

# New Definitions Driven by Equity; Informed by Science

## Thriving Youth

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

**The term thriving is strengths-based.** It is more than being competent, resilient, and without problems. It is how a person is in the moment, as well as on their path towards optimal development. Thriving is more than being well, it is a sense of doing well. Resilience and well-being are necessary but not sufficient conditions for thriving; rather too often they set a lower and inadequate threshold.

**Thriving is a multi-dimensional concept.** Reflecting growth or success in any number of domains from physical to economic to spiritual.

**Thriving is linked to key internal and external characteristics and assets.** Thriving involves social, emotional and cognitive competencies, skills, and dispositions. Other things being equal, resilient, competent youth are more likely to report a sense of thriving at any point in time because they have more capacity to respond to adversity and take advantage of opportunities. Thriving, however, is also related to the social and physical environment: there is a dynamic relationship between and among individual, collective, and environmental thriving.

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### An individual young person's sense of thriving is:

**Summative, reflecting an overall sense of well-being and future success or growth.** Thriving is context dependent, and contextual factors promote, accelerate, or constrain thriving. Resilience and well-being are important parts of the thriving journey, because adversity is normative, and trauma and ill-being undermine thriving.

**Relational, reflecting an individual's sense of connection to others.** Thriving involves children, youth, and adults supporting each other both in every moment as well as over time in dynamic relationship with each other and to culture, social structures, and the physical environment.

**Calibrated to cultural lenses and social networks.** An individual's situation, including their cultural lenses and their social networks and other reference points, influences which thriving domains (e.g., academic achievement, sports) they see as important, relevant and consistent with their view of success.

**Adjusted over time as experiences and perceptions change.** Since people learn over time, encounter new situations, and may shift or broaden identities, their perceptions of thriving may also change.

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### Leaders promoting a robust adoption of thriving acknowledge:

**Establish well-being as a threshold.** Robust equity efforts have overall thriving – not just well-being in one domain or equalized odds for success between specific groups – as a goal. Practice-focused systems should establish well-being as a bottom-line goal in the life domains for which they have accountability (e.g., health, academic competence, employment). They should incorporate thriving as a multi-dimensional goal towards which they are contributing and, equally important, against which they are not inadvertently doing harm.

**Affirm the importance of resiliency as a socially supported individual response to adversity.** Considering thriving when we address equity necessitates addressing physical and social emotional and economic wellness. Considering thriving when we support learning necessitates focusing on learning across all parts of a youth's life; providing culturally responsive youth driven conditions for learning and the development of portable assets that support agency, engagement, meaning making.

**Create explicit accountability for strengthening individual and group capacities to thrive.** Since individuals' sense of thriving is calibrated to their cultural contexts, individuals' capacity and motivation to thrive is enhanced when they experience their efforts as both aligned with, and contributing to, that of the groups with which they identify. Acknowledging individual, group, and cultural identity, history and perspectives is therefore a critical indicator of a robust commitment to youth thriving.