THE READINESS PROJECTS

A unified effort supported by the Forum for Youth Investment, the National Urban League, and the American Institutes for Research

BUILD FORWARD TOGETHER CONVERSATION GUIDE

Over the past year and a half, we have seen growing efforts to address the inequities and issue exacerbated and laid bare by COVID and the racial reckonings. The scope and scale of the disruptions not just to learning, but to living, is beyond anything this country has experienced in recent history. But so are the opportunities to disrupt the status quo, and design and do better:

There is a broad commitment to build schools back better.

It is widely accepted that COVID and the surge of white nationalism have exposed gaps and inefficiencies that must be addressed in every setting and system where young people spend time. Many school, community, and government leaders are committed to not go back to "normal" and to use this disruption as an opportunity for positive change.

There are growing calls to more fully leverage community partners.

As weeks turned into months, the contributions that youth, families, and community organizations made got more attention. These efforts are admittedly uneven, and not present in every community. But they demonstrate the wealth of learning opportunities in young people's lives that, if recognized, could be resourced and leveraged.

There is increased recognition that tweens, teens and young adults all have different needs.

Efforts to support families and offer some in-person classes have focused on younger students and students with special needs. The real-time impact on teens and the near-term impact on the workforce is now gaining attention.

There is growing interest in leveraging summers.

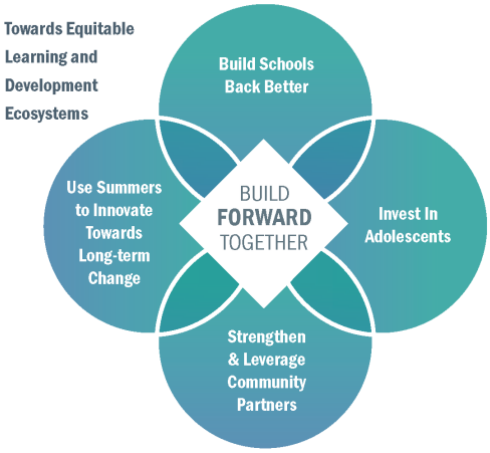
The flexibilities that exist in summer provide opportunity to use summers (not just this summer) as a low-stakes testing ground to document, test, and scale different ways to leverage school, family, and community assets in support of accelerated learning and development that can help us build forward together post-COVID.

NOW IS THE TIME TO BUILD FORWARD TOGETHER

The momentum coming out of the disruption presents a tangible opportunity to challenge and support school districts and community partners to create equitable learning and development ecosystems optimize all learning settings and approaches and recognize the power of all committed adults as we unleash the potential of all learners.

This conversation guide is designed to support school and community leaders who are ready to take a hard look at the inefficiencies and inequities that can be minimized when they begin to work as interdependent systems fully centered on youth and families.

No matter which of the Build Forward Together goals is the right leverage point for your community to accelerate action, this guide will help you identify ways to think and talk, see and hear, act and react differently so that you can continue to blur the lines between school, community partners, and families once the pandemic ends.



BALANCING ACTION AND REFLECTION

As we look toward the fall, it seems increasingly clear that schools will return to predominantly in-person learning. Across 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic and racial reckoning required schools, community programs, and families to step up with quick and immediate action and reaction. This often meant putting families at the center, schools and community organizations partnering in deeper and more meaningful ways and beginning to reimagine and strengthen learning and development.

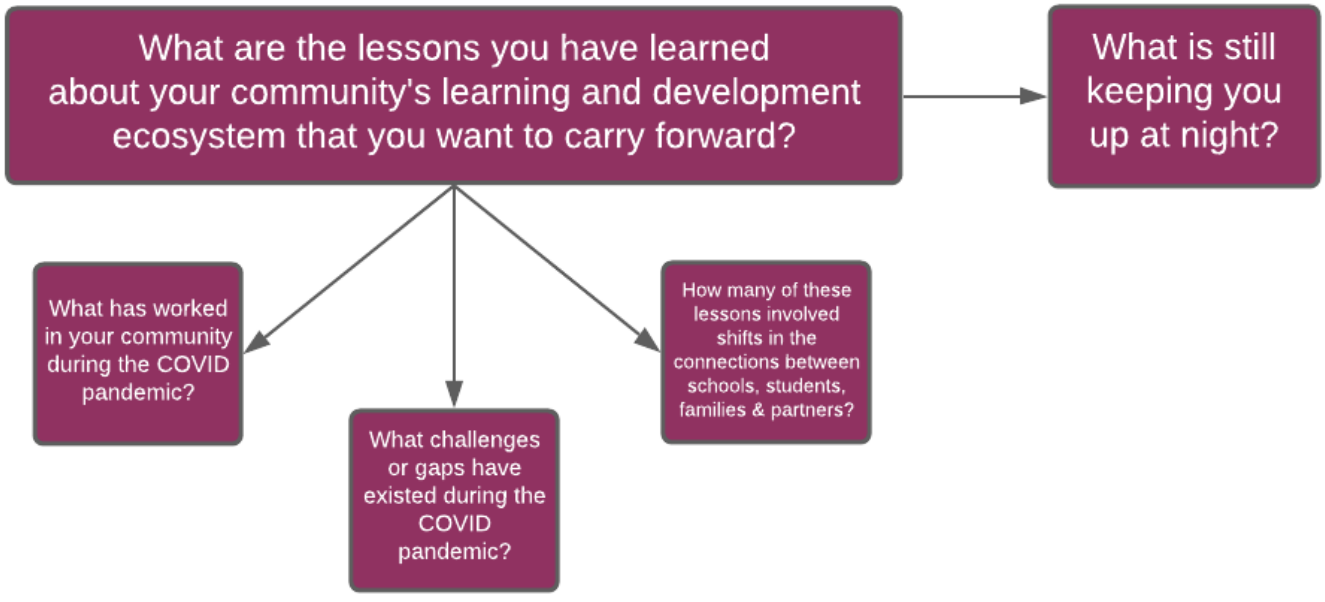
But there has been limited time to pause and reflect on lessons learned, what actions have potential for longer-term change within the education and other youth-serving systems, and what opportunities lie ahead to unify across these systems to create learning and development ecosystems. Now is the time to start to take stock - to acknowledge shifts and understand roadblocks; to take a hard look at the ways school, family, and community leaders worked or did not work well together; and to hear from young people, families, and front-line staff.

As you begin to build forward together, we encourage you to take time to carefully reflect. Consider bringing together a community team of stakeholders from schools, community organizations, government, families, and young people themselves. Or consider conducting interviews with key members of your community to answer the questions in the conversation guides that follow.

This guide provides two paths for reflection – general reflection on the action of the last year and a half, or reflection using the Build Forward Together goals and strategies as a guide. Each is valuable and may provide critical insight into your community's path to build forward together.

General Reflection of Community Action

Capture and carefully consider your current state and lessons learned from the COVID and the racial reckonings. High level general reflection will allow your community team to capture a wide range of lessons learned from the last year and a half about what is possible in terms of supporting learning and development. This might be the right place to start if you are convening a new, or otherwise disconnected, group of stakeholders.



Reflection Using the Build Forward Together Framework to Guide You

Based on your lessons learned, consider how your community is best situated to Build Forward Together and focus in on specific aligned questions to help you consider learning and future action.

The Build Forward Together goals are grounded in what we have been hearing from education and youth development leaders across the country:

- We must build schools back better with more intentional focus on learners' needs and the engagement of the wide range of learning and development supports in their community.
- The full range of actors in community spaces and places must be strengthened and leveraged.
- Summers should be used for innovation and inspiration, encouraging the kinds of creative, de-siloed solutions that are too often restricted during the traditional school year and school day.
- And now is the time to increase our attention and investments in adolescents, particularly as their daily lives and demands for change require an ecosystem approach.

While ultimately, all four goals must be attended to, every community's journey to Build Forward Together will look different. Your community's context, the nature of your partnerships, efforts already underway, and your lessons learned will guide you to a goal that serves as your starting or initial leverage point.

To help you consider where to begin, ask - *How can we build from the strengths of our work over the last year to help overcome our challenges in the future*? You might also consider doing a quick pulse check (poll, dot voting, etc.) with stakeholders to identify which goal(s) they feel makes the most sense to focus in on first.

Within the Build Forward Together goal, reflection questions will guide you to consider each of the Build Forward Together strategies.

- **Build Back Smarter** — Acknowledge learners' losses while affirming learning ability. Optimize learning environments while prioritizing reconnection.
- **Build Back Broader** — Support complementary learning delivery systems and modalities. Invest in program-level staff and city-level coordinating structures.
- **Build Back Bolder** — Focus on how, why, and with whom learning happens. Respect and diversify learners' experiences and contexts and adults' expertise and power.
- **Build Understanding of Inequity** — Equity is the goal, but inequity is the reality. Acknowledging skepticism, take time to get baseline data right in order to truly cover all bases.
- **Build on Adolescents' Determination** — Embrace adolescent risk taking and leverage the brain science. Create and support alternative success pathways for all adolescents to be competent, connected, confident contributors.

Based on your target goal, use the conversation maps that follow to continue to dig in on where you are and where you want to be as you Build Forward Together.

Within each goal you will see one set of questions is labeled START HERE. This starting point for discussion is based on strategy and goal alignment. After the START HERE questions, you may choose to move to action planning for that strategy, or you may choose to move through the questions for all of the strategies.

After each set of questions, make preliminary notes about potential next steps. We've provided a Reflection Conversation Note Catcher following the conversations guides.

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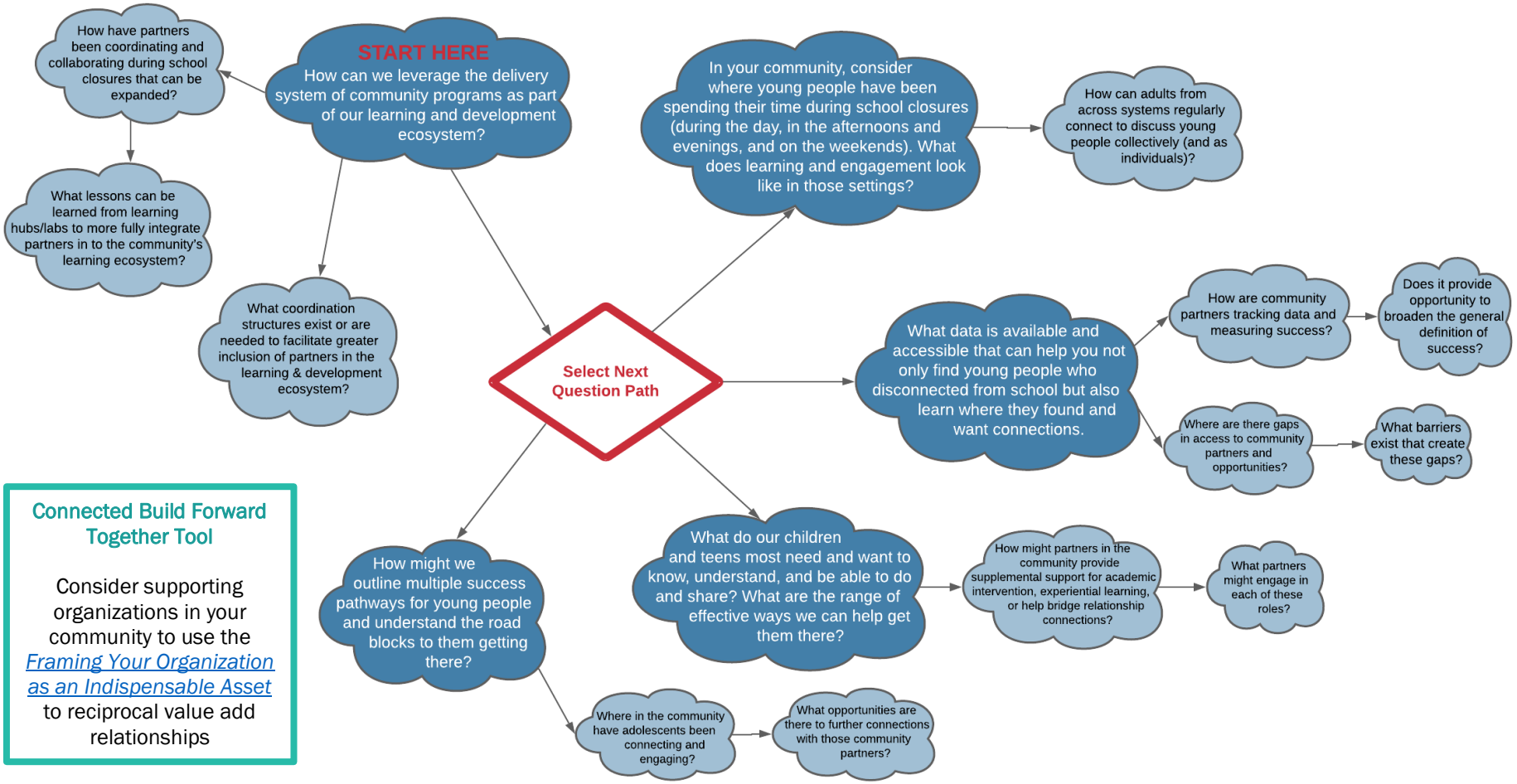
Conversation Map – Strengthen & Leverage Community Partners

In your community, take time to take stock of your systems of coordination. Identify areas of collaboration that can be formalized or expanded. Identify areas of duplication that can be minimized. Consider how data, funding, and other resources can be successfully shared and blended.



Connected Build Forward Together Tool

Consider supporting organizations in your community to use the *Framing Your Organization as an Indispensable Asset* to reciprocal value add relationships

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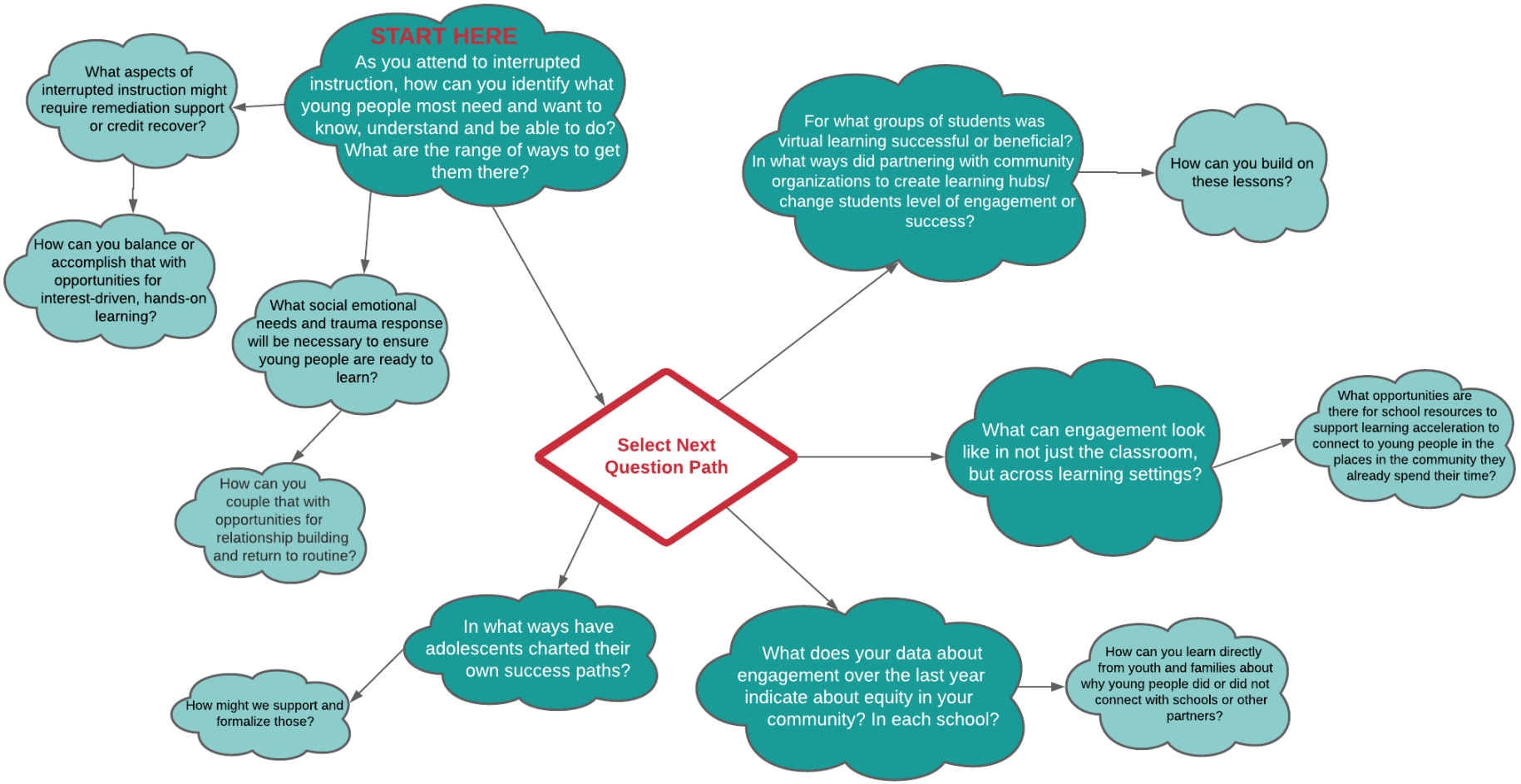
Conversation Map – Build Schools Back Better

In your community, consider what it means for schools to not go back to normal as we once knew it. Leverage the science of learning and development to take an asset-based approach to reopening and reengaging young people.



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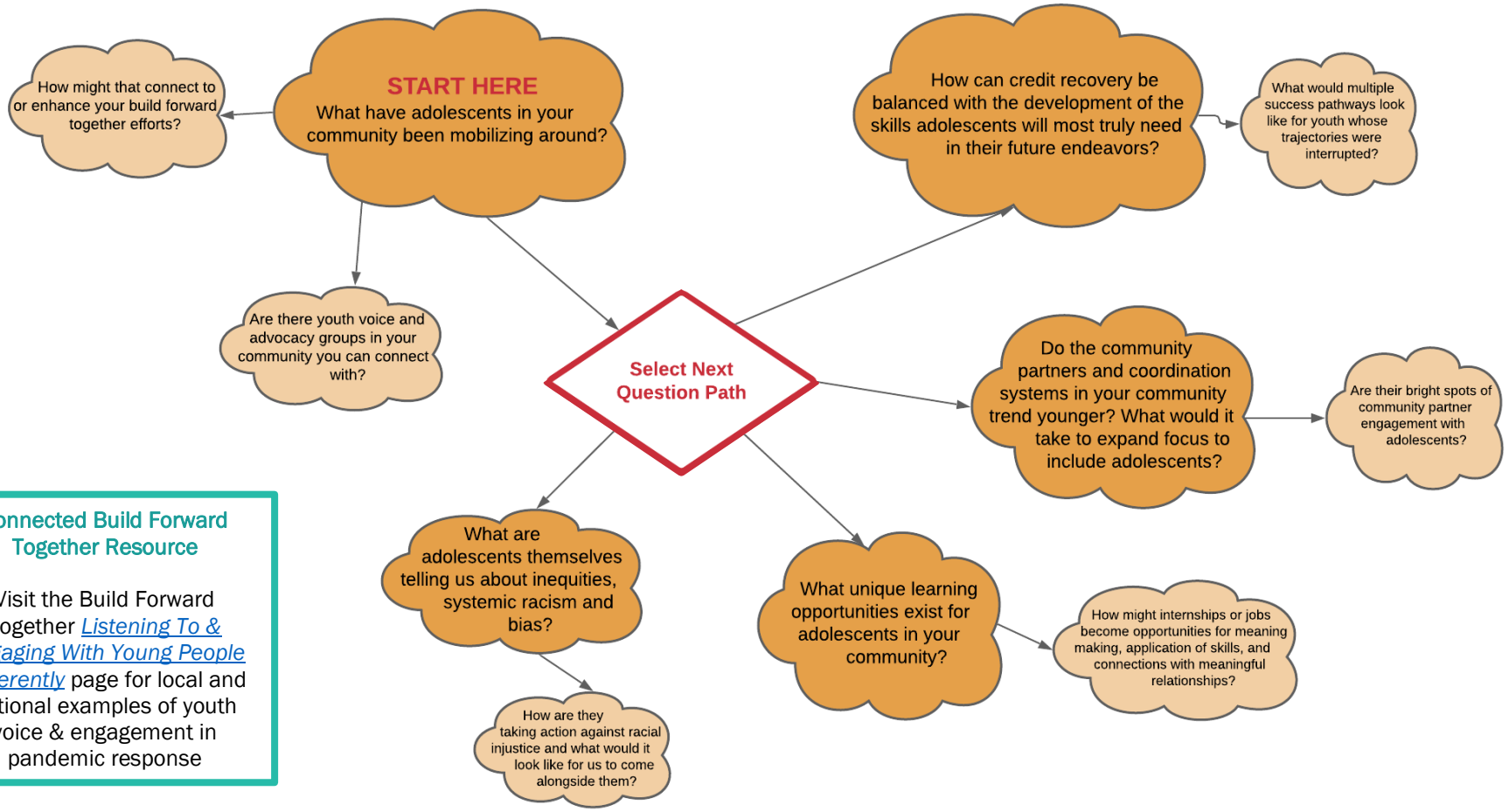
Conversation Map – Invest in Adolescents

In your community, consider how to engage the power and determination of adolescents utilizing brain science. Outline multiple success pathways for young people and understand the roadblocks to them getting there.



Connected Build Forward Together Resource

Visit the Build Forward Together *Listening To & Engaging With Young People Differently* page for local and national examples of youth voice & engagement in pandemic response

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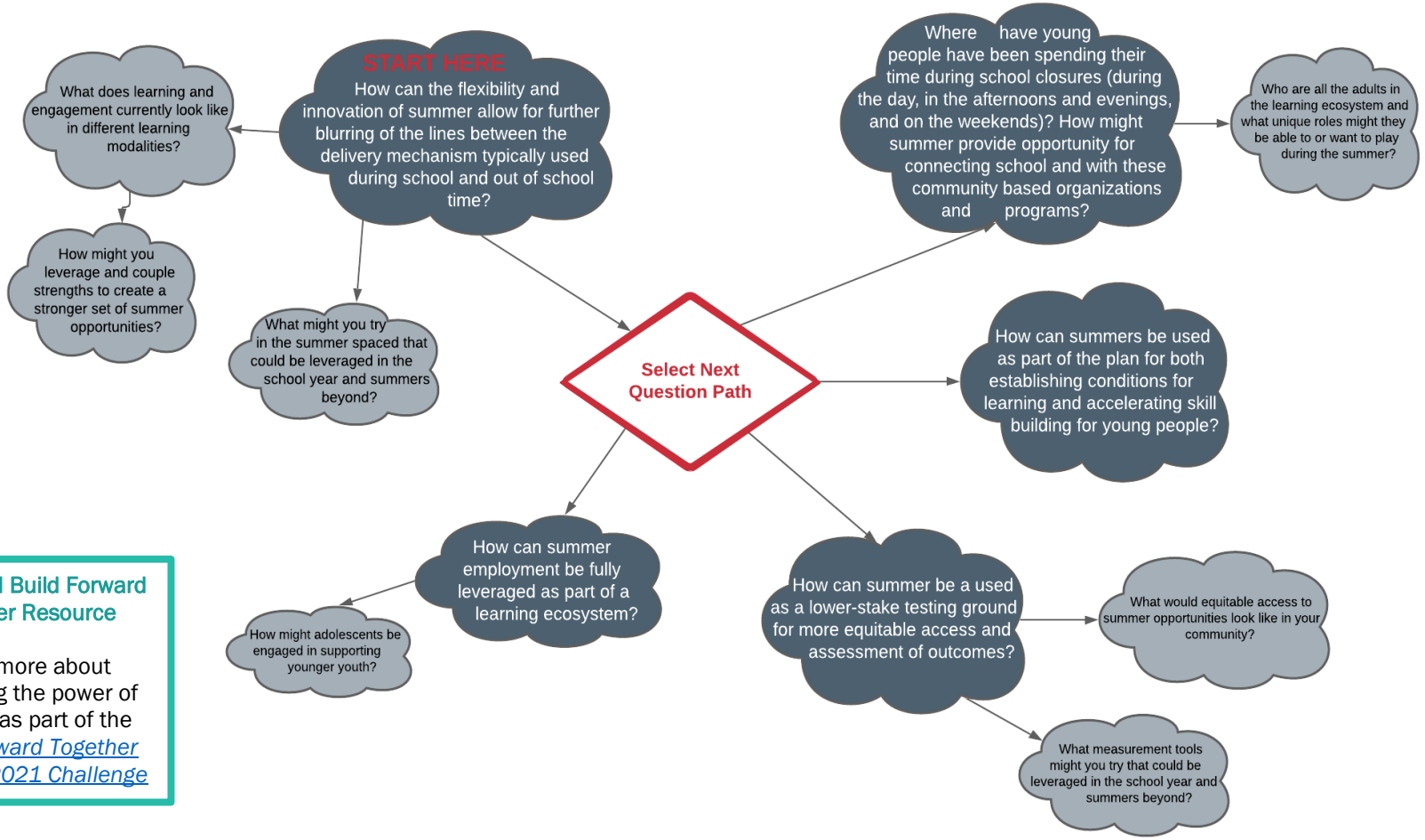
Conversation Map – Use Summers to Innovate Towards Long Term Change

In your community, consider how you can use summer as a low-stakes testing ground to document, test, and scale different ways to build forward together. Prioritize children most challenged by the pandemic and current conditions who are also the least likely to have resources for summer programs.



Connected Build Forward Together Resource

Learn more about leveraging the power of summer as part of the *Build Forward Together Summer 2021 Challenge*

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REFLECTION CONVERSATION NOTE CATCHER

Conversation Guide:	
Conversation Participants:	

Key Ideas & Reflections	Potential Next Steps
♦	♦
♦	♦
♦	♦
♦	
♦	
♦	
♦	

Conversation Guide:	
Conversation Participants:	

Key Ideas & Reflections	Potential Next Steps
♦	♦
♦	♦
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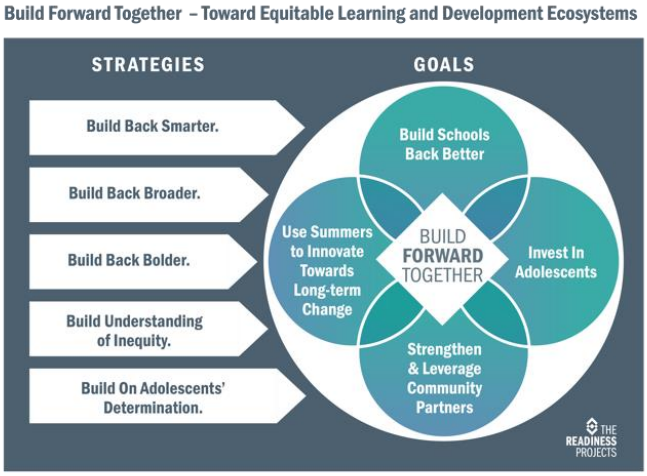
GLOSSARY

Adolescents

Grounded in *The Core Science of Adolescent Development* from The Center for the Developing Adolescent for the Readiness Projects, "adolescents" refers to youth and young adults between the ages of 10 and 25.

Build Forward Together Goals & Strategies



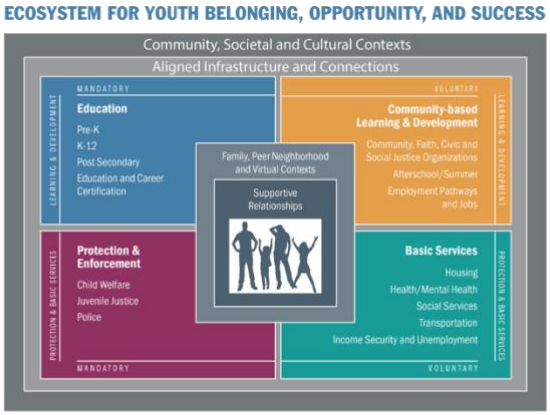
Build Forward Together Goals

- **Build Schools Back Better** – Intentionally focus on learners needs and the engagement of the wide range of learning and development supports in their community.
- **Strengthen & Leverage Community Partners** – Consider all adults and all settings so the full range of actors in community spaces and places are engaged and resourced to support learning and development
- **Use Summer to Innovate Towards Long-term Change** – Use summer for innovation and inspiration, encouraging the kinds of creative, de-siloed solutions that are too often restricted during the traditional school year and school day.
- **Invest In Adolescents** - Increase attention and investments in adolescents particularly, as their daily lives and demands for change require an ecosystem approach.

Build Forward Together Strategies

- **Build Back Smarter** — Acknowledge learners' losses while affirming learning ability. Optimize learning environments while prioritizing reconnection.
  - Stop using the term "learning loss."
  - Stop making more instructional time the go-to remedy.
  - Optimize learning experiences, even while prioritizing reconnection.
  - Resist deficit thinking.
- **Build Back Broader** — Support complementary learning delivery systems and modalities. Invest in program-level staff and city-level coordinating structures.
  - See community organizations as complementary delivery systems, not just second shift responders.
  - Embrace virtual environments as permanent assets.
  - Create coordinating roles and structures that cut across delivery systems, elevate community, and connect to families.
- **Build Back Bolder** — Focus on how, why, and with whom learning happens. Respect and diversify learners' experiences and contexts and adults' expertise and power.
  - Shift the focus from where and when learning happens to how and why.
  - Diversify learners' experiences. Acknowledge adults' expertise and power.
  - Respect and connect to young people's learning and development ecosystems.
  - Double down on investments to embolden and connect adults in the "mesosystem."
- **Build Understanding of Inequity** — Equity is the goal, but inequity is the reality. Acknowledging skepticism, take time to get baseline data right in order to truly cover all bases.
  - Get the right baselines. Cover all the bases.
  - Acknowledge the skepticism.
  - Work from the margins.
- **Build on Adolescents' Determination** — Embrace adolescent risk taking and leverage the brain science. Create and support alternative success pathways for all adolescents to be competent, connected, confident contributors.
  - Embrace adolescent risk taking, leverage the brain science.
  - Commit to the age group, not just the enrolled student body.
  - Address critical roadblocks and affirm multiple success pathways.

Learning & Development Ecosystem



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is one of the most widely used theories and most frequently adapted models that described the components of the learning and development ecosystem. This graphic – while based upon Bronfenbrenner – emphasizes the "systems" that are part of the ecosystem, a complex array of interconnected education, community-based learning & development, basic services, and protection & enforcement systems that young people and their families navigate. An ecosystems approach to learning and development considers: *All Learners. All Adults. All Settings. All Approaches. All Systems.*

Science of Learning & Development

According to the SoLD Alliance, "The science of learning and development refers to the emerging and growing body of knowledge illuminating how young people best learn and develop. It brings together leading scientists and education experts from a variety of fields —including neuroscience, epigenetics, learning science, social and emotional learning, early childhood development, the science of adversity, and human development—to identify and articulate essential insights that can inform how best to transform education systems, so that all young people thrive."