

# Pandemic Pods and Teaching to the Whole Child: The Role of Parents and Community

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By **Melissa Steel King and Thomas Gold**

“One key theme has emerged so often in our conversations with other parents: a universal desire for our children to be recognized and valued as individuals at school.”

**- Parent Advisory Panel of The Aspen Institute’s National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (SEAD Commission)**

The Family Call to Action,<sup>1</sup> produced by the Parent Advisory Panel of the Aspen Institute’s SEAD Commission, succinctly captures the desire of parents around the country for schools to “know and teach the whole student”—a concept that includes supporting multiple domains of development (social, emotional, identity, mental health, and academic) as well as creating a safe and supportive school climate. For parents and community-based organizations (CBOs) that believe attention to the whole child is lacking in schools, the emergence of pandemic pods around the country provided an unprecedented opportunity to design learning environments that supported comprehensive student development and positive classroom climate in addition to academic growth. Now that virtually all schools have returned to in-person learning, the experiences and lessons learned from these pandemic pods offer opportunities for parents, CBOs, and schools to find new ways to collaboratively meet family and community needs.

Research shows that the majority of parents believe it is important for schools to develop students’ social and emotional competencies as well as their academic skills,<sup>2</sup> with parents voicing particular support for their children learning skills such as respect, confidence, problem solving, goal setting, emotional regulation, and

<sup>1</sup> Aspen Institute, “In Support of How Children Learn: A Family Call to Action,” Aspen Institute, 2018, [https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Family-CTA\\_FINAL\\_web.pdf](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Family-CTA_FINAL_web.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See the following: Matthew N. Atwell, John M. Bridgeland, and Eleanor P. Manspile, *Ready to Engage: Perspectives of Teachers and Parents on Social and Emotional Learning and Service-Learning in America’s Public Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Civic, 2021), [https://casel.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/ReadyToEngage\\_Final.pdf](https://casel.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/ReadyToEngage_Final.pdf); and Adam Tyner, *How to Sell SEL: Parents and the Politics of Social-Emotional Learning* (Washington D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, August 2021), <https://sel.fordhaminstitute.org>

social skills.<sup>3</sup> Parents also want their children to learn in a safe, supportive, and culturally competent environment; this is particularly important for Black, Latino, and Indigenous students, who are less likely than Asian and White students to report having caring adult relationships or feeling safe and supported in school.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, parents favor an approach that integrates whole-child development with academic instruction rather than teaching academic and social and emotional skills separately.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, most parents don't believe their school is paying enough attention to these competencies; one nationally representative study found that 63 percent of parents believe schools should place a higher priority on developing social and emotional skills.<sup>6</sup>

This paper draws from CRPE's [study of pandemic pods](#) conducted in 2020 and 2021 to understand what lessons we can draw from the focused implementation of the whole-child approach in pandemic learning communities and to what degree these lessons are applicable to traditional schooling. This includes case studies on the following initiatives, which operated pod-like learning environments during the pandemic:

- Black Mothers Forum's (BMF) microschool
- My Reflection Matters virtual colearning community
- Boston CLC's learning pods
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District's learning pods
- Neighborhood North learning pods
- Joanna Rosa-Saenz's learning pod

The majority of the learning environments and their leaders that are the focus of this paper intentionally aimed to support children's social, emotional, physical, and mental health and/or identity development, as well as their academic growth. Promoting a safe, supportive, connected, and culturally competent learning environment was also a key priority, especially in pods designed for students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Universally, these elements were supplemental to academic instruction.

While many of the efforts studied were borne out of the tremendous need exposed in the wake of school closures, their design and implementation suggests new paths forward to making good on the Parent Advisory Panel's vision of schools that "know and teach the whole student." These pandemic-era experiments showed us that CBOs and parent leaders can be powerful partners in helping schools achieve learning environments that parents want—where children can grow in multiple domains and feel safe and respected by their teachers and other adults. In particular, these stakeholders bring great strengths and knowledge about how to support students' social-emotional well-being. They also demonstrated that in order for

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3 Rebecca Bauer and Helen Westmoreland, "What is Whole Child Education?" brief, The Center for Family Engagement, National PTA, 2018, <https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/cfe/2019/what-is-whole-child-education.pdf>.

4 Adam Voight, Thomas Hanson, Meagan O'Malley, and Latifah Adekanye, "The Racial School Climate Gap: Within-School Disparities in Students' Experiences of Safety, Support, and Connectedness," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 56, no. 3 (2015): 252–67, doi:10.1007/s10464-015-9751-x.

5 Tyner, *How to Sell SEL*.

6 Atwell, Bridgeland, and Manspile, *Ready to Engage*, p. 7.

SEL instruction/programming to be most impactful, it needs to be integrated into academics—a shift that is challenging and will require new and innovative strategies to move beyond the current siloed approach. Schools need to pay attention to these lessons and enlist these stakeholders to help codesign an integrated and comprehensive approach to student development. Finally, the pods highlighted the importance of engaging in an inclusive innovation approach to identify and solve core challenges that local communities face in educating their children.

## Whole-Child Development: An Overview

Parents' demand for schools to “know and teach the whole student” echoes research on how children and youth learn best. Educators who take a whole-child approach know that learning does not happen in a vacuum; it is a social process that requires students to learn and exercise intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, as well as academic skills. To create an environment where students can truly thrive as learners, a whole-child approach should include strategies that both (a) support students' individual development across multiple domains and (b) ensure a classroom and school climate where students feel safe, connected, and supported.

### *Supporting Individual Development across Multiple Domains*

Educators use many terms to describe strategies that support students' growth in “nonacademic” domains, including social and emotional learning (SEL), life skills, soft skills, character education, and 21st-century skills, to name the leading terms. The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative provides a useful framework defining six key domains critical to whole-child development: academic, cognitive, social emotional, identity, physical health, and mental health (see Table 1). Integrating support for these areas of development into academic instruction yields proven benefits for students. Research shows that youth with stronger social and emotional competencies are more likely to succeed academically in school, as well as enroll in and graduate from college, have successful careers, and experience positive professional and personal relationships as an adult.<sup>7</sup>

### *Creating a Positive Social Climate*

Instruction isn't the only factor critical for whole-child development. Ample evidence demonstrates the importance of creating a learning environment that is culturally responsive, that is characterized by caring, supportive relationships among staff, students, and families, and that provides students with a sense of safety and belonging. Building a positive school climate improves student learning, reduces suspensions, and mitigates the effects of poverty on student outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Among other strategies, educators create a positive school climate when they recognize and appreciate students' individual strengths and needs; incorporate students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into learning; foster students' sense of agency; and facilitate strong communication and engagement with parents and families.<sup>9</sup>

7 CASEL, “SEL in the Classroom: A systemic approach integrates SEL across all key settings where students live and learn,” Systemic Implementation, CASEL, <https://casel.org/systemic-implementation/sel-in-the-classroom>.

8 Linda Darling-Hammond and Channa Cook-Harvey, *Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success* (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2018), <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/educating-whole-child-brief>.

9 “What Is the CASEL Framework?” section “Classrooms,” CASEL, <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#classrooms>.

## Supporting Whole-Child Development in Pandemic Learning Communities

The majority of the initiatives studied intentionally sought to support whole-child development. These strategies included the following:

- Building in time to focus on students' social-emotional well-being, mental health, and/or identity development
- Investing in counseling and positive behavior-management practices
- Creating safe and culturally affirming learning environments for BIPOC students
- Investing in frequent and authentic parent engagement

### *Incorporating Activities to Support Students' Social-Emotional Well-Being*

All of the learning environments studied prioritized incorporating activities into the school day meant to support students' social-emotional well-being, including physical movement, socialization, and identity development. For example, many of the learning environments prioritized time in the day for interactive play and physical movement. In the Community Learning Collaborative (CLC) pods in Greater Boston, for example, the schedule included time each day for dancing, basketball, or even just playing Simon Says. Some of the CBOs that hosted pods were well set up to support organized sports. For example, one of the CLC partner pods, The BASE, is an organization that runs an after-school program with a specific focus on athletics. Pod students at the BASE facility had access to a gym and sports equipment, and the staff were well trained to support the development of skills like teamwork and other competencies. However, even pod spaces that were not designed for athletics made an effort to create activities that allowed students to move around—a particularly crucial component after long days of sitting in front of the computer for remote learning. As one parent remarked,

“They’re being physical. They’re moving their body. They’re not just, like, sitting around. They’re kids. I feel like you start these patterns young, and they fall into them, and stick into them. That’s not what I wanted for my kid. We like them to be active and move around.”

All of the learning environments studied offered enrichment activities specifically designed to support students' cognitive, creative, and interpersonal development. For example, Neighborhood North in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, offered a play-oriented community museum where participants engaged in arts activities, gardening, and creative play. Similarly, in Cleveland, several pods that were led by CBOs in partnership with the school district drew on their prepandemic out-of-school-time (OST) programming to offer art classes and field trips. Finally, pods run by parents—like Joanna Rosa-Saenz's Denver pod and the My Reflection Matters (MRM) virtual colearning community for BIPOC families—made a point of providing students with lessons in cooking, gardening, Lego building, music, and arts and crafts. These activities provided children opportunities to develop their competencies in nonacademic domains, practice reasoning and critical thinking in novel contexts, and exercise their social skills. They also allowed pod staff and students to get to know

each other better and to build trusting relationships in a way that they might not have done in a solely academic context.

In addition to offering lessons in nonacademic subjects, some of the pods also experimented with innovative ways to deliver the material. In the case of the MRM, students were encouraged to lead classes themselves, with support from adults when necessary. According to one parent,

“I really appreciate it, because for the most part, the young people in the class series were the ones who led the cooking class, and they get our support when there are parts where they need help.”

MRM is a special case because of its focus on unschooling and directly involving parents in the education of their children to give students and parents more agency over their learning. According to its founder,

“With unschooling, we are shifting away from traditional behaviors, practices, and ideas. That doesn’t mean we are anti-school. MRM is not necessarily against the concept of a school. We are against coercive, oppressive learning practices. Unfortunately, schools tend to perpetuate those practices.”

The rest of the pods, however, were much more traditional in the sense that they provided enrichment and instruction to students while they still participated in online learning, typically delivered by the local school district.

An emphasis on identity development emerged as particularly important in the pods created for Black and Latino students. In these learning spaces, pod organizers stated that they wanted to create an environment where these students felt loved, valued, and seen in a way that is often lacking in their regular schools. In most cases, pod staff created original lessons and activities designed to help students reflect on and feel pride in their identities and racial/ethnic heritage. In Boston, CLC pod staff implemented several projects that enabled students to explore their background and identity, including a student roadmap and a project where they identified the origins of their own names. Similarly, students were asked to develop a personal leadership identity statement that helped them describe how their own identity is a source of strength. BMF found opportunities to expose students to Black professionals in various careers, bringing in guests including firefighters, police officers, nurses, and others.

Students responded positively to activities focused on race and identity. One student at the CLC pod said the following:

“I think that brought us more together. I know that it’s just a color, the skin is just a color [that] doesn’t change the fact of anything, like who have [sic] more money or something else like that. And I feel like I learned more about my past and how I can change my future.”

Parents also noticed the influence of this programming on their children, as it helped them build their own sense of self-efficacy as students and as members of the school community. One said the following:

“It’s been very positive. He’s been able to have a positive experience. He’s happy when I pick him up from school. He’s happy about his work while he’s in school. He’s proud of himself. He feels pride in how much he’s learning, how good he’s doing. He’s fostered great relationships with the other children. He’s learning a lot about himself. I think he’s feeling safer than before. He’s feeling seen and heard. So I think it’s been a very positive experience for him.”

### *Investing in Mental Health Resources and Positive Discipline Practices*

Several pods also invested in resources and training to support students’ emotional and mental health. For example, the Boston CLC designed its virtual high school pod so that students met weekly with a counselor. This support was critical for students, in part because of the emotional and psychological challenges brought on by the pandemic and the isolation that followed in quarantine. However, students also highlighted the fact that such direct mental health support was lacking in their own schools. One said the following:

“It shows us someone cares, and it’s like when we’re talking to her [the counselor] and she shows us she’s paying attention...I wish that in school we had a counselor or something that we could talk to weekly to see how we’re doing and stuff.”

The pods also addressed student behavior using more holistic approaches. Recognizing that Black and Brown children often bear the brunt of harsh discipline approaches in schools, CLC and BMF invested in training staff to take a positive approach to discipline, working with students and parents to help children develop more positive behaviors rather than relying on punitive disciplinary practices. In the CLC pods, one student reflected during a focus group on the relationships with staff and the emphasis on humor:

“So it’s like we have like a calm relationship. They’re not always yelling at me, and I can joke around with them, and they know I’m joking. And then with students, it’s the same thing. I never beef or argue with any students.”

### *Building a Safe and Culturally Affirming Climate for BIPOC Students*

Although all the learning environments in this study strove to provide a safe and supportive environment to students, the importance of a culturally and personally affirming space emerged as a particularly strong theme among those designed for BIPOC students. The leaders of these initiatives wanted to counteract the experience of many Black and Latino students in school, where they typically do not feel as connected, valued, and affirmed as White students. To create more affirming and culturally competent classrooms for their students, many of these pods implemented strategies such as hiring staff who reflected students’ race/ethnicity and language (student-teacher ethnic concordance).

BIPOC-led pod providers intentionally focused on hiring staff that reflected the racial and ethnic makeup of the students participating in their programs. For example, the Boston CLC pods made a concerted effort to hire Black and Latino staff members to reflect the communities they serve. They saw this as an important contrast to Boston Public Schools (BPS), where—as is the case in many school districts across the country—the proportion of teachers of color does not reflect the student body.

Only 63 percent of the district’s workforce identifies as a race or ethnicity other than White, compared to around 75 percent of students.<sup>10</sup> In similar fashion, the Black Mother’s Forum, an organization started in 2017 in an effort to address the needs of Black students—particularly Black boys—intentionally hired Black teachers who they felt would be in a better position to relate culturally and bring in their own lived experiences.

Feedback from students, parents, and staff suggest that the emphasis on student-teacher ethnic concordance helped increase a sense of engagement and belonging for BIPOC students. In a survey of CLC participants, 96 percent of parents said that it was important for their children to see themselves in their teacher with respect to race, ethnicity, and language (see Figure 1). Parents and students reported that shared racial identity bolstered self-esteem and strengthened connections between students and staff. According to one CLC parent,

“I actually really appreciate [the diversity]...Not that it necessarily matters to me one way or another, but I do think that it is important for them to see staff that are also representative of themselves.”

Students also mentioned that interacting with Black and Latino staff was different from their experience in BPS and something that brought a level of familiarity and comfort. As one CLC student said during a focus group,

“I feel like I fit in more because even the teachers as well, they’re the same ethnicity or they might be the same race or color as me, and I feel like that makes me more comfortable.”

An MRM parent elaborated on how being in classes with Black teachers helped her Black daughter develop a positive sense of identity in a way that other spaces had not:

“Even though we were not in a lot of White spaces, she was getting the message that she should want to be White and White was better.... So MRM, I think really, really for her has changed that...being in a space where she has pretty much all Black women leading classes and consciously talking about blackness really is the focus, I started to hear her be proud of her hair and draw pictures where she really looked like herself, even her skin tone, claiming her own skin tone.”

For Latino students and families, the intentional hiring of Spanish-speaking staff made a meaningful difference in their ability to engage and build relationships with teachers. Staff noted how even casually speaking to students in Spanish helped reaffirm their identity. As one CLC staff member noted,

“And even stuff [like] me greeting him, when I greet him, I greet him in Spanish, ‘Señor, what’s up?’ and that in Spanish, and even that I can tell a sense of comfort from the youth. It brings him home almost, I can just see that sense of comfort, he’s comfortable around us, the way he talks, he jokes with us.”

10 Andrew J. Rotherham and Thomas Gold, *Window of Opportunity: How States and Localities Can Use Federal Rescue Plan Dollars to Diversify Their Teacher Workforce* (Washington, D.C.: Bellwether Education Partners, July 2021), [https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether\\_%20ARP%20Teacher%20Diversity%20Publication\\_Final.pdf](https://bellwethereducation.org/sites/default/files/Bellwether_%20ARP%20Teacher%20Diversity%20Publication_Final.pdf).

Students also talked about the importance of having staff that spoke and conversed in Spanish and how it created closer bonds. As one student expressed in a focus group for the CLC pods, “I feel differently. My dad speaks Spanish and some here speak Spanish.” Added another student, “My mom and my dad speak English and Spanish. But there are some parents that prefer Spanish (so it’s helpful for them to be able to talk to the teacher in Spanish).” Another student explained that the diversity of staff “helps Black and Latino communities. We can relate to everyone.”

The CLC pod was not the only one that focused on the Latino community and its own linguistic needs. The pod run by Denver parent Joanna Rosa-Saenz took a bilingual approach to teaching and learning in an effort to build self-esteem and empower students. Rosa-Saenz supported this vision by also hiring Spanish speakers, including one staff member who had a day job in a school cafeteria.

### *Investing in Frequent and Authentic Parent Engagement*

Many of the initiatives in this study focused on building positive staff-family relationships as part of their strategy to know and support the whole child. In learning environments designed for BIPOC students, staff made a concerted effort to create a supportive atmosphere where parents felt comfortable and welcomed and where they didn’t feel judged or second-guessed in their parenting or priorities. Boston CLC pod leaders, for example, noted that they felt that the school district could do a better job building trust and communicating with parents, and they set out to model a better approach to parent engagement. CLC staff made a point of checking in with parents at pickup and dropoff times, relaying information about both successes and challenges in individual children’s days. Because of the high proportion of Spanish-speaking staff, CLC teachers were able to welcome Latino parents with limited English proficiency and create a much tighter bond than in traditional schools.

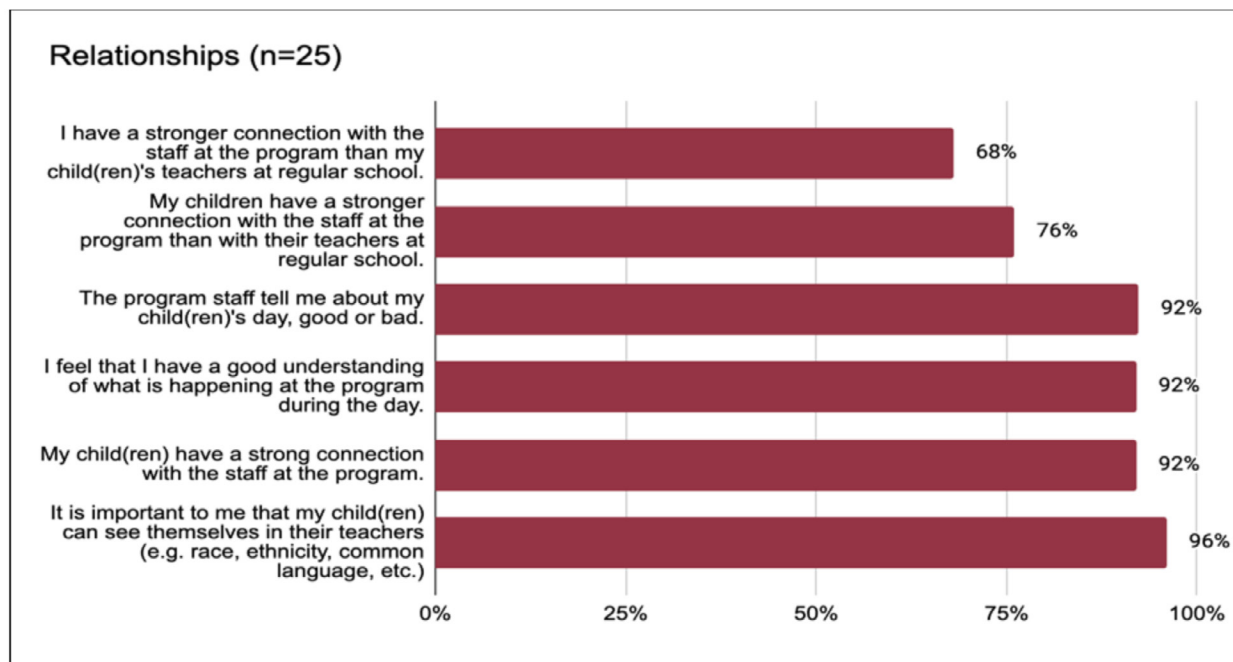
The close ties with parents—a result of both regular communication and, for some parents, language abilities—created opportunities for CLC staff to relay information about students to their parents. Parents reported having a good sense of what was happening in the pods, a connection that is often missing in regular public schools.<sup>11</sup> Ninety-two percent of the parents surveyed as part of the study of the CLC pods reported that they “have a good understanding of what is happening at the program during the day,” further highlighting the critical importance of connecting parents to schools (see Figure 1). More than two-thirds (68 percent) of CLC parents also reported a stronger connection to pod staff than they had at their child’s previous school.

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<sup>11</sup> James P. Comer and Norris Haynes, “The Home-School Team: An Emphasis on Parent Involvement,” *EduTopia*, July 1, 1997, <https://www.edutopia.org/home-school-team>.



**Figure 1. CLC Parent Survey: Student and Parent Connections to Pods**



Source: Parent Survey, CLC Evaluation, Boston. Bellwether Education Partners, 2021.

Growing parent engagement also reflects a larger trend, as the pandemic has made parents more aware of their children’s education and eager to develop closer ties with teachers and staff. In a nationally representative survey of parents during the pandemic, 85 percent of parents said that they were somewhat likely or very likely to develop better relations with their child’s teacher than they have in the past.<sup>12</sup> Another global survey conducted by Brookings affirmed parents’ interest in parent-educator partnerships, as well as their desire for schools to provide social and emotional as well as academic development for their children.<sup>13</sup>

Strong parent-staff communication helped pod leaders tailor their support for children in a way that schools often do not. In her parent-run pod, Rosa-Saenz placed a high priority on communicating with and listening to the parents of her students. Her trusting relationships with parents helped her respond to individual students’ needs and personalize her support for students as needed. Parents noticed and deeply appreciated these close connections, noting the contrast with traditional schools. Likewise, families who participated in the BMF microscool appreciated how staff communicated with parents and were responsive to their concerns and requests.

The MRM pod provides an extreme example of what can happen when parents continue to feel undervalued and left out of the conversation. Participating parents have given up on the ability of traditional schooling to meet their needs in a way that they see as equitable and uncoercive. By disengaging from the traditional education system, they hope their children will learn in a way that is more self-directed and more affirming of their identities as BIPOC students.

<sup>12</sup> *Parents 2020 | COVID-19 Closures: A Redefining Moment for Students, Parents & Schools* (Learning Heroes, 2020), [https://bealearninghero.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/LH\\_2020-Parent-Survey.pdf](https://bealearninghero.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/LH_2020-Parent-Survey.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Winthrop and Mahsa Ershadi, “Know Your Parents: A global study of family beliefs, motivations, and sources of information on schooling,” essay, Brookings Institution, March 16, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/know-your-parents>.

## Implications for Education Policy

The insights from the experiences in these pandemic-era learning environments raise questions about how educators, activists, and parents can best use these lessons to move closer to the vision of schools as places that “know and teach the whole student.” By shifting control over the classroom environment to CBOs and parents, pandemic learning communities underscored both the potential and the limitations of community leaders to serve as partners to schools in improving whole-child development—and the present moment opens up a new opportunity for these different parties to engage.

By nature, CBOs and parent leaders are deeply embedded in the lives of their local communities and have the capacity to foster personal relationships with individual students and families. Pandemic pods provided these stakeholders with an unprecedented opportunity to apply these strengths in the context of the academic school day. As a result, we saw that the community- and parent-led pods in this study achieved the following:

- Developed and implemented enrichment activities and practices that supported children’s social-emotional well-being and identity development
- Demonstrated that they have the resources, cultural competence, and ability to create supportive, culturally affirming learning environments where students felt a sense of belonging and engagement
- Demonstrated the potential of CBOs to serve as bridges and intermediaries between teachers and parents, particularly facilitating engagement for families from marginalized racial/ethnic and linguistic communities

At the same time, these pandemic learning communities reinforced that most schools have a long way to go toward realizing a vision of learning where supports for multiple domains of development are integrated into academic instruction, as recommended by the Aspen Institute’s SEAD Commission and other experts. None of the community or parent leaders in this study possessed the expertise to incorporate SEL into the daily academic curriculum, and SEL-focused activities were universally supplemental to instruction.

Furthermore, now that most schools are back to operating in person, many of the initiatives studied have shut down and the community leaders no longer have power or influence to shape students’ experience during the school day.

### *Engagement through Inclusive Innovation*

Moving forward, the unprecedented experiences of the pandemic era open up a new opportunity for schools to reach out to CBOs and parents to innovate and create something new. One way to frame this approach is within the lens of inclusive innovation—a model which states that in order for innovation to be impactful, it needs input from those who are closest to the problem that needs solving. It is only through this process that solutions will incorporate equity in the process of addressing core issues. In a recent report, *Designing a Process for Inclusive Innovation*, Digital Promise argues that what is missing in education innovation is “a radical commitment to equity.” In response, the report authors make a case for the use of inclusive innovation, “a process of ensuring people closest to the challenge lead, participate in, and benefit from innovation.” Furthermore, with inclusive innovation,

“...solutions are co-designed and co-created with marginalized populations to address challenges as they see and experience them. Success is defined by marginalized populations having full access to, participating in, and benefiting from powerful learning outcomes, both among those involved in co-design and those to whom the innovation scales.”<sup>14</sup>

The involvement of CBOs and parents in pandemic learning communities has created a new opportunity for schools to engage these stakeholders as partners in innovation. CBOs and parents were able to use the global crisis as an opportunity to bring in ideas and programs for teaching and learning that were closely aligned to the needs of the members of the community in an authentic way. Schools can learn from this, building on these lessons to find better ways to incorporate a whole-child approach throughout the school day so more students feel known and included.

The process of inclusive innovation can start small, beginning with as simple a step as a school principal reaching out to a community educator to meet and discuss learnings from the year. It could also involve a CBO meeting with schools to discuss strategies that work to engage children in learning. A prepandemic study of districts and CBOs partnering to coordinate SEL practices offers insight into how to start.<sup>15</sup> Schools and CBOs can start to forge new partnerships around teaching the whole child in the following ways:

- Committing to meet together regularly to share practices and build a partnership
- Cocreating a shared definition of what it means to support whole-child development
- Planning opportunities for teachers and OST program staff alike to receive training in strategies to support whole-child development and create a positive climate
- Agreeing on practices and routines that can be implemented in both the school and OST environment

Schools and CBOs find themselves at a critical juncture. During the pandemic-pod era, CBOs and parent leaders in many communities took on an unprecedented role in hosting and supporting school-day learning. They used the opportunity to validate parents’ desire for schools to know and teach the whole child, demonstrating the strengths they can bring by responding to the crisis and creating learning environments that addressed gaps that have existed in schools for years. In return, schools and districts benefited from an active social sector that filled a void when schools shut down. Now that schools have reopened and the pod-like learning environments have nearly all closed down, it is still unclear whether schools and CBOs will seize the opportunity to engage in a process of innovation toward a new vision of student success or return to the status quo. For those educators who seek to strengthen their approach to supporting whole-child development, the experiences of the past two years can help create a path forward.

14 Colin Angevine, et al., *Designing a Process for Inclusive Innovation* (Washington, D.C.: Digital Promise, November 2019), <https://digitalpromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Designing-a-Process-for-Inclusive-Innovation.pdf>.

15 Heather L. Schwartz, et al., *Early Lessons from Schools and Out-of-School Time Programs Implementing Social and Emotional Learning* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, October 2020), <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/early-lessons-from-schools-and-out-of-school-time-programs-implementing-social-and-emotional-learning.aspx>.

## About the Authors

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## About the Center on Reinventing Public Education

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