

# A Needed Formula for Youth Success

## Equity Driven, Science Informed

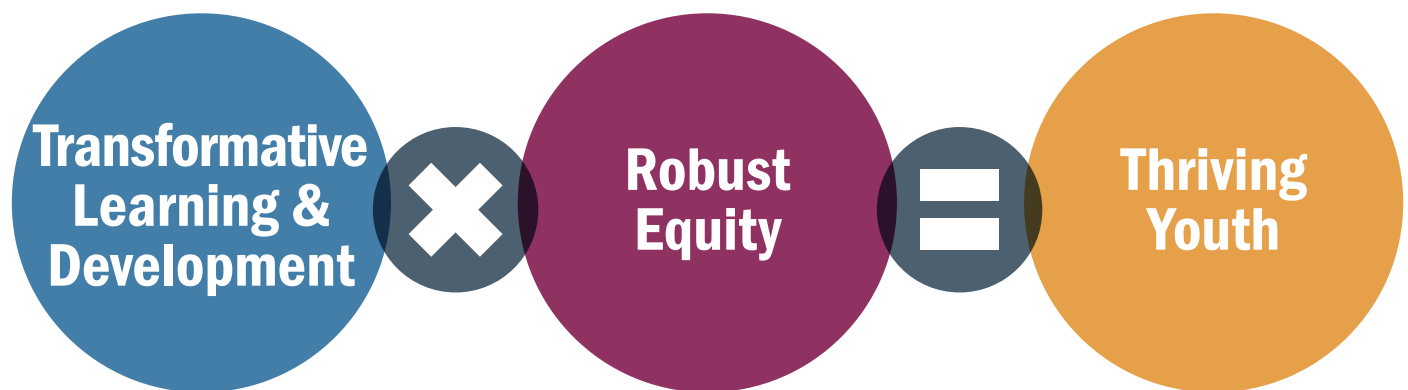
### Each and every young person has great potential to thrive.

The potential for thriving is universal, but so too is the existence of adversity. Young people can overcome adversities, but the ease of doing so is not equally shared. Opportunity structures – in schools, communities, and society – make it easier for some youth to avoid or buffer the impacts of adversity than others.

COVID-19 and the renewed attention on racial injustice thrust the country into long-overdue debates about how (not whether) to dismantle systemic, institutional inequities that are literally taking the lives of Black Americans and other people of color. Systemic changes are needed in every system – not just law enforcement and education. Educational equity cannot be achieved without a focus on racial equity.

### The formula is greater than the parts.

Developing more powerful definitions of thriving, equity, and learning and development, and considering them together enriches our understanding of each. In doing so we can leverage recent syntheses of the science of adolescence, the science of learning and development, and the impacts of institutionalized inequities and emphasize the fact that children and adolescents can realize their potential and thrive.

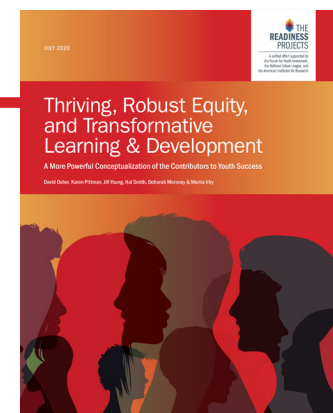


**Transformative Learning & Development** is the optimization of a learner's ability to translate specific experiences and content into generalizable knowledge, competencies, and perspectives.

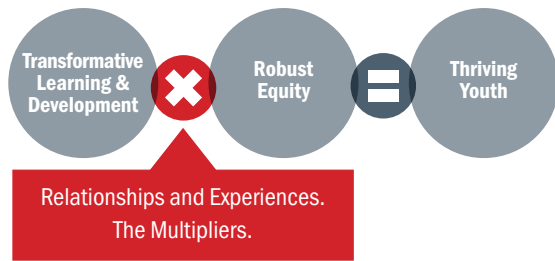
**Robust Equity** is the intentional counter to inequality, institutionalized privilege and prejudice, and systemic deficits and the intentional promotion of thriving across multiple domains for those who experience inequity and injustice.

**Thriving** is a dynamic process that goes beyond well-being to include individual and collective growth in grounding and agency.

This brief summarizes key elements from the July 2020 paper, *Thriving, Robust Equity, and Transformative Learning & Development: A More Powerful Conceptualization of the Contributors to Youth Success* by David Osher, Karen Pittman, Jill Young, Hal Smith, Deborah Moroney & Merita Irby.



# The Critical Multiplier



Formulas describe the relationships between independent and dependent variables. A good formula is a concise way to declare a goal and propose a strategy for achieving it.

The terms “thriving,” “equity,” and “learning and development” (linked together) are frequently found in the same sentence, especially when the topic is education. The relationship between the terms, however, is not always clear. Thriving, equity, learning, and development are connected to different goals and, by association, different systems: thriving with health; equity with racial justice and economics; learning with education; and development with developmental science. More

complete, nuanced and scientifically grounded definitions can highlight the dynamic interrelationships among thriving, equity, and learning and development in ways that should inform policies and practices.

The multiplier insert included with this formula emphasizes the fact that schools supplemented by a host of other organizations – including libraries, museums, employment training programs, community, faith and civic organizations – have been charged with or have taken on responsibility for creating structured experiences that support learning and development in different contexts with different content.

A concerted effort to not only increase the quality and quantity of intentional relationships and experiences created by adults in these organizations is critically needed but not sufficient. There is ample evidence that efforts within systems will be more successful if system leaders and staff are guided to recognize the fact that they and the young people they engage with are a part of a dynamic learning and development ecosystem.

The term ecosystem is frequently used to acknowledge the range of **settings where children, youth, and families live, learn, work, play, and make meaning.**

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## Relationships are the fuel for brain development.

Relationships shape the developing mind, buffer the effects of stress and ignite learning processes. The moment is now to reach young people experiencing trauma and reshape their future trajectory. A young person’s success is linked to their capacity to thrive – to feel, be, and be seen as competent in multiple life domains – and is a product of their opportunities to develop individual competencies and experience supportive conditions. Adults can support young people to succeed and thrive through life by helping them develop their individual competencies, and also by providing supportive conditions while also working with them and their families to address historical and institutional barriers.

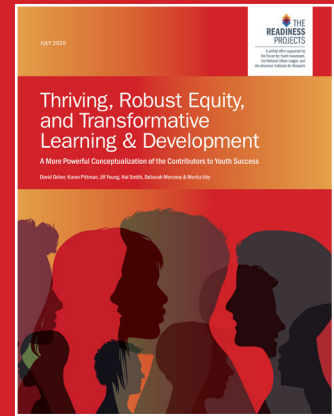
A commitment to aggressively expand access to equitable learning environments is simply an imperative. In schools and across communities, we must align the opportunities for youth that focus on thriving, optimize transformative learning, enhance development, and address multiple determinants of inequity.

The science of learning and development presents many powerful lessons that can transform education systems, advance equity, and can help every young person thrive.

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# Beyond Business as Usual for Youth Success

Conclusions from the paper *Thriving, Robust Equity, and Transformative Learning & Development: A More Powerful Conceptualization of the Contributors to Youth Success*



Changing business is not just changing the actions or intentions of individuals (e.g. teachers, youth workers, police and security officers). It requires systemic efforts at every level of intervention that ensure that every adult 1) understands how relationships and experiences across contexts drive learning and development, 2) recognizes the power they have to influence youth thriving and success, 3) is empowered to create opportunities and nurturant for transformative learning and development that support inclusivity and robust educational equity, and 4) uses that power in support of thriving and robust equity.

## Relationship-rich settings that support transformative learning and development optimize two strategic approaches:

### Opportunities for Transformative Learning & Development

Youth benefit from transformative opportunities for learning and development that provide and support:

- ▶ **Meaningful work**
- ▶ **Inquiry as a major learning and development strategy.**
- ▶ **Well-designed collaborative learning and development opportunities and service-learning projects**
- ▶ **Formative assessments and timely, supportive feedback**
- ▶ **Opportunities to develop metacognitive skills**
- ▶ **Opportunities to develop and use social, emotional, and cognitive skills**
- ▶ **Opportunities for critical analysis to challenge biases in knowledge sources, learning opportunities and skill assessment**
- ▶ **Challenging biases and segregated thinking**

### Supportive Conditions for Learning and Development

Relationship rich settings build supportive conditions for learning and development. These conditions reflect and contribute to the dynamic interaction of everybody. They include organizational (or group/family) culture, rules and how they are developed and enforced, the physical environment including greenspace, the supports available to young people and adults, the way in which these supports are organized, and the social and emotional conditions for learning and development.

The social and emotional conditions for learning & development include:

- ▶ **Safety**
- ▶ **Connectedness**
- ▶ **Support**
- ▶ **Challenge**
- ▶ **Peer and adult social and emotional competence**
- ▶ **Cultural competence and responsiveness**