are always grounded because we are always accountable to these families and parents in a way that is organic.”

Sustaining a governance model that involves residents in decision-making takes care, attention, and investment. One interviewee said, “For organizations that don’t have that in their structure and then try to add it and don’t give it the appropriate attention or resources, then it becomes much more challenging to do the outreach and keep people engaged.” Another partner noted that at times the strong community-based presence in Promesa’s governance has been called into question – most notably in feedback on the collaborative’s first Promise Neighborhood grant. This triggered “good and important” conversations that eventually acted as a grounding force for the collaborative: “It was affirmed that, as much as the Department of Education funding was going to be important for implementing the work, that it couldn’t make us become something we weren’t.”

#### LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Building individual and collective community leadership is a key component of grassroots community organizing, and includes both skill development and political or issue-based education that allow “community members who are often left out of decision-making processes . . . to engage as equal and equipped partners” at decision-making tables (Tieken, Potochnik & Catone 2015, p. 132 ). In addition to membership in the governing bodies mentioned above, parent and resident leaders have additional leadership development opportunities at many levels. These leaders often help with outreach and mobilization, and assist with meetings and events by aiding in preparation and sign-up, leading icebreakers, and co-facilitating. They may also be engaged in participatory research activities, such as gathering and analyzing surveys or participating in best-practice visits to school-based health centers in Los Angeles and other cities as part of planning for school wellness centers.



Promesa's newer early education work is utilizing the Promotores model (WestRasmus et al. 2012), in which community members become experts, advocates, and peer educators within their community. There are school-based opportunities to participate in structures such as Family Action Teams, to volunteer at a school's parent center, and to help plan and design a series of wellness workshops for parents. Parents and residents also have access to trainings on leadership and organizing that help them to meaningfully participate and self-advocate in situations such as meetings with decision makers. Speaking of these opportunities, one parent told us: "And it makes you feel proud, to be someone who – I still, at 47, feel like I'm 15 and learning. I feel like I still have a lot to learn. But, well, little by little, at the end you can say, 'Well, yeah. Yeah, that's something.'"

Parents and residents in Boyle Heights also can take advantage of Parent College, a multi-level parent empowerment and leadership program spearheaded by the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools and centered on monthly academic and empowerment workshops. In 2016, Promesa partnered to design and implement an "advanced" track for parents who had gone through two years of Parent College, focused on particular issues for community activism and organizing. Parent College has also provided Promesa with another way to continue to build its base: twenty parents graduated from this advanced track in 2016, the majority of whom had not previously been involved in any of Promesa's efforts.

## BUILDING PARENT POWER: COMMUNITY VOICES

We talked with a focus group of parent and resident leaders involved in Promesa's work, and a number of themes in their conversation reinforced the collaborative's core values; the ways in which parent and resident voice is central to the work; and the capacity of parents and residents to rise to the opportunities presented, become true leaders in their community, and be partners in meaningful change. As one community partner stated, "I think me being able to work with them on a daily basis, seeing their growth as parent leaders, as individuals, and as parents, really shows you the potential, and the capacity that we have as Promesa to make those changes in that community." These themes are presented below, with representative quotes from parent and resident leaders.

### ■ Unity and Collective Power

**PARTICIPANT 1:** [System decision makers] think that we're ignorant because we live here. Because they say, "Oh, we have to educate the community. The community isn't educated." No. The community is not stupid. The community is not participating because it's never been informed. It's never been considered. Because, if money comes in, you never know where it's going to end up. And we're – we're just a letter and a number to them. But they don't know who we are. Because we are not ignorant. We have power, and if we work together, we can accomplish many things.

**PARTICIPANT 2:** That power is our voice.

### ■ Determination and Perseverance:

That's why we're here, to keep going. We have to keep going. Perseverance. We can't say – we can't lose. You never lose when you're fighting. That's what I tell my daughters. If you fight, you can't lose. That is, it's another step forward. You never lose when you're fighting.

### ■ Commitment

And, so, I don't have young children anymore. They are all grown up. But I keep coming here, because I like being here. Because, well, we are mothers who are still interested in promoting the well-being of all children. So, we have to keep supporting the schools, because they're really the only ones helping our children to move forward.

### ■ Pride in Place

Because, before, living in East Los Angeles – it was marked. When kids would leave, it was, "Where are you from?" "I live in Boyle Heights." "Oh, you're in a gang, you're a thief, you're a drug addict." And, thank God, over the course of the years, and with the work and the changes we've made, we can be proud now. Many of us have kids who have served their country, or are policemen, or are sheriffs. We have kids in college, who have graduated. We've erased that old image, that Boyle Heights is nothing but delinquency.

### ■ Empowering Youth

And I'm happy, because my daughter fights for those rights, too. And now she's also standing up for immigrant rights at her school, which they just finished protesting at the college. So, the example we can set is to teach our kids to fight, to fill them with these ideas, you know? To fight for your community, fight for your rights, help out.

## Impacts

Many areas of Promesa’s impact have been cited in our earlier findings. Here we discuss additional noteworthy impacts felt at the individual, organizational, community, school, and district levels.

### Individual Impact

*Individuals*, particularly parents and CBO staff, spoke of expanding and growing both personally and professionally through participation in Promesa. Seeing how organizations come together with “good intentions” to build community capacity for the good of the community has built more trust and hopefulness, both in individual relationships and in the collaborative process. Said one community partner, “Seeing this in action really sort of gives that there’s hope, . . . like it can be done, like let’s continue to do this.” Participants also noted the impact of developing their individual capacity to do systems-change work through the collective impact frame.

### Organizational Impact

*Organizations* are strengthening their capacity to partner through Promesa’s work. Notably, participants stated that Promesa is modeling a shift in collaboration, where organizations come together for the work, not for money, with less positioning between individual organizations. A related effect is an expansion of the range of organizations that have come to the table in a positive way; for example, members of the police department participate in Promesa’s Steering Committee, even though they may have difficult relationships with community members in other spaces. And although by all accounts Promesa partners have no expectation of financial benefit, a Promesa staff member noted that participation in the collaborative has brought “new resources and better-used resources” to partners, including increased staff skills and capacities, more meaningful relationships, and in some cases, direct funding.

### Community Impact

Interviewees cite *community members* – specifically parents, youth, and other residents – owning the work collectively as a significant impact of Promesa’s engagement in Boyle Heights. As a Promesa staff member said: “Overall, we have been able to really become a valuable entity in the community. Not separate from the community or organizing the community – we are the community.” Community members have experienced greater leadership, agency, and investment through the process of setting an ambitious goal with a clear vision, and the resulting community-led planning, decision making, and stewardship of resources toward achieving that goal have led to a recognition of the community’s power. As one organizational representative said:

And so, the level of investment and commitment at the community level I feel has really strengthened over the years. The community is already strong. So, I’m not trying to take away from that, but really sort of focusing on the investment in creating this change, and changing the narrative is really powerful to see. And that’s something that I, personally, have not seen in my career, that level of investment to making this change. . . . It’s really powerful.

Through Promesa’s work, community members are able to leverage the attention and resources of critical stakeholders, such as elected officials, CBOs, and funders, to help meet the needs of the entire Boyle Heights community. Parents and youth see that as advocates, allies, and leaders, “their voice really matters.” And through this deeper engagement, capacity-building, and support, parents in turn feel better able to support the community’s students to reach their goals. As a system leader noted:

In a way, it’s also about how people feel. So if people feel like the work is helping, that’s a big part of why people stay together and work together toward something. And they do have, there’s always the success story that’s

really – there’s always the student that you can point to that winds up getting into exactly the school that they wanted to, and found the scholarship, and those are the points of light where people say that can be my grandkid, or my son. That’s what keeps people going.

## School Impact

*Schools* are shifting their culture and climate as a result of Promesa’s work. School culture, systems, and structures have changed so that school staff and partners focus on working with the highest-need students not as an add-on, but as part of their core mission and as proof about the efficacy of this particular collaborative approach. A key element is listening to the voices of students themselves, through structures such as restorative justice circles, and understanding their needs and barriers to success. There is a notable feeling of longer-term commitment from the partner organizations to support school success, an investment no longer just tied to short-term grant-funded timelines. Schools are seeding good practices and bringing them to other places – either within a specific school, such as scaling restorative circles across Roosevelt; to other schools in Boyle Heights, such as helping to design the school-based Wellness Series programming at several schools; or, in the case of Wellness Teams and graduation trackers, to other schools across LAUSD.

According to one community partner, Promesa’s work is also “pushing the fact that the schools belong to the community,” breaking down silos and perceived walls around schools in Boyle Heights and helping hold schools accountable to the community. Community members have been instrumental in designing the Wellness Series at several schools, and have pushed for and helped secure school-specific resources, including a college counselor at Mendez and a commitment from the district to build wellness centers at Mendez and Roosevelt High Schools.

Interviewees assert that schools feel different through regular practices facilitated by Promesa’s engagement. This is most pronounced at Mendez, where Promesa began its work and has had the longest time to incubate, but also where school leadership has been strong, consistent, and aligned with Promesa’s values and approach. Said one Mendez staff member of what feels different:

So personally, I’m happy to be here. I think most of the staff is really happy to be here, because we feel like we have that rapport with the students. I believe that our students really appreciate us, and we really appreciate them. And it’s just . . . our parents like coming to [our school]. Our parents are happy with the school. And just the act that our enrollments are getting higher tells you that there’s people in the community – not just from Boyle Heights, but from outside, from East LA, and charter schools – that want their kids to be here, when they have other options close to their home.

Several school staff spoke of themselves or their colleagues enrolling their children in Mendez as a testament to Promesa’s impact, as one said:

I think another indicator is that a lot of our staff, including our principal, have their children here. His sons attend, and my [child’s] going. . . . So when we want our kids to join our schools, it shows that we, at least for myself, that I’m going to bring my [child] into the campus because I trust all the networks of teachers and community partners and admins. I’m like, yes, I want my [child] to come to this school. I think that speaks a lot. Because in other schools that I’ve either worked with or been at, you don’t get that sense. And I think that’s the sad part. If schools are not treating the students like their own kids, then that’s a problem. And here at [our school], literally we’re treating them like our own kids, because our kids are here.

## District Impact

At the *district* level, Promesa has worked to align LAUSD's priorities with those of Boyle Heights community members, schools, and other partners, serving an important intermediary role. According to system leaders, Promesa's advocacy has helped student, family, and community wellness (applied broadly to academic, financial, and mental health) become a greater priority for the district. Within these broad priorities, the collaborative has pushed for action on specific policies and strategies, including the passage of a resolution to earmark \$50 million for the creation of wellness centers (including those in Mendez and Roosevelt), increased restorative justice practices, more equitable funding in the implementation of the district's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), and access for students to A-G courses (required for admission to the University of California system). Promesa has also increased the understanding and expansion of the community school model as a cohesive framework for incorporating these priorities. Practicing intentional communication and stakeholder engagement of parents, students, teachers, and CBOs is key to Promesa's work to catalyze change. But Promesa's model of embedding in schools allows them to move beyond traditional organizing to directly support implementation of the changes they catalyze for schools and within the district.

## Vision for the Future and Next Steps

When asked about their vision for the future of Promesa Boyle Heights, stakeholders spoke of a set of bold, broad hopes for the collaborative, encompassing three key areas:

- Expanding across the full cradle-to-career continuum, with a focus on wellness;
- Improving the whole ecosystem; and
- Sharing the Promesa Boyle Heights story.

### Cradle-to-Career Expansion

One key component is to expand Promesa's work to encompass the full cradle-to-career education pathway, building on many of the strong results at Mendez, to include work in early and elementary education, middle school, and college, as well as with opportunity youth. The emerging early education partnership with First 5 LA is one important step toward this vision. Deepening the community school, "school-as-community-hub" approach has the potential to help create more aligned relationships and collaborations with stakeholders and partners, as well as to ensure continued community voice and engagement.

The work on wellness was mentioned many times. Many partners and community members see securing wellness centers and expanding work on wellness as critical to supporting young people's success along the education pipeline. Several interviewees called for a greater focus on students, including facilitating more leadership roles for youth, follow-up with the students in the community being serviced, and opportunities for peer collaboration and support. Overall, collaborators have a vision for "continuing to go deep" to uncover and support new areas of need along the cradle-to-career pathway, such as ideas for more classroom support. As one school administrator said:

I see it as, how can we get the Harvards, the Brown Universities, the Yales? What can we do? It has to be instruction. Because we've got the social-emotional piece. And it's not perfect, but there's enough energy to smooth it out, to keep it alive. Because it adapts every year with a new set of kids, it has to adapt, and we're well aware of that, it's organic. . . . What does that look like? I don't know. We have to sit down and figure out, what holes do we have that we've got to plug in. If that requires Promesa to get familiarized with effective system-wide instruction, then so be it.

### Ecosystem Improvement

The community's shared vision for Promesa extends even beyond the education pipeline. The original community planning process that launched Promesa Boyle Heights envisioned creating a focus on the broader cross-sector neighborhood ecosystem, moving the needle on a set of ecosystem outcomes and indicators that link quality education, quality housing, quality environment, safe communities, and economic development. One parent expressed the vision as:

Safer, with cleaner streets, healthier people in general – not just physically, but emotionally, too. Because, if you're doing well emotionally, it's reflected in your whole community, wherever you walk, wherever you go – in education, teaching people to keep our community clean. I see, as [Los Angeles mayor] Garcetti said, "Boyle Heights will be a great community." Because we're – we're already seeing it, right? We're already seeing that our streets are clean, that First [Street] is very clean. You can see that places seem a bit cleaner, especially close to downtown, where they've been remodeling. So, wow, this community is going to be amazing. I see it as amazing.

From that original visioning process, Promesa's role in the next five years is to help build a better community overall. This expanded engagement will

require careful, strategic political action. Since Boyle Heights, like many urban communities, is experiencing struggles with gentrification, balancing the competing forces of change in the community will be an ongoing challenge to the work. But community members see themselves as up for the challenge: "That's why organizations exist. That's why we're here, right? That's why we're here. It has to start somewhere, you know? So, it's about raising those issues and fighting. That's what the question is asking, how we see it. And, in order to see it, to envision it that way, we have to fight."

### Sharing the Promesa Boyle Heights Story

Interviewees also envision sharing the Promesa story more widely over the next five years to increase positive relationships across key stakeholders, facilitate more fund development, and help the broader field learn from and replicate Promesa's successes. Stakeholders expressed a special desire to highlight the collaborative's community-driven and equity-based focus. Opportunities to share the Promesa story should come through a renewed effort to secure a Promise Neighborhood implementation grant and other strategic funding prospects aligned with the coalition's core values and goals. Increased funding, in turn, will lead to greater staff capacity and infrastructure to lead and grow the work. By sharing the Promesa story – both its successes and challenges – partners and community members could see opportunities for potential replication in East Los Angeles and even across Los Angeles County. A small number of interviewees wondered whether the synergy of relationships, values, and approaches from Promesa's place-based initiative would be as successful if taken outside of Boyle Heights. However, over the next five years stakeholders want to continue to focus on building Promesa's momentum, commitment, engagement, persistence, and successes so far, to improve their community and beyond.

## Conclusion and Lessons for the Field

In discussing what has helped Promesa Boyle Heights to achieve its successes, one system leader noted that there was a bit of a “special sauce” at work, some of which originates in the Boyle Heights community itself: the strong “social cohesion” and pride of place, inter-generational engagement, a sense of common struggle. These elements can’t simply be transferred to other communities with different histories, social factors, and individuals, but our findings indicate that key design principles are replicable and can serve as models for similar initiatives and for the field working to transform education through collective impact and smart education systems frameworks. These include:

- Building on deep, trusting relationships that exist between key community and school partners and prioritizing relationship building as a foundation for the work;
- Investing ample staff time and energy in schools where leadership supports collaborative work and understands the value of partner organizations and family engagement;
- Including community organizing groups as core partners in the work and investing the necessary resources and capacity to facilitate meaningful and authentic grassroots community leadership and ownership;
- Valuing the assets, capacities, and knowledge that students, parents, and community residents bring to the table, and developing structures to ensure that they not only construct the vision for change but have a role in enacting that vision;
- Ensuring that core values drive fund development, not the other way around;
- Using data strategically to advance the collaborative’s vision and align the work of its partners, focusing capacity strategically on areas of greatest need and potential impact, particularly when resources or capacity are limited; and

- Cultivating a highly skilled backbone organization with staff who move the work forward while maintaining strong adherence to the collaborative’s vision and values, and who are representative of – or have significant points of connection with – the community.

Finally, Promesa’s key partners emphasized to us that the importance of determination, persistence, and belief cannot be understated:

Just because one person [in a leadership position] says [no], we’re not going to be satisfied with that. Because, I mean, we have all been told things aren’t possible. Higher graduation rates aren’t possible. College access. Ending violence is not possible. So we’ve all seen things be possible.

Promesa’s story shows what is possible. By sharing it, we hope that more people working to catalyze systems change in education will invest energy, time, careful thought, and funding in collaborating equitably with their communities.

## Appendices

### APPENDIX A Methods

We held a series of interviews with stakeholders both in-person and via phone, reviewed historical and current documents, and conducted a few limited observations of meetings and events. The director of Promesa Boyle Heights worked with us to recommend interviewees across multiple stakeholder groups who were directly involved with or could speak to the work of Promesa Boyle Heights. These included leaders and staff of community-based organizations and organizing groups, school leaders and staff, systems leaders, parent and resident leaders, and Promesa staff. Among those interviewed were individuals who were instrumental in Promesa's founding and development.

We conducted 21 interviews that included a total of 32 individuals.

- 14 leaders or staff from community-based organizations (including Promesa staff)
- 9 school-based leaders and staff
- 6 parent and community leaders
- 3 systems leaders

These included both one-on-one and group interviews. Additionally, we conducted three in-person observations of meetings and events that occurred during our data collection trip to Los Angeles in the spring of 2016.

Using qualitative methodology, we generated major themes and findings from this series of interviews, which are presented in the report.

### APPENDIX B Promesa Governance and Staffing Structure

Promesa's governance structure incorporates community leadership, team learning and dialogue, mutual accountability, and commitment to fostering trusted connections among residents, schools, and organizations. This is critical to the process of creating a safe, empowered community where children and families thrive.

The *General Assembly* is Promesa's consensus-based decision-making body. It is comprised of approximately eighty members, 60 percent of whom are adult and youth residents from the community. Other members include community partner organizations and school representatives. Meeting three to four times a year, this group makes decisions on changes to the vision, mission, values, and key focus areas, and monitors overall progress. All meetings are open to the public, and any resident or partner organization can participate in General Assembly meetings. However, only residents, Steering Committee, and Solution Team members who have attended at least two previous General Assembly meetings can become voting members.

Meeting every other month, the *Steering Committee* engages core community and school partners who are leading strategy implementation, as well as a representative subset of adult resident and youth General Assembly members. This group provides oversight and support for the General Assembly, Solution Teams, and the Promesa management team, and ensures partner accountability.

*Solution Teams*, which guide and implement work in specific areas, include the Academic and Wellness Teams at Mendez and Roosevelt High Schools and Hollenback Middle School, which meet approxi-

mately monthly. These teams are made up of organizations, school staff, and/or residents (parent and resident participation varies across these groups). An Organizers Team also meets to coordinate resident leadership and organizing opportunities.

*Promesa staff*, which was initially comprised of a director and one community school coordinator, has grown rapidly over the last two years. Three community school coordinators are now on staff, along with a wellness organizer, and a team of five focused on early education work. Additionally, Promesa is hiring new administrative and development staff, a college and career coordinator, and a director of impact. The collaborative also has been supported by consultants at various points, particularly during the Promise Neighborhood planning phase, to assist in areas such as data and evaluation tools as well as the use of an Efforts to Outcomes database.

## APPENDIX C

### Promesa Impacts

Since 2011, Promesa's impact at Mendez High School has been reflected in the following outcomes:

- Increased four-year high school graduation rates – from 48 percent in 2011, to 88 percent in 2015, with early data showing 94 percent for the class of 2016 (see Figure 3);
- Increased college readiness<sup>1</sup> and college-going (see Figure 3), e.g., in 2016:
  - 52 percent of students applied to a four-year college
  - 40 percent of students were accepted to a four-year college
  - 98 percent of students planned to attend a four-year or community college;
- Increased attendance (see Figure 3);
- The percentage of students, parents, and staff who report feeling safe on campus exceeds the LAUSD average (see Figure 4);
- In state testing, Mendez scores in English Language Arts and Math have continued to rise since 2012 and are now comparable to or exceed the LAUSD average (see Figures 5 and 6);
- In 2013, Mendez became the most improved high school in California according to gains in the Academic Performance Index (Romo 2015), the last year this state index was calculated to measure the academic performance and growth of schools.<sup>2</sup>
- In recognition of Promesa Boyle Heights' work at Mendez High School and the school's outcomes, in September 2015 the partnership was named one of the Bright Spots in Hispanic Education by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We use two research-based college readiness indicators: completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and being on track to complete a set of coursework required for admission to the University of California, so-called A-G requirements.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/list/hispanic-initiative/bright-spots.html>.



FIGURE 3. Mendez Attendance, College Readiness, and Graduation Rates Compared with LAUSD 2014-15

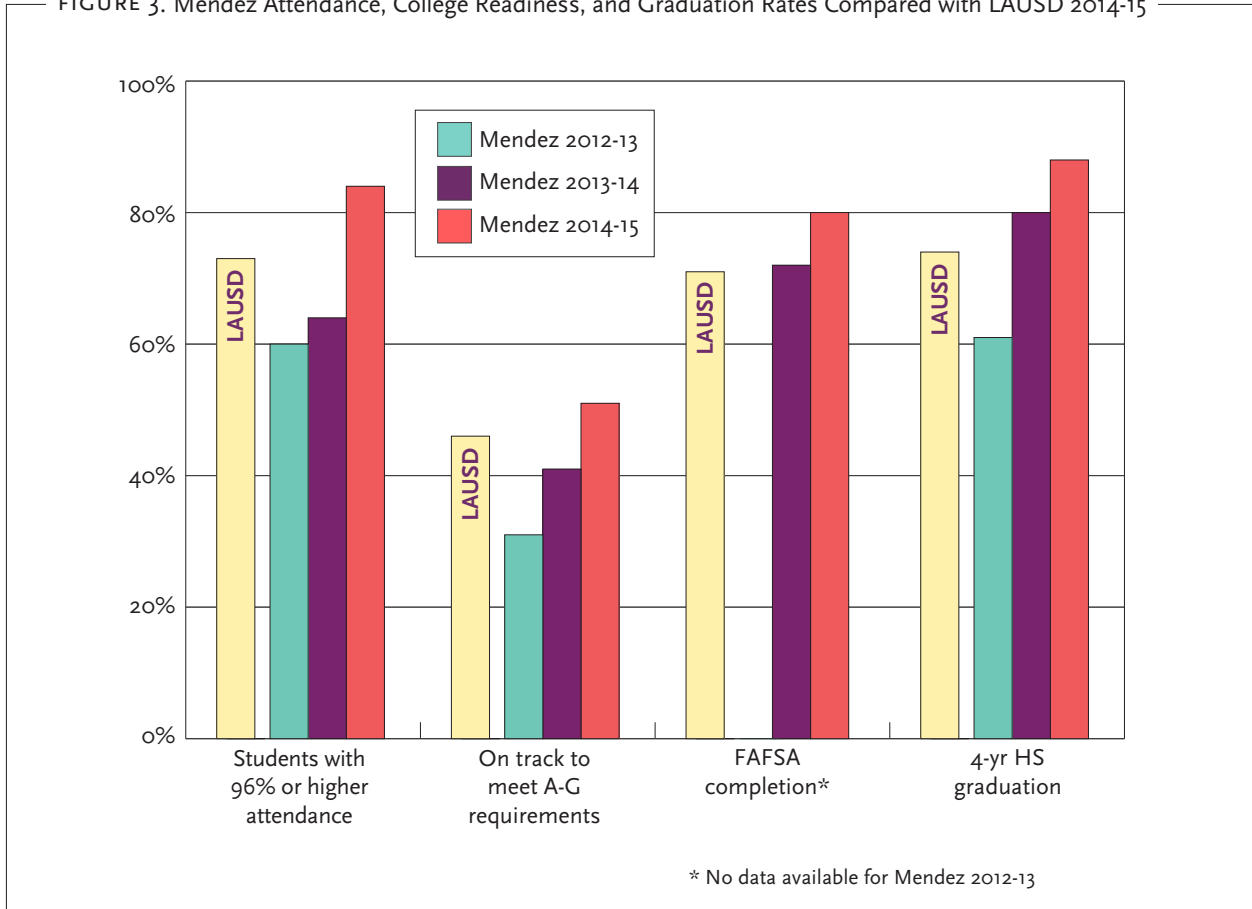


FIGURE 4. Sense of Safety from Students, Parents, and Staff (2014-15)

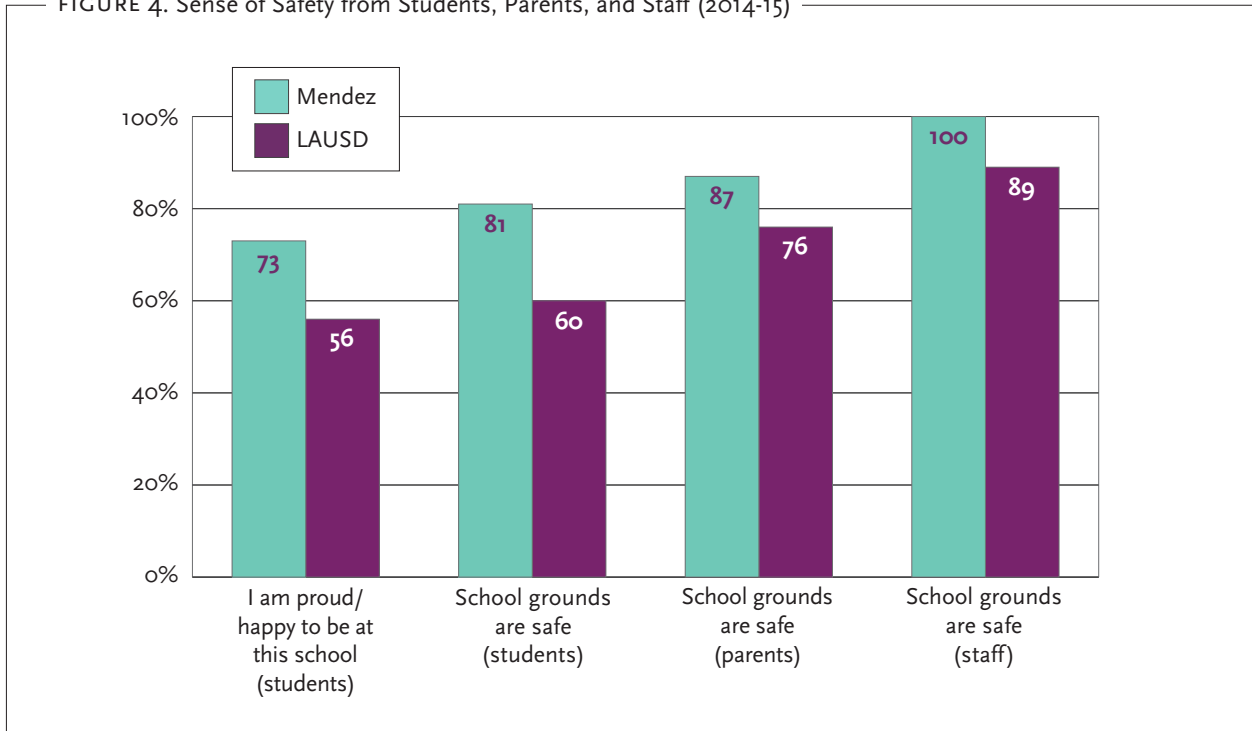


FIGURE 5. English Language Arts State Test Scores

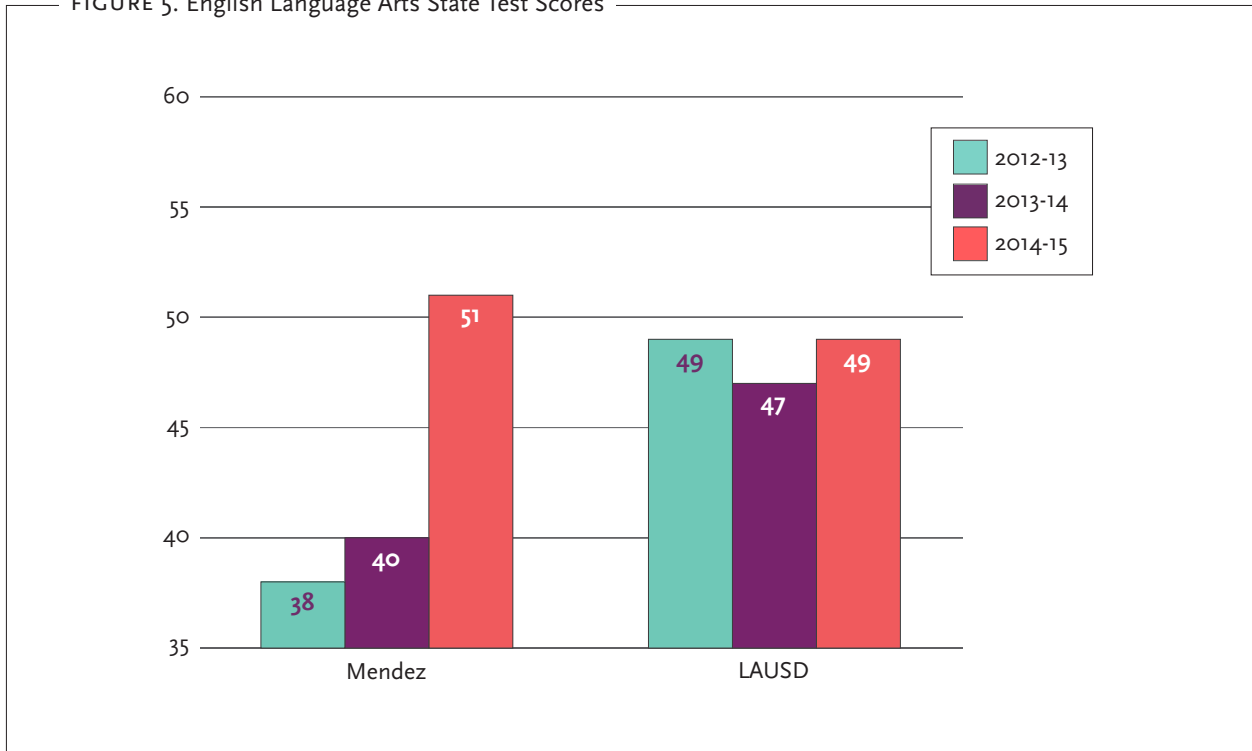
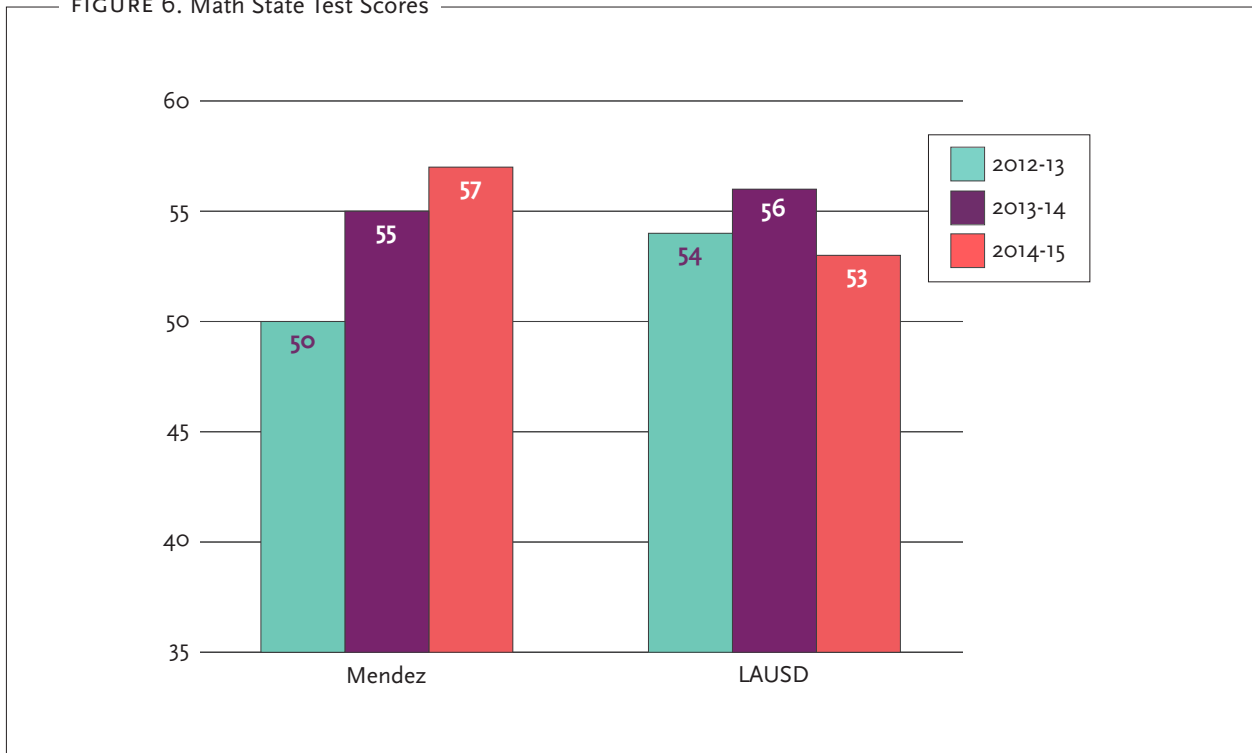


FIGURE 6. Math State Test Scores



## APPENDIX D

### Promesa Partners and Schools

#### Promesa Partners

Proyecto Pastoral serves as the backbone organization of a collaborative with more than twenty members that implement Promesa strategies in the Boyle Heights community:

- Alma Family Services
- AltaMed
- Best Start East LA
- \* California State University, Los Angeles
- \* City Year
  - Clinica Romero
- \* Communities in Schools
  - College Track
- \* Dolores Mission Church
  - Dolores Mission School
- \* East LA Community Corporation
- \* East Los Angeles College
  - East Los Angeles Women's Center
- \* El Centro de Ayuda
  - ENKI Family Services
  - Health Corps
- \* Hollenbeck Middle School
  - Homeboy Industries
- \* InnerCity Struggle
- \* Latino Equality Alliance
  - Las Fotos Project
- \* Legacy LA
- \* Mendez High School for College & Career Prep
- \* Partnership for Los Angeles Schools
  - Planned Parenthood
- \* Proyecto Pastoral
- \* Roosevelt High School
  - SHOUT (Salesian Boys and Girls Club)
  - St. John's Well Child & Family Center
  - White Memorial Medical Center
  - Yerberia Mayaguel

\* denotes members of the steering committee.

#### Promesa Schools

##### FELICITAS AND GONZALO MENDEZ HIGH SCHOOL

The first new high school to open in Boyle Heights in twenty-eight years, the Mendez campus opened in 2009 and featured two small schools, which were consolidated in 2013. In 2014-2015, the school enrolled 792 students: 96 percent of these were Latino, 89 percent were socioeconomically disadvantaged, 15 percent were English learners, and 17 percent were students with disabilities. Mendez is named after a Latino family who were leaders in *Mendez vs. Westminster*, a 1947 federal court case that led to the desegregation of California schools. Principal Mauro Bautista has led Mendez for five years, and was previously an assistant principal at the school and a teacher at Hollenbeck Middle School.

##### THEODORE ROOSEVELT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Opened in 1923, Roosevelt was for a time one of the largest high schools in the country, with an enrollment of more than 5,000 students in 2007. Roosevelt is a key part of Boyle Heights' history of activism, one of five school sites where young Chicano activists staged walk-outs in 1968 to demand improvements in education and facilities, including bilingual education and culturally relevant curriculum reflecting Mexican American history and culture. In 2006, a student walk-out protested immigration legislation. In 2010, Roosevelt was split into seven small schools, though five of these recombined into one in 2013. In 2014-2015, Roosevelt enrolled 1,795 students: 99 percent were Latino, 84 percent were socioeconomically disadvantaged, 20 percent were English learners, and 18 percent were students with disabilities. Principal Ben Gertner has led Roosevelt since 2015 and was previously an assistant principal and teacher at the school.

### HOLLENBECK MIDDLE SCHOOL

Opened in 1913, Hollenbeck serves students in grades 6–8, with a goal of improving the academic and personal success of students. It is located in close proximity to Roosevelt High School, and the two schools have much shared history. In 2014–2015, Hollenbeck enrolled 1,176 students: 98 percent were Latino, 86 percent were socioeconomically disadvantaged, 19 percent were English learners, and 15 percent were students with disabilities. Principal Randy Romero has led the school since 2015. He began his career in education at Hollenbeck and also served as principal of Roosevelt High School’s Math, Science, and Technology Magnet Academy.

### APPENDIX E

## Community Schools Background

The community school approach features an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement, with public schools serving as community hubs. The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) has defined the following elements of high-quality sustainable community schools:

- Engaging, culturally relevant, and challenging curriculum;
- High-quality teaching;
- Wrap-around supports including health care and social-emotional services;
- Positive discipline practices such as restorative justice; and
- Transformational parent and community engagement.

Community partnerships are key, as is the position of community school coordinator. This role is responsible for building relationships with school staff and community partners, engaging community residents, and coordinating efficient delivery of services. Figure 7 shows Promesa’s framework for the community school model.

FIGURE 7. Promesa’s Community School Model



Youth in Boyle Heights face multiple and interconnected barriers to academic success. In order to maximize our impact and address these barriers, we need a coordinated network of supports that includes students, parents, schools, and community organizations/institutions as partners in this effort.

# Community School Model

## Systems that Foster Shared Leadership

- Schools, families & community work together to leverage resources & coordinate systems to address academic & wellness needs of students and families (e.g. Steering Committee)
- Collaboration structures that foster a shared vision & shared ownership over school strategies and student outcomes (e.g. Wellness and Academic Teams)
- Engage & empower students, parents, and teachers thru education, leadership, and civic engagement
- Early warning systems to identify and track student needs
- Ongoing evaluation, data-analysis and learning to inform our work and impact the field

## Positive learning Environment that Fosters WELLNESS

### Student Leadership & Resiliency supports

- Student engagement and efficacy as measured by:
  - Student s feeling safe, connected, and respected at school
  - Restorative Justice Practices
  - Attendance
  - Suspension rates
  - STAR recognitions
  - Student participation in leadership opportunities

### Wellness Center

Campaign to organize residents & build local capacity for a comprehensive school-based Wellness Center that would provide prevention and intervention supports to ensure students, parents, and local residents can live healthy, stable, fulfilling lives.

## Targeted & high quality ACADEMIC interventions & supports

- Partners individually provide high quality interventions & services that are aligned/coordinated
- Core partners implement SHARED strategies to impact shared outcome goals:
  - **Successful High School Graduation**, measured by:
    - Attendance
    - Course Performance (A,B, Cs)
    - Credits and A-G on track
    - CAHSEE & portfolio
  - **College Readiness & Completion**, measured by:
    - Parents & students understanding of A-G req, systems of higher education, college requirements, financial & scholarship info
    - Students can articulation of college & career goals across all grades (9-12)
    - #/% in internships, community service, & programs that prepare them
    - #/% taking and passing SAT and AP classes
    - #/% applying and accepted to college

Systemic Social Change to increase resources & opportunities for schools, students & families.

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