



HOW LEARNING HAPPENS:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM FIVE COMMUNITIES 2021

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About America's Promise

America's Promise Alliance is the driving force behind a nationwide movement to improve the lives and futures of America's children and youth. Bringing together national nonprofits, businesses, community and civic leaders, educators, citizens, and young people with a shared vision, America's Promise sparks collective action to overcome the barriers that stand in the way of young people's success. Through these collective leadership efforts, the Alliance does what no single organization alone can do: catalyze change on a scale that reaches millions of young people.

About How Learning Happens

Science confirms what educators, parents, and caregivers have long known: learning is social, emotional, and cognitive. The most powerful learning happens when we pay attention to all of these aspects—not separately, but woven together, just like how our brains work. Through How Learning Happens, America's Promise Alliance is advancing this understanding about how learning happens and helping to fuel the growing movement to educate children as whole people—combining their social and emotional well-being with academic growth and success. Our effort builds on the work of many organizations and coalitions to advance a whole child approach to learning and development. We do so by developing a shared and inclusive message about how learning happens, sharing this message with a broader audience of stakeholders, infusing the lessons from how learning happens into our signature campaign work, and exploring the perspectives of young people about how learning happens.



COMMUNITIES REPORT ON HOW LEARNING HAPPENS

About this report

The strategies and lessons shared in this brief are the result of learning-based collaboration between leaders in the five featured communities and at America's Promise Alliance. Rachel Murphy and Mark Toner conducted extensive interviews and documented the experiences of each community over the course of the partnership. Rachel and Monika Kincheloe created a set of learning questions, creating the foundation for what we sought to learn from these five communities. What we created here is a result of qualitative analysis from hundreds of hours of planning, learning, and convening, in addition to narrative submissions and interviews. Rachel and Liz Glaser conducted significant analysis to identify themes and lessons from across the five communities. Monika distilled that analysis into the strategies and lessons highlighted in this report.

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THROUGHOUT 2020, AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE worked with five communities across the country that wanted to extend and deepen their efforts to support young people's social, emotional, and cognitive (SEC) development. Each community planned cross-sector convenings to inspire action in pursuing more comprehensive and collaborative approaches to learning. Their efforts were unexpectedly and indelibly shaped by the challenges of the past year—including the global pandemic and national reckoning with racism. What follows are the stories and lessons learned from these communities.

Young people are going through drastic changes in what school looks like, drastic changes in their whole lives and family lives, drastic changes in their community. There is an opportunity for young people to reflect and act fully on all the things that are happening to them. It's an opportunity for adults to recognize the tremendous opportunities for growth and give young people credit for growing and transforming.

It would be a shame for us to come out of this time, and come back to in-person life, give young people academic assessments and say, 'Hey, you didn't learn very much this last year.' I know every young person, whether they were in exceptional circumstances or adverse circumstances, have learned a tremendous amount across a broader set of skills and competencies because they've been challenged and tested.

-Rachel Ford, Nashville After Zone Alliance



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INTRODUCTION

How do young people learn?

It's a beguilingly simple question with profound implications.

A growing practice and research base confirms what educators, parents and caregivers, and young people have intuitively understood: children learn best when they are treated as whole people and when all aspects of their growth and development are prioritized.

Learning, from this perspective, is not simply the result of taking core academic content classes, engaging with a particular pedagogy, or acquiring specific knowledge and skills. Rather, learning is a social endeavor requiring human connection; an emotional enterprise in which feeling safe and respected enhances the ability to learn; and a contextual pursuit whereby racial, cultural, and individual identities play a central role in development. In short, learning is a social, emotional, and cognitive process that happens in different places and spaces and is influenced by young people's full lived experiences.

Despite this knowledge, various youth-supporting systems—including the nation's education system—are too often not organized and resourced in ways that reflect and promote integrated and comprehensive approaches to learning. The reasons for this are myriad, from an overreliance on test-based accountability in determining school and district performance to siloed approaches to funding the many systems that support young people and their families. The result is that holistic, coordinated, community-driven approaches to learning and development are the exception rather than the norm. In fact, a [national survey of high school students](#) revealed that more than half do not experience the supportive conditions (relationships, belonging, agency, and meaningful learning) that are necessary components of multi-dimensional approaches to learning.

Against this backdrop, the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development worked to coalesce the evidence base around how learning happens, the applied knowledge and expertise of educators, and the insights and experiences of young people and their families into a growing movement for a whole child approach to learning and development. Its 2019 [Nation at Hope report](#) put forth recommendations in research, practice, and policy to help catalyze these approaches in communities across the country.

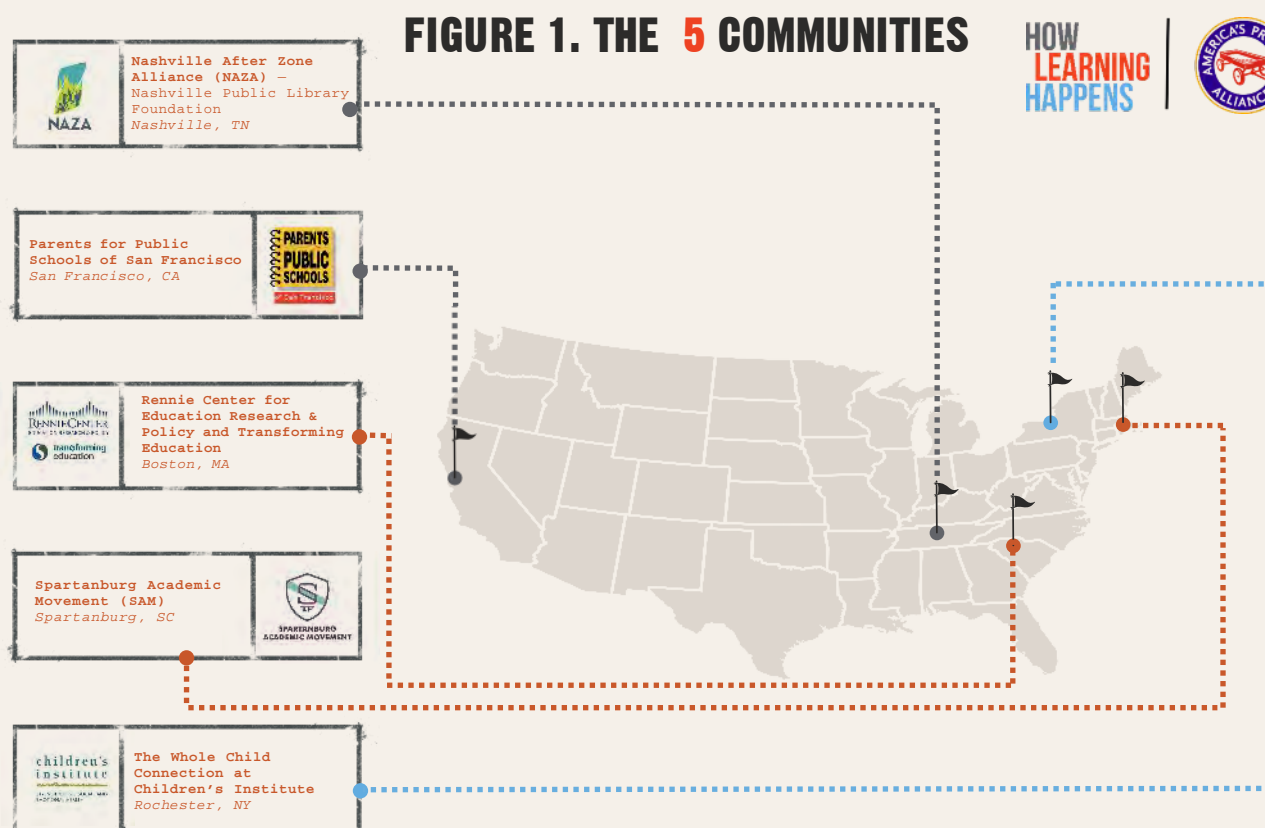
In the following months, America's Promise Alliance worked with five diverse communities to apply the Commission's recommendations to their unique settings and contexts (see Figure 1).

These five communities were already prioritizing comprehensive approaches to young people's learning and development and were ready to expand their efforts through intentional cross-sector collaboration. With the support of \$30,000 mini-grants and an ongoing professional learning community coordinated by America's Promise, the communities planned catalytic convenings that were designed to: 1) share knowledge about how learning happens, 2) inspire action and connection across the community, and 3) identify specific opportunities on which the community was poised to act.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its inequitable impact on student learning and wellbeing, combined with highly publicized incidents of police shootings of unarmed Black people across the country and the subsequent public reckoning with racial injustice, deeply influenced the community organizations' efforts. The community conveners' initial visions and timelines were upended, and their emphasis shifted from advocating for whole child approaches to filling real-time needs and gaps related to whole-child learning that these crises were revealing in their communities.

Each community's convening shifted to a virtual format that was often smaller in scale and narrower in focus than originally conceptualized. Even so, as a group, the community organizations' efforts were fueled by a reawakened appreciation for holistic and coordinated approaches to learning and development. Participants and stakeholders were more squarely focused on the themes of anti-racism and belonging and more intentionally centered on the perspectives of young people. (More detail about the purpose and outcomes of each community convening and their background information can be found in the Appendix starting on p. 26).

This brief explores how these community organizations fulfilled their roles as connectors and conveners in the face of daunting physical, social, economic, and equity challenges during a tumultuous year. The first section shares key strategies the organizations used and the roles they played in advancing a community-wide vision of whole child learning and development. The brief then shares crucial lessons learned on what it took to turn those visions into reality for—and with—young people. Our hope is that communities across the country, and the philanthropic, collective impact, and other networks and organizations that support them, can draw from these experiences, stories, and lessons to advance their own efforts to holistically support young people going forward.



APPLICATION OVERVIEW

How prepared are communities to address social, emotional, and cognitive (SEC) development? In summer 2019, America's Promise released a request for proposals for community conveners. The ideal host convener was described as an organization that was already working to address young people's comprehensive development and was poised to extend those efforts. Importantly, the organization had to be trusted in the community to represent and honor its young people and have the capacity to effectively gather a cross-sector planning team and convening participants.

America's Promise received more than 150 applications from communities in 37 states. However, the readiness levels differed, with only 35 applications considered having a high readiness level.

While many communities were able to articulate the importance of social, emotional, and cognitive development for young people, some were unable to draw explicit connections between the needs of their young people and SEC development. This signals strong interest but reflects a need for greater education about SEC development and implementation.

Community convener applications, by readiness level





STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING A WHOLE CHILD VISION

Young people thrive when a variety of adults across their lives have a shared understanding of youth development. The five communities focused on fostering a common vision across a wide range of stakeholders—educators and other youth-serving adults as well as parents and members of community organizations. In Nashville, for example, the Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA) worked with 20-plus youth-serving organizations, Metro Nashville Public Schools, the mayor's office, and more than 200 individual stakeholders to create a common vision for youth development and collective action. Doing so helped "create a level playing field for us to move forward," said the Education Program Officer at the Dan and Margaret Maddox Fund and NAZA program evaluator Joseph Gutierrez. To build and sustain shared visions, participating communities pursued a range of strategies.

BUILDING ALIGNMENT

Community leaders identified areas that needed to be aligned to advance a shared vision of integrated social, emotional, and cognitive development, including terminology and language, strategies for implementation, equity concepts which extended to commitments to anti-racist practices and program quality processes.

From early on, community leaders fostered alignment within learning environments (e.g., among staff providing out-of-school-time programming) and across learning environments (e.g., among teachers and parents). And although senior leaders in each community had made public commitments to whole child approaches, particularly as the pandemic wore on, achieving alignment within the ranks of youth-supporting adults required careful planning and regular listening and responding. To move beyond the approval of the superintendent to the applied space of classrooms, community organizations provided trainings, common standards, and expert dialogue to reinforce aligned strategies and supports. For example, to operationalize shared principles of youth development, Spartanburg out-of-school-time (OST) groups and district educators received common professional development through joint convenings held throughout the year, and the Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM) developed common standards and assessments to help districts identify aligned OST providers.

Even so, it was challenging to adopt aligned practices in a year with many competing priorities. "The district has done deep work to think through a vision for transformative social emotional learning," leaders of the Rennie Center and Transforming Education reflected on their work with Boston Public Schools. "We've gotten some really good traction with district staff, but the challenge is really having it trickle down to particularly the school level. Obviously, they're attentive to issues around the whole child and whole child supports, but how do we make sure more specific messages are really getting through when there are so many other things on their minds?"

Aligning stakeholders on definitions of race, racism, and equity were crucial foundations to acting on inequities within each community. For many conveners, the first step was having community leaders recognize that a required aspect of social and emotional learning practice is to understand the differences and inequities across young people's lives. In Boston, the Rennie Center and Transforming Education emphasized that "we recognize that students learn everywhere—including after school programs, libraries, community centers, and health centers—and it is critical that the entire community approaches social emotional learning (SEL) through a racial equity lens."

An explicit racial equity lens opens up discussion about teaching strategies and instructional materials. In San Francisco, for example, Parents for Public Schools – San Francisco (PPS-SF) worked closely with the district to define equity, which was then incorporated into professional development for the district's educators. The district created "launch units" that were developed for every grade level, providing teachers with detailed lesson plans for the start of the year. These units prioritized rebuilding community and honoring student identity and experience. They also integrated aspects of restorative practices and "radical healing," which was well received by families. Those launch units served as a foundation for racial equity conversations with young people.

GAINING CLARITY ON LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION INTO PRACTICE

Misconceptions can flourish when adults across the youth-supporting field lack a common knowledge base to support the transition to learning environments that integrate social, emotional, and cognitive skills.

Community convenings provided an opportunity for groups of adults to receive the same messages and descriptions of how the community wanted to be able to serve youth. This approach increased clarity among adults on what various terms meant for their job roles and how to appropriately translate concepts into practice.

Some of the messages that adults had heard prior to these convenings became widespread misconceptions that conveners needed to address. For example, the words schools and districts used to communicate about social, emotional, and cognitive development to parents and families were at times inaccessible and too broad to have meaning, which prevented broader audiences from connecting with the concepts. This led to misperceptions about SEL that were reinforced by the continued use of language by community leaders and practitioners that did not have widely agreed upon meaning. If adults could not understand what terms they needed to use, they were not confident they could implement the right practices. "We are concerned that the conversation around SEL gets filled with jargon and only those in the education sector can meaningfully participate," staff at the Rennie Center noted. "We would love to.... [focus] on removing jargon from the conversation so that community members can actively contribute to this discussion."

In other communities, skills like empathy, problem-solving, and perseverance were specifically identified as characteristics of a graduate from that community, but youth-supporting adults were unclear whether these skills were supposed to be taught in school or afterschool programs or if they were the responsibility of parents and families. Many of the convenings took the opportunity to remind communities that everybody has a role to play in developing social, emotional, and cognitive skills—and that these skills are fundamental parts of learning, and thus have a place in classroom instruction. In conversations with employers about the importance of these skills, NAZA Strategic Initiatives Director Marielle Cummings said, "We have to move away from people thinking it's soft skills. These are essential functioning skills that people need for life—and employment, of course."

A misunderstanding that every convener identified and addressed was the conflation of social and emotional learning, mental health, and trauma-informed practice. While related, these concepts are distinct and serve different needs among youth and require different interventions from adults working towards different ends. When practitioners viewed these concepts as the same or interchangeable, their understanding of social and emotional learning as a condition for learning was at risk of being incorrectly applied. In Rochester, a participant noted, "There's a lot of focus on of mental health, and they're taking SEL and equating it with mental health supports, which can sometimes distract from the message we're trying to bring. I certainly don't want to come across as saying that mental health needs aren't important. It's more, how we create the right foundation?" Put another way, what an educator does to foster social and emotional development in the classroom or in an after-school program is not the same as referring a young person for behavioral health services. Convenings offered an opportunity to clarify that all young people benefit from learning in socially and emotionally supportive environments and that those with specific mental health needs will need more specific supports like counseling.

REDUCING HARM TO YOUTH ACROSS YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

Against the backdrop of highly publicized police shootings of unarmed Black people, convening organizations were compelled to articulate explicitly how race, racism, identity, and belonging show up in whole child approaches. Elizabeth Devaney from the Children's Institute and Savannah Ray from the Spartanburg Academic Movement both identified changes in their community priorities throughout a summer of protest. "What we saw was an opportunity to start focusing on equity and inclusion and transforming our practices because it was the center of the conversation," Ray said. "[W]e noticed there

was some resistance to some of these concepts in what we'll call before the George Floyd-era protests. That was a big turning point... after that summer [of 2020], it became a lot more obvious that [equity] needed to be a primary focus, which could lead to some transformation across the communities."

Adults and youth in every community shared examples of ways in which current systems harm youth of color, a prerequisite discussion to repair harm and develop more equitable approaches. Conveners understood that intentional efforts at the individual and systems levels were needed to build capacity and improve conditions for marginalized populations and adult staff of color.

Conveners identified culturally competent social and emotional practices as one way to address racism. This included taking the time to understand historical examples of white supremacy in schools and communities and their implications in modern learning environments in order to help youth-serving adults develop more equitable approaches and work to repair harm. As one youth said in Spartanburg, "I think that promoting equity and inclusion really starts with knowing that we don't all know the truth, and that we must learn the truth."

Conveners also provided opportunities for youth to speak about their shared experiences. Young people in Rochester, for example, raised questions about their teachers' identities and how lived experiences can impact the ability to form cross-racial relationships. Leaders at Rochester's Children's Institute shared that they would take what they learned from young people to ensure that their services and resources center equity as to not perpetuate harm: "We are now revising all our trainings to bring an equity and anti-racist perspective and are looking for opportunities to use what we learned from young people during our convening in our trainings and consultation work," one said.

In San Francisco, PPS-SF pointed to greater numbers of parents and caregivers attending school board meetings to support proposals addressing racial injustice, including resolutions to reduce police presence in schools and adopt a K-12 Black studies curriculum. The San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) also required professional development on anti-racism for all educators and provided lesson plans on rebuilding community, honoring student identity and experience, and integrating aspects of restorative practices and "radical healing."

In Boston, focusing on the social and emotional skills of classroom teachers through an equity lens allowed community leaders to explicitly connect wellbeing to adults' ability to foster young people's holistic development. Working with national partner the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), Bloodine Barthelus provided participants with an overview of transformative SEL, calling it "a different way to approach social and emotional learning [that] requires that we look at ourselves as adults. What is the identity that we bring into the space, and how has that impacted the environment we are in? What is the power that we need to let go of so that students and families have power that they have always been entitled to, but have never been given?" (See Figure 2.)

In supporting the transition to transformative SEL, The Rennie Center acknowledged the harmful impact of practices historically associated with SEL, including disciplinary practices that exclude youth of color from the classroom, causing adverse emotional and social associations with school; curricula that do not include the stories of communities of color, leaving youth to wonder if they belong and what their people have contributed; and adult-to-youth microaggressions that have gone unchallenged. "If SEL skills do not begin with educator self-awareness, it can result in putting a Eurocentric norm on students of color... We are grappling with the things that have historically been harmful that have been tied to SEL," staff said. Another area of change involves shifting from deficit-based to asset-based perspectives of youth and communities. Barthelus discussed why a shift in mindset to an asset frame helps practitioners implement

FIGURE 2. IN BOSTON, SHIFTING THE LENS ON SEL

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is nothing new for Boston Public Schools (BPS). Persistent disparities among students, however, made it essential to create a shared—and more expansive—vision of SEL, says Annelise Eaton, research director for the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy.

Along with helping youth and adults develop essential life skills and competencies, the transformative SEL practices embraced by the district ensure that “young people and adults are now becoming co-learners and co-designers of the types of learning experiences they should have to thrive,” says Bloodine Barthelus, director of practice innovations at the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), who served as BPS senior district advisor. Among the strategies for doing so:

BPS Definition of SEL

“Social and emotional learning is the process through which youth and adults learn essential life skills and competencies that promote a positive identity, a well-managed self, healthy relationships and agency to successfully navigate their future.”



- **An explicit focus on addressing inequities.** Boston’s vision of transformative SEL includes addressing the inequitable contexts in which learning happens and identifying ways to shift them to ensure better outcomes for all youth. “We are interrogating the systems that have perpetuated inequities,” Barthelus says. That work began by focusing “on the student experience and the changes we wanted to see for students in the classroom,” Eaton says.
- **Differentiating training and support across grade levels.** BPS and its How Learning Happens partners are taking what Eaton calls a “big tent approach” to support, including online webinars, a transformative SEL toolkit, and planned training to prepare district SEL coaches to help educators put the model into practice in schools.
- **Recognizing the importance of changing adult mindsets to improve equity-centered practices.** While all SEL training requires educators to draw from their own social and emotional competencies, BPS’ explicit focus on identifying the root causes of inequitable learning contexts also forces the difficult, often painful examination of internal biases. “As we progressed, we realized shifting towards transformative SEL required some really deep personal work on the part of educators,” Eaton says. To address this challenge, a partnership with BPS and CASEL will create a network of 15 to 20 Boston schools that will do a “deep dive” on transformative SEL and develop practices, including those that support adult SEL, that other schools in the district can learn from. “If you focus too much on the specific moves for the classroom, you can miss the deep adult work that needs to happen,” Eaton says.

transformative SEL: "When we talk about transformative SEL... we're seeking to create a new context that no longer predefines how our students should act, how our students should regulate themselves, or how our students should show up so that we are able to teach in the way that's comfortable to us. Through transformative SEL, we are creating a space where we recognize that students are individuals in and of themselves, and they come with aspects, attributes, assets, and identities that can only make our context richer."



LESSONS FROM COMMUNITY EFFORTS TO ADVANCE A WHOLE CHILD VISION

Against the backdrop of the challenges of the pandemic and the nationwide calls for racial justice, participating communities worked to confront longstanding issues of equity, the need for authentic youth voice and leadership, and the social and emotional challenges faced by youth-serving adults as well as the young people they serve. Creating the venues and conversations needed to do so was often challenging and uncomfortable but resulted in a shared sense of urgency and momentum that helped push communities forward. Participating communities highlighted three lessons learned over the course of these efforts during the past year.

LESSON 1. EQUITY MUST BE AN EXPLICIT DESIRED OUTCOME OF ALL EFFORTS TO FOSTER SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Across the five communities, young people consistently raised up issues of racism and challenged the adults in their lives to increase opportunities to interrogate the country's history of racism and how it affects their lives today.

In his call to action at the end of one convening, Simeon Banister from the Rochester Area Community Foundation reflected how the "stress exacerbated by the current moment—taking into account the gross racial injustice laid bare through the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, so many more unnamed and unfilmed, and of course our own Daniel Prude right here in Rochester, along with the worst pandemic in our lifetime, depletes students and teachers and disrupts the process of learning." The confluence of heightened national awareness about the pernicious impact of racism, the opportunity to convene on young people's social and emotional wellbeing, and community-wide discussion of school reopening during the pandemic resulted in adults being generally more open to listening to and learning from young people.

Boston Public Schools Assistant Superintendent Jill Carter framed the challenge of an "equitable instructional recovery" in sobering and honest terms. "The return to school [in Fall 2020] will be unlike any other in our educational history and emotionally charged, as evidenced by our socio-political climate," she said during a convening held by the Rennie Center and Transforming Education. "This moment calls on the adult members of our community to deepen their social emotional competencies to intentionally listen and respond to colleagues, leaders, and students to create equitable learning environments that will foster the opportunity for the school community to be vulnerable, heal together, and trust one another. Students and staff must feel safe and healthy before they feel cared for and engaged and have a sense of belonging before they will be ready to learn or teach."

Communities identified the following strategies:

Reducing inequities by inviting and acting upon a diversity of perspectives. Examining and shifting the practices within youth-supporting systems that perpetuate inequities is a key element in how communities are reframing social and emotional learning. Throughout the pandemic, youth, caregivers, and other youth-supporting adults experienced collective trauma. But they also recognized that while everyone was experiencing disruption to their normal routine, many youth and families were experiencing economic insecurity and reduced access to typical supports. This widespread understanding caused nearly every community to emphasize trauma-informed practices as community organizations worked in tandem with local school districts to prioritize supports.

Early in the pandemic, "PPS-SF worked hard to help the district with messaging and support to the community. We jumped quickly to building and sharing resources. [We] work with a lot of disconnected families, so we're trying to be more like case managers and fill in the gap that the government can't yet fill," said Miranda Martin, PPS-SF's director of policy. This all-hands-on-deck approach that included an expanded array of services may be difficult to end as communities shift into post-pandemic learning recovery, particularly for youth and adults for whom COVID brought death and grieving, shifts in family finances, and loss of emotional supports.

Partnerships in Boston and San Francisco reaffirmed the role of social and emotional learning in equitable school reopening plans. San Francisco Unified School District Superintendent Vincent Matthews stressed the importance of ongoing partnerships in the district's efforts to support students. "We know students are struggling right now, but we also know that integrating SEL into the life of a school and fostering those

supportive caring relationships within the school community can help to counter the impact of the pandemic on lifelong success and learning," he said.

When training OST staff, Kiyliise Lowe from The Forum for Youth Investment highlighted this point, stating that "an explicit transparent equity lens is necessary to ensure that an SEL program serves to rectify and not recreate social inequities. It's about not just overcoming the odds but changing the conditions that set the odds. We need to be explicit about the impact of structural oppression, such as racism, sexism, and other -isms. We also need to take action to change how those structures and systems operate in our spheres of influence."

To sustain progress on equity, center youth and their families. When districts or community organizations try to implement approaches with equity as the desired outcome, they must recognize that authentically engaging with youth and families is an essential—and challenging—component of these efforts. Convening organizations responded with "adults passing the mic to youth and really wanting to listen to them," says Meghan Smith, SAM's director of college and career readiness. Rachel Ford, NAZA project coordinator, agreed. "We throw around equity as a buzzword without always defining it," she says. "Having our young people draw those connections is really helpful."

A recurring part of the disconnect is that many communities of color do not have positive perceptions of the agencies or organizations that say they support their youth. While many youth-supporting organizations have long recognized the importance of the racial, cultural, and individual identities of each young person, there is also a growing awareness that social and emotional learning programming must be considered through a lens of empowering youth, particularly given SEL's history as part of behavioral management programs that regulate youth behavior. Practitioners integrating social and emotional skills into the learning experience must actively avoid reflecting historic power dynamics between adults and young people that result in young people disengaging from learning.

In Rochester, the Whole Child Connection at Children's Institute reframed its fall virtual convening to center youth voice and the importance of relationships. The convening spoke to the necessity of self-care; the unacknowledged burdens Black and brown educators carry; the importance of humility, openness, and curiosity when building relationships, especially across cultures; and the mutual benefits of authentic relationships. But as Zipporah, a student leader from a local suburban district participating in a CI convening, explained, it also means more than metrics. "The environment of a classroom is so different when you have a teacher who culturally [recognizes] what makes you, you" she said.

Improving relationships will be challenging and worth the investment. As Jayven, a Rochester city school student, put it, "I want teachers to understand that it's okay for a student to call you out on something as long as it is in a respectful way. Because if a student doesn't call you out, you're never going to know what mistake you made and how to fix that."

Equitable implementation requires time and relationship building. While convening leaders and participants appreciated that community-driven responses to racial inequities may lead to better outcomes for youth, they took different approaches to drawing connections between social and emotional learning and racial equity. Though district leaders and practitioners in school and out-of-school settings at times look for "quick fixes" and straightforward strategies amidst competing priorities, community members and leaders reinforced the idea that this kind of work takes time and relationship building – and that the environment must support a culture of taking time to form impactful relationships.

"SEC skills integration is not quick and does not have a clear set of instructions," leaders at Rochester's Children's Institute reflected. "This can be frustrating and make it difficult to push past conversation to

action. The opportunity that comes of that challenge is to push educators past their discomfort, to engage in authentic conversations with young people about what they need, and to think about ways to infuse, in our case relationship building, across everything they do. The opportunity is also in understanding it will be a process and the more they engage with their own discomfort and the more they listen to and work to respond to their students, the more they will see the benefits and the more comfortable they will become with trying new strategies and practices and sharing power in their classrooms." As these communities learned, modeling social and emotional skills like understanding others' perspectives, empathy, and navigating social situations—the building blocks of adult-youth relationships—was also key to increasing adult capacity to address issues of race and racism in their classrooms and program settings.

LESSON 2. SHIFTING ADULT PRACTICE REQUIRES TIME AND SPACE FOR ADULT SELF-CARE

To develop their own capacity to model and teach social and emotional skills in an integrated way, adults need supports, like time, protocols, and a safe workplace culture. However, focusing on the mindsets and behaviors of adults was not a natural starting place in most communities; rather, emphasis had historically been placed on what adults should be doing with young people. The pandemic forced a different approach, as many adults expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and requested more emphasis be placed on their own social and emotional needs and development.

During the early months of the pandemic, community leaders explicitly stated that youth-serving adults are "humans first," which necessarily means that adult caregivers and practitioners should have opportunities to cultivate their own social and emotional needs. Community leaders worked quickly to create safe spaces where stakeholders were encouraged to be vulnerable, personal, and ask for help. NAZA describes this thinking in its strategic plan, stating "youth development professionals create space for youth to share their experiences, reflect on their identities, and process social events, and it is critical that youth development professionals have that same opportunity."

Communities identified the following strategies:

Provide opportunities for youth-serving adults to attend to their own social and emotional needs. At times, creating a safe space where adults could share what is challenging them at home and work was the sole purpose of convenings in participating communities. "There seemed to be a real desire just to have spaces for people to have kind of therapy sessions with each other on what they were experiencing," says PPS-SF's Martin. "So, I think not just focusing on what we need to do this work or the policies, but to also have spaces to process is really important." These supports appeared in the form of formalized check-in calls and restructured meeting norms, and PPS-SF staff provided opportunities for feedback with partners, families, and caregivers centered on authentic listening, social connection, and support.

At the start of most meetings, convenors took the time to ask participants to rate how they were feeling, name areas in which they felt overwhelmed, or provide specific examples of how they were practicing self-care. Calling this shift "Maslow before Bloom," Rennie Center and Transforming Education staff stressed the importance of focusing "on the needs of adults, which directly impact student experiences. Recognizing the trauma that adults had experienced...we kept educator self-care at the forefront of our convening approach," as did community organizations in other communities (See Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. IN ROCHESTER, SUPPORTING THOSE WHO SUPPORT YOUTH

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Rochester-based Children's Institute found new ways to support those supporting young people.

"People needed a way to process, and the most useful thing we could offer is to support their own well-being," says Elizabeth Devaney, director of the Whole Child Connection at Children's Institute.

Initially offered three times a week over Zoom, the Connection's free Community Check-in Conversation Series featured small-group conversations that initially focused on the impact of the pandemic and the toll it has taken on those who work with children. Even at the onset of the pandemic, however, participants were exploring ways to repair relationships with their students, re-establish norms, and support students in new settings, says project coordinator Sierra Fisher.

The conversations represented a rapidly evolving model of support for providers during the pandemic that could scale to provide ongoing supports to reach more youth-serving adults across entire communities. Among their key components:

- **Creating space for adults.** Participants said they appreciate the ability to check in with one another to see how the pandemic is impacting others who serve young people. They've also appreciated the ability to focus on themselves. One participant, says Fisher, said that before the conversation she felt as though she "needed permission to self-reflect."
- **Modeling SEL practices.** To support SEL, activities are intentionally designed in ways that adults who work with children and youth could potentially use them in their own settings. For example, one closing reflection asked participants to reflect on the last physical object they touched that gave them joy, an activity which could be modified for multiple settings for youth or adults.
- **Balancing flexibility and structure.** Facilitators were "willing to really let what the community was dealing with in the moment lead the conversations," says Andrea Bertucci, training manager. While the conversations were deliberately open-ended, Connection facilitators followed a consistent format, including opening and closing activities such as videos or guided questions that reinforce social and emotional learning practices.
- **Recognition of the demands on youth-serving adults.** The word "overwhelmed" comes up frequently in conversations with partners, and the Connection's staff sought to strike the right balance of support and connection without the sessions becoming an imposition. "We're still trying to tease out how to make this a ritual or routine without tying people to another commitment," says Fisher.

In Spartanburg, SAM leveraged feedback from a Young Women of Color listening tour to identify cultural competence and implicit bias training as needs among out-of-school time providers. "We realized we needed to go deeper into supporting providers," says Smith. While SAM provided training on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and how to address them, its convenings uncovered a need for concrete strategies for adults to use to build resiliency. "One change that we determined was necessary in order to create an integrated learning environment was the importance of adult SEL," SAM leaders reflected. "We believe that there was a shift in our community's thinking from seeing the adult and student as separate people in one environment to seeing the two as intricately connected. The adults, through their own SEL development, both model and teach SEL skills to the youth."

Challenge adults to reflect more deeply on their own competencies and biases. Providing a safe space to process and amplify the role of self-care were important steps in the early days of the pandemic, but community leaders soon pushed for deeper engagement on adults' social and emotional competencies. They called attention to the harm their burnout has on young people and sought to create structures for support to improve capacity. Against the backdrop of the pandemic and increased accountability around racial justice, adults also needed to tackle the complicated challenge of re-examining biases and building up their knowledge base both individually and in community with colleagues.

Across convenings, both young people and adults highlighted that even when it is not explicitly stated, the emotions and biases of youth-serving adults have a direct effect on the young people that they serve. Leaders in Boston shared how educators need time and space to begin to understand their biases as well as tools to persist when the work becomes difficult. "We recognize that this work requires each of us to face unpleasant realizations about our thoughts, beliefs, and actions. In order to persist in the work to de-bias, we must not turn away when the work becomes difficult. As a result, we believe that it is critical that schools couple a focus on 'starting with the self' with educator self-care," Boston leaders reflected.

Foster an ongoing culture of self-care as an essential component of addressing youth needs. Many stakeholders initially expressed guilt or discomfort about asking youth-supporting professionals to focus on their own needs instead of youth. However, communities ultimately reinforced the importance of making space for adult care, particularly given the continuing challenges sparked by the pandemic. Speaking with educators in Boston, CASEL's Barthelus stressed that "caring for yourself is not a selfish act. It's actually a way of caring for others and also normalizes asking for help."

Once adults' social and emotional growth is considered central to implementation, a culture of self-care becomes the gateway to self-inquiry and self-actualization. Speaking to Boston teachers, Barthelus described the distinction that "[S]elf-care isn't just the massage and the teachers' lounge once we're back in school... It's not giving yourself an opportunity to sit back and sip tea. Self-care is radical, and sometimes it's just the act of becoming aware of what your emotions are in the moment and recognizing what you need to actually meet the need of what those emotions are telling you that's also an act of self-care."

Parents and caregivers are equally in need of professional and personal supports. A related learning from this group of communities is that if learning happens everywhere, then adults in every setting need supports, including parents and caregivers at home. The pandemic brought into stark relief how parents and caregivers fill gaps during times of crisis, as they did by supporting at-home learning on top of all the other vital roles they continued playing in the lives of their children. Though pandemic-era learning was difficult, many parents saw in a new light the importance of supporting their children's social and emotional growth and sought out opportunities to find ways to do so. PPS-SF, for example, addressed the need for knowledge and strategies through its parent SEL webinar series (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. IN SAN FRANCISCO, NEW WAYS TO PARTNER WITH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

As San Francisco parent Kate Moore watched her son navigate his sophomore year of high school virtually this spring, she wondered about the impact on his social and emotional development. “What must this situation be like for an adolescent? How do teenagers cope and what is healthy?” she asked in a blog post. “I am also aware that my skills as a parent are being tested differently too.”

Moore wasn’t alone. Parents and caregivers quickly identified similar challenges as they tried to support their children learning at home after school buildings closed in spring 2020. “I would like tools to help my only child (7) who is missing social connections and whose social skills seem to be devolving,” said one parent during one of more than a half-dozen webinars focused on fostering parents’ SEL skills held by Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco (PPS-SF). “While challenging, this is an opportunity for students and families to build skills that will really serve them when school resumes—and for the rest of their lives,” explained Miranda Martin, the organization’s director of policy.



The parent-focused webinars offer strategies for other organizations seeking to build stronger partnerships with parents and caregivers. Among them:

- Increasing parent and caregiver capacity. While PPS-SF’s initial goal was to develop parent support for SEL initiatives in schools, the organization quickly recognized that parents “wanted tools they could use right now,” Martin says. Webinars also were held with live translation or conducted completely in other languages, including Spanish and Chinese.
- Student voice matters to parents, too. Students discussed their own experiences during several webinars, which was well-received by parents. “Sharing with parents helps them understand the ‘why’ of schools supporting student social, emotional, and cognitive needs as well as academics,” Martin says.
- Enlisting parents as advocates. Discussions about best practices at individual schools during the webinars, including intentional efforts to build community schools and foster restorative practices, helped parents better understand what was happening in their own children’s schools. But as PPS-SF seeks to share best practices across the district in hopes of encouraging its leaders to replicate them, parents could play an important advocacy role.
- Developing communities of learning. Schools and community-based organizations have expressed interest in PPS-SF providing similar training to their own parents and caregivers. The organization also hopes to continue programming for parents and families, including multigenerational learning events in which adults and youth share and learn from each other.

In San Francisco, parents were often unaware that the district was prioritizing and implementing a curriculum to integrate social, emotional, and cognitive development with academics. Many parents and caregivers interpreted skills like regulating emotions or developing autonomy as being beyond the purpose of school, preferring instead a focus on traditional measures of academic progress like grades and college preparation courses. Learning at home created an opportunity for the district and PPS-SF to increase understanding that the process of learning involves social, emotional, and cognitive aspects. As schools and their community partners seek to recover learning, they will need to identify ways to maintain the level of engagement that the pandemic demanded them to have with families as co-creators of learning environments. "We're just scratching the surface," says Martin.

LESSON 3. YOUTH VOICE IS A CRUCIAL INFLUENCE IN TRANSFORMING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Regardless of a community's entry point for taking a whole child approach, conveners found that centering youth experience and leadership was a powerful way for youth to influence their learning environments. The results were twofold. First, conveners found that youth perspectives provided the best path forward in developing responses to the pandemic and in implementing whole child strategies; youth also were the most vocal in raising issues of racism in their learning environments. Second, empowering young people to make decisions that influence their learning is in itself an integrated learning experience that has social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.

Communities identified the following strategies:

Make space for youth wherever adults are usually the only ones involved. "Youth voice and choice" have long been mantras for youth-serving organizations, but participating communities made significant steps to empower youth to plan and lead their own activities and advocacy, as NAZA did with Youth in Action! and other programming (see Figure 5). Youth voice was a key component in many communities' convenings. "From the outset, our planning team prioritized the centering of youth voice as a primary goal for our convening and for our community's approach to supporting the whole child across sectors," NAZA staff reflected. "We could not plan a convening about social and emotional learning and development without having youth play a large role in delivering the message and facilitating conversation." The Nashville team made clear to its audience that youth partnership remains key. "As we move forward thinking about Nashville's vision, let us never forget that we're not here to work for them rather with them. We are participants in a team effort. And when we dare our youth to dream, we can rest assured that they already carry the dreams of their ancestors inside of them."

FIGURE 5. IN NASHVILLE, YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Like many 8th graders, Eva readily admits she's a bit shy.

"I used to struggle with talking with people," she says. Working with older peers as part of a middle school mentoring program sponsored by NAZA, she says, "helped me not only show leadership, but to raise my voice more."

Raising the voices of young people is the goal of Youth in Action!, a youth-created and led initiative that provides a leadership platform for participants in afterschool programs. The goal, says youth community leader—and high school junior—Avery, was "to create a space where youth could make friends, come up with amazing ideas and feel comfortable together working to achieve a goal." For example, middle-school youth meeting virtually during the pandemic proposed a virtual interactive showcase which younger students ultimately planned and performed, says NAZA youth advisor Allie Duke.

Among the keys to ensuring authentic youth leadership:

- Student choice. Having students identify issues they are passionate about and develop plans to address them is at the heart of Youth in Action!, but leaving that wholly in the hands of young people represents a shift for the youth-serving adults who support them, says Avery. "It's really important to step back and let the youth come to these decisions naturally."

- Blended support. Each Youth in Action! program is supported by both afterschool program staff and a youth community leader recruited by NAZA who work together to help students develop advocacy skills to take action. NAZA also provides in-kind supports for initiatives chosen and led by youth, and youth community leaders meet with NAZA staff to identify opportunities where adult collaborators can support youth-led efforts.

As a youth community leader, 11th grader Lily focused on helping her middle school mentees adjust after the high school experience went virtual as a result of the pandemic. "It's a very stressful time, but I think right now is a key time to discover who you are," she says. "The teenage stereotype—we're too moody, we don't care about anything, and we don't know what we want—that's not true. If adults come in and they don't think of us like that, we won't think of them as someone who is trying to oppress us."

Moving from youth-informed to youth-led activities helped communities address challenges with engaging youth during the pandemic, including the newly coined "Zoom fatigue" (see Figure 6).

But along with providing authentic opportunities for youth to lead, organizations must address other, less obvious, challenges. Youth-led activities and programming must have logistical support from adults, says NAZA's Cummings. "Besides having a line item in your budget, make sure you have a staff member supporting them," she says. Others stressed the "tricky balance" of providing opportunities for leadership beyond a small group of highly engaged youth.

FIGURE 6. IN SPARTANBURG, SUSTAINING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Ironically, one of the efforts to help connect young people to each other in South Carolina during a time of social distancing began because they were doing just the opposite.

After noticing that young people were still congregating despite stay-at-home orders, Antiwan Tate of the My Brother's Keeper Alliance of South Carolina wanted to share information from experts. But early into the online conversation, the young people shifted the lens, speaking about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on them, their friends, and their families. "It really hit home that there's an emotional toll," Tate says. "The message is the same: 'Don't forget about us. We are here.' We need to create conversations, content, and platforms."

To that end, MBK and other organizations participating in the collaborative of out-of-school providers convened by the Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM) launched support lines and drop-in virtual chatrooms, provided virtual mentoring, and created groups such as book clubs to provide support, encouragement, and normalcy during this unprecedented time. While the virtual setting was new, key elements of empowering and supporting youth persisted, including:

- Recognizing the importance of sustaining youth engagement. Members of the collaborative discussed how some of the practices discovered during this transitional time would influence their post-pandemic operations. "Even in regular circumstances, people seem to like engaging through a computer," one said. "It has changed our model for the good, and maybe even permanently."
- Hosting events designed by youth. Held online throughout the spring and summer, MBK's Youth Chats focused on topics suggested by young people, including healthy eating, empowering young women, masculinity, mentorship, and mental health, as well as emergency readiness and virtual coursework in areas such as first aid and CPR.
- Offering security and support for youth conversations. The Uplift Outreach Center had previously hosted weekly drop-in meetings to help provide a safe social place for LGBTQ+ youth. To replicate the experience online while protecting participants, participating youth created a closed chat space on Discord, an online community space, to replace the organization's in-person meetings, with adults serving as mediators for the virtual sessions.

Children's Institute training manager Andrea Bertucci reflected on fostering authentic partnerships with all kinds of young people rather than the ways adults tokenize specific young people under the banner of youth leadership. "Adults often say 'those youth are amazing' without reflecting on the young people they work with on a daily basis," she says. "Looking for [new] youth leaders who aren't the same [as the youth they serve] gives the illusion that there is something magical about these youth instead of all youth. If you aren't listening to the teenagers you know, you have missed the point."

Participating organizations are redoubling their efforts to foster youth leadership. In Rochester, Children's Institute initially worked with (Youth) One Voice One Vision, the mayor's youth advisory council. Through their work with America's Promise, Whole Child Connection has developed its own youth advisory council that reflects the diversity of lived experiences of youth in its region, with representatives from urban and suburban communities. "I was one of those youth," says project coordinator Sierra Fisher. "I was easily looked over and could have benefitted from something like this."

Empower young people as decision-makers. As the convenings concluded, conveners and leaders began to identify young people as both constituents to share power with and key community members whose buy-in was needed to influence change. This shift in understanding of the role young people play in the community also helped conveners to shift the way they work with young people and provide opportunities to develop agency and authority over the decisions that impact their lives.

"We've moved from an adult-driven decision-making process with youth consent to a youth-led decision-making process with adult feedback," says Fisher. In Boston, initiative leaders are working with the BPS student advisory council to ensure the district's restorative SEL practices reflect the reality of students in each school. "Especially as we get down to this work at the school level, their voice needs to be such a priority," says Annelise Eaton, research director for the Rennie Center.

For example, young people across the convenings shared their experiences with racism and why their experiences are important for youth-serving-adults to understand. "With COVID, the numbers are limited, so right now a lot of my classes only have five to seven students, and I'm the only Black girl in many of my classes. [I] personally feel singled out," student leader Zipporah explained. "Sometimes, I feel like an outcast so sharing my experience might be difficult, but also for students who might be questioning different racial content...we need to find ways for students to ask those questions without singling anyone out or making them feel embarrassed for having a question."

NAZA's Ford reflected on the shifting role of young people in the organization's work. "People are working for NAZA that have been in the field for a really long time. And they do have expertise and that should be valued. But the vision is designed to focus on the lived experiences of our local community. [W]e don't always have a language for it, or people don't know where the resources are, or where the assets are. [W]e're trying to shift power and resources as much as possible to acknowledge that."



CONCLUSION

The challenges of the past year have indelibly changed how the five communities detailed in this brief are approaching how they support young people's development. While their efforts reflect the specific contexts of their communities and the youth and adults who live in them, the strategies and lessons learned can inform efforts in all communities committed to holistic, coordinated, and community-driven approaches to learning and development. They range from specific strategies focused on alignment, language, and the translation of theory to practice to intentional efforts to ensure adult self-care, address inequities and implicit biases, and elevate the voices of young people as not just participants but fully empowered decision-makers who shape the direction of these efforts and the organizations which support them.

Together, these strategies reflect and reinforce the longstanding belief driving these communities' collective action: that young people learn best when they are treated as whole people with opportunities that allow them to learn and grow in various ways. The inequities surfaced over the last year have created an imperative that is just beginning to gain resonance: the need to transform how systems and the adults that operate those systems provide equitable learning opportunities for youth of all backgrounds and identities.

"There's a long way to go where the intermediary isn't just a provider (of funding and services) and connector, but helps people connect to where the resources are in a systemized way," says NAZA's Cummings. "That's a part of the shift to create greater equity and sharing of power."



APPENDIX: COMMUNITY CONVENING OVERVIEW

Appendix.

The community organizations included in this report reached youth and youth-supporting adults with locally prioritized content to build capacity, learn, and identify future action areas. Their convenings were held from February 2020 through October 2020.

The Whole Child Connection at Children's Institute Rochester, NY				
Prioritized Commission recommendations: Clear Vision; Build Adult Capacity; Alignment				
Audience	Priority content	Organizational capacity built	Key lessons	Future action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12 educators • Out-of-school time program staff • Students • Caregivers • Community members within the Greater New York 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of relationships as a catalyst to learning • Equity and racial justice focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created and renewed partnerships • Integrated youth leadership • Increased trust and credibility • Reduced duplication of services • Established "SEL & Critical Discourse" committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct work with youth is essential • Need to explore furthering the connection between SEL and equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct action planning sessions and workshops • Improve existing and introduce new training and consultation offerings • Establish a youth advisory council
<p>For 60 years, the Whole Child Connection at Children's Institute has served the social and emotional needs of children and the adults who work with them. Children's Institute is a cross-sector collaboration that is building a strong community, improving adult practice, and bringing together experts and practitioners. Representatives from early care and education, K-12, OST, health, human services, higher education, policy, and funders work together to support whole child development and improve the quality of out-of-school time programs for youth ages 5 to 18.</p>				

Nashville After Zone Alliance Nashville, TN				
Prioritized Commission recommendations: Clear Vision; Transform Learning Settings; Build Adult Capacity				
Audience	Priority content	Organizational capacity built	Key lessons	Future action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle school youth in NAZA- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six essential anchors for transformative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytelling to elevate youth and YDPs' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YDPs have an opportunity to embed support, connection, and engagement to support the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a think tank with youth and YDPs

funded programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth-development professionals (YDPs) • Caregivers • Policymaker & elected officials • Community partners 	learning in the <i>All of Who I Am</i> report, including identity development, relationships, belonging, intentionality, meaningful learning, and youth agency and leadership.	perceptions and experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened partnerships Unveiled "Vision for Holistic Youth Development for Nashville"	whole child, particularly in the context of racial justice, the pandemic, and environmental events. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth emphasized the importance of investing in youth-led and adult-supported initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner across learning settings to help measure progress on new vision • Co-design new learning experiences for adults and youth • Integrate vision into trainings and peer coaching • Begin convening a "Community of Practice" in partnership with NAZA-funded partners
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Housed in the Nashville Public Library and supported by the Nashville Public Library Foundation, Nashville After Zone Alliance (NAZA) is a nationally recognized system of free, high-quality afterschool programs that provide academic support and new creative outlets for Metro Nashville middle school students. NAZA was created to help prevent at-risk middle school students from veering off the path to high school graduation, college, and future success.

Parents for Public Schools – San Francisco | San Francisco, CA

Prioritized Commission recommendations: Clear Vision; Building Adult Capacity; Alignment

Audience	Priority content	Organizational capacity built	Key lessons	Future action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and families • School and district leaders and educators in San Francisco Unified School District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the current state of youth • How schools are maintaining caring and supportive relationships during remote learning • Specific and actionable caregiver training so students feel safe and ready to learn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged diverse audiences in multi-lingual events using several approaches (simultaneous vs. consecutive interpretation, mono-lingual breakout rooms, separate events by language with same content) • Demonstrated ability to augment district capacity, supporting wellness checks that reached two-thirds of the district's 50,000+ students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mono-lingual virtual events were more seamless technically and allowed for deeper engagement • Multi-lingual events allowed participants to hear more perspectives during share out segments • Parents and caregivers value insights from students (who are not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess existing programs to embed SEC principles • Support to families and community-based organizations through workshops, train the trainer events, and professional learning communities. • Update measurement of outcomes for families • Bring family perspective and participation into SEC-

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep dives on self-management, growth mindset, social awareness, and self-advocacy, skills measured by SFUSD through surveys and reported on the district's standards-based report cards for K-5 students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Became “resident experts” to support families in understanding child development and applying knowledge to practices at home to better understand these concepts and translate them into practice. • Built and strengthened relationships with key school district personnel 	<p>their own) because it helps them further understand the "why" of schools supporting student social, emotional and cognitive needs as well as academics</p>	<p>related programs that the district prioritizes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modify existing programs and workshop modules •
<p>Parents for Public Schools – San Francisco is a nonprofit organization that helps families to navigate SFUSD enrollment, understand education policy and decision-making, and become empowered, engaged members of their school communities. The group has a 20-year history of bringing diverse stakeholder voices to decisions affecting families and students.</p>				

Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy and Transforming Education Boston, MA				
Prioritized Commission recommendations: Transform Learning Settings; Build Adult Capacity; Alignment				
Audience	Priority content	Organizational capacity built	Key lessons	Future action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12 educators and staff in Boston Public Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of belonging, self-awareness, identity, and agency • Transformative SEL in the classroom setting using the Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices and Transformative SEL framework • Adult wellbeing and building adult social and emotional skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborated with Boston Public Schools and CASEL • Partnering with teachers to shift SEL skills and competencies through a racial equity lens • Deepened equity lens and understanding of Transformative SEL • Developed a Transformative SEL Action Guide for BPS Educators to improve educator capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to successfully transition to BPS “Transformative SEL” model, adult capacity and community-building are critical areas of focus • Educators felt overwhelmed by the demands created by virtual school reopening and needed specific tools and strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer more opportunities to learn about Transformative SEL and embed transformative SEL practices in the classroom • Develop an action guide, a series of webinars, and SEL coaching

The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy's mission is to improve public education through well-informed decision-making based on deep knowledge and evidence of effective policymaking and practice. The organization creates open spaces for educators and policymakers to consider evidence, discuss cutting-edge issues, and develop new approaches to advance student learning and achievement. TransformEd is a nationally recognized non-profit organization that partners with school systems and other education-focused organizations to support educators in fostering the development of the whole child so that all students, particularly those from underserved populations, can thrive. TransformEd works directly with district, charter management organizations, school, and organizational partners across the United States to integrate a whole child approach, while also producing open-source, evidence-based tools, resources, and guides for educators.

Spartanburg Academic Movement | Spartanburg, SC

Prioritized Commission recommendations: Clear Vision; Transform Learning Settings; Build Adult Capacity

Audience	Priority content	Organizational capacity built	Key lessons	Future action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and leaders at 23 out-of-school time programs serving youth in grades 6-12. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultivating empathy and engaging youth in supported struggle Implicit bias and building cultural competency Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Building resiliency Incorporating youth voice into program planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased alignment on SEL implementation between schools and OST organizations Learned new and creative online engagement tools for OST partners Pooled resources and amplified expertise within the Collaborative Reduced barriers for organizations by providing training at no cost Embedded recommendations from Spartanburg youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To make learning settings safe and supportive for all young people, communities must invest in the adults that are leading those settings OST providers want multiple ways to connect with peers to stay informed and supported Training should go beyond raising awareness and must provide practical skills and strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue increasing alignment with schools Introduce shared data platform for school and OST partners Prioritize future trainings on ACEs, youth mental health, and cultural competency Create aligned attendance measurement for OST Collaborative member organizations

Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM) coordinates the focus and work of leaders in the nonprofit, business, government and civic sectors in partnership with the County's seven urban and rural school districts to ensure economic mobility for students, anchored in academic achievement. SAM tracks outcomes from kindergarten readiness to college completion, engaging partners to provide support to

ensure student success. The Spartanburg County Out-of-School-Time Collaborative is a voluntary, incentive-driven, opt-in network created for the purpose of achieving better results for young people in Spartanburg County through improving, expanding, and sustaining high quality afterschool and summer programming for youth.