

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX: Creating Catalytic Partnerships to Change the Odds for Children and Youth

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The Forum for Youth Investment

Greater Chattanooga United Way
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My goal today is to encourage you to think about the need for catalytic partnerships - partnerships that spark broader action and act as keepers of the vision and monitors of progress. Let me begin by sharing my point of view with you. I've been saying these three things for almost 20 years:

- Problem-free isn't fully prepared.
- Academic competence, while critical, is not sufficient.
- Schools are critical, but not sufficient.

If Chattanooga wants to ensure that young people are ready for college, work and life; Chattanooga will have to create a catalytic partnership to ensure that all of the community's resources, not just the schools, have assumed shared responsibility for student success. Let me explain why schools, no matter how good they are, assume full responsibility for this goal.

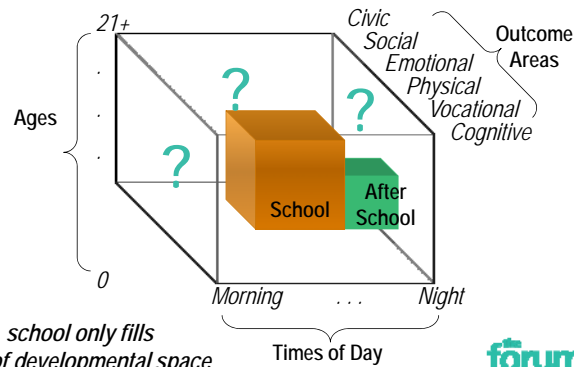
We need to make sure there are early and sustained investments in children and youth from before birth into their twenties. Our K-12 systems are responsible for only a portion of this developmental continuum.

We need to make commitments to providing opportunities for learning and development year round, throughout young people's waking hours.

We need to ensure that young people are competent not only academically, but physically, socially, vocationally, civically and, many would argue, spiritually. Schools do not assume this mandate, nor should they.

Schools fill only a small portion of developmental space. Annually, young people spend less than one-third of their waking hours in school. After-school programs, if viewed as taking place from 3-6 p.m. for elementary and middle school students, fill a bit more. If we believe that, other things being equal, young people do better when more adults are intentional about providing more supports, more of the time, then we have to ask, "who fills the rest of the white space?" The good news is that many do – first and foremost families, but also non-profit service providers, civic and faith-based organizations, health and social service organizations, businesses, libraries, parks and recreation departments, colleges and universities, early childhood educators and family care providers. The bad news is that most communities have very little idea of the overall levels of

Thinking Outside of the Box

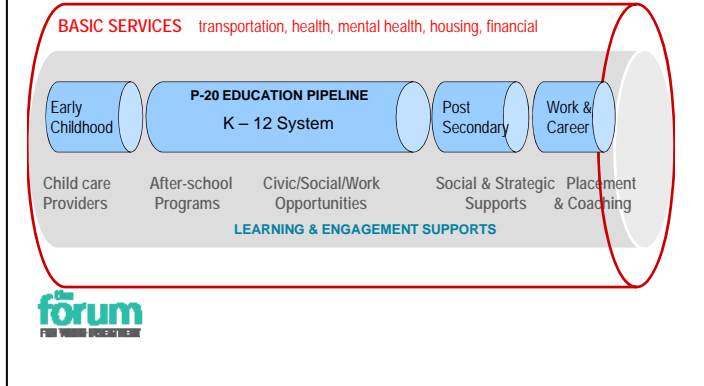


At its best, school only fills a portion of developmental space



supports provided by these disparate leaders, or of the quality of what is being provided. The developmental space surrounding school, is really a black box into which we put things and hope that they will be useful.

Insulating the Education Pipeline



There are a number of very good reasons to focus on tightening the joints in the education pipeline (the links between pre-K and elementary, between middle school and high school), and to reduce the corrosion inside the pipe to increase the flow of students (e.g. increase the number of 9th graders who graduate in 4 years).

There are even more reasons to resist stopping there. We don't just need to fix the leaks and increase the flow. We need to insulate the entire pipeline to ensure that young people come out the other end "ready." The first layer of insulation should be a melded mix of the family, plus formal and informal organizations (including employers) who provide students with opportunities to apply their learning, pursue their interests and build social capital. The second layer of insulation ensures young people have access to quality basic services – health care, transportation, housing, financial, etc.

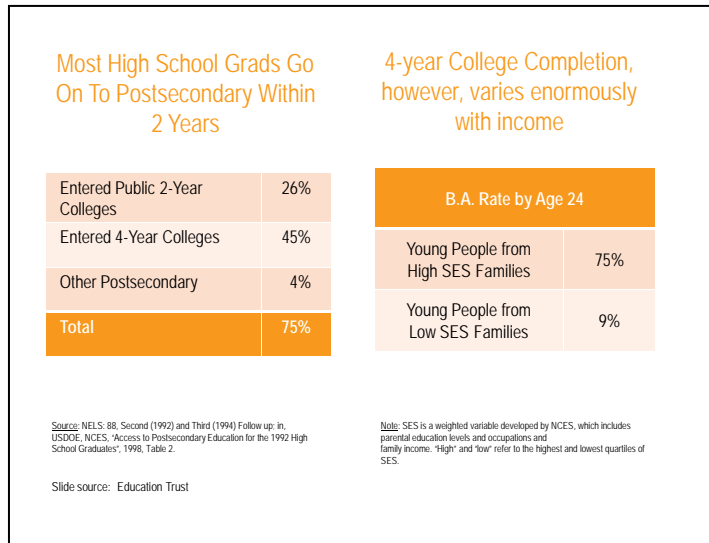
Again, these supports, services and opportunities need to be in place from birth through adulthood. Too often, the initial response to the question of what non-academic supports are in place for

students is "after-school programs." These services are critical, but they are not enough, especially if they are literally provided from 3 to 6p.m. in the elementary and middle grades. Communities should know as much about the quality and availability of student supports outside of school provided by families and neighbors, community groups, businesses and public agencies as they do about those provided during the school day. And if we want to ensure that young people are not only ready for college, work and life, but make successful transitions, our curiosity and responsibility should not end when students leave high school either as graduates or dropouts.

The idea that we have to insulate the education pipeline or fill the developmental white space is the easiest way we have found to help leaders "think outside of the box." Let me give you some reasons why ensuring student success requires thinking beyond school, beyond the school day, beyond academics and beyond age 18.

Message #1

Too few students are ready for college, work or life. More high school diplomas are not the only answer.



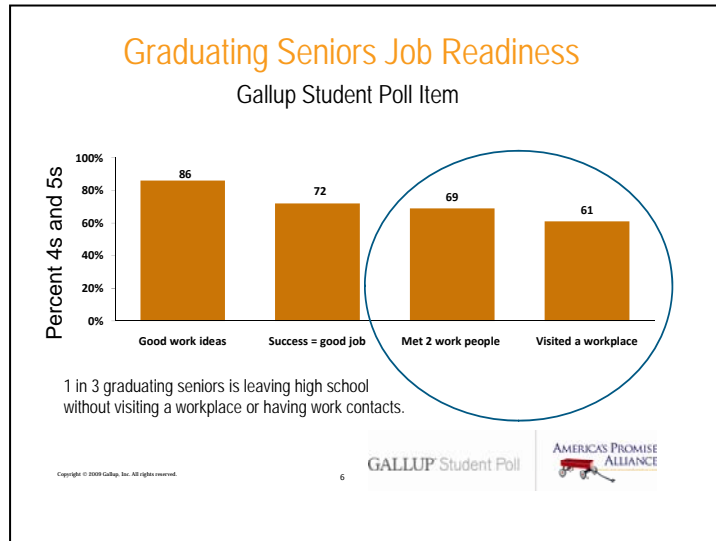
A 4-year college is not for every student, but every student needs and should be ready to succeed in some type of post-secondary education or training. A high school diploma is a requirement in this day and age. But ensuring that young people are successful in their next undertaking requires that we look beyond the diploma to ask more than whether they graduated from high school.

- **Entering college does not ensure completion.** According to information provided by the Education Trust, 75 percent of high school graduates enroll in some form of post-secondary education within two years of graduation. But far fewer complete the course. Only 42 percent of those who enter college graduate. And only 9 percent – less than 1 in 10 – low-income students actually complete a 4-year degree by age 24.

- **Work aspirations are greater than even basic work experience.** The Gallup Student Poll (2009) found that 85 percent of graduating seniors have good ideas about the kind of work they want to do, but 4 in 10 have never visited a workplace as a prospective employee. And 3 in 10 could not name 2 people that they have met to discuss work ideas.

- **Employers report that many high school graduates are unqualified for entry-level jobs.** There is increasing agreement on the list of skills young people need to function well in the 21st century. In a 2007 survey by Corporate Voices for Working Families, approximately 400 employers rated skills such as teamwork, social responsibility and professionalism as high as oral communication and reading comprehension. 7 in 10 thought these skills were important for the kind of entry-level jobs available to high school graduates. They reported that only 4 in 10 high school graduates were deficient in these skills.

It is absolutely critical that we address the dropout problem. But high school graduation is only a predictor of future success. Ensuring success requires that we look not only for credentials, but for clear signs that young people are competent and connected.



Researchers Gambone, Connell & Klem (2002) estimate that only 4 in 10 young people are doing well in their early 20s.



2 in 10

22% are doing poorly in two life areas and not well in any

- **Productivity:** High school diploma or less plus unemployed or on welfare
- **Health:** Poor health, bad health habits, unsupportive relationships
- **Connectedness:** Commit illegal activity once a month



4 in 10

35% are doing okay – doing poorly in no more than one life area and doing well in at most one – and doing okay in the rest



4 in 10

43% are doing well in two life areas and okay in one

- **Productivity:** Attend college, work steadily
- **Health:** Good health, positive health habits, healthy relationships
- **Connectedness:** Volunteer, politically active, active in religious institutions, active in community

In their 2002 study *Finding Out What Matters for Youth: Testing Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development*, researchers Gambone, Connell, and Klem analyzed large data sets for their that tracked young people from their early teens until their early 20s and created a profile of young people who were doing well. For young adults, success is defined as being productive (attending college and/or working steadily), being healthy (in good health, with positive health habits, and healthy relationships) and being connected to something bigger than themselves.

Only 4 in 10 young adults were doing well according to this definition. Another 4 in 10 were doing okay. 2 in 10 were in trouble – undereducated, unemployed or on welfare, in poor health or engaged in risky behaviors or relationships, and disconnected from community to the point that they are committing illegal activities.

This data resonates with leaders across the country. Forum staff members have presented this data to leaders from dozens of communities over the years. All agree that this definition of “doing well” is reasonable. Rarely do groups believe that more than half of their young people are doing well

according to this definition. Quite a few believe that even 4 in 10 is too high. It is difficult to understand why we are not more outraged at the fact that fewer than half of our young people are meeting a basic definition of success as young adults. Especially since we really do know what young people need to succeed.

What Research Tells Us

The National Research Council List

- Physical and Psychological **Safety**
- Appropriate **Structure**
- Supportive **Relationships**
- Opportunities to **Belong**
- Positive **Social Norms**
- Support for **Efficacy** and **Mattering**
- Opportunities for **Skill-Building**
- Integration of **Family, School** and **Community Efforts**
- Basic Services (implied)

America's Promise Five Promises

- SAFE PLACES**
- CARING ADULTS**
- OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP OTHERS**
- EFFECTIVE EDUCATION**
- HEALTHY START**



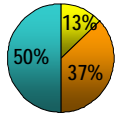
Message #2

Improved academic instruction is critical, but too few students are getting all of the supports they need.

The America's Promise Alliance, founded by General Colin Powell, has helped the country understand that young people need five basic supports in their lives – safe places, caring adults, effective education, a healthy start and opportunities to help others. This list is backed up by research conducted by the National Research Council on the characteristics of effective learning environments.

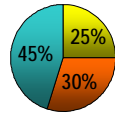
One Third of 6-17 Year Olds Lack the Supports They Need

- According to the America's Promise Alliance National Promises Survey, only 31% of 6-17 year olds have at least 4 of the 5 promises. 21% have 1 or none.
- The likelihood of having sufficient supports decreases with age



6 - 11 Years Old

- 37% of 6-11 year olds have at least 4 promises;
- 13% have 1 or none.



12 - 17 Years Old

- Only 30% of 12-17 year olds have at least 4;
- 25% have 1 or none.

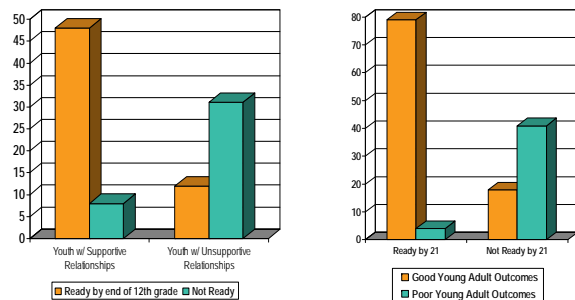
Every Child, Every Promise: Turning Failure Into Action, a national poll published by America's Promise in 2008, found that fewer than one-third of 6 to 17 year olds have at least 4 of the 5 promises. 21 percent have one or none. And the likelihood of having all or almost all of these basic supports decreases with age.

Again, it is difficult to understand why we are not more outraged about the efficacy of our efforts when presented with basic data like this. Only 4 in 10 young adults are doing well. Only 30 percent of 12-17 year olds have all of the supports they need.

Message #3

We can change these odds if we change the way we do business.

Do these supports really make a difference?
Even in adolescence? **ABSOLUTELY**



Gambone and colleagues show that youth with supportive relationships as they enter high school are 5 times more likely to leave high school well-prepared than those with weak relationships. These students are then 4 times more likely to be doing well as young adults.

Positive, meaningful relationships are one of the first things adults and young people say is critical to student success. Gambone and her colleagues demonstrated that young people who enter high school with strong relationships and have strong relationships with adults throughout their high school years are 5 times more likely to leave high school doing well than those who have no supportive relationships with adults. Doing well, was more than graduating. These young people had good grades, and college or career plans.

Teens who came out of high school doing well were then 4 times more likely to be doing well as young adults than those who weren't. Similar results were found when looking at the effects of other supports, such as challenging experiences and opportunities to contribute.

The researchers didn't stop there. They asked the question, if every young person coming into high school had the supports that those in the "doing well" category had would the picture change? The answer was "yes". The 4 in 10 statistic would increase to 7 in 10 doing well. The number doing poorly would drop to 1 in 10.

Providing These Supports CAN Change the Odds

Gambone/Connell's research suggests that if all young people got the supports they needed in early adolescence, the picture could change...

from 4 in 10
doing well



to 7 in 10
doing well



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FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

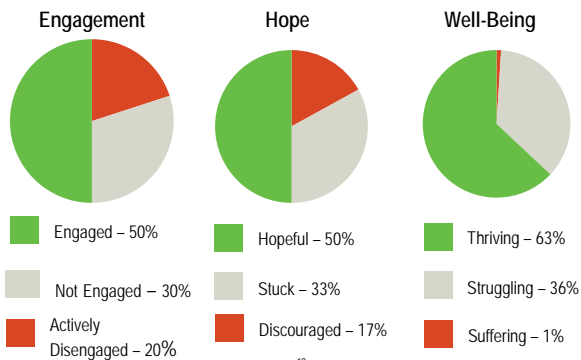
This research suggests that it is never too late to invest in young people, and that it is possible to change the odds.

If all young people got the supports they needed in early adolescence, the picture could change from 4 in 10 doing well to 7 in 10 doing well. That's not perfect, but it's significant – and this research only captures the difference made based on supports provided during early adolescence. It is possible that with increased investments during the first decade of a young person's life, we could get closer to 10 out of 10.

We can change the odds for young people, but this will only happen if we stop being satisfied with pilot programs and piecemeal interventions and begin to set bigger goals, build broader partnerships, and adopt bolder strategies that will net improvements at scale. Chattanooga seems to be poised to do this. Let me take a few more minutes to talk to you about one of the most important tools passionate leaders can use: better data. Data that not only allows us to track youth outcomes and community supports, but allows us to ask hard questions and get better answers.

Message #4: What gets measured matters

Gallup Student Poll Indices



We have enormous amounts of data on what happens in school. On student courses, attendance, performance and promotions. But we have very little data on how young people feel about their lives or on what they participate in outside of school.

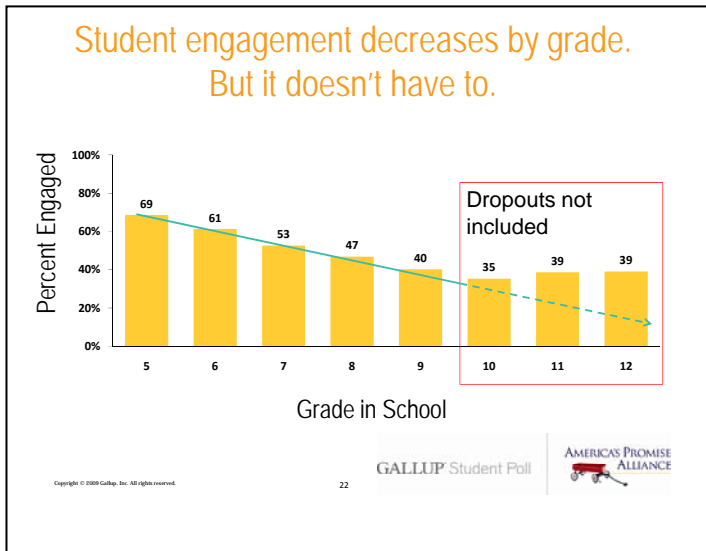
Research (Gallup Student Poll, 2009) shows, however, that young people who are hopeful, engaged in school, and thriving do better than those who are not:

- Hope predicts college GPA and retention over and above HS GPA and ACT/SAT scores.
- Engagement distinguishes between high-performing and low-performing schools
- Well-being drives academic and vocational success.

But only half of 5th through 12th graders are hopeful, only half are engaged in school, and only one-third are thriving. Only 1 in 4 students starts his or her day with the power of all three.

Message #5

School, business and community leaders can use these new types of “leading indicator” data to spark and track change.

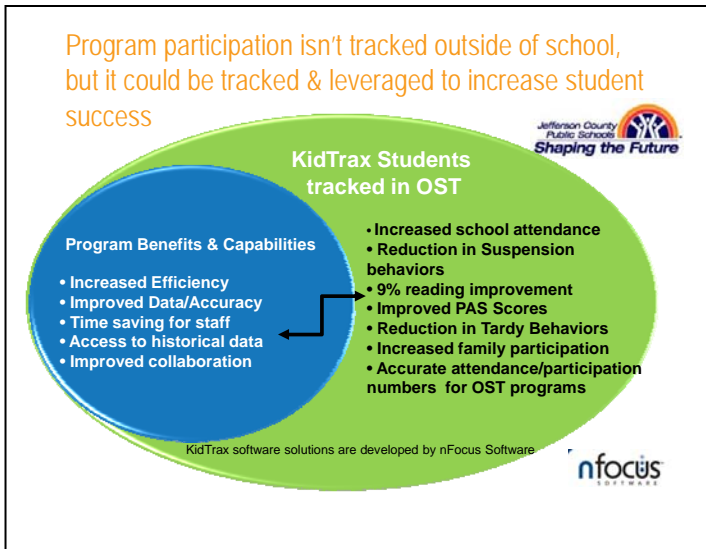


Students' sense of hope, engagement and well-being decline steadily with age, but they don't have to. If we measure these important indices, we can improve them. The solutions are relatively simple.

The Gallup survey is currently being made available to school districts **free of charge**. It is administered twice a year. Communities receiving building-level data on these important indices could begin to make changes and track progress.

With extra effort the survey could be linked to individual student files so that parents and teachers and others who work with you can engage students and watch for improvements.

Student participation in learning opportunities outside of school also declines steadily with age. The disengagement of students is not visible because we only track attendance in school.



In Louisville, school administrators recognized the importance of partnering with community organizations to increase student success. Working with the United Way and the Mayor's office they created and helped more than 80 independent after-school program providers adopt a common data platform that tracked student participation and documented program activities. They considered these programs “adjunct classrooms” and gave after-school providers access to the academic records of the students enrolled in their programs. School and community providers then began to work together to attain common goals such as improvements in 4th grade reading. As a result of this partnership, the programs got stronger, parent participation increased, and the students improved across multiple fronts – attendance, behaviors, test scores.

Quality Counts

It Matters

Research shows that improved youth outcomes requires program attendance *and* program quality.

It is Measureable

The core elements of program quality are both measurable and consistent across a broad range of program types.

It is Malleable

Most programs can improve quality by undertaking integrated assessment and improvement efforts.

It is Marketable

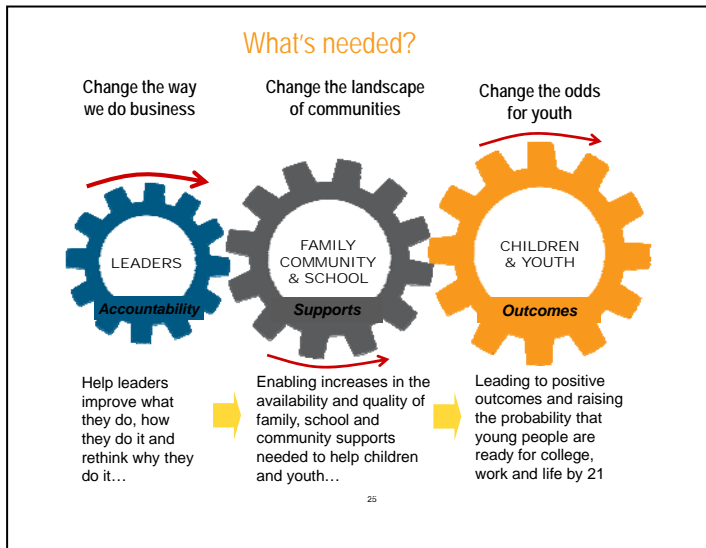
Decision-makers and providers will invest in improving quality if they believe that it matters, is measurable *and is malleable given available resources.*

Increased student participation - in school and out - produces increases in students' academic, social and emotional skills only when the activities they participate in are high quality. Whatever our opinions about No Child Left Behind, most of us agree that NCLB created common expectations for student achievement and created systems for schools to be held accountable for progress. Communities need to broaden their definition of goals (beyond academics), broaden their definition of learning environments (beyond schools), strengthen their capacity to track student participation and student progress, and measure and improve the quality of the learning environments in which young people spend their time. This is possible. Quality is measurable. Quality is malleable (teachers, coaches, after-school providers can quickly improve once they know what is needed).

Quality matters. A major analysis of the evaluation results of more than 80 programs found that young people in high-quality after-school programs showed significant academic, social and emotional gains. Those in low-quality programs showed none. The low-quality programs may have helped young people avoid risky behaviors, but they did not help them prepare for success.

Message #6

Change Begins with Leaders. Partnerships are key.

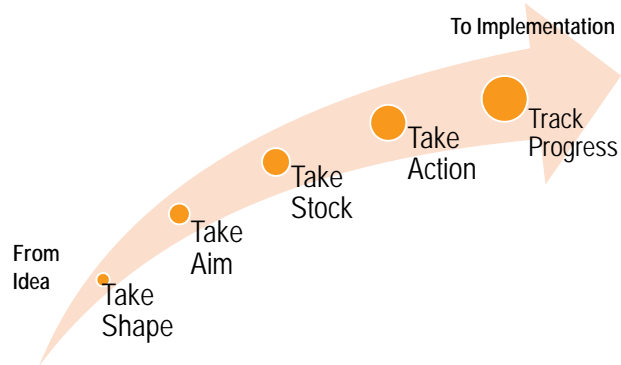


Changing the way leaders think and act is the key to success. We can't insulate the education pipeline unless we coordinate all our efforts to ensure that they add up to what is needed. And we can't improve student success – change the odds – unless we fix the pipeline.

Leaders, by definition, are individuals who take the initiative to move an idea through to implementation. Leaders take on a recurring set of tasks as they do this work – they find volunteers, form partnerships and alliances, set goals, take stock of what exists, develop action plans and track progress.

In any community, on any given day, there are leaders who are making decisions about which priorities to set, which data to review, which providers to support, which funding sources to tap, which groups to work with.

Leaders take on a recurring set of tasks



The Ready by 21 Approach meets leaders where they are. The goal is not to get you to push the “restart” button, but to understand where you are, ask you questions about where you’ve been and help you go farther faster by providing strategic connections, tools and resources.

The Ready by 21 Partnership has brought together a unique group of national organizations that represent state and local government, business, education, community and non-profit leaders – organizations like United Way Worldwide, the American Association of School Administrators, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the National Collaboration for Youth – and organizations that specialize in developing the kinds of information, tools and technical assistance leaders need to make a difference. nFocus and Gallup, two of the organizations whose tools were mentioned briefly, are a part of this group.

The Rb21 Approach aspires to...

Meet Leaders where they are.

Ask questions about where they’ve been.

Help them go farther faster.

- ✓ Responding to pressing issues?
- ✓ Selecting a planning/decision-making approach?
- ✓ Engaging stakeholders?
- ✓ Creating Partnerships and coordinating teams?
- ✓ Creating a vision & setting goals?
- ✓ Gathering data?
- ✓ Selecting priority areas?
- ✓ Developing action plans?
- ✓ Advocating for resources?
- ✓ Implementing strategies?
- ✓ Tracking progress?
- ✓ Reporting results?
- ✓ Making improvements?

Wanting to do all of the above?

I want to give you a brief description of the Partnership for two reasons.

First, I want to challenge you to show the country what it looks like when a community does this right – when you engage all stakeholders, set big goals, use bold strategies and drive change – collecting the kind of data that will not only tell you where you’ve been but really help you get there. We are convinced that rising to this challenge requires that a cross-sector group of leaders agrees to be the keeper of the big vision – what President Obama has referred to as a “cradle to career” commitment – and then takes responsibility for aligning the work, engaging the community, facilitating decision-making based on sound data and advocating for changes in policies and resource priorities.

Second, I want to assure you that the Ready by 21 Partnership is prepared to be helpful if you are serious about wanting to publicly map your path and measure your progress as you work to meet your goals. Thanks to support from Philip Morris USA, an Altria Company, we have funding to work with up to 10 cities in the Southeast. We look forward to learning more about what you are doing and want to do to change the odds for youth.

Ten years ago, I was one of the people who worked with Colin Powell to get the America's Promise Alliance started. I felt it important to articulate the vision of what a "responsive" community looks like. I wrote an article called "Know Thy Neighbor's Child." A responsive community is one that does more than react to crises. It is even more than one that assumes collective responsibility for improving outcomes and conditions for youth. A responsive community is one that is truly able to respond to the opportunities and obstacles that constantly emerge because it has a vision and a plan, has the partnerships in place to execute against the plan, and has the capacity to "know thy neighbor's child" – have a complete picture of every child's needs and assets; every family's strengths and resources, every provider's capacities and reach, and every leader's commitment to change. Ten years ago, this was a dream we couldn't figure out how to realize economically, so it was tabled. Today, this is a reality we cannot afford not to build. The Ready by 21 Partnership was built to help state and local leaders build this capacity. It isn't easy. It isn't cheap. But it is critical. Knowing them – the children, the families, the providers, the leaders – by name is what we need to allow ourselves to be truly outraged at the progress we have made so far and truly optimistic that we can do much better and move much faster.

You can do this. We can help.