Building Impact: A Closer Look at Local Cross-Sector Collaborations for Education
October 22, 2020

Ian Faigley (00:00:01):

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for joining us for today's session. My name is Ian Faigley, and I'm the director of Outreach and Engagement here at the Forum For Youth Investment in Washington, D.C. The forum was founded in 1998 with the tagline of moving ideas to impact because we help leaders think differently about what it takes to manage and sustain change, whether they're in the process of planning and partnering for impact, improving and aligning policies, or strengthening practices and programs. Today's session is on the topic of collective impact efforts to improve educational outcomes. The Wallace Foundation commissioned Teacher's College, Columbia University, to conduct a study to gain insights around how collaborations were established and their prospects for survival and success. We're honored to have Jeff Henig, Michael Rebell and Carolyn Riehl on today's session to discuss their research and findings.

Ian Faigley (00:00:49):

Today's session is being recorded. Later this week, it will be sent to everyone who registered and also posted to the forum website, along with any additional resources that are mentioned. All lines will be muted throughout to avoid background noise. So please submit your questions and comments using the chat feature. It's now my pleasure to introduce our presenters. Jeff Henig, is a professor of political science and education at Teacher's College, and a professor of political science at Columbia University. He has been elected a fellow of the American Educational Research Association and a member of the National Academy of Education. His expertise and interests include privatization in school choice, race and urban politics, the politics of urban education reform, the politics of education research, local school boards, and philanthropic contributions to educational institutions and programs. He is the author, co-author or editor of 12 books.

Ian Faigley (00:01:42):

The most recent of which, Outside Money in School Board Elections: The Nationalization of Education Politics, received the 2020 Dennis Judd Award for the best book in urban politics. Michael Rebell, is an experienced litigator administrator, researcher and scholar in the field of education law. He is the executive director of the Center for Educational Equity, and professor of law and educational practice at Teacher's College Columbia University. Previously, Mr. Rebell was the co-founder executive director and counsel for the campaign for fiscal equity. In CFE versus State of New York, the court of appeals, New York State's highest court declared that all children are entitled under the state constitution to the opportunity for a sound basic education and it ordered the state of New York to reform its educational finance system to meet these constitutional requirements.

Ian Faigley (00:02:33):

Mr. Rebell is currently a lead counsel for plaintiff in Cook versus Raimondo, a case that seeks to establish a right to an education adequate for capable citizenship under the US Constitution. Mr. Rebell is the author or co-author of six books and dozens of articles on issues of law and education. Among his most recent works are Flunking Democracy: Schools, Courts, and Civic Participation, Courts and Kids: Pursuing Educational Equity Through the State Courts and The Right to

Comprehensive Educational Opportunity. Mr. Rebell has also taught at Harvard Law School, Yale Law School and Columbia Law School. He is a graduate of Harvard College and Yale Law School. Carolyn Riehl, is associate professor in the department of education policy and social analysis, and current director of the educational policy program at Teacher's College, Columbia University.

Ian Faigley (00:03:22):

She is a sociologist of education who teaches studies and writes about organizational dynamics in schools and school systems, diversity and equity in schooling, public engagement, policies and practices for instructional management and school leadership. Dr. Riehl's recent research has focused on teacher's data use for instructional improvement and how schools are responding to the COVID pandemic, and racial reckonings around the country. Dr. Riehl earned graduate degrees from New York University and Teacher's College. She has been a high school English teacher, and has held faculty appointments at the University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University and the University of North Carolina in Greensboro. Since 2005, Dr. Riehl has been a faculty mentor for the Cahn fellows program for distinguished public school principals at Teacher's College, supporting year-long cohorts of principals and assistant principals, as they engage in inquiry-based improvement projects in their schools. It's now my pleasure to turn it over to Carolyn.

Carolyn Riehl (00:04:19):

Good afternoon, everyone. We're really pleased to be with you today to share some details of our study of cross-sector collaborations. So The Wallace Foundation wanted to know if the rising number of collective impact collaborations were viable, and what they were trying to do. As Ian said, commissioned us to do that research. So we developed a way to gather basic public information about as many collaborations as we could find, and then took a closer look at a smaller set of initiatives. The national sample included 182 programs that were anchored in a neighborhood city or Metro region that had educational outcomes as they're focused, and that involved partners who crossed the sectors of educational level, government and businesses and nonprofits. They included service providers as well as funders.

Carolyn Riehl (00:05:17):

We also chose cases for our case study that varied in the characteristics of the areas they served, whether they were affiliated with a network of programs and their longevity. Our sample for the case studies included two STRIVE initiatives, a college promise program associated with Say Yes to Education, several locally developed collaborations, and one long standing initiative that was in its sunset period. Before we began our field work, we took a look back at the history of similar collaborations, the research literature around the organizational and political challenges, others have identified in this kind of initiative and the forces that seem to be driving the new burst of collaborations. We've organized what we'd like to share with you around five questions. So let's move to Jeff for the first one.

Jeff Henig (00:06:14):

So some of the core ideas behind cross-sector collaboration have been with us for over 100 years in what was our first report for Wallace, which was a title putting collective impact. In context, we trace the idea of cross sector collaboration back to turn of the century urban settlement houses like Jane Addams Hull-House, which is arguably the most influential US settlement house, which started by offering neighborhood residents, enrichment programs, such as classes in art appreciation and literature. As Addams and the founders of Hull-House came to understand better the neighborhood needs and the needs of the immigrant and lower income communities, they were serving, they added childcare, health services, public baths, afterschool recreation programs, and classes for children and adults, as well as other kinds of services.

Jeff Henig (00:07:14):

During The Depression Flint, Michigan under then mayor and later philanthropists, Charles Stewart Mott, opened schools to a wide range of programs, serving children and working parents. Eleanor Roosevelt actually brought this Flint effort to national attention with a newspaper editorial she wrote, in which he called it remarkable community plan by which they coordinate all the various community forces, industrial social, philanthropic, recreational and educational, she said. During the war on poverty, as many of you know, programs sought to mount locally coordinated initiatives by deliberately bypassing siloed governmental bureaucracies and sending federal money down to community action in model cities agencies at the neighborhood or community level that at least in theory had the flexibility to craft local solutions that met local context and local needs.

Jeff Henig (00:08:22):

These episodic manifestations of cross-sector approaches seem to have emerged during times when society and government have been willing to see youth and family challenges as intertwined with other issues like poverty, race, housing, health and crime, but we're often followed by phases, favoring narrower approaches either because the stakeholders had not come up with successful solutions or they lost over time their will or patients, or resources to keep going on. Now, we suggest that several forces contributed to the more recent resurgence of interest in collective action. Carol, if you can advance the slide. First, the recession that ran from December, 2007 to June, 2009 was unusually long and severe. In the six years leading up to the recession total public spending on K-12 education had risen by 12 and a half percent in constant dollars.

Jeff Henig (00:09:28):

Over the following six years, it declined by 2.6%. This kind of fiscal pressure created an environment we think in which communities were desperate for lower cost strategies to improve education, and one selling point for cross-sector collaboration has been the prospect of getting more bang for the buck by reducing duplicative efforts. At least that's what's been hoped for. Secondly, while no child left behind was enacted with strong bipartisan support in 2002, over time frustration with high stakes testing and the lack of promise gains led to disillusionment among many, and for many folks that tainted generally the idea of top-down federally led reform likely contributing, we think to a sense that local communities can and should reassert themselves as the definers and drivers of educational improvement.

Jeff Henig (00:10:31):

A third factor had to do with protecting reform from turnover and form a leadership. The average tenure of a large city school superintendent is short generally, between three and five years, and because succeeding leaders typically bring their own ideas and then downplay or dismantle those identified with their predecessors, local efforts at education reform have often had a stop and go pattern. Stop, go and stop again. A pattern that has been characterized as spinning wheels because there may be lots of action, but little traction. The contemporary movement for cross-sector collaboration, we think has appeal in part because it promises to embed the reform impulse in a broader coalition of civic and community leaders and their organizations. Ones that will stay in place even if elected leaders turnover or superintendents leave the community.

Jeff Henig (00:11:34):

A fourth factor may be eagerness by many to move past the polarizing debate one which dominated the NCLB era, and which pitted those who argue that focused change in schools can raise achievement against those who argue that schools really can't make much difference without addressing factors like concentrated poverty, public health disparities, inadequate social services

and mental health services. Instead of an either or answer, many now seem ready for a both and approach combining reform of instruction with efforts to reduce inequalities and increased supports for relatively disadvantaged families and communities. The growing interest in full service community schools, as an approach to coordinating delivery of various kinds of social services to children and families using the school as a delivery focus is one manifestation of this both and approach.

Jeff Henig (00:12:38):

Finally, three somewhat distinctive elements of the more recent manifestation of collaboration, the form under the terminology of collective impact involve the idea of anchoring a collaboration in a backbone organization, the strategic use of data to measure and direct progress and national support networks like STRIVE. This appealed, especially perhaps to philanthropic funders, because these three ideas picked up on the funders' own evolution into more strategic giving. From their standpoint, all three ideas promised to make it easier for foundations to leverage their money, letting local backbone organizations handle some of the challenges of coordination and allocation, generating the output and outcome data that their own boards or foundation's own boards have been expecting, and creating a national support structure capable of sharing lessons across places and helping their grantees, the donors grantees manage through challenging situations as well as scouting sites for expansion. Carolyn you want to pick it up?

Carolyn Riehl (00:14:01):

Okay. So we wanted to know what the collaborations were trying to do and why. We explore that question both through the national scan and our case studies, and this research revealed that many of these programs were indeed trying to achieve population level improvements in outcomes for youth. They did so through fairly common series of action. So they often took a cradle to career orientation, recognizing that development and progress happens along the continuum of the youth's lifespan, and trying to impact key benchmark points along that continuum. As Jeff mentioned, they increasingly acknowledged the importance providing comprehensive wrap-around supports so that students could be ready and able to learn in schools.

Carolyn Riehl (00:14:59):

Many of the collaborations acknowledged the need to engage in what they often called a root cause analysis, trying to not just change the provision of services, but to understand what had been the barriers and challenges in getting to the markers that they were looking for. They often took a consistent with the use of data that Jeff described there. They often took an approach of identifying benchmarks for success and indicators for what they were trying to accomplish, and made those very visible on their websites, and in their communications with the public really taking responsibility to be accountable for those outcomes. Many also recognized fairly early on, the need to try to develop a strategy for these initiatives that would be sustainable. They often started out using soft money and recognize that the vagaries in the way that that comes and goes, and wanting to make sure they had both the people, the resources and the organizational infrastructure available and ready to last for the long time.

Carolyn Riehl (00:16:16):

So given all these ambitious intentions, what we observed, typically we were studying collaborations a few years into their implementation phase, was a little more limited. The collaborations reflected the difficulties of addressing everything at once, even when they were large and had many partners. So they often had to make decisions to target services and strategies that they could find funding for, that there was sufficient local interest in, and that they had the capacity to actually address. These did tend to occur along that cradle to career continuum, but the pattern and the array of services was different in the different collaborations. So we did see for instance, efforts to improve

early childhood education by strengthening the qualities of teachers and staff workers in early childhood centers.

Carolyn Riehl (00:17:18):

We saw a number of school-based interventions, most that were initiated at the school district level, and the collaborations were trying to be supportive partners and to help those move along. In addition to the college promise efforts to get funding and scholarships to students to attend college, there were programs available that were put in place to smooth that transition to make college more available, to increase students' interest in applying for financial aid, which is one of the barriers to applying to college. Some collaborations began internship programs and mentoring programs to encourage students as they moved from high school to college, and then into the job sector.

Carolyn Riehl (00:18:12):

Again, there was a wide array of wraparound services that the initiatives tried to put in place having to do with health services, social services, even legal supports. As one can imagine, it took time to implement these services, and most of the programs found that they needed to scale back the initial outcome expectations. They were achieving some of their benchmarks' success markers, but not often as readily and as comprehensively as they intended, but they did continue to track markers. So in this slide, we showed graphically the prevalence of in the national scan of the achievement indicators, the markers that the collaborations we're trying to monitor.

Ian Faigley (00:19:09):

Sorry to interrupt, but it looks like participants aren't able to see your slides. Can you restart the PowerPoint presentation?

Carolyn Riehl (00:19:21):

All right. I will.

Ian Faigley (00:19:21):

Sorry. Sorry for the interrupt.

Carolyn Riehl (00:19:21):

I will stop the share.

Ian Faigley (00:19:25):

And just to let everyone know, I put the full slideshow in the chat in case there's any issue you can follow along.

Carolyn Riehl (00:19:34):

Great. Let me restart the screen-share and get us back to the PowerPoint. Does that show now?

Ian Faigley (00:19:47):

Yes. That's great.

Carolyn Riehl (00:19:49):

Great. Thanks. Thanks Ian. So when I got started, many of these collaborations, they wanted to develop indicators and to develop data systems that would track them. Often the easiest, most

readily available indicators were the kinds of things that school systems already track about, student performance in courses, high school graduation rates. So those were the most prominent indicators that the collaborations were using, but they also were the trickiest ones to make progress on particularly for the programs that weren't really offering services and interventions related to what was going on inside schools and classrooms. They did, however, also track indicators along that cradle to career continuum.

Carolyn Riehl (00:20:46):

There were measurements of kindergarten readiness were used by about a quarter of the collaborations we looked at in the national scan. Pre-K enrollment was tracking something about 10% of the programs. Then on the other end of the spectrum, post-secondary enrollment and post-secondary completion, we're tracking about a fifth of the programs. They also were getting at the root cause analysis and the deeper factors that play a role in students' success. Some less common indicators where the collaborations were paying attention to things like student attendance, parent engagement, school safety, and the availability to extra-curricular activities. So a lot was going on and the array of services and interventions was quite different in each of the collaborations. Let's not take a focus and look at what was going on with school systems. Michael. I think you're on mute, Michael.

Michael Rebell (00:22:07):

Sorry about that. All right. As we indicated earlier, the motivation for many of the business groups, non-profit organizations and other entities that joined these collaborations was some concern about what was going on in education in their cities, in their areas, both in terms of leadership turnover, as Jeff mentioned but also less than stellar outcomes in many cases. So this was a way that the larger community could assist pressure, whatever word you want to use in their relationship with the school districts. That raised serious questions about what the relationship between this larger collaborative in the school districts would be. On the one hand, the collaborative needed the cooperation of the school districts because the central focus was going to be on improving outcomes for children. On the other hand from the school district's point of view, this was a little tricky.

Michael Rebell (00:23:15):

On the one hand, if they could get assistance, especially resource assistance they would welcome it. On the other hand, the school districts were very often jealous about their prerogatives, and with good reason, they also said, "We know a lot about education." Many of these other groups did not know that much about education, even though they were all motivated to want to improve it. So what we found was a great range of approaches that the various collaboratives that we studied undertook, and their relations with the school districts. In some areas they work together really well, that the collaboratives found ways to be very helpful to the school districts without in any way threatening or undermining their autonomy and their success. Nashville is a particularly good example of that.

Michael Rebell (00:24:09):

In its statement of purpose its theory of action, the Alignment Nashville group specifically said our purpose is to assist the school district in carrying out the strategic action plan. When there was a leadership change along the way, and there was a new strategic action plan, the whole coalition shifted their focus to be more in line with what the new strategic action plan was. So there was a very good working relationship there. Each of their strategic action teams, alignment teams that called them, was headed by somebody from the business community or the nonprofit community and the school district having joint leadership. In Milwaukee also, there was a good understanding between Milwaukee Succeeds, they call the collaborative organization and not only the school district, the tricky thing in Milwaukee is there was a very big issue about the role of charters in Milwaukee.

Michael Rebell (00:25:15):

There were concerns about private schools, large Catholic school sector, and the collaborative work gingerly to be able to at the same time relate to each of those entities but carve out areas, particular projects where the collaborative could be helpful, and each of those sectors could join in and work on the issues. Now in Portland, we had another model where the collaborative that developed All Hands Raised, actually it had a history originally of working with the Portland school board and the Portland School District. Once they formed this broader collaborative, it was really a countywide collaborative, not just in the city. With the support from the Portland School District, the collaborative reached out to other school districts in the county about six of them.

Michael Rebell (00:26:16):

They all agreed that certain programs, especially an emphasis on equity for low-income students and students of color became priorities that everybody agreed on. They carved out this area. They weren't directly getting involved in major education initiatives, aside from the carved out areas, and that worked very well. We have a third pattern that was emphasized by Minneapolis, Buffalo and Oakland, as Jeff and Carolyn mentioned, the idea of comprehensive services is something that most of the collaboratives emphasized in general, and in these cities in particular what the collaborative had to offer to the school district was real support in those areas of comprehensive services. So for example, in Buffalo, one thing that the Say Yes Organization did was beef up the district's ability to provide afterschool programs, summer programs health clinics in many of the schools, and some of that they used their own seed money.

Michael Rebell (00:27:33):

They were also very effective in working out arrangements where for instance, in regard to summer programs, they got the county to really be supportive and provide money personnel, other supports. This was the ideal coalition-collaborative arrangement that was exemplified by the wraparound services that Say Yes was able to initiate and build into the system, and eventually they phased out of financial support, but those important wraparound services have continued. In Oakland, the pattern was a community school district orientation. The arrangement that was being supported was to make every school in Oakland, community schools by definition or schools that attempt to provide all their students are range of important wraparound services, so that was an internal arrangement. It was not a collaborative that brought in groups outside the city of Oakland, but we use it as an example of collaboration on a school level.

Michael Rebell (00:28:58):

Oakland has been a very successful example of mounting these community schools in a major urban area. Minneapolis had a very interesting twist on the wraparound services because the Northwest achievement zone as the collaborative organization there, had a very interesting arrangement where they were able to assign community people as staff members to work with students and families, and pull in the particular services that each family needed. It was not only after school tutoring or summer programs or preschool, but it was things like housing assistance or employment assistance. That was the nature of the wraparound services in Minneapolis. One of the other things that these groups really did accomplish in some of the areas was what we called calming down toxic climate for education.

Michael Rebell (00:30:03):

In Buffalo, for example, before Say Yes arrived there were pitched battles with racial themes with the union and the school district. Many people had really questioned why Say Yes was going into this district, which had historically been known as one of the most contentious, politicized, difficult school

districts in the state, if not the country. It is clear that just organizing to approach Say Yes, to convince them to come to the city was in and of itself an event that brought many of these groups together, and Say Yes, did set up management organizations, ways of organizing what they were doing and what the school district were doing that really had a positive effect.

Michael Rebell (00:30:57):

As I mentioned in Milwaukee, we did have a previous history and an ongoing history, I should say, of real contention between the charter section and the school district per se, and also separate issues involving private schools and Milwaukee Succeeds was successful to a certain degree. They haven't fully overcome some of those tensions but the presence of the collaborative really made a difference. We don't want to say though that these relationships were always more or less positive. In most places they were more or less positive, but there were times when the relationship between the school district and the collaborative did not work out very well. Savannah was a particular case in point.

Michael Rebell (00:31:50):

Right from the beginning, there was some competition between the school board superintendent and the main outside organization that became the spearhead for the collaborative in applying for the money and speaking with the main philanthropic funder, and those tensions never disappeared. Even when the collaborative got going, the money was sent through the organization and the school district people were lukewarm to say the least didn't always have representatives attending collaborative meetings, et cetera. Finally, after a few years of this the collaborative basically decided to institute and promote youth programs on their own outside the school district. So as you see, there were a variety of approaches, but overall it was impressive that these collaboratives found various ways to deal with their relationship with the school district.

Michael Rebell (00:32:57):

There's one lingering problem that some of the collaboratives articulated very often, which is they purposely did not want to focus on core instructional issues, because that was the turf of the school boards and the school superintendents. But at the same time the collaboratives are being judged to a large extent by how successful the school districts are in things like improving standardized test outcomes, as Jeff had mentioned. So as one of our collaborative leaders put it, it's like a donut hole. We're providing all these wraparound services, all of this basic support. But if the core instruction is not being improved substantially we're going to be left with an empty hole. So that's one way of looking at what one of the continuing issues that collaboratives in many of these areas have to work on is. Anyway, back to you. Is it Carolyn or Jeff's turn? I forget.

Carolyn Riehl (00:34:03):

So all of the collaborations wanted to reduce disparities in their locales, and some of them did engage in either formal or informal reflections and deeper analysis that took them to some of the longstanding structural inequities and patterns of racism and exclusion in their locales, in housing, employment, criminal justice, social services, and governance, as well as in access to education. These factors were openly acknowledged, but the initiatives tackled them in different ways. For some, the approach was more consistent with colorblind efforts to reduce disparities in education, adding services that could benefit everyone on a surface level, but not really calling out some of the deeper issues.

Carolyn Riehl (00:34:54):

Other programs took a more explicit approach and took steps to at least get people acknowledging and talking about the deeper issues. This messaging and conversation, and eventually in some cases, some interventions, were sometimes more on the symbolic level, but often substantive as well, really trying to address disparities. Many of the collaborations, most of the collaborations actually were begun primarily by involving local elites, mayors, school district officials, foundation leaders, social service agency heads, and so on. This was reasonable for gaining the legitimacy of these new initiatives and for acquiring resources including finances, to get them off the ground. But as many of them have learned and acknowledged over the years of their implementation, it's important to have grassroots community involvement when you're trying to really understand and change the ways in which inequity is produced and sustained.

Carolyn Riehl (00:36:03):

This remains an ongoing challenge. It's sometimes very hard for initiatives that begin at an elite level to begin to bring in community members. So as you know, we're in the midst of some very challenging and potentially transformative times between the pandemic and the racial reckonings around the country, including a lot of activities in the cities that we studied, including Minneapolis, Portland, Oregon and Milwaukee. We would expect these collaborations founded under the principle that they are flexible, nimble, inclusive, and that they stand somewhat outside the constraints of both bureaucracy and politics, to possibly step up and have a strong voice and a real presence in their communities, around responses to the issues we're facing right now. Our fieldwork ended a few years ago, so we don't want to make any false statements about how these initiatives have been responding, but in some random informal checkups, we've seen a little bit less of this, at least in the public face of the collaborations.

Carolyn Riehl (00:37:18):

Again, the many statements about racial equity that you saw from businesses, from school systems, from non-profit organizations during the summer, sometimes took on the character of a performative nature, sort of obligatory statement, but those aren't even present on the websites of some of the collaborations we started. So it certainly may be that they're addressing these issues and really in the midst of them. We do know of some initiatives that have really stepped up, especially around the pandemic and the closing of school to really ramp up and change the way they were helping school systems deliver education, and make sure that the support services were getting to the children who needed them, but it remains to be seen what will happen on next. So let's turn to Jeff to discuss a little bit of what we might be able to anticipate.

Jeff Henig (00:38:19):

So in the end, we concluded that the goals presented by advocates of cross-sector collaboration and collective impact in particular generally, are a grander than what most local collaboratives are able to implement and promise impacts, maybe more ambitious than they can actually muster. They're engaged in many tangible activities, but those are constrained by available resources, by personnel and the continuation of competing interests within the community. Overall, we concluded at least when we were done that the collective impact idea retains appeal, but it seems to function more effectively as a broad framework than as an explicit formula or prescriptive model for how to achieve and make impact through collaboration. We concluded also that collaboration efforts at times, may serve better as a bulwark against unproductive intramural sniping among local actors and backsliding in tough times, rather than as a powerful driving force for comprehensive systemic change.

Jeff Henig (00:39:39):

That said, we came away generally impressed by much of what we saw. The groups we studied were actively wrestling with ongoing challenges, and trying to find the right balance themselves between high expectations and realistic ones, adjusting some of their initial ideas and decisions about collaboration and governance and measurement and funding, as they learn from experience about what works and what's problematic in their local context. As they've been implemented, a lot of the current collaborations show promise for creating the new venue to bring in local partners who have historically not necessarily cooperated in the past, and even been in conflict as Michael talked about in a couple of instances, notably Milwaukee.

Jeff Henig (00:40:33):

Importantly, most collaboration seemed to have helped calm down as Michael also said, they often contentious urban education politics in these communities and establish enough stability for partners to move forward. So for a number of reasons, we consider it wise to give this sector more time to mature, but they do face a major challenges, and I'll finish with those. First, moving beyond supporting school systems to strengthening them. Michael said a lot about this, so I won't say much more other than to say that that school systems have been under a lot of pressure in the last 20 years, first under a heavy accountability pressure from the nation and the states. Now, perhaps as that was easing up somewhat the new array of challenges presented by the pandemic.

Jeff Henig (00:41:34):

Ultimately, we do believe that success will require tackling direct instructional improvements, and so far that's something as we've said, that's been done in only a limited way. Secondly, as we went around in these communities, we heard some critical voices expressing frustration with what they considered to be the dominance of business, and civic leaders to the exclusion of more marginal vice groups, as Carolyn said, most of their local collaboratives and the national leaders to their credit have acknowledged this as a weak spot. But our work predated the national focus on systemic racism as catalyzed by Black Lives Matter, as well as the backlash against the demonstrations as voiced and led by President Trump, and exactly how that will play out in these local arenas we're not sure, but we suspect that there will be continued challenges for even well-intentioned efforts to overcome skepticism and resistance, both at the elite and the local level.

Jeff Henig (00:42:46):

Third, philanthropic support has been important for all of our cases, but foundations often shift the foci of their enthusiasm and the spigots of foundation dollars can close without substantial alternative sources of funding being developed in their place. There can be some very real challenges, and that leads us to a fourth point, which is most of the collaborations have been wary about engaging in direct advocacy for policy change or high pressure advocacy for greater and more direct funding for their efforts. But more sustainable suspending on cross-sector collaboration probably is important, but it puts these collaborations in a new arena. It puts them in an arena and a political landscape that's densely populated with readily mobilizable, well-connected interest groups that are oriented around protecting their existing resource flows.

Jeff Henig (00:43:50):

So we do anticipate that the collaborations may find a greater need to push for public funding to institutionalize their efforts, but they'll need political muscle to do that, not simply good data that supports their claims of impact. Finally, I'll end on this and this may be things that I think that we'd love to hear some of your views on, but there's the question of how sharp changes at the political and policy environment at the national level will trickle down to the local level, and how the collaborations will adjust. That includes things we've already alluded to, the Black Lives Matters protests, the pandemic.

Jeff Henig (00:44:41):

We all share some uncertainty about what's coming in the next two, three weeks in terms of national elections. Those kinds of national forces create powerful winds, and we're not sure whether all or even most of the local collaborations we studied have deep enough roots necessarily to withstand the buffeting, although we're hopeful that they can, and we're interested in hearing what you all think about that. I think on that, we'll conclude other than to sort of point you in the direction of the publications that we have produced that are available for free, and we'll take whatever questions Ian's harvested.

Carolyn Riehl (00:45:27):

I just like to add that we did try to focus on some of the more important questions about the missions, the overall strategy, some of the challenges that these collaborations experience doing this work. We also did a lot of looking and observing and talking to people about some of the technical issues of just developing the operational structures putting people together, developing communication structures, those kinds of logics. A senior official at STRIVE said in a context I was in the other day, "2020 is not the year to be worrying about the technical matters. We have a lot of big questions that we're looking at in this country right now." Eventually, if you want to do something, you have to address those, and our reports have a lot of information about how these eight collaboration's actually went about setting themselves up and getting their work done.

Ian Faigley (00:46:37):

Thank you all so much. There's a number of really questions that have come in through the chat. We can also unmute lines if anyone would like to verbally address their question. All you need to do is just raise your hand and I can unmute you, but we'll start with a few of the questions that have come through in the chat. I'll address one from Bridget Rodriguez with Ed Redesign. Were there any policy recommendations to help support collaborative action?

Jeff Henig (00:47:10):

Well, I'll count on Carolyn and Michael to jump in. I think probably the strongest, but somewhat implied recommendation that we offer was the need to address the more permanent channels of funding for these organizations. They've thrived initially on a general enthusiasm in the philanthropic community. The philanthropic community, as I said before, it can be fickle and they're facing a whole range of other pressures from the pandemic and other sources. So finding some levers to tap these efforts into either existing funding, streams, or creating new ones would be one policy implication.

Michael Rebell (00:48:11):

Yeah. I guess like to add to that, that the whole question of funding is taking on a much more serious tones as we're dealing with this COVID-19 situation, because not only are most school districts finding that their resource needs are expanding because in many cases doing remote learning and in-person learning at the same time, all the extra materials you need, laptops, et cetera, to distribute to students. But at the same time many of the states and cities are seeing their revenue sources contracting, and we may be heading for a permanent storm of funding disaster. I would say though, on the other hand it is impressive how that perfect storm has not fully landed yet in most places. There seems to be a greater awareness that we have to do the maximum and the we meaning all the municipal officials, legislatures, governors, and school districts to at least hold the line.

Michael Rebell (00:49:23):

Probably, after the worst of the pandemic situation is over in six months a year, whatever it is truly work together to find the resources. Here, I think the Black Lives Matter, the increased arousal about

the need to overcome systemic racism and deal with the great needs of many of our students coming from areas of poverty and various students of color, et cetera that there's going to be a real political pressure to do more for these students and these students were the focus of many of the collaboratives work. So I wouldn't be overly pessimistic about the future funding climate. It may actually present a lot of new opportunities, but as Jeff indicated, that's a major area. Philanthropy is not going to carry these collaboratives and the school districts forward in the future, and it's really got to be public funding, and how that's going to develop is going to be a major factor.

Ian Faigley (00:50:39):

Great. I'll now unmute Christopher Locke, who I believe has a question. So Christopher, you should be unmuted now. We'll give him a moment. Another question came in through the chat from Fritz Edelstein, talking about Nashville. You mentioned that it's unique among the sample and that it's a city county government and the school systems boundaries are solely within the county. You mentioned that this kind of unique structure, enhanced Nashville success. Alignment Nashville started back in the '90s and its success was in part due to the role of the mayor, along with the cooperation of the NGOs and the school district. Seed money was provided to begin the process, and it provided an example for others, and it brought everyone to the table and it provided a coordinated effort rather than everyone doing their own thing. Do you know of any other cities or school districts that are doing or taking similar approaches as Nashville?

Michael Rebell (00:51:44):

Well, basically what we found is every one of these collaboratives did have a unique approach. The context really made a difference. So I'm not sure that any other city or county was exactly doing what Nashville was doing, but many of them did work at cooperative arrangements with the school district, as I mentioned, and as Mr. Edelstein undoubtedly knows, Alignment Nashville actually because of great interest in the way they had successfully undertaken many of these approaches, they formed an alliance called Alignment USA, which has about a dozen other districts that are following the Alignment Nashville model. Of course, we didn't have time to get into the whole question of national networks, but STRIVE, which Carolyn mentioned that has 50 odd cities and counties aligned in, in their approach to things. Say Yes, which went into Buffalo also is in four or five other cities now. These national networks have had a real impact in spreading patterns that have proved successful in some cities to the others.

Ian Faigley (00:53:12):

Great. The next question comes from Matthew Miller. The question is, did your research indicate that the collective impact initiatives are more successful at creating a new social support structure more than an education impact? I think Carolyn, we'll turn the floor over to you.

Carolyn Riehl (00:53:28):

Okay. So as we've been discussing, one of the founding ideas behind many of these collaborations was to get away from the polarity of those two things, education change and reform, and the provision of social supports. So that really was present in most of the collaborations where there was an acknowledgement that we're not going to see educational change until students have access to the supports and services that they need to help them get ready for school and be ready to learn. Many of the collaboration's started by addressing that question of the wraparound services, and for the reasons Michael laid out skirted around some of the skittishness that school districts had about turning over some of their core work to a collaboration about sharing resources. They were happy to obtain resources, not so happy to devote resources all the time.

Carolyn Riehl (00:54:36):

So most of the core initial work was in the area of social services, and that did seem to, as Michael and Jeff, and I have explained to calm down some of the problems and the tensions in the areas, and to begin to help to build more trust between the school systems and even school systems and other agencies and the communities in the public. So it sort of opened up the space in a number of the cities for more cooperation. I think it's fair to give the system's time. I think Buffalo is a good example where the initial focus of Say Yes, Buffalo was really the wraparound services. As Buffalo finally got a superintendent that has had it been there more than a few years now, he has a good trusting relationship with Say Yes. They were able to start, began talking and doing things around after school and then summer school, and slowly move more into the core of the school district agenda.

Carolyn Riehl (00:55:50):

One of the just logistical problems, this was evident in Milwaukee. The meetings for the collaborative were held during the day. So teachers were not easily available to participate our school principals, and that's just a sort of simple structural barrier to involving school folks in these initiatives. On the other hand, there were in Milwaukee was a really large component to assist with early literacy that very much bore into the school. It was presented as a demonstration project and had quite a lot of success with the students that it impacted directly. The issue of scaling up because it was an expensive intervention model that was quite challenging. In cities like Portland, Portland's program, All Hands Raised is STRIVE initiative at the county level.

Carolyn Riehl (00:56:45):

So seven school districts were involved in the program. One of the key features of the program has been to involve those superintendents in real discussions, not just amongst themselves, but with community partners about the issues facing the separate districts. All Hands Raised did not begin by offering particular interventions. They wanted the school systems to come up with the interventions they wanted to try, and All Hands Raised has helped them develop demonstration projects, pilot projects. So there have been a variety of ways in which the collaborations have moved from a support system structure more closely into the educational core, but it's probably work that's going to need to take a number of years.

Ian Faigley (00:57:44):

We have a question from [Rob Schanberg 00:57:46] with Castle. He asks, you have on one of the slides reducing the reliance on philanthropic support. Can you please explain that further? In my experience with collective impact, there's a great need for philanthropic funding to kick off and sustain these types of collaboration. It's very rare that communities can sustain these efforts with the tax base. So can you...

Carolyn Riehl (00:58:12):

So I think two examples are in order, would be potentially helpful here. Say Yes Buffalo began with seed funding from the Say Yes to Education National Organization, and that money funded infrastructure for the central office operations of Say Yes, paid for the executive director and their staff and so on. But they had a strategy early on to find money in county and city budgets, not so much the school system but also state education money, to find money that was available through government sources to fund the wraparound services that they were providing. Some of their success on that depended on relationships. Say Yes hired as an Executive Director, David Rust, who had worked for the County and knew where the dollars were hiding and had good relationships with people.

Carolyn Riehl (00:59:16):

So they worked out some arrangements, for example, bringing in county child protective services dollars for social workers who became the workers placed in each of the schools in Buffalo. That started out an arrangement where those workers were constrained by the county provisions and budgets as to who could be on their caseload, and that caused some frustration for people. So using that government money, changed the delivery model a bit, but they made accommodations, they worked it out. So Buffalo was pretty successful in finding government dollars. The last time I talked with Dave Rust about that, he was as tentative and worried about the permanence of those arrangements is anybody using mostly philanthropic dollars.

Carolyn Riehl (01:00:15):

This is, I think why STRIVE has taken an aggressive stance in its network to work at the state. I'm not sure how much at the federal level, but definitely at the state level, to try and build a support for these kinds of initiatives in state budgets. They had some early success in Minnesota in getting some state level funding. Wisconsin has been doing a little bit in that area as well for Milwaukee, but this is really a new effort. I've been told that STRIVE has been pouring quite a lot of money into funding these policy advocacy initiatives and policy often means finding dollars.

Michael Rebell (01:01:01):

Yeah. Just one quick. Other example I give from our study, which is the NAS group in Minneapolis. They really got off the ground in a big way with a promise neighborhood grant from the federal government, which I think ran about five years. From the beginning the leadership, there was very conscious that the clock was ticking. The grant was going to run out in five years, and they had to establish themselves. One thing they were able to do picking up on Carolyn's theme, because they got more well known, they built alliances which included political alliances.

Michael Rebell (01:01:37):

By the last year or two of their tenure, they not only were getting philanthropic money, but even more important, they had also gotten themselves established in the state budget. So when the federal promise money, ran out, they got new state money. Let's hope that the state funding for these things is more stable and continues because for the long range future, if we don't have solid funding coming from the states, not only for the collaborators, but for the core school districts, then none of this is going to work out and funding is going to be a big issue in the future.

Rob Schanberg (01:02:15):

Hi, this is Rob Schanberg. Can you hear me?

Carolyn Riehl (01:02:18):

Yes.

Rob Schanberg (01:02:20):

So I was the one who posed that last question, and I agree with that notion that we need... I mean, it's all about finding a suitable funding, that's part of the system so that we are reducing our reliance on philanthropic support. But just to your example, the first example about, I think it was David Rust was the name that you had. So there was a person there, there was a person who had access to some money, a person who was interested. I don't think we can build a system based upon that. I've had experience in a couple of communities around collective action. I just wanted to make sure that there wasn't a message that our purpose overall is to reduce philanthropic funding. Also, I think that it's always going to be an essential part of sustaining these kinds of collaborations, because as your data shows, they're fragile and we need to continually be building them. That's going to take

philanthropic dollars to keep that backbone going. If you could comment on that as well, that would be great. Thank you for your workshop.

Carolyn Riehl (01:03:54):

So I think that is true. Jeff mentioned how foundations sometimes pivot in what their interests are. They sometimes like to grab onto the next new approach, the next big thing. But there also is a stream of what we might consider permanent, soft money that funds some of the things in our social structures and social communities. Some foundations do commit to long-term permanent support. In Milwaukee, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, says there's no exit strategy from this particular initiative. So I do think that if this is going to probably be a three-pronged approach, looking for that core base of stable foundation support, which might be more likely when the backbone organization is aligned with the foundation, also looking for more opportunistic philanthropic funding or funding from businesses, and then pursuing the government routes, and finding those hard dollars as well.

Ian Faigley (01:05:15):

Thank you very much. We've reached the top of the hour. I want to [inaudible 01:05:19] everybody's time. Thank you very much to Jeff, Carolyn and Michael, and thank you all for joining us today and have a wonderful afternoon.

Jeff Henig (01:05:29):

Thank you.

Carolyn Riehl (01:05:30):

Thank you.