Design Principles for Community-Based Settings

Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action

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The Forum for Youth Investment

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In partnership with Learning Policy Institute and Turnaround for Children

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EXTERNAL REVIEW

Design Principles for Community-Based Settings Advisor Group

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A RENEWED PURPOSE FOR LEARNING IN COMMUNITY-BASED SETTINGS

Imagine a world in which every child's life is a succession of positive opportunities for development—opportunities through which a child can come to know who they are and discover the wide range of possibilities for what they can become. Imagine different types of learning settings in which those kinds of opportunities are also intentionally built and optimized, regardless of zip code. Imagine, too, that all adults dedicated to the well-being of children and youth think that it is their job to identify each child's talents, interests, and aspirations and align them with learning and development opportunities designed to promote them and build on them to create new competencies.

This is not the world in which we currently we live, but it is one that we can now begin to create. Building on new knowledge from the science of learning and development—coupled with a commitment to advancing equity for all learners—families, schools, and community partners can bring these opportunities to bear for every young person.

The need is great. Even as the United States has led the world in so many areas, it remains a country of dramatically widening inequalities, with many children living in poverty and with significant adversities of many kinds, including food and housing insecurity, exposure to increasing gun and racial violence, lack of access to health and mental health services and to educational, employment and engagement opportunities that build competencies and connections in ways that contribute to agency and identity.

Throughout 2020, the combination of COVID-19, the economic recession, and increased racial reckoning have further revealed the systemic inequities and injustices built into our current systems. The dramatic inequalities in the conditions of living and learning in America have been exposed. These events have also demonstrated the resilience and resourcefulness of families and of the community-based organizations that work with them, in concert with and independently of schools.

During the pandemic, community-based organizations became first responders for many young people and their families as they navigated rapidly shifting realities—in numerous communities staying open for essential workers when schools were closed, checking in with families regularly to ensure basic needs were met, and continuing or strengthening partnerships with schools on everything from space to food delivery to complementary and enriching learning opportunities. At a time of increased disconnection, the adults and young people working in community-based organizations and networks demonstrated not only their nimbleness to respond but also the relationship-driven nature of their approach. Voluntary by design, they intentionally blend a combination of interest-based learning, safe and engaging group dynamics, and problem-solving around individual and collective needs. This is what they do naturally. If it's not a safe, engaging and relevant experience, young people and families will look elsewhere.

The pandemic also underscored the relative vulnerability of these community-based organizations and of their workforce. While many were able to stay open, social distance requirements led to smaller groups sizes, more limited use of buildings, and related reductions in the workforce. These organizations—especially those that are embedded in the community and have staff and volunteers from the community—can be experienced as safer, more culturally relevant and more engaging for young people than the major public systems that they must interact with regularly, including schools.

The year further exposed how institutionalized racism and classism are baked into the design of the U.S. education system itself. This system reinforces beliefs about who has potential and who is worthy of opportunity that are false, harmful, and discriminatory on both scientific and moral grounds, and contributes to growing inequality in our society. Community-based learning settings are driven to be more equitable because they have been created to support the interests, reflect the cultures, and understand the experiences of our children and youth. Especially for groups that have been repeatedly marginalized, this stands in stark contrast

to the experiences that they have had in our public education system, as well as other public systems. We can't expect a system that was not designed for equity to rapidly transform to embrace it.[1] We need to not only acknowledge but strengthen and center leaders from the community—not just as potential partners, but as critical shapers of the solution. Why not start the transformation from the outside this time?

The inequities shaping and challenging our children's futures before the coronavirus, heightened by anti-Black and other forms of racial violence, have been dramatically amplified by these concurrent and devastating events. These forces cry out for a redesign and reimagining of all the systems that support our children and families and educate and prepare our youth. The situation facing our country demands that we use the major disruptions of 2020 as an empowering stimulus for transformational societal, educational, and economic change— defined by the goals of social justice, multidimensional equity—and the opportunity for each and every young person to thrive. Just as disruption sparks change in natural ecosystems, we must respond to these incredible disruptions across the humanly constructed ecosystems of learning and development.

THE OPPORTUNITY WE FACE

As schools continue to re-open and we move towards our next "new normal," we must all resist the temptation to go back to business as usual. The softening of the walls that occurred "**when out of school time became all of the time**" forced families, educators, community practitioners and learners themselves to adapt and see each other in different ways. The next few years offer an incredible, unprecedented opportunity to build upon this new awareness to position and strengthen the diverse range of community-based organizations and programs that became even more visible during COVID-19. We must build forward together—intentionally leveraging the flexibility and complementary assets of these community settings in support learning and development.[2]

Developmental and learning science tell an optimistic story about what all young people are capable of. There is burgeoning scientific knowledge about the biologic systems that govern human life, including the systems of the human brain. Researchers who are studying the brain's structure, wiring, and metabolism are documenting the deep extent to which brain growth and life experiences are interdependent and malleable. (See "Foundational Science of Learning and Development Research" for the key articles and reports that form the basis of this work.) Because researchers know so much more about the brain and development than they did when the 20th-century U.S. education system was designed, we can now use this knowledge to not only redesign that system, but acknowledge and affirm a healthy learning and development ecosystem that fully acknowledges the role of families and communities as instrumental places for engaged learning. As learning is not simply content mastery or memorization but, ultimately, about meaning making—connecting new information and experiences to those that have come before—an awareness of what young people are experiencing in the broader ecosystem is essential. As schools across the country tackle the challenge of creating more equitable opportunities for learning, for making meaning in ways that connected to community and culture, they are acknowledging the value of completely rethinking their role within the ecosystem.

This playbook suggests a set of design principles that were developed by a group of educators, practitioners, scientists, and parents, building on the knowledge we have today and the contributions of many in the field to nurture innovations, new models, and new enabling policies. These principles are already being applied in places where innovative approaches to learning have taken root. The companion playbook for schools—**Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action**—lifts up recommendations for both structures and practices as well as powerful examples of how these design principles are currently manifested in leading lights across the country. The playbook for schools aims to promote the scaling of these structures and practices so that all schools—not just the highly resourced or highly innovative—are fully manifesting these Guiding Principles for Whole Child Design.

In this playbook, we explore how these principles are the nonnegotiable starting points for community-based settings, including how these principles are being explicitly used to engage and validate learners who have been marginalized or "othered" by the traditional education system. Paralleling the schools playbook, we include an overview of the Guiding Principles for Whole Child Design and individual sections exploring each principle. (See Appendix A for a full description of how the design principles were co-created.) This playbook also offers framing for how to think about these design principles in the context of the diverse structures and complex array of programs, organizations and institutions operating in the "community" space. This includes both a typology for community-based settings and a comparison of this somewhat idiosyncratic array of settings to the more recognizable features and factors of the public education system. With the aim of promoting a more healthy learning and development ecosystem co-created by young people and adults across family, school and community settings, we close with a discussion of the power of partnerships.

At their foundation, the design principles are intended to advance the following goals for youth learning and development (see Appendix B for a more in-depth treatment of the goals and their embedded components):

- Learners can think critically and creatively to solve complex problems.

- Learners deeply understand content and can apply their knowledge beyond the classroom.

- Learners are self-aware and engage meaningfully with others.

- Learners hold a positive sense of identity, self-potential, purpose, and direction.

- Learners make healthy life choices.

- Learners are empathetic, ethical, and proactive in contributing to the welfare of their communities.

The desired result of these dual playbooks is to support increasingly robust innovations, new collaborations aligned with the resources for positive growth found in young people's communities and cultures, and a commitment to the reimagining and redesign of our education and learning systems in both formal and informal learning settings.

INTENDED AUDIENCES FOR THIS PLAYBOOK

If you are reading this as a creator of community-based learning opportunities, think about how you are elevating these design principles in the particular places and spaces that you are creating for young people. How have you structured and combined the characteristics of your adults, your young people and your particular setting in ways that take these guiding principles of equitable whole child design into account. Also, use this playbook to help you think through the things that you have in common with your counterparts throughout the community, and ways that you can lift up these practices in your partnerships with schools and other systems.

If you are reading this as a K-12 educator, this playbook can help you better understand the extensive diversification of community partners. It can help you explore where different partners are coming from, what their starting points are, and the particular components/ingredients that are part of their design—so that you can more readily identify how they complement what you are working to create inside of your school as well as how you can draw upon their expertise in your own transformation efforts.

In addition, you can use this playbook as a way to see the range of experiences that your school is offering in the more flexible spaces and places beyond the academically focused classroom (e.g., the ball field, the choir room, youth leadership, the library, the cafeteria, the playground, the camp site). As you think about the many staff and volunteers in your school building that are from the community and frequently also play similar roles in community settings, this playbook can help you identify and lift up the range of roles and approaches that they are taking to engage young people in transformative, personalized, empowering, and culturally affirming ways.

ROADMAP TO THE PLAYBOOK

In this playbook you will find:

- Overview of the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design

- An Exploration of Community-Based Settings, including:
  - ▶ Applying Design Principles in Diverse Settings
  - ▶ A Typology of Community-Based Settings
  - ▶ Common Elements that Vary Across Schools & Community Settings

- The Guiding Principles - Chapters that discuss the key principles and practices related to each essential component of whole child design.
  - ▶ Positive Developmental Relationships
  - ▶ Environments Filled with Safety and Belonging
  - ▶ Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development
  - ▶ Development of Skills, Habits, and Mindsets
  - ▶ Integrated Support Systems

- Levers of Change: Enabling Conditions to Accelerate the Implementation of Equitable Whole Child Design Across the Learning Ecosystem

KEY TERMS

Learning and Development Ecosystem: The many learning and development settings (e.g., homes, classrooms, cafeterias, gyms, playgrounds, clubs, maker spaces, workplaces) throughout the range of community settings (e.g., schools, non-profit community organizations, faith and civic organizations, libraries, recreation centers, businesses) that work collaboratively to support the whole child.

Whole Child Design: An approach to designing learning and development settings that calls for the policies, practices, and relationships established across a learning and development ecosystem ensure that each child, in each school, in each community, is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design: Five research-based essentials of equitable conditions for learning, development, and thriving.

Design Principles: The implementation strategies associated with each of the five guiding principles.

Robust Equity: Robust equity involves individual and collective thriving across every life domain both in the moment and over time. Robust equity includes but goes beyond fairness, which is a basic component of most definitions of equity. In addition to fairness robust equity includes eight elements; inclusivity, wholeness, sufficiency, high success standards, opportunity, agency, quality outcomes as a measure fairness, and multidimensional measurement.

Community-Based Learning and Development Settings: The myriad of community partners that work independently, with each other, and with schools to support learning and development in diverse settings throughout the community.

FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Developmental and learning science tell an optimistic story about what all young people are capable of. There is burgeoning scientific knowledge about the biologic systems that govern human life, including the systems of the human brain. Researchers who are studying the brain's structure, wiring, and metabolism are documenting the deep extent to which brain growth and life experiences are interdependent and malleable.

Three papers synthesizing this knowledge base form the basis of the design principles for community-based settings presented here. For those seeking access to the research underlying this work, these papers are publicly available.

- Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. *Applied Developmental Science*, 23(4), 307–337. **https://doi.org /10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649**.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B. J., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97–140. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791**.

- Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(1), 6–36. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650**.

OVERVIEW OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EQUITABLE WHOLE CHILD DESIGN*

Adapted from Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action, 2021

Emerging science tells an optimistic story about the potential of all learners. There is burgeoning knowledge about the biological systems that govern development, including deeper understandings of brain structure and wiring and its connections to other systems and the external world. This research indicates that brain development and life experiences are interdependent and malleable—that is, the settings and conditions individuals are exposed to and immersed in affect how they grow throughout their lives.

With this knowledge about the brain and development, coupled with a growing knowledge base from multi-disciplinary research, there is an opportunity to design learning systems in which all individuals are able to take advantage of high-quality opportunities for transformative learning and development. The situation facing our country today—sharp and growing economic inequality, ongoing racial violence, the physical and psychological toll of the pandemic—underscores the need to enable societal and educational transformations that advance social justice and the opportunity to thrive for each and every young person.

Figure 1: Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design
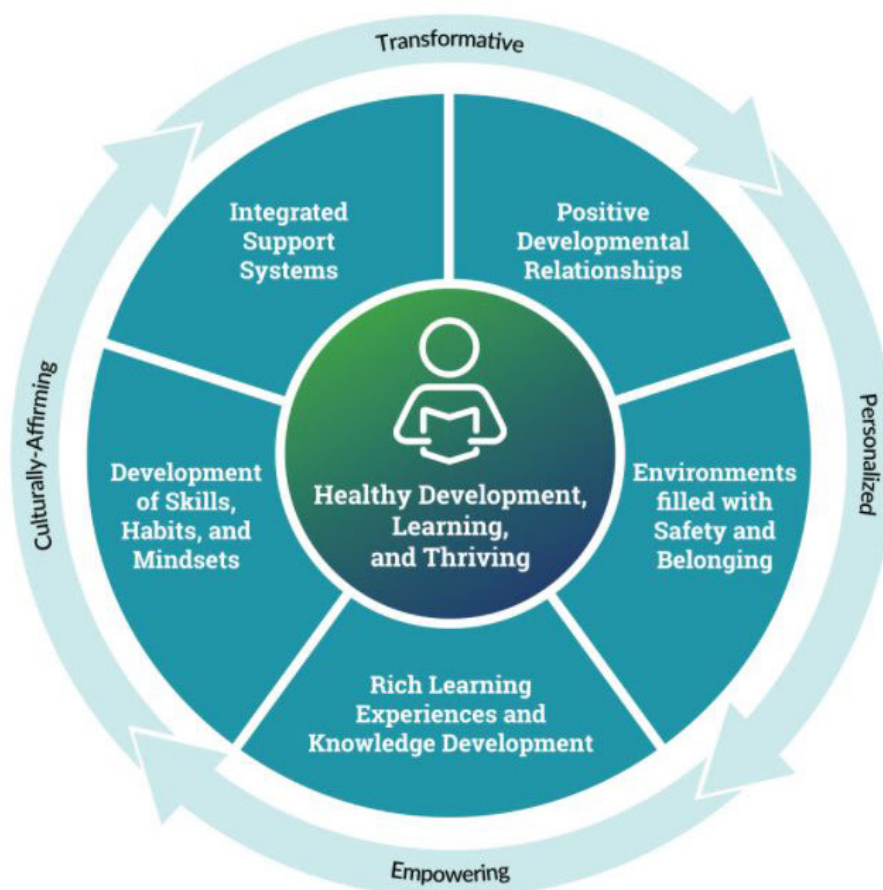
THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EQUITABLE WHOLE CHILD DESIGN

The Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design aim to seize this opportunity to advance change. The organizing framework to guide transformation of learning settings for children and adolescents is depicted in Figure 1. The inner circle names the five science-based elements that, taken together, are the guiding principles for healthy development, learning, and thriving:

- Positive Developmental Relationships

- Environments Filled with Safety and Belonging

- Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development

- Development of Skills, Habits, and Mindsets

- Integrated Support Systems

The outer circle of the graphic names the four essential conditions for equitable whole child design: all learning and development settings need to be transformative, personalized, empowering, and culturally affirming. In day-to-day practice, all of these elements need to be considered and actualized together.

The five elements in many ways are not controversial and resonate with many community-based practitioners already. However, they have not yet been widely used to develop and create learning settings, nor have they been engineered in fully integrated ways to yield healthy development, learning, and thriving. Progress has been impeded by both historical traditions and current policy built on dated assumptions about learning environments, accountability, assessment and practitioner development. Current constraints do not support robust implementation, let alone integration of these practices. If, however, the purpose of education is the equitable, holistic development of each young person, scientific knowledge from diverse fields can be used to redesign policies and practices to create settings across the learning and development ecosystem that unleash the potential of each and every learner.

The guiding principles do not to suggest a single answer or check list; the desired result is increasingly robust innovations and new collaborations aligned with the resources for positive growth found in young people's communities and cultures. Redesign around these core

principles should influence all levels of the ecosystem from the classroom to the school, to the district and the larger macrosystems (e.g., teacher preparation and higher ed). But it should go further to influence the myriad of community-based learning and development settings that will join together to produce an intentionally integrated, comprehensive developmental enterprise committed to equity for **all** learners, not just some learners. Each component is separated and enumerated individually, but the unique application of these components will be to build them in reinforcing and integrated ways to truly support learner needs, interests, talents, voice, and agency. The aim is a context for development that is greater than the sum of its parts and is transformative, personalized, empowering, and culturally affirming for each and every learner.

The framework, described below, defines and names how each of the elements of whole child design is associated with key principles from developmental and learning science and from excellent youth development practice. *The design principles playbooks are not how-to manuals or easy checklists, but rather a way to think about describing, assessing, and co-designing new learning and development ecosystems in partnership with youth, educators, families, and community-based practitioners.*

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

That relationships are important is not new knowledge to practitioners, families, or researchers. Relationships engage children and youth in ways that help them define who they are, what they can become and how and why they are important to other people. However, not all relationships are developmentally supportive. The key characteristics of a developmental relationship include emotional caring and attachment, reciprocity, progressive complexity, and a balance of power. The emotional connection is joined with adult guidance that enables young people to learn skills, grow in their competence and confidence, become more able to perform tasks on their own and take on new challenges. Children and youth increasingly use their own agency to develop their curiosity and capacities for self-direction. Looked at this way, developmental relationships can both buffer the impact of stress and provide a pathway to motivation, self-efficacy, learning, and further growth.

A strong web of relationships between and among young people and their peers, families, and practitioners, both in the school and in the community, represents a primary process through which all members of the community can thrive. Community-based settings can be organized to foster positive developmental relationships through structures and practices that allow for effective caring and the building of community.

There are three primary ways that community-based learning and development settings can and do support developmental relationships with young people.

- **First, adults in community settings form developmental relationships with young people** in their settings. This includes: providing responsive support and caring; sharing leadership with young people; and using strategies to help young people discover their strengths, expand their possibilities, and challenge growth.

- **Adults cultivate relationships with family members.** Working together with family members can build on or even improve the relationships family members already have with young people and improve the capacity of staff to support young people's development. Specific ways community-based settings cultivate relationships with family members include: seeing families through a strength-based lens; providing opportunities for family engagement; and fostering mutual learning and decision-making.

- Another source of developmental relationships for young people can be older youth. While having positive relationships among peers is important in all community-based learning and development settings, some settings go beyond just supporting positive relationships among the young to providing **opportunities for developmental relationships among young people**. They have traditions or practices that provide older youth with an opportunity to lead or mentor those younger or less experienced youth.

ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING

The community-based settings or contexts of development, such as afterschool and summer programs, sports programs, and museums and libraries, drive the development of who we become, including the expression of our genes. This is especially important as the cues from our social and physical world determine which of our 20,000 genes will be expressed and when. Over our lifetimes, fewer than ten percent of our genes actually get expressed. This biological process highlights the malleability and plasticity of development that is both an opportunity and vulnerability. When settings are designed in ways that support connection, safety and agency, a positive context is created.

The brain is a prediction machine that loves order; it is calm when things are orderly and gets unsettled when it does not know what is coming next. Learning communities that have shared values, routines, and high expectations—that demonstrate cultural sensitivity and communicate worth—create calm and ignite the other part of the brain that loves novelty and is curious. Children are more able to learn and take risks when they feel not only physically safe with consistent routines and order, but also emotionally and identity safe, where they and their culture are a valued part of the community they are in.

In contrast, anxiety and toxic stress are created by negative stereotypes and biases, bullying or microaggressions, unfair discipline practices, and other exclusionary or shaming practices. These are impediments to learning because they preoccupy the brain with worry and fear. Instead, co-creating norms; enabling young people to take agency in their learning and contribute to the community; and having predictable, fair, and consistent routines and expectations for all community members create a strong sense of belonging.

There are three primary ways that community-based learning and development settings can and do foster environments filled with safety and belonging:

- First and foremost, these learning and development settings need to feel like safe spaces for young people, with **consistent routines and expectations**. This means creating consistent rituals and routines; helping young people build personal connections and a sense of purpose; and using restorative practices to help young people to reflect on any mistake, solve conflicts, and get counseling when needed.

- A key strategy for helping young people feel like they belong is to **intentionally create a sense of community** among peers and adults. Doing so involves using positive behavior management practices aimed at fostering a healthy, inclusive community; fostering strong peer to peer relationships; and co-developing program expectations with young people.

- Finally, environments that promote belonging feel **inclusive of and culturally responsive to all participants**. This means that adults need to: use affirmations that establish the value of every young person's many identities and abilities and actively counter stereotypes and bias; build on the diversity and cultural knowledge of young people and their families to make learning engaging; and develop young people's knowledge, skills, and agency to critically engage in civic affairs.

RICH LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

Rich learning experiences require that adults provide both meaningful and challenging work, within and across core disciplines (including the arts, music, and physical education) for **all** learners, that build on learners' culture, prior knowledge and experience, and help them discover what they can do and are capable of in their zone of proximal development.[3] Young people learn best when they are engaged in authentic activities and are collaboratively working and learning with peers to deepen their understanding and transfer of skills to different contexts and new problems.

Learning is highly variable, and each learner will have their own pathways of learning and their own areas of significant talent and interest. They will be empowered along these pathways through formal and informal feedback, from peers and adults as they engage in activities. The acquisition of more complex and deeper learning skills will be prioritized and personalized for each child, recognizing that learning will happen in fits and starts which require flexible scaffolding and supports along with methods to leverage learners' strengths to address areas for growth, while differentiating strategies to reach these goals.

There are three primary ways that community-based programs can and do use science findings to create rich learning experiences.

- First, they **use scaffolding and differentiation techniques** to support each young person's individual learning style. These techniques include: assessing and adjusting programming to fit the interests, strengths, and needs of young people; providing asset based personalized supports to encourage all young people to persevere and improve; and managing groupwork to support cooperative learning.

- Creating rich learning experiences means that practitioners use **inquiry-based approaches to learning** that help youth be active and engaged learners. Community-based programs, because of their voluntary nature, provide young people with a wide range of choices and thereby are well-poised to let young people take charge of what questions or problems they are curious about and want to investigate and analyze. Practitioners can support them by asking effective questions that enable them to problem solve, think through various considerations of possibilities and alternatives, and apply that knowledge in various settings.

- Rich learning experiences occur in **culturally responsive learning environments** that celebrate the unique identities of all learners, while building on their diverse experiences to support rich and inclusive learning.[4] This asset-based orientation rejects the idea that practitioners should be colorblind or ignore cultural differences, as these orientations can have harmful effects on learning and development. Instead, culturally responsive practitioners place young people at the center by inviting their multifaceted identities and backgrounds into the learning setting to inform content, instruction, and learning structures.[5]

DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS, MINDSETS AND HABITS

The science tells us that learning is integrated—there is not a math part of the brain that is separate from the self-regulation or social skills part of the brain.[6] This means parts of the brain are cross-wired and functionally interconnected. For young people to become engaged, effective learners, adult practitioners need to simultaneously develop content specific knowledge and skills along with cognitive, emotional, and social skills. This way of learning needs to be incentivized by systems and leaders, planned for, explicitly taught, and integrated across curriculum areas and across all learning settings.[7] These skills, including executive functions, growth mindset, social awareness, resilience and perseverance, metacognition, curiosity, self-direction, and civic engagement are malleable skills and need to be taught, modeled, and practiced just like traditional academic skills.

Supporting young people's learning and development means supporting them in developing the capacities—the skills, habits, and mindsets—to direct and engage in their own learning. These capacities include understanding of and growth in social and emotional learning (SEL) skills, habits of mind for learning and persevering in learning, and sufficient health and wholeness to engage in the learning process.

Helping young people develop these capacities means that community-based learning and development settings implement practices that:

- **Integrate social and emotional learning in a culturally responsive context** by: fostering awareness and understanding of young people's emotions and support meta-cognitive thinking processes; promoting young people's self-regulation by actively providing them with strategies that support them to both express and manage emotions; and ensuring cultural sensitivity and responsiveness.

- **Help young people develop productive mindsets and habits** through: nurturing young people's growth mindset by using growth-oriented language and practice; providing opportunities for planning and goal setting; and supporting interpersonal skills like empathy, collaboration and problem solving.

- Create an environment that **incorporates healing-centered practices** by: employing responsive strategies that are based on the principles of safety, trust, collaboration, choice, and empowerment; and promoting physical and mental well-being through mindfulness strategies, breathing exercises, and other stress relieving practices.

INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS

All young people need support and opportunity. And all learners have unique needs, interests, and assets to build upon, as well as areas of vulnerability to strengthen without stigma or shame. Therefore, learning environments need to be set up with many protective factors, including health, mental health, and social service supports as well as a universal focus on relationships, supportive environments and skill building. Building both comprehensive and integrated supports will tip the balance toward a learning and development ecosystem where young people feel safe, ready, and engaged.

A well designed and implemented support system weaves together school and community resources to enhance equity of opportunity for success throughout the learning and development ecosystem and it recognizes the value of partnerships across settings. Community-based partners can and do provide assistance vital to social and academic success in classrooms and schools and connect learners and their families to services that promote holistic development. But they also work with other community-based partners and child and youth systems to make sure that all young people are connected to the supports they need to succeed.

Community-based learning and development settings can and do contribute to integrated support systems in two primary ways:

- Help children and youth **access supplemental learning opportunities that contribute to academic growth** by: partnering with schools to provide seamless and aligned supports for youth; monitoring youth's academic progress and growth; and adding adult capacity to the school day to support learning.

- **Promote access to other supports and opportunities that foster health and well-being** by: ensuring mechanisms and partnerships are in place to connect families and youth to basic needs such as food, health, and mental health in addition to academic supports; and participating in whole-school comprehensive community partnership models.

THE POWER OF INTEGRATING PRACTICES

Developmental and learning science provides us with optimism about what all young people are capable of. The contexts and relationships they are exposed to influence what they learn and who they become. Today, we can use the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design and its associated design principles to build environments in all of our classrooms, schools, and community-based learning settings that enable all young people to develop and thrive. By designing all learning settings that integrate the five elements—Positive Developmental Relationships; Environments Filled With Safety and Belonging; Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development; Development of Skills, Habits, and Mindsets; and Integrated Support Systems—we can help youth build resilience and knowledge; develop their full selves; and grow skills, habits, and mindsets they need to live lives of fulfillment.

While the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design are each critical to supporting youth learning and development, their impact is deeply felt and effective when practitioners integrate all five into a coherent, continuously reinforcing set of practices that aim to be transformative, personalized, empowering, and culturally affirming. Once we understand that environments, experiences, and relationships drive the wiring of our brains, the task and responsibility before us becomes clear: to design settings and experiences for optimal development and learning. This is the purpose and the foundation for the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design presented in this playbook. The development of a whole child emerges when we combine the five elements into experiences that connect to one another.

CONCLUSION

The framework for the design principles is built on a theoretical foundation of how children learn and develop that is inherently optimistic and recognizes the power of educators, families, youth practitioners, and other practitioners from diverse disciplines to create conditions that:

- Support the talents and agency of each young person

- Respect the culture and assets of the community

- Create personalized opportunities for growth

Building better conditions for learning and development will yield the robust equity we all seek in our learning and development ecosystems.[8] Today, these ecosystems must be willing to embrace what we know about how young people learn and develop. The core message from diverse sciences is clear: The range of young people's social, emotional, academic and cognitive skills and knowledge—and, ultimately, their potential as human beings—can be significantly influenced through exposure to highly favorable conditions. These conditions include learning environments and experiences that are intentionally designed to optimize whole child development.

The playbook, *Design Principles for Community-Based Settings: Putting the Science of Learning and Development into Action*, suggests how community-based practitioners can create these kinds of learning settings and points to engineering principles that build on the knowledge we have today to nurture innovations and systems change.

The field of youth work, or positive youth development, has embraced the five essentials of equitable whole child design for decades without using the term. Indeed, these essentials have flourished primarily in community-based civic, social justice, and youth programs and, in recent years, has been brought together into quasi-systems at the state and local level. The movement to take what was known about how children and youth learn and develop and use it as the starting point for programming and policy gained force in the early 1990s, with the seminal work of the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research.[9] In 1992, the release of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's *A Matter of Time* report issued the seminal call to action for youth development. In that report, community programs to support youth development are described as: safe places that are relationship-rich, offering a sense of belonging, and help youth develop critical life skills such as decision-making and teamwork.[10]

Given the rich history of supporting positive youth development, many community-based settings do apply the principles to some degree but are challenged to do so fully for at least two reasons. First, the extent to which positive youth development is understood and practiced varies widely across the learning ecosystem. Second, many community-based settings lack the infrastructure support to implement practices consistently across the diversity of their sector. The playbook aims to address these challenges by setting forth common terms, definitions, and shared practices that can be used by community practitioners, technical assistance providers, and out-of-school time intermediaries in order to implement the science with quality and consistency, bringing intentionality to practice, and rigor to self-reflection so that all essential adults working in these settings are implementing science-informed practices aimed at transforming learning and development ecosystems.

END NOTES

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APPLYING DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN DIVERSE SETTINGS

Applying the design principles in daily practice requires commitment and capacity. Professional development supports are critical. Socializing, scaling and sustaining practices, however, often requires changes in structural design that make transformative, empowering, personalizing, culturally affirming experiences the norm. In schools, structural design changes—from advisories to co-teaching to the content of routine assessments—codify intentional shifts in how time, space, staff and resources are used to support redefined learning goals. In community-based settings, the design changes needed are different and more varied. This is because the settings themselves are quite different from schools and varied from each other.

To understand this variation and discuss general implications for scaling and sustaining the design principles in community settings in ways that not only improve practice but could also strengthen connections with schools and other youth-serving systems, we tackle three questions. All are explored in relationship to five guiding principles of whole child design. They are:

- Why is there a need for dual playbooks —one for schools and one for community-based learning settings?

- How can community-based practitioners and system leaders—as well as young people, families, and school and community leaders—anticipate and optimize the diversity of these community-based learning settings?

- How can community-based practitioners and system leaders use the shared design principles as an opportunity to better connect with school leaders as both work to be more transformative, personalized, culturally responsive, and empowering?

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR DUAL PLAYBOOKS—ONE FOR SCHOOLS AND ONE FOR COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING SETTINGS?

Because the fundamental differences between community-based learning settings and schools make the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing the design principles very different.

Schools are very complex settings. When most of us think of schools, we think about classrooms. But we seldom stop there. We imagine a building or even a decentralized campus of micro-settings (classrooms, labs, cafeterias, libraries, outdoor spaces, music rooms, ball fields, gyms, hallways filled with bulletin boards and lockers). The size and quality of these settings changes, but our expectations are generally consistent and are reinforced in policies and budgets.

Communities are very complex settings. When most of us think about communities, we rarely think about classrooms first. We imagine an array of formal and informal places and spaces managed by different organizations and systems—libraries, parks and recreation departments, community-based nonprofits, civic and faith-based organizations, affiliates of national organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Communities in Schools, National Urban League—that support learning during and after the school day, in and outside of school buildings, and throughout the summer. (For a fuller discussion on the diversity of these settings, see **A Typology of Community-Based Learning and Development Settings**.) The variety of places and spaces throughout a community are similar to schools, but they are bundled together in many different combinations, supported by different organizations. Consider the combination of spaces you would expect to find within a community club (e.g., Boys and Girls Club), a local library, a recreation center, and a sleepover camp.

Learning and development settings are functional **spaces** (classroom, art room, gym/pool, Zoom group) made available by organizations that usually, but not always, have physical **places** (school, rec center, community club, performance spaces). These organizations recruit, train, and manage paid and volunteer staff who work with young people to co-create experiences in ways that are consistent with the **practices and structures** of that organization (or system).

Schools and school systems recruit many kinds of staff and manage many kinds of settings. But teachers and classrooms are the focal point for implementing practices and structures selected to achieve defined student learning goals.

The design principles playbook for schools is written with a deep understanding of the traditional conceptualization of the classroom and of school, with the explicit purpose of re-envisioning how these settings and the education system itself should be designed. The playbook lifts up practices and design structures using real-life examples of how schools are transforming from these traditional starting points working in ways that are scalable throughout fairly uniform systems.

Community-based settings, however, have always been anything but uniform. They are exceedingly diverse, in part, because they are highly flexible. This flexibility stems from a combination of factors, including: 1) participation is voluntary (young people and families "vote with their feet"); 2) content is not mandated (academic instruction may be a part of the programming, but is not required); and 3) accountability standards are not, for the most part, linked to dedicated public funding. Unlike schools, they do not have extensive structures at the local, state, and federal level focused on accountability for academic credentials and success. While this flexibility comes with challenges related to capacity and sustainability, it also encourages innovation, adaptation, and authenticity. For a further exploration of the structural differences and dynamics across schools and community-based learning settings, see **Common Elements that Vary Across School and Community Settings**.

As we worked with advisors to create this playbook, we quickly recognized the need to articulate both how the design principles illuminate the goals and strategies adopted by so many community-based learning settings, and why community learning settings would benefit from a playbook that is different than the one for schools.

Here are our answers:

- **Taken together, the design principles are integrated non-negotiables for every setting and every organization that claims to support learning and development**. If settings, organizations, or systems that support them are "in the red" on any element (implementing practices and policies that actively go against the principle), not only is learning threatened, but it is possible they are doing harm.

- **Taken separately, the design principles often reflect the primary purpose or top priorities of each system or organization.** No organization or setting should be in the red, but few, if any can honestly argue that all five principles are their top priorities. Schools lead with content mastery. Mentoring programs lead with relationships. STEM and arts programs lead with activity-rich experiences. Character organizations lead with building skillsets, mindsets and habits. Multi-service organizations lead with access to integrated supports and services. This variation of emphasis also applies to specific settings and adults within organizations (e.g., the counselor may be more focused on supports and services, the coach on building skillsets, mindsets and habits).

- **The diversity across community-based settings and organizations of what guiding principle they lead with makes it difficult to offer general recommendations for design structures.** One setting or organization's weakness could well be another organization's strength. In this playbook, you will find program and organizational examples that may lead with a particular principle, but are intentionally thoughtful about the integration of all five.

HOW CAN COMMUNITY-BASED PRACTITIONERS AND SYSTEM LEADERS—AS WELL AS YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES—ANTICIPATE AND OPTIMIZE THE DIVERSITY OF THESE COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING SETTINGS?

By giving ways to unpack and take stock of the "raw materials" that make up the learning experience—the adult leader(s), the setting, and the young people.

Since the structure and composition of community programs vary widely, putting the science findings into practice requires understanding and embracing the diversity of settings so that practitioners—regardless of where they operate, whom they serve, and what they do—"see themselves in the science".

The main reason community-setting practitioners and administrators should be encouraged to look at all of the raw materials they are working with—ideally in consultation with young people and their families—is that they often have more freedom than traditional systems to flexibly respond in ways that optimize how these elements come together to create powerful learning experiences.

Three elements combine to influence the creation of the learning experience—the adults[1], the settings, and the young people and families that "vote with their feet" to participate.
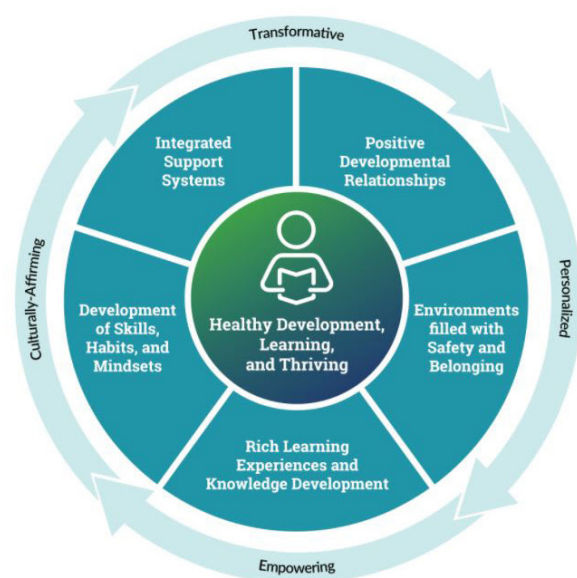
The Adults

The adults in community-based settings are likely to be from the community and look like the young people that they work with.[*1] Practitioners who work in community-based programs run the gamut from professionally certified youth workers, to paraprofessionals, to volunteers in the community. Some are teachers (working in summer programs), former teachers, or adults with teaching experiences. In many large youth serving organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs of America many of the staff are, themselves, older youth. School-based afterschool programs often hire school day personnel to provide academic support while also engaging community member and college students to provide enrichment. Staff who run community programs in arts organizations, libraries, museums, and outdoor/nature programs usually have deep content knowledge of a topic or issue but may have no training in youth development but have a general interest in working with children and teens.

The Young People

The groups of children and teens who participate in community learning settings usually participate voluntarily. They may be children that have been enrolled by their parents or caregivers. They may be teens that are drawn in because of their specific interests. Because they are not assigned to organizations or settings, most groups will be more diverse in some way than the classroom groups young people are a part of. They may span grades, experience and ability levels but all be from the same housing development which sponsors after-school activities. They may all be from the same racial or ethnic group but come from neighborhoods across the city to participate in cultural programming, or all be selected becauseof their ability to participate in a performance group. Within a place or organization, they may be loosely grouped if at all (e.g., younger children, pre-teens, teens) and then encouraged to reform in smaller groupings related to their interests and responsibilities.

*You could also think of these as "learning leaders" – in many community settings the designers of the learning and engagement experience are teenagers and young adults as frequently as older adults.

The Settings

As noted, community-based settings may be familiar-type spaces (classroom, meeting room, ball field, online groups), housed or linked to different places (libraries, youth organizations, faith-based organizations, community centers, workplaces) that are associated with organizations that have different goals, rules, resources, and approaches. It is precisely because generally adults, young people and families, if they chose to engage, can influence the shape of specific setting-level experiences that it is important for all actors—practitioners, administrators, youth and families—to have a firm understanding of their assets and constraints. Giving them explicit information about the elements that contribute to optimal learning, allows them to use the program flexibility and relational connections they have to deepen opportunities for meaning making[2] by seizing moments.

Given parents and young people's intuitive awareness of the importance of these design principles, the effort they make to look for these elements when selecting opportunities, and the high level of trust they have in the staff of these programs, it makes sense to engage them more explicitly in assessing and improving learning settings, including recommendations on how to scale and sustain supportive practices.[3]

HOW CAN COMMUNITY-BASED PRACTITIONERS AND SYSTEM LEADERS USE THE SHARED DESIGN PRINCIPLES AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BETTER CONNECT WITH SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERS AS BOTH COMMIT TO CREATING TRANSFORMATIVE, PERSONALIZED, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, AND EMPOWERING CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

By explaining how they activate these four broad commitments, and sharing successes and challenges associated with achieving equity and excellence.

These aspirational commitments for the systems and settings —transformative, personalized, empowering and culturally affirming—are the raison d'etre for many community-based settings. While many position themselves as supporting academic achievement, transference of academic content and credentialing of the "average student" are not their primary goals.[4]

In the K-12 education space, leaders are using these commitments to challenge traditional ways of doing business and rethink and redesign how they organize

Figure 2: Forum for Youth Investment (2021). Equitable Ecosystems for Youth and Young Adults Idea Exploration Series. Forum for Youth Investment.
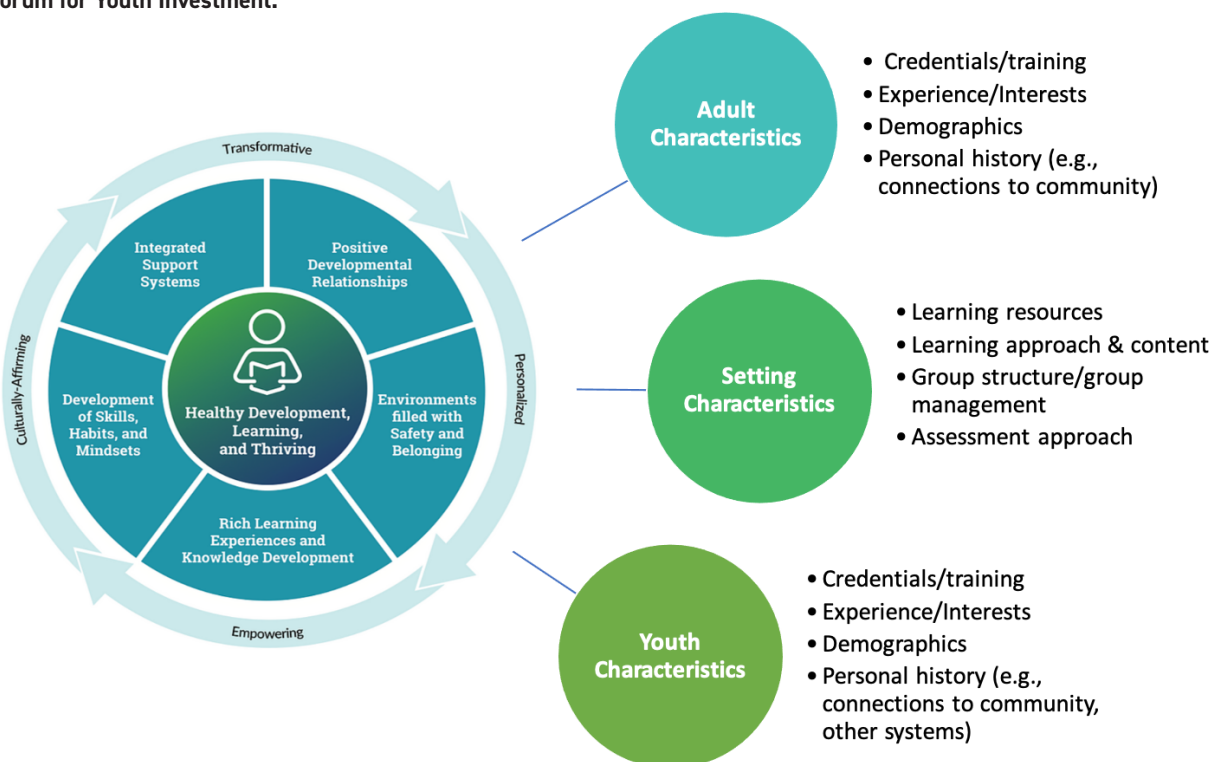
their staff, their resources and their schedules, and their spaces to meet those goals. In the community spaces, these goals are frequently their reason for being and often have been established in response to what they see as the inadequate response of schools and other systems.

Many of these community-based learning settings have been committed to **transformative** learning and development because they are working to counter what was seen as rote learning or harmful experiences that took place in schools or other systems. In particular, programs and organizations that work with young people who have been system-involved or experienced marginalization from systems work to not only transform the trajectories of these young people but, in many cases, work with young leaders to advocate for change in the systems themselves. Many are committed to **culturally affirming** experiences not only because they are often community grown and community embedded, but because of their sense that their young people aren't seen and aren't getting their identities affirmed in the school. They are committed to **personalized** approaches because they start with relationships, interests, assets, and needs. They are committed to **empowering** in ways that are not just about the agency of the learner in their own learning experience, but the agency of the young person in bringing about community and societal change. They are not held accountable for a certain number of hours or credits. They have been created with the flexibility to lead with these principles and develop structures and infrastructures around these things.

That is not to say that this parallel space is by any means perfect but, put simply, the design questions are different. The overall picture is not equitable. Access and affordability are major issues. The offerings are frequently piecemeal. The quality is variable. The upside of the flexibility is that they have had more opportunity to be innovative and responsive. The downside is that they do not have the stable funding and infrastructure to support professional development and consistency or to sustain and scale their work in ways that every young person has access to high-quality, equitable learning and development experiences.

As the K-12 system steps up to meet these **commitments**—transformative, personalized, empowering, culturally affirming—there are decades of

wisdom and expertise to mine from the practitioners in these community-based settings. As school leaders get to know the range of community-based organizations and programs in their community, it will help to not only understand the emphasis of individual programs but also to get to know the organizations and networks as a collective set of community assets. As a set of providers, what are they doing to be intentional—individually and as a field—to promote practices aimed at these commitments? How do they manifest being culturally responsive? How do they personalize? How do they empower? How are they transformative? Starting with these fundamental questions—as well as a nuts and bolts understanding of the differing factors that shape how K-12 systems and community-based settings operate—will illuminate where there are opportunities for partnership and shared responsibilities that move beyond the transactional (space, transportation, time coverage) towards more shared understanding of purpose, expertise, and approach.

A TYPOLOGY OF COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SETTINGS

Community-based learning and development settings is a phrase that describes the myriad of community partners that work independently, with each other, and with schools to support learning and development in diverse settings throughout the community.

As noted in the National Research Council's seminal publication *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, "the characterization of community programs for youth is complicated. The landscape of programs is vast. And the variety of terms used to describe the programs varies."[5] This statement was made in 2002 and the landscape has become even more diverse in the past two decades as the field has broadened our definition of where and when learning happens beyond specific programs to other potential learning and development spaces in a community.

For example, community institutions such as libraries and museums have become "maker spaces" for young people to experiment with art, music, and technology; robotics and other STEM skill programs are commonplace in many afterschool programs; and workforce development programs are on the rise, supporting adolescents to develop the skills for a 21st century workplace.

Organizations like 4-H; Big Brothers, Big Sisters; Camp Fire; Scouts; Y-USA; and Boys and Girls Clubs have affiliates in most communities and are household names. These national organizations and others have enormous reach—they are second only to the public schools in the number of youth they serve each year. But community-based learning and development settings span and are staffed by every sector of the community—nonprofits, faith-based organizations, employers, businesses, civic and arts associations, and public agencies focused on recreation, health, safety, and learning. They range from afterschool programs and community centers to mentoring programs and summer camps. They receive funding from multiple public and private sources. Their staff and volunteers work in and across systems and sectors, meeting youth wherever they are—in schools, sports leagues, clubs, and community centers, as well as in public housing, detention centers, homeless shelters, and hospitals. They provide myriad learning opportunities in an array of settings. They acknowledge that young people are learning all the time, both during and out of school, and in families, neighborhoods, and communities. They support an approach to learning that develops a broad set of skills, knowledge, and competencies needed to become a lifelong learner, productive worker, and engaged citizen. And they foster settings and services that allow young people to grow while exploring interests and wrestling with issues that reflect their passions and concerns.

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Therefore, defining what is meant by *community-based learning and development settings* needs to be broad and inclusive, yet specific enough to distinguish the sector from other kinds of learning and development settings such as early childhood programs, K-12 schools, and post-secondary institutions.

The typology to describe the universe of community-based learning and development settings is organized by **whom they serve**—primarily youth vs. a broader population; and **what their goal is**—primarily learning and development vs. broader goals that include other important outcomes that contribute to thriving—health, wellness, and safety. This results in four "types" of community-based settings:

- Settings that primarily provide opportunities for youth with a focus on learning and development goals

- Settings that provide opportunities for a broad population (e.g., children, youth, and families) with a focus on learning and development goals

- Settings that provide opportunities for youth with a focus on goals broader than learning and development

- Settings that provide opportunities for a broad population with a focus on goals broader than learning and development

Each of these types is described in more detail below. Figure 3, while not inclusive of all types of community-based settings, is meant to depict the complexity and variation across community-based settings, underscoring the need for a companion playbook geared to toward helping the myriad of practitioners working across these settings understand and implement science-informed practices.

Settings that primarily provide opportunities for youth with focus on learning and development goals

Most community programs focus on youth and have a primary goal of learning and development. The same could be said about K-12 education. A main difference, however, is that learning and development in the context of K-12 education, by design, has historically led with content-rich instructional experiences, followed by the development of critical skills, knowledge, mindsets,

and habits. In doing so, school day teachers should be striving to create relationship-rich environments filled with safety and belonging that connect children and youth to supports as needed.

Unlike K-12 education, community-based programs are not wired to lead with content. In fact, the voluntary nature of participation in community-based programs, as opposed to the compulsory requirement of attending school, means that community-based programs need to ensure that whatever their goals for young people are, they focus on youth engagement as a strategy for attracting and retaining participants. Relational programs, such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters and Mentor. org, lead with relationships that often are developed

Figure 3: Typology of Community-Based Learning and Development Settings. Forum for Youth Investment (2021). Equitable Ecosystems for Youth and Young Adults Idea Exploration Series. Forum for Youth Investment.
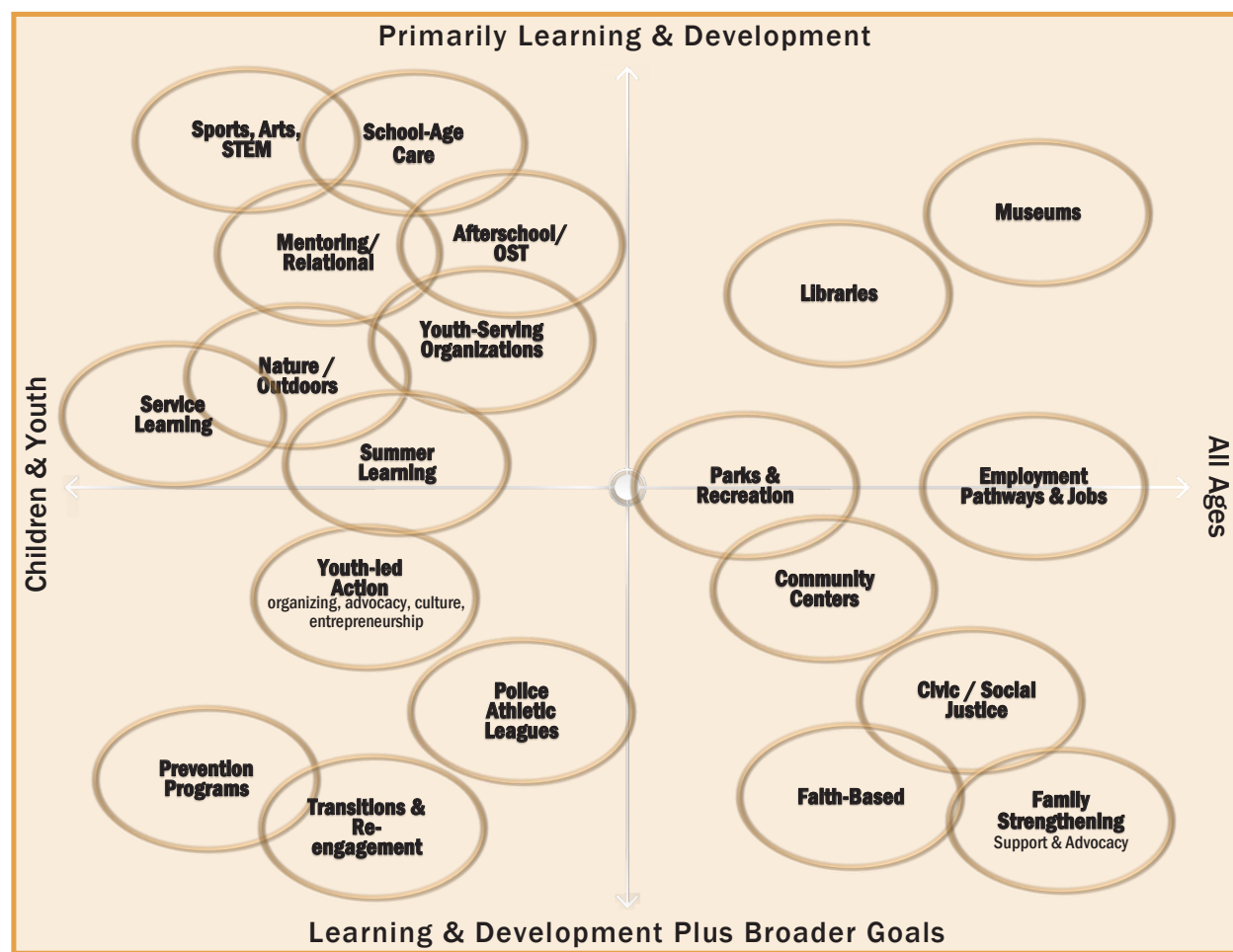
through engaging in a rich learning experience. Communities in Schools is an example of a community program that leads with connecting youth to integrated supports, and in doing so helps them develop critical skills, knowledge, mindsets, and habits that enable them to engage in the rich learning experiences offered in and out of school. Skill-building programs such as a STEM or arts camp, or a nature program, lead with the intentional development of specific skills and knowledge, and do so by cultivating strong relationships in a trusting environment.

Community-based programs that focus on youth and have a primary goal of learning and development span the many settings where youth spend their time. Afterschool and summer learning programs often utilize school buildings, bringing community partners into school spaces to support enrichment activities. Other community-based programs, such as sports leagues and nature-based programming bring youth into community parks and other outdoor spaces. Summer youth employment programs connect youth to a broad set of local businesses who serve as mentors to youth.

Settings that provide opportunities for a broad population (e.g., children, youth, and families) with a focus on learning and development goals

Some community-based learning and development settings are hosted by institutions whose missions expand beyond serving youth. Libraries, museums, and parks and recreation are institutions that exist in most communities and offer some youth programming alongside early childhood programming, programming for young adults, families, and the elderly. Knowing the science, particularly as it relates to the foundational elements of optimal conditions for learning—environments filled with safety and belonging, and developmental relationships—is no less relevant to these settings than to other opportunities across the learning and development ecosystem.

Settings that provide opportunities for youth with a focus on goals broader than learning and development

Many community-based programs have a focus on helping young people who have been marginalized or traumatized—by public systems and by their society. Many of these community-based supports are aimed at "disconnected" youth or "opportunity" youth—young people who are out of school or out of the workforce and often times facing numerous life challenges. While learning and development goals are usually part of the mix, these programs start with the basics—housing, basic health, positive alternatives to negative influences, and pathways to stability. There are also decades of youth-led movements to address these systemic challenges. Frequently, youth organizing and advocacy efforts are led by young people who have had direct experiences with racist and inequitable systems. While community and societal change are the express goals of this work, the learning and development of the young people themselves must also be considered and supported.[6]

Settings that provide opportunities for a broad population with a focus on goals broader than learning and development

Throughout the community are organizations and institutions focused on the spiritual, cultural, and civic life of community members. These often reflect communities of identity and experience within a larger geographic community. Although the majority of these institutions are family-oriented and aimed at improving the well-being of all ages, they often have age-specific programming—whether that is a youth program at a faith institution or a youth leadership program in a local civic or civil rights organization (e.g., the Urban League).

END NOTES

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COMMON ELEMENTS THAT VARY ACROSS SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SETTINGS

The structure and composition of community programs vary widely; therefore, putting the science into practice in community settings requires understanding and embracing the diversity of settings so that practitioners who work and volunteer in the myriad of community learning and development settings within a community—regardless of where they operate, whom they serve, and what they do—"see themselves in the science." The differences between the formal structures of school and the flexible and free choice nature of community-based learning and development settings have implications for how practitioners are able to implement science-informed strategies that support equitable learning conditions.

Below are some key differences in settings.

Goals and approaches to teaching and learning

As described above, community-based learning and development settings have varying goals depending on the content and purpose of their programs. Unlike formal K-12 settings, which share a goal of academic growth as well as fostering critical mindsets and habits that contribute to academic success, informal community learning and development settings share the broad goal of supporting learning and development, but specific goals depend on the content being offered. Goals for community-based learning and development settings often lead with positive youth development but then include everything from cultivating STEM skills to learning a new physical skill such as climbing or soccer to helping youth become community advocates.

Size

Community-based programs range from one-on-one mentoring programs to large youth serving organizations with capacity to serve hundreds of young people. There are no "average class size" guidelines for community-based settings. Rather, size is driven by both the goals of the program as well as the resource capacity to offer programming.

Dosage and attendance

In community-based settings attendance expectations vary programmatically by goals and developmentally by age. School age childcare programs tend to have an expectation of consistent five day per week attendance to support working families. Programs for middle school youth tend to have less frequent participation because at that stage of development, youth want to explore many options and may participate in two or three different learning and development settings over the course of a week. High school youth may participate in a traditional community program only once a week, and do so based on interests or desire to learn a specific skill. Regardless of what is being offered, the voluntary nature of participation in community-based settings makes it essential that programming is relevant and engaging to youth in order to bolster participation. This is in contrast to K-12 education that sets specific guidelines for expected school day attendance.

Practitioners

In addition to classroom teachers, a school setting includes other professionals—counselors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, librarians, family and community outreach specialists. It also includes paraprofessionals and support staff—teacher aides, bus drivers, extended day staff, and others. Practitioners who work in community-based programs run the gamut from professionally certified youth workers, to paraprofessionals, to volunteers in the community. In many large youth serving organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs of America many of the staff are, themselves, older youth. School-based afterschool programs often hire school day personnel to provide academic support while also engaging community members and college students to provide enrichment. Staff who run community programs in libraries and museums may have no training in youth development, but have deep content knowledge of a topic or issue.

Professional development and training

Community-based program practitioners have no common, coordinated pre-service or in-service training and professional development system at the national or state level. While there are efforts to have a national youth workforce credential, participation in training and professional development is voluntary and not at scale.

However, locally, many youth development practitioners are trained in learning approaches that more naturally lend themselves to engaging the whole child, especially focused on positive developmental relationships and environments filled with safety and belonging. This is done through implementation of a program quality improvement system that has standards of practice, performance feedback, supports for continuous quality improvement, and guidelines and incentives for participation.[1]

Access

Although gross inequities exist within the K-12 public education system—and this has been a primary driver of the design principles work—there is universal recognition that all children and youth are supposed to have access to public education. The same is not true for community-based learning and development settings. Too often there is a pattern of winners and losers in terms of which youth get access to what kinds of opportunities, with youth from middle and upper-income families getting more and varied access to community learning and development opportunities than their disadvantaged peers.[2] Focusing on just one type of community-based learning and development setting, afterschool programming, research from the Afterschool Alliance indicates that in 2020 approximately 25 million youth (50 percent of our nation's total) not currently in an afterschool program would be enrolled in a program if one were available to them, according to their parents. Further, unmet demand for afterschool programs is higher among African-American and Hispanic children (58 percent and 55 percent, respectively) compared to Caucasian children (46 percent), according to their parents.[3]

Funding sources

While the funding of public education in the U.S. is complex, most of the resources are public and the mixture of Federal, state, and local funding is clear and well-documented. The same is not true for community-based programs, which rely on both public and private sector funding, often showing idiosyncratic and unique patterns. A 1992 study described financial support for community youth programs as "grossly inadequate."[4] This situation has not changed dramatically since then. Until the 1990s, funding for afterschool programming was provided largely by community-based organizations, such as the YMCA and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, rather than by the federal government. In the mid-1990's however, with new research on the benefits of afterschool participation combined with more family members working outside the home, the issue of afterschool gained policymakers' attention, and in 1994 legislation for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative was passed. While 21st Century Community Learning Center grants are still the only federal funding source dedicated exclusively to providing afterschool and summer learning programs for children and youth, more than 26 million youth are eligible to attend Community Learning Centers. But funding allows only 1.7 million to participate.[5] Private philanthropy supports many community-based learning and development settings but even so, they remain on fragile footing.

Institutional "home"

K-12 public schools have, for the most part, an institutional home called "the district" that dictates policies and procedures that create both enabling conditions and barriers to implementing the guiding principles (see the K-12 Playbook for information on these enabling conditions and potential barriers). Community-based learning and development settings vary widely in their organizational affiliation. Sometimes they are part of larger institutional structure with its own set of guidelines that influence all of the differences described above. A local Boys and Girls Club, for example, has a national office that supports content development, adult capacity building and continuous quality improvement efforts. As such, it also creates enabling conditions and potential constraints for being able to implement science-informed strategies. In contrast, a youth practitioner in a locally developed organization may only have access to these kinds of supports if they are active in a local provider network. The ability of practitioners to implement science-informed strategies then, is very much affected by the institution and structure in which they are working.

Despite the diversity of community programs, their common denominator is the commitment to create supportive learning settings that nurture young people's strengths and interests and enable them to thrive. *Relationship building is at the heart of what these organizations do.* While an organization may be known by its activities or content—an arts program, a sports league, an environmental camp—young people consistently voice a common refrain: they may initially be "hooked" by the activity, but they stay because of the bonds they form with peers and adults.

KEY RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTING DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN COMMUNITY-BASED SETTINGS

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Weikart Center) has tools, resources, and research to help community-based settings create safe, supportive, relationship-rich learning environments that offer opportunities to develop critical skills, mindsets and habits.

Preparing Youth to Thrive and **Preparing Children to Thrive**, created by the Weikart Center with the Forum for Youth Investment, are field guides that provide case studies of exemplary community-based learning and development opportunities and how they create structures and opportunities that support whole child design in school-age and adolescent settings.

Ready by Design: The Science and (Art) of Youth Readiness, developed by the Forum for Youth Investment, provides a synthesis of the existing research—including new findings in brain science as well as trends in social emotional learning, 21st century skills, employability skills and childhood well-being—into a systems-neutral compendium.

Thriving, Robust Equity, and Transformative Learning and Development, co-authored by **Readiness Project Partner**s, leverages recent syntheses of the science of adolescence, the science of learning and development, and the impacts of institutionalized inequities to emphasize the fact that all children and adolescents can realize their potential and thrive.

How Learning Happens Edutopia video series illustrates strategies that enact the science of learning and development in schools and community-based settings.

Aspen Institute's National Commission for Social, Emotional, and Academic Development's **reports** provides a **research agenda** to support whole child and adolescent development across learning settings, offers **strategies** for how school and communities can create learning environments that foster comprehensive development of all young people, and discusses **the role of policy** in creating conditions for communities to implement locally crafted practices that drive more equitable outcomes. Reports include **Building Partnerships to Support Where, When, and How Learning Happens** which describes the critical role that youth development organizations play in supporting whole child development, in partnership with schools.

The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research offers a **developmental framework** for youth development from early childhood to young adulthood, with an emphasis on the kinds of experiences and relationships that foster the development of factors that influence success.

END NOTES

[1]David P. Weikart Center for Program Quality. (n.d.). Youth Program Quality Assessment ® and School-Age Program Quality Assessment. **http://cypq.org/assessment**; National Institute on Out-of-School Time. (2021). APT: Assessment of Program Practices Tool. **https://www.niost.org/Tools-Training/the-assessment-of-afterschool-program-practices-tool-apt**

[2]Deschenes,S., Arbreton, A., Little, P., Herrera, C., Grossman, J., Weiss, B. (2010). *Engaging older youth: Program and city-level strategies to support sustained participation in out-of-school time*. Harvard Family Research Project.

[3]Afterschool Alliance. (2020). American After 3 PM. **http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/**

[4]Carnegie Corporation New York. (1992). *A matter of time: risk and opportunity in the nonschool hours*. Carnegie Corporation of New York.

[5]U.S. Department of Education. (2019). *21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) analytic support for evaluation and program monitoring: An overview of the 21st CCLC performance data: 2017-2018* (14th report). U.S. Department of Education.

USER TIPS TO THE PLAYBOOK

The *Design Principles for Community-Based Settings: Putting the Science of Learning and Development into Action* playbook provides the research-based rationale for why each of the five essential guiding principles for equitable whole child design matter for young people's success and then describe a set of design principles and key practices that adults who work with young people in community-based programs settings could use to strengthen their practice. A curated list of resources where you can learn more about how to implement specific practices is included for each blue wheel component. This section of the Playbook provides guidance on where to start, given your community-based setting's goals, priorities, and program structure.

Essential Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole-Child Design
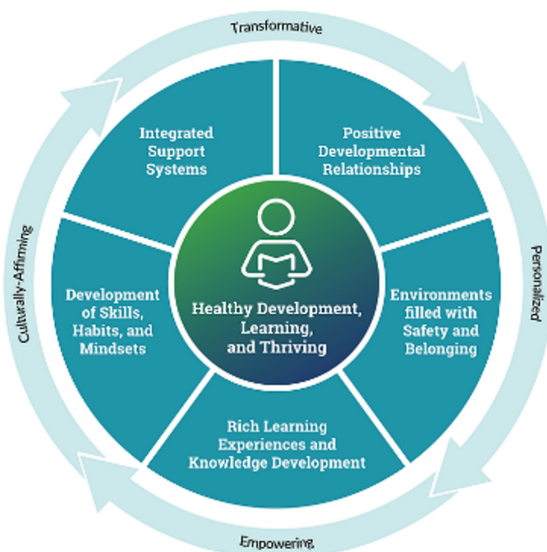
INTENDED USERS

As described in **A Typology of Community-Based Learning and Development Settings**, the term community-based learning and development settings encompasses a wide range of community partners from national youth-serving organizations who are vast both in terms of reach and size to Jean's Front Porch (literally a program on Jean's front porch started to provide nutritious snacks, homework help, and supervised space for the kids on the block after school)—to everything in between including museums, librarires, workforce development programs, etc. As we widen our definition for community settings from traditional out-of-school time settings and consider the entire learning and development ecosystem, there are many settings (e.g., homes, classrooms, cafeterias, gymns, playgrounds, clubs, work places) with varying roles (e.g., librarians, docents, coaches and trainers, ministers and choir directors, theatre directors and music teachers, shift-supervisors at businesses that employ young people) who interact with young people.

APPLYING THE SCIENCE FINDINGS

Given **the diversity of community settings and the roles, responsibilities, and experiences of the practitioners who work in them, means there is no one "right way" to apply science findings.** This section of the Playbook provides tips on how to take some key steps in being able to put the science of learning and development into action in their community-based setting. Namely:

1. Develop a shared vison for learning and development among practitioners in your setting;

2. Define practitioner roles and spheres of influence in the setting;

3. Articulate the **characteristics of the community-based setting** (e.g., learning approach, resources, content, group mananagement, group structures, assessment approach, attendance expextations);

4. Understand the characteristis of the practitioners in your setting and their capacity to put the science into action;

5. Figure out your readiness to implement.

Each of these tips is discussed more fully below.

1. Develop a shared vision for learning and development

Quality implementation of the key practices highlighted in the playbook begins with establishing a shared vision for learning and development among the practitioners in your setting.

- What are your goals for the young people who participate?

- What are the potential barriers in being able to help them achieve those goals?

- What are the core strengths of your setting?

- How does the vision of high-quality learning setting that incoporates developmental practices highlighted in this playbook connect to your setting's broader goals for the young people you serve?

The **QuEST** model can be used to create a shared vision of quality for your program or setting by identifying key practices that adults will implement and the long term and short term skills, beleifs, and outcomes you want to develop for the young people you serve. The QuEST model articulates how time spent in settings rich with engaging content and high-quality staff practices increases youth engagement and contributes to positive short- and longer-term outcomes. It helps you to map your program strengths, identify gaps, align past efforts,

and move towards identifying and setting shared goals.

As you dig identifying the quality of instruction, the content, or context of your setting, you may want to consider using the QuEST framework to think about what types of data, standards, and resources you use. How do you know that the young people you serve are engaged? What are the specific skills that you want young people to develop? What are the long-term outcomes that you want young people to have?

2. Define your role and sphere of influence

Depending on your role and how you identify your settings, there may be multiple levels of a system where you can influence practice, or none at all. Unlike K-12 systems that have training and accountability mechanisms in place for educators, the supports for community practitioners range from "none at all" to a robust quality improvement and credentialing system. This means that your ability to influence how and how much you and others in your setting are able to apply the science of learning and development is shaped by factors that may be beyond your ability to control. Stand-alone programs like Jean's Front Porch (described above) likely have limited capacity and resources to invest in training and support whereas if you are part of an out-of-school time system, or are part of a larger national youth-serving organization, you may have access to a quality improvement system that helps ensure that the adults working in your settings have the training and capacity to create quality learning and development settings that are putting the science into action.

Figure 4: QuEST Model

Quality	**E**ngagement	**S**kills/beliefs	**T**ransfer of outcomes
instruction content context	behavior, interest with challenge	social emotional cognitive	ready for school, work & life
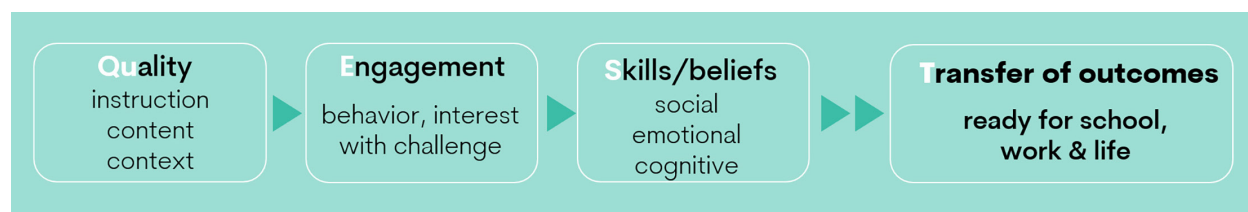
3. Articulate the key characteristics of your setting

What "essentials" are a prioritiy in your setting?

One way to prioritize how to start digging into this work is to **identify one or two specific essentials for equtabile whole child design that your community-based setting leads with**. For example:

- You work or volunteer in a mentoring program that focuses on strong developmental relationships

- You work of volunteer in a robotics program that helps youth learn critical skills

- You work or volunteer in a public library running a reading club for middle school youth

- You work or volunteer in a youth advocacy organization that focuses on youth voice and empowerment

What are the Dosage and Attendance Expectations and Patterns?

- How frequently does a young person attend your program?

- Given that frequency, what are the key practices you feel are the most important to implement?

- What are potential barriers that you/your team would need to overcome for successful implementation?

What Mechanisms do you have in Place to Improve Access and Engagement?

- How are you reducing barriers to participation so that all young people who want to participate are able to?

- What are your outreach and recruitment strategies?

- How are you helping family members understand the value of participating in community programs?

- How would you engage families and caretakers as you consider an implementation plan for key practices?

4. Understand and improve adult capacity to put the science into action

The characteristics of the adults that interact with young people in a setting (e.g, credentials, demographics, expereince, interest, personal history i.e., connections with the community) greatly affect whether and how they can implement science-informed practices. A common approach to ensuring that adults in a setting have the capacity to create optimal learning environments is to adopt a continous program quality improvement process.

Focusing on building the quality of a learning setting can sometimes feel vague and intimidating. The **Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI)** represents years of research and field testing geared toward helping practitioners transfer engagement at the leadership level into concrete staff skills and tangible youth outcomes. This approach helps programs continue to evolve, positioning improvement as an ongoing process rather than a one-time goal..

YPQI is an evidence-based continuous improvement process that uses an Assess-Plan-Improve cycle at the site level, as illustrated in Figure 5. A **2012 study of the YPQI** demonstrated implementation of four practices—standardized assessment of instruction, planning for improvement, coaching from a site manager, and training for specific instructional methods—improves the quality of staff practices that children and youth experience. The YPQI produces a cascade of positive effects beginning with provision of standards, training, and technical assistance, flowing through managers and staff implementation of continuous improvement practices, and resulting in effects on staff instructional practices.

Figure 5: Assess-Plan-Improve (Weikart Center)

ASSESS — Observe programming. Collect **data** about your program.

PLAN — Use the data to create an improvement **plan** with your team.

IMPROVE — Carry out your plan. **Train** & **coach** staff.
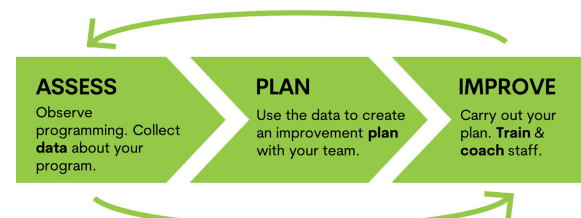
If you want to intentionally implement the developmental practices highlighted in this playbook as an organization, then you may consider embedding a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process like the YPQI approach described above, that provides supports in terms of training, technical assistance, and coaching to make the implementation process systematic and sustainable. Building a CQI system includes developing a shared vision of high-quality implementation of practices and mapping how these practices lead to specific short term and long term outcomes for young people (e.g., using the QuEST model), assessing current implementation of these key adult practices, providing feedback, and accordingly providing targetted supports to adults to align their practices with the shared vision of high-quality. It is also important that participation in a CQI process is embedded and sustained in an organization.

5. Are You Ready to Implement?

Being more intentional about putting the science of learning and development into action is aided by considering your personal, organization, or system-level readiness to implement the design principles and related practices described in the playbook. Implementation readiness is a combination of:

1. Your **motivation** to implement the principles and practices.

2. The **general capacities** of your learning and development setting to implement the principles and practices. Capacity varies widely depending on whether you are a stand-alone program, part of a larger youth-serving organization, or have an out-of-school time system already established to support your adult capacity-building efforts.

3. The **specific capacities** that you will need to implement the principles and practices.

This simple R=MC[2] approach[1] to thinking about readiness, where R refers to readiness, M refers to motivation, and C refers to the two kinds of capacity— general and specific, can help you "right size" your approach to improving practice so you don't take on too much and risk not implementing what you have the capacity to do well.

Readiness considerations are useful prior to implementation; however, the road to readiness is cyclical, not linear. Readiness-focused thinking is intended to inform continuous improvement. You may move back and forth

in your readiness to implement the five essential guiding principles as you recalibrate and improve the quality of their implementation. As such, even if you already do implement aspects of whole child design in your learning and development setting it may be useful to consider the current state of readiness (i.e., motivation and capacity) to see if there are opportunities for improvements that will ultimately ensure successful implementation.

GETTING STARTED WITH A REFLECTION TOOL

The five tips offered above will take some time for you, your organization, and/or your larger network of community-based settings to consider. But if you are looking for a place to just get started and see where your community-based setting is in terms of putting the science of learning and development into action, the simple self-refleciton tool helps you think about how important the practices are to your setting and how well you think your setting is implementing them. Adressing the questions below may help you identify a few practices based on what you want to strengthen and/or improve. You can then find information, example, and resources related to those practices in the Playbook chapters.

- What practices related to the five essential guiding principles of the blue wheel do you think your program does well?

- How do you know how well you are doing them? What qualitative or quantitative evidence do you have?

- What practices would you like to improve and why? What is the problem that you are trying to solve?

- What other conditions for learning do you/your team consider critical to for your work with young people? How would you integrate those practices?

- How do these key practices align with standards already established in the program?

- What resources would you/your team need to implement key practices?

END NOTES

[1]Scaccia, J. P., Cook, B. S., Lamont, A., Wandersman, A., Castellow, J., Katz, J., & Beidas, R. S. (2015). A practical implementation science heuristic for organizational readiness: R=MC[2]. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 43(4), 484-501.

Figure 6: Design Principles for Community-Based Settings - Reflection Tool

Instructions: Using the columns on the right, rate each of the below categories from 1 (low) to 5 (high) on how important you feel it is and how well it is currently being practiced in your community-based learning and development setting.		How Important? 1 (low) – 5 (high)	How well is it practiced? 1 (low) – 5 (high)
POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS	**Form developmental relationships between adults and young people** that promote leadership and help young people discover their strengths, expand their possibilities, and challenge growth		
	Foster relationships among young people by providing opportunities to lead and mentor.		
	Cultivate relationships with family members using a strengths-based lens that provides opportunities for engagement and collaborative decision-making		
ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY & BELONGING	**Cultivate safety and consistency**, implementing routines that support risk-taking, helping young people build personal connections and a sense of purpose for themselves, Use restorative practices to help young people to reflect on any mistake, solve conflicts, and get counseling when needed		
	Build community using positive behavior management practices, fostering positive peer to peer relationships, and co-developing program expectations with young people.		
	Be culturally responsive and inclusive, using affirmations that establish the value of every young persons' many identities and abilities, building on the diversity and cultural knowledge of young people and their families, and developing young people's knowledge, skills, and agency to critically engage in civic affairs.		
RICH INSTRUCTIONAL EXPERIENCES	**Use scaffolding and differentiation techniques** to support individual learning styles, assessing and adjusting programming to fit the interests, strengths, and needs of young people while providing asset based personalized supports as well as fostering co-operative learning.		
	Facilitate inquiry-based approaches to learning to help youth be active learners, providing regular and thoughtful feedback and creating opportunities for young people to reflect and revise.		
	Adopt a culturally responsive approach to learning by explicitly connect students' diverse experiences and cultural assets with program content, promote racial-ethnic identity development, voice, and agency, and facilitating conversations around equity and social justice.		
DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, MINDSETS, AND HABITS	**Integrate social and emotional learning** in a culturally responsive context, fostering awareness and understanding of young peoples' emotions, providing them with strategies that supports them to both express and manage emotions, and doing so in a way that ensures cultural sensitivity and responsiveness.		
	Develop productive mindsets and habits by nurturing growth mindset, providing opportunities for planning and goal setting, and supporting interpersonal skills like empathy, collaboration and problem solving.		
	Incorporate healing-centered practices, employing responsive strategies based on the principles of safety, trust, collaboration, choice, and empowerment and promoting physical and mental well-being through mindfulness strategies, breathing exercises, and other stress.		
INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS	**Connect youth to supplemental learning opportunities** by partnering with schools to provide seamless and aligned supports, monitoring young people's academic growth, and adding adult capacity to the school day.		
	Promote access to other supports and opportunities that foster health and well-being by ensuring mechanisms and partnerships are in place to connect families and youth to basic needs such as food, health, and mental health in addition to academic supports and participating in whole-school comprehensive community partnership models.		

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

THE POSSIBILITY PROJECT

The Possibility Project, a program for teens age 14-19 in New York, brings together vastly diverse groups of teenagers and uses the performing arts to examine and address the personal and social forces that shape their lives and identities. The program focusses on building community and believe that the relationships that young people develop with each other and with adults is the vehicle of their program's impact.

In the vignette below, the adults provide intentional structures where young people are able to practice inter- and-intrapersonal skills by sharing their personal stories with each other. They provide opportunities for young people to express care, support and challenge each other, and explore and identify strengths, The adults form positive developmental relationships with young people as they share power with them. They also provide opportunities for youth to lead and decide how to use each other's stories to create various performing art pieces. Adults take a step back, but continue to provide support, checking in on how youth are feeling, and scaffolding supports for them as needed.

The Possibility Project uses storytelling in a particularly powerful way. The young people in the program first tell their stories to each other, and then ultimately combine their stories and their passions into an original musical performance they present to the community. Young people are not casted for their own story and are intentionally casted in a story that is representing one of their cast member's stories. There is deep and shared responsibility to tell that story in the best way they can, and the responsibility to not let people down because if they don't show up for these story-telling sessions, then the whole group can't build narrative as individual stories are all woven together. Each young person feels the importance of their story and a sense of responsibility to show up for the team, and they reinforce that in each other.

The program facilitates structured time for young people to build relationships with each other and understand where they are coming from to truly represent each other's stories in an authentic way. They have one-on-ones: between pairs of participants (A and B) in which A asks a question of his/her partner B. When B is done answering, B asks a question of A. At the end, everyone scrambles and switches partners for a second round of one-on-ones. Participants, both adults and young people, are instructed to ask questions from a place of curiosity about the person across from them. Young people from the program share that they feel genuine care from the adults because of how they check in with them. They mentioned that the adults remember conversations they had with them and inquire about past events. A youth shares, "*they remember what you're going through and it's just like, 'Hey, how's that going? Do you need to talk, because I'm still here for you?' It's not like, 'Oh, you need someone.' Or, 'I'm listening to you,' and then like a week later they'll never talk about that again. They're still there. They're still checking in.*"

Along the way, the young people develop self-awareness as well as acting and singing skills. The staff gradually let young people take over more of the decision-making and artistic control as they design and rehearse for their final performance to the community.

Source: Adapted from Smith, Charles, Gina McGovern, Reed Larson, Barbara Hillaker, and Stephen C. Peck. (2016) *Preparing youth to thrive: Promising practices for social and emotional learning.* Forum for Youth Investment.

WHAT ARE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS?

Positive developmental relationships enable everyone to manage stress, ignite their brains, and fuel the connections that support the development of the complex skills and competencies necessary for learning success and engagement. Such relationships also simultaneously promote well-being, positive identity development, and a young person's belief in their own abilities.

Caregivers, parents, and other family members from all backgrounds want their children, at any age, to be in settings where they are well known, cared for, respected, and empowered to learn. All caregivers hope that their children will be able to feel safe and valued wherever they are spending their time, and all children deserve such contexts for learning and development. Recent brain research affirms that secure relationships build healthy brains that are necessary for development and learning.

Having secure relationships does not just mean that young people are treated kindly by adults. It also means that young people are nurtured and respected through those relationships to develop independence, competency, and agency—that they grow to become confident and self-directed learners and people.

Developmental relationships provide the avenue to learning and growth and buffer individuals' negative experiences and stress. A strong web of relationships between and among children and youth, peers, families, and educators, both in the school and in the community, represent a primary process through which all members of the community can thrive.

WHY ARE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS IMPORTANT? WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

Human relationships are the essential ingredient that catalyzes healthy development and learning. Relationships that are reciprocal, attuned, culturally responsive, and trustful are a positive developmental force in the lives of all young people. For example, when an infant reaches out for interaction through eye contact, babble, or gesture, a parent's ability to accurately interpret and respond to their baby's cues affects the wiring of brain circuits that support skill development.

These reciprocal and dynamic interactions literally shape the architecture of the developing brain and support the integration of social, affective, and cognitive circuits and processes, not only in infancy but throughout the school years and beyond. When children and youth interact positively with practitioners and peers, qualitative changes occur in their developing brains that establish pathways for lifelong learning and adaptation.

Developmental relationships allow all learners to grow in trust, competence, and agency. That relationships are important is not new information to practitioners, families, or researchers. Relationships engage young people in ways that help them define who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people. However, not all relationships are developmentally supportive. In a developmental relationship, the emotional connection is joined with adult guidance that enables children to learn skills, grow in their competence and confidence, and become more able to perform tasks on their own and take on new challenges. Children increasingly use their own agency to develop their curiosity and capacities for self-direction. As developmental relationships enable the young person to grow, the balance of power shifts toward the young person. Looked at this way, developmental relationships can both buffer the impact of stress and provide a pathway to motivation, self-efficacy, learning, and further growth.

Adult relationships best support young people when they are attuned and responsive to, and celebrate, all aspects of a young person's experience, including—importantly—their cultural experiences. All children and youth need to feel that they belong and are valued in all the settings where they spend time. If young people experience anxiety about whether they will be valued for who they are, which may accompany stereotype threats associated with their identities (race, class, language background, immigration status, dis/ability, sexual orientation, or other marginalized status), the cognitive load this creates undermines their success. When practitioners build, practice, and apply their own cultural competence—including their knowledge of and respect for young people's cultural backgrounds and personal experiences— research shows that they are better able to understand the verbal and nonverbal communication of young people and respond appropriately, helping all learners to be respected and heard, and supporting stronger achievement.

Supportive relationships in childhood and adolescence have an important protective effect against the impacts of stress and trauma. Research has found that a stable relationship with at least one committed adult can buffer the potentially negative effects of even serious adversity.

These relationships, which provide emotional security and reduce anxiety, are characterized by consistency, empathetic communications, modeling of productive social behaviors, and the ability to accurately perceive and respond to a child's needs. Search Institute's studies on developmental relationships indicate that young people who experience strong developmental relationships: are more likely to report a wide range of social-emotional strengths and other indicators of well-being and thriving; are more resilient in the face of stress and trauma; and do better when they experience a strong web of relationships with many people[1].

Young people do best when they experience strong, positive relationships in all parts of their lives. Research indicates that young people who experience strong developmental relationships across different parts of their lives are more likely to show signs of positive development in many areas, including: increased academic motivation; increased social-emotional growth and learning; increased sense of personal responsibility; and reduced engagement in a variety of high-risk behaviors.[2]

WHAT CAN COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SETTINGS DO TO FOSTER POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS?

Most young people report that the parenting adults in their lives are the strongest source of developmental relationships—not surprisingly, as families provide the foundation of care from birth onward and get know their children best. Search Institute administered the **SPARK Youth Voice Survey** to over 3000 adolescents in grades six through 12 in a large, diverse U.S. city and found that parenting adults most often exhibited the elements of developmental relationships, while community program leaders and teachers were about equally as likely to build developmental relationships with young people.[3]

While families are the most common sources of developmental relationships that provide the foundation for young people's success, developmental relationships need to extend beyond family members to include the many other adults in the community with whom youth interact—youth practitioners to mentors, to museum docents, to coaches. When all adults work to support positive developmental relationships, webs of support are created that recognize that youth are active agents in relationships, their relationships are embedded within a broader ecology of relationships (and other supports), and different adults will provide different sets of social supports.[4]

There are three ways that community-based learning and development settings support developmental relationships with young people. First and foremost, the **adults in community-based settings form developmental relationships with young people** in their settings. Secondly, they **cultivate relationships with family members**. Working together with family members can build on or even improve the relationships family members already have with young people and improve the capacity of staff to support young people's development. Lastly, when programs **foster relationships among young people by providing opportunities to mentor and lead**, older youth can form developmental relationships with peers and younger program participants in ways that inspire and encourage the younger ones.

How to Build Positive Developmental Relationships

▶ Foster developmental relationships between adults and youth

▶ Cultivate relationships with family members

▶ Foster relationships among young people by providing opportunities to lead and mentor.

Foster Developmental Relationships Between Adults and Young People

The Search Institute describes five ways adults create developmental relationships with young people: express care; challenge growth; provide support; share power; and expand possibilities.[5] These five elements help young people:

- Discover who they are
- Develop abilities to shape their own lives
- Learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them[6]

Together, the five elements of developmental relationships when implemented in community-based settings, lead to three main practices:

- Provide responsive support and caring
- Share leadership control with young people
- Use strategies to help young people discover their strengths, expand their possibilities, and challenge growth

Provide responsive support and caring.
For a relationship with a young person to promote positive development it must foundationally be warm, dependable, and encouraging. Being aware of young people as individuals, greeting them by name, and welcoming warmly them and treating them with respect is foundational. Using responsive practices helps foster developmental relationships between adults and young people. Responsive practices are ones in which staff respond to young people based on their unique needs, experiences and strengths, particularly when adults respond or adjust in the moment, based on shared conversation about what is best for the young person at that moment. Responsive practices include:

- Observing and interacting in order to know youth deeply
- Providing structure for check-ins to actively listen to and receive feedback from individual youth
- Coaching, modeling, scaffolding, and facilitating in real time as challenges occurs

Figure 7: Search Institute on Developmental Relationships
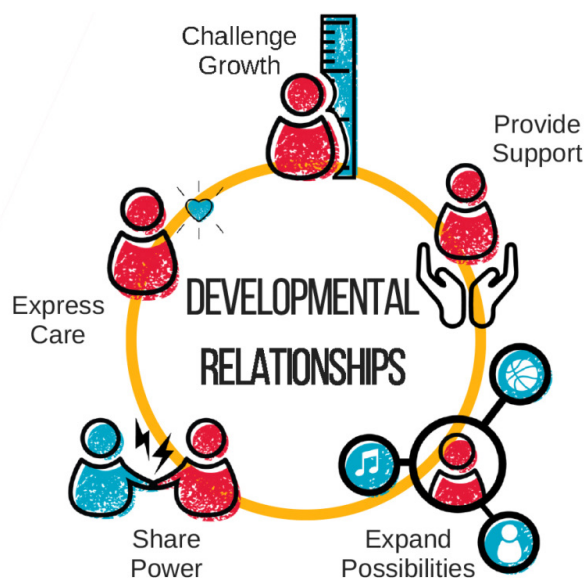
Incorporating responsive practices into community-based settings involves incorporating appropriate structures like get-to-know-you activities and the check-ins mentioned above. Having young people tell their stories is a powerful structure for getting to know the young people deeply. Young people learn more about themselves as they learn about others. Regular structured opportunities for sharing and reflection are practices that a variety of community-based learning and development opportunities can implement.

Playworks is a community partner that helps schools and community-based learning and development opportunities make the most of recess, fostering safety, engagement, and empowerment through positive play. One strategy Playworks uses is to encourage adults to jump in the game alongside children, thereby demonstrating that adults are amateurs too, learning as they go, just like youth. When an adult gets out in a game and models accepting disappointment, it shows youth that their experiences are similar. Playing with children, as opposed to refereeing, shows young people that play matters, and that an activity that is "just for fun" is important too. This aligns the adults with young people beyond cognitive activities, offering another entry point for strong developmental relationships. Playing with children and youth is a powerful way to build developmental relationships. Young people can teach adults how to work together as a team to win a game and they can suggest adaptations of a game to accommodate different spaces, sizes of the group, and ages of the players. Putting children in charge of games that adults are participating in, creates a positive relationship between young people and adults in an entirely new way.

Share leadership control with young people.

Sharing control or power with young people involves giving young people choices and supporting autonomy, independence, and decision-making as their skills and competence grow. The adult role is to guide and facilitate as needed. Practical strategies for sharing controls with young people include: encouraging young people to give feedback, providing input on decisions that affect them, and generating ideas.

Figure 8: Adapted from Mitra D. Increasing student voice and moving towards youth leadership. (2006)

Pyramid of Student Voice

- Building Capacity for Leadership
- Collaborating With Adults
- Being Heard
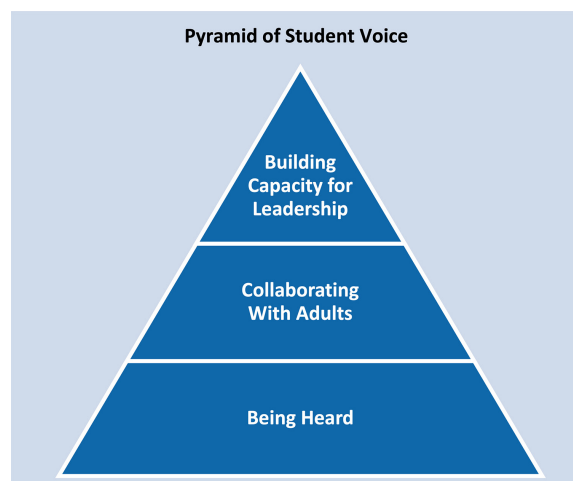
The Pyramid of Student Voice[7] provides a framework for thinking about how young people can move toward increased autonomy and decision-making. The pyramid begins at the bottom with the most common and most basic form of youth voice—'being heard.' At this level, adults listen to young people to learn about their experiences in the learning and development setting. 'Collaborating with adults' is the next level. It describes instances in which young people work with adults to make changes in the school, including collecting data on problems and implementing solutions. The final level at the top of the pyramid, 'Building capacity for leadership,' includes an explicit focus on enabling young people to share in the leadership of the youth voice initiative.

In the Strive Forward program, at Minnesota's **Voyageur Outward Bound School**, staff increasingly share power with the young people as their outdoor skills grow. The program is intentionally sequenced to build a progression using three phases to create a graduated level of responsibility for youth. The three phases—Training (Learning) Phase, Main (Leadership) Phase, and Final (Responsibility) Phase—are stretched out over the year, with youth spending roughly three months in each phase, but progressing through them at their own pace.

In the beginning the staff structure everything, providing lots of training and hands-on help. As the practical and leadership skills grow for the youth, ages 14 to 18, the staff step back and transfer responsibility to the youth who set goals, make decisions, and take the lead in their expeditions.

Use strategies to help young people discover their strengths, expand their possibilities, and challenge growth. Developmental relationships empower and inspire young people, enabling them to discover and develop their strengths, build their confidence, and take on challenges. Many community-based settings provide structures for young people to learn about themselves in ways that the academic priorities do not allow time for in the classroom. In many cases, young people or their care-taking adults can select environments that are conducive for developing and displaying the strengths, interests, and talents of young people that may not emerge in an academic setting, affording youth opportunities to explore interest areas without concern about grades.

Some settings focus on developing a particular skill or interest area such as a basketball, chess, or music, while some provide a wide range of choices and interest areas within one program. Many others provide leadership opportunities or opportunities for civic engagement. Adults in community-based learning and development opportunities can help young people see possibilities within their community, but also expand their range of experiences beyond their community. In community-based learning and development opportunities such as camps, museums, and art venues, adults have unique opportunities to show young people an expanded set of possibilities for their lives and encourage them to explore and develop new interests and talents.

Whatever the context, adults interacting with young people need to be able to describe and name individuals' strengths, express confidence in the young person and encourage the young person to believe in themselves. This requires that practitioners commit to an unconditional positive regard for the young people in the program.

Cultivate Relationships with Family Members

The research is clear that families are most often the source of developmental relationships with young people, therefore, when other adults who work with young people partner with families it supports developmental relationships with young people. Key practices that support relationships with families are:

- See families through a strength-based lens
- Provide opportunities for family engagement
- Foster mutual learning and decision-making

Key Practices to Cultivate Relationships with Family Members

▶ See families through a strength-based lens

▶ Provide opportunities for family engagement

▶ Foster mutual learning and decision-making

See families through a strength-based lens. Practices that support positive relationships with family members begin with seeing families through a strength-based lens. Adults who work with young people often say family engagement or family involvement is important. At the same time, families may be viewed from a deficit lens. Behavior problems may be viewed as the fault of family upbringing and the strengths of family culture may not be recognized. While the possibility of abuse or neglect within a family cannot be overlooked, recognizing family strengths and assuming families want the best for their children is always the place to start.

The **Michigan Hispanic Collaborative** is a non-profit organization that provides academic and career support programs to enable more Hispanic students to graduate from college and achieve career success. They follow a two-generation approach to engage both families and young people in the learning process. They use a *cafecitos* (*Café*) model where they bring young people and families together to build a strong and supportive community. Parents benefit as they get practical advice from an experienced parent peer facilitator, a Hispanic professional, and other families to understand the academic process. It aims to empower both families and young people to support successful learning.

Provide opportunities for family engagement.

Research links family involvement with improved learning and outcomes for young people.[8] Sometimes family involvement in community-based settings is more accessible than involvement in school. Programs and activities are more likely to be scheduled for afterschool, evenings, and weekends, so family members may have more routine connection points to community learning and development opportunities than to school settings. They may drop off or pick up their children and youth, they may watch sports games or other performances, or they may volunteer or provide snacks. If community programs are staffed by volunteers from the community the young people live in, family members may already know the leaders, and may share cultural or ethnic backgrounds with them. Additionally, community learning and development opportunities are more likely to have relationships with young people that endure over a period of years, enhancing opportunities to get to know young people and family members well. In some cases, adults may be closer to the young person's age and may be an example of achievement that young people can relate to.

Family engagement starts with clear and welcoming communications and established mechanisms (e.g., newsletters, email, conferences, group meetings, dinners, picnics) to keep family members and other caregivers informed as well as to ask for suggestions and feedback. It also requires that adults share with parents or guardian examples of their children and youth's achievements, progress, and positive behavior either in person or through various technology platforms.

It is important to ensure that interactions with family members are not just about negative behaviors or performance. Central to effective family engagement efforts are inclusion and accessibility, with logistical barriers to engagement, such as translation, removed.

Showing up at events for their children and youth may be viewed as families' primary form of involvement or contribution to young people's learning. However, families and guardians support young people's learning in many ways—from reading to their children, to helping with homework. In the middle school years, however, a meta-analysis found parents' academic socialization to be a better predictor of achievement than direct involvement.[9] Academic socialization includes having high expectations for their children and youth, valuing education, and helping them prepare and plan for the future. Practitioners in community-based settings can support and supplement families' and guardians' role in academic socialization, as adults can also convey high expectations and possibilities for young people.

Navigating Your Way to Success: Youth, Families, and Schools Aligned and Connected is a family engagement pilot program to increase the amount of family engagement in Michigan's 21st Century Community Learning programs. Each week for eight weeks, families and their middle-school aged children shared a meal together in the afterschool space and focused on a particular theme that supported academic mastery mindset. The parenting adults started with a session learning about adolescent development and were reassured to discover other families were also experiencing the challenges of navigating relationships with children emerging from childhood into adolescence. At the same time, young people were brought together to engage in a dialogue around the stresses and concerns of the adults that care for them. Over the course of the program, young people explored their career interests, learned about their personality types, evaluated their social and emotional learning skills, and learned more about options available in high school and college. The families also explored each of these themes and were coached to have supportive discussions with their young person. Each week the youth creatively incorporated something from the week's theme into a "This is Me" project they would share with their families in a "youth-led conference" at the end of the program.

Foster mutual learning and decision-making.
Practices that support partnerships with family members begin with seeing families through a strength-based lens. Building on that involves creating structures for adults in community-based learning and development opportunities and families to learn from each other and work together in the best interests of the young person. Families advocate for their children and youth. Family members and guardians can share insights into their young person's personality, interests, culture, and behavior, thus helping adults be more responsive to the young people in their program. Adults in community-based settings can share successes and achievements of the young person in their program, providing an additional opportunity for family members to express pride in their young person. Adults can work with family members to strategize how to support young people in improving their skills and engaging successfully in learning settings. They may model supportive language and provide resources on child or adolescent development. And, of course, one of the primary ways' families expand possibilities for their children and youth is by connecting them to community-based learning and development settings.

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework (Figure 9), while developed to help schools and districts improve their partnerships with families, is equally applicable to community-based settings. It articulates the essential conditions for effective partnerships with families—i.e., the partnership is collaborative, interactive, culturally responsive and respectful, asset based, built on mutual trust, and linked to learning and development, coupled with essential organization conditions including system level leadership buy in, integrated and embedded in all strategies and sustained by resources and infrastructure support. With these process and organizational conditions in place, both practitioners and families are able to build and enhance their capacity to develop capabilities, make connections, connections, increase cognition, and improve confidence. Together, these capacities empower both practitioners and families to connect their partnership to learning and development, become co-creators, honor the assets they bring, and advocate on behalf of the young people.

Figure 9: Mapp, K. L. & Bergman, E. (2019). Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Version 2). Retrieved from: **www.dualcapacity.org**

Foster Relationships Among Young People by Providing Opportunities to Mentor and Lead

Another source of developmental relationships for young people can be older youth. Some community-based settings have traditions or practices that provide older youth with an opportunity to lead or mentor those younger or less experienced. Sometimes these are even paid opportunities. Camp programs sometimes use older, experienced campers to provide leadership and support to younger campers using models such as Counselors in Training (CIT). Sports programs and other community-based learning and development opportunities may also look for older youth to work with younger youth, providing valuable assistance to the program leaders, opportunities for growth in leadership for the older youth, and someone closer to their own age to be a role model and example for the younger ones. Having someone to look up to that comes from a similar background makes identification with a role model easier, whether that person is an older youth or an adult leader.

> ### Key Practices to Foster Relationships Among Young People by Providing Opportunities to Mentor and Lead
>
> ▶ Scaffold leadership opportunities over time
>
> ▶ Provide support and explicit leadership training
>
> ▶ Provide structures for young people to pursue a mentor or leader role

Scaffold leadership opportunities over time.
Standards of positive youth development practice, such as the **Youth Program Quality Assessment**, encourage all programs to provide opportunities for young people to exercise leadership. At first, opportunities may be small and the adult may provide substantial support and guidance. Even younger or more introverted children can be supported to share their expertise with their peers or to lead a group in a small activity. A simple example comes from Bright Futures, an afterschool program: in a cooking activity, a staff member notices that an older child is skilled in cutting onions. The staff member encourages the older child to take responsibility to "mentor" a younger child who does not have that skill.[10] These kinds of experiences build confidence over time. Gradually, the adults provide for increasing independence and autonomy and young people take on more complex roles.

Provide support and explicit leadership training.
Young people, especially teens, are capable of significant leadership and responsibility, but they need support and training. Sometimes this support can be informal—a staff member taking a young person under their wing—but intentionally structuring a program so that staff members both encourage and coach and provide training is important. Some community-based learning and development opportunities invite older participants to serve as mentors or assistant leaders for younger participants and create training specifically for them. Camps refer to these older campers as CITs. Other types of programs provide various types of leadership opportunities, but to maximize the benefit for participants of all ages, it is best to intentionally utilize and encourage developmental relationships.

The **YMCA Storer Camps** provide two-week training and service experience for older youth who desire to grow as leaders and potentially prepare themselves to be full camp counselors in the future. Young people must submit an application to participate in the program. The CITs live side-by-side with camp counselors, take workshops where they learn behavior management, age characteristics and other topics, engage in team building and are supported to exercise leadership in their cabins. CITs also develop relationships with younger campers. Since CITs are an integral part of the camp experience, younger campers can see the CITs as role models and know they could one day be a CIT.

Provide structures for young people to pursue a mentor or leader role. Young people often more easily identify with another young person than with an adult leader. It is easier to envision themselves in a few years, recognizing how continued involvement in the community-based learning and development opportunities can lead to successful skill development and leadership opportunities. Programs that intentionally utilize older youth as assistants or even have an established training path for youth leadership, make it clear that leadership is a possibility for young people. Young people can see that they need not outgrow participation in the program but have a level of challenge and responsibility they can grow into.

Each year, **The Possibility Project**—the program described at the beginning of this chapter—establishes a Production Team comprised of six-ten returning cast members and two new cast members. This Production Team gets to know new cast members, helping them to feel safe and supported. As new cast members see Production Team members exercise significant leadership over setting goals, planning, hiring, and solving problems, new cast members realize that it is also possible for them to grow from novice to leader.

SUMMARY

Developmental relationships depend on mutual respect, knowing a person well, expressing care and support, seeing their strengths, and creating an environment that brings out the best in young people. Adults in community-based learning and development opportunities have specific assets when it comes to being a source of developmental relationships for youth and children. Adults who work and volunteer in community-based settings may have greater ties to home, family, and culture as they often come from within the community may have a head start in building trusting relationships with young people. If program leaders are from the community of the young people, they can intuitively identify and affirm young people's cultural strengths and build trust. Community-based settings with mixed age-groups that continue to meet year after year have a unique opportunity to encourage developmental relationships between older and younger youth. Ideally, families help adults in community-based learning and development opportunities to know their young people better, supporting developmental relationships between adults and young people and may provide resources to families to support developmental relationships in the family.

Families support the development of their children and youth when they enroll them in community-based learning and development settings. These settings can expand young people's horizons beyond their community or comfort area. Museums and libraries may figuratively take young people outside of their home communities, exposing them to new worlds. Camp or residential settings may literally take young people beyond the community, immersing them in a challenging and supportive program where deep relationships can be formed and young people can be introduced to novel experiences and new environments. Even within their home community, young people may be encouraged to see themselves in new ways through civic engagement or leadership opportunities. These opportunities, combined with trusted, caring relationships with adults and others, are key to young people thriving and learning. The following section lists some resources programs may use to learn about or support developmental relationships.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO CREATE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

- **Preparing Youth** and **Children to Thrive** are two field guides that provide cases studies of exemplary community-based learning and development opportunities and how they create structures and opportunities that build caring and meaningful relationships with young people that challenge, support and expand possibilities.

- The Search Institute has many **resources** on developmental relationships for families, schools, programs and organizations. **Keep Connected** is a curriculum based on developmental relationships for young people and their families that schools and community or faith-based organizations can sponsor. They also have **resources** for how families can spend time together and make an intentional space to develop relationships.

- **The Afterschool Guide to Building Relationships and Routines E book** helps afterschool professionals create safe, supportive environment based on program activities that build relationships and routines and are based on the Science of Learning and Development.

- Playworks provides various **resources** across age groups and group sizes for both in-person and virtual settings that help to build relationships, build adult-youth relationships, and solve conflicts.

- **Family Engagement in Anywhere, Anytime Learning** guide encourages youth development workers and community programs to support families in providing developmental relationships with their children that expand the interests and, possibilities. It provides links to resources for how community-based learning and development opportunities and families can work together to support young people.

- **The Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships** was formulated using the research on effective family engagement and home–school partnership strategies and practices, adult learning and motivation, and leadership development. While aimed at school-family partnerships the framework is equally applicable to community learning and development opportunities.

- **Navigating Your Way to Success**. This online course provides a curriculum for afterschool programs to use with families and their children who are in or approaching the middle school years. Through the courses, participants will receive a set of six themed program sessions with activities for young people and their families to engage in together with afterschool staff.

- **AMP's Top Ten Tips for Engaging with Young People** is a simple and practical guide for engaging in a supportive conversation with young people. It includes examples of what types of things to say and what not to say.

- **Peer Mentoring: A Discussion with Experienced Practitioners webinar** engages mentoring practitioners around best practices for engaging young people to become mentors to other young people.

- **The Mentor's Guide to Youth Purpose**. Mentors have a unique opportunity to help youth find meaning, a sense of self, and ways of giving back to their world. MENTOR's resource is a how-to guide for mentors and the young people in their lives. The Mentor's Guide to Youth Purpose includes directive tips and worksheets to help adults and young people understand and explore purpose together.

FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Three papers synthesizing the knowledge base on the science of learning and development form the basis of the design principles for community-based settings presented here. For those seeking access to the research underlying this work, these papers are publicly available:

- Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. Applied Developmental Science, 23(4), 307–337. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649**.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B. J., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(2), 97–140. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791**.

- Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(1), 6–36. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650**.

END NOTES

[1]Roehlkepartain, E. C., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A., Sethi, J., Sullivan, T. K., & Scales, P. C. (2017). *Relationships first: Creating connections that help young people thrive*. The Search Institute.

[2]Roehlkepartain, et.al. (2017).

[3]SPARK and Search Institute. (2019). HELPING KIDS THRIVE AT HOME: *How Itasca area youth experience strength and resilience in their relationships with parents and grandparents*. The Search Institute. **https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2018_SPARK_Report_Families_final.pdf**

[4]S. M., & Zaff, J. F. (2017). Defining Webs of Support. **https://www.americaspromise.org/resource/defining-webs-support-new-framework-advance-understanding-relationships-and-youth**

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[9]Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: a meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 740-763.

[10]Borah, P., Conn, M., Pittman, K. (2019). *Preparing children to thrive: Standards for social and emotional learning practices in school-age settings*. The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality.

ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING

YOUTH BUILD McLEAN COUNTY

Youth Build McLean County is a nonprofit organization that provides educational and occupational skills training for youth. It offers training on residential construction for both new home construction and rehabilitation of affordable homes in the community. Youth Build's mission is to build, develop, inspire, and challenge educationally and economically disadvantaged young people to make a difference. Given the nature of the program, the personal histories of the young people they serve, and the local community, the young people navigate various challenges through a shared understanding of what it means to be part of the Youth Build community.

The vignette below provides several examples for how the program lays the foundation for building interpersonal and community-building skills by providing an intentional space with consistent routines such that all young people feel safe to share their stories and hear from others. It highlights a time when racial tension emerged between two groups of young people when a group of white young people started wearing clothes displaying Confederate flag memorabilia. The vignette also provides several examples of the structures and practices that the adults institutionalized that were culturally responsive and inclusive, providing young people with opportunities to lead, share perspectives, respectfully disagree, question dominant narratives, understand causes, and consequences.

A noteworthy routine that Youth Build practices as a program is to start each day by reciting the creed below as a daily ritual that helps young people set intentions, build community, and maintain consistency.

"I am YouthBuild. I proudly accept the challenge YouthBuild offers me to transform my life through education, leadership development, completion of vocational training, and service to my community. I gladly receive the opportunity to develop my independence, work history, and personal integrity. I make this pledge now to myself and to the world. I am YouthBuild. I do make the difference."

During the time that racial tensions emerged when a group of white young people started wearing apparel displaying Confederate flags, the sense of belonging that young people felt in the program along with youth leadership skills and youth voice that the program inculcated among its young people helped them to put forward their perspectives and collaboratively problem solve. A group of black youth were deeply hurt by the Confederate apparel as they were aware of the deep legacy of slavery and white supremacy associated with the Confederacy and the confederate flag. This group of youth voiced their concerns to the program administration. The group of white people who were wearing the Confederate apparel on the other hand felt that the Confederate flag was a symbol of cultural heritage that they had grown up with and had no active memory of the offense that symbol held for others or the controversy around it.

One of the first steps that the leaders did was to provide a space that would empower the two groups of young people to discuss the issue and agree to a mutually agreeable solution that they could they bring forward to the administration. The discussion was unsuccessful, and the symbol appeared often in the clothing that young people were wearing. The leaders realized that the young people needed more scaffolding and education regarding the symbol. Youth Build is not about enforcing rules and codes but believes in engaging young people in the discussion, with their permission to teach. After gaining young people's permission to teach them, the leaders gathered all young people to come together to discuss appropriate apparel, address controversial and hurtful symbols, thereby reinvigorating community expectations and an anti-racist approach in building community.

The staff at Youth Build often use these community meetings as a structure to build relationships, build community, and pose challenging situations for the whole community to come together, discuss, and reflect. The meetings are structured around the relationships that adults and young people share at Youth Build. It is an opportunity to share personal stories in a safe space with adults and young people who have worked together through the program. It is a space to create new meanings, unlearn, and relearn as they work together to define their program culture. Youth Build uses a robust developmental lens to use conflicts and challenges as an opportunity to come together and tackle the issue head on and not side-step or ignore which is often the alternative that the outer world presents. At the conclusion of this community meeting, the young people who donned confederate flags apologized. They also joined an initiative to design an organization wide T-shirt that everyone could wear and be proud of.

Source: Adapted from the Readiness Projects "**Building a (Culture) War-Free Zone**."

OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING

Features of the physical environment, as well as how time and space are used and how relationships and experiences are created, set the tone for environments filled with safety and belonging. The context of the environment sends messages about the value placed on the young people and adults who work together in a learning setting. What is important or unimportant, what is rewarded or sanctioned, who is powerful or powerless, and who is viewed as trustworthy or untrustworthy are all communicated by the environment. Broken or functional furniture, current or outdated technology, and sufficient or limited supplies communicate that those participating in the space and those working in the space are important or unimportant, worth investing in or not. Access to and use of texts and materials that acknowledge and reflect young people's backgrounds, culture, and interests send a message about the degree of acceptance and belonging, the legitimacy of young people's cultures, and the importance of youth voice in the community setting. And an emphasis on restoring relationships rather than punishing missteps sends a message about whether young people are viewed as worthy of trust and belong to the community.

An environment can be rich in protective factors or contain significant risks to both young people and adults. A positive learning environment supports growth across all domains of development—physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional—while it reduces stress and anxiety that create biological impediments to learning. Such an environment takes a "whole child" approach to learning and development, seeking to address the distinctive strengths, needs, and interests of each and every young person as they engage in learning. Settings that provide developmentally rich relationships and experiences can buffer the effects of stress or trauma, promote resilience, and foster healthy development and engagement in learning.

WHY ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING ARE IMPORTANT: WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

The brain is a prediction machine that loves order: It is calm when things are orderly and gets anxious when things are chaotic or threatening. The brain wants to know what is going to happen next. We are constantly making predictions, unconsciously and at every moment of the day; positive, consistent routines allow our brains to predict what is coming next, which reduces the cognitive load needed to process new information. This new information fuels the learning process and the brain's ability to be productive.

When the brain knows what is coming next, it can plan for what it is going to do in response. However, if the environment is chaotic and unpredictable, the brain is less able to focus, concentrate, and remember. Environments designed with shared values, norms, and routines create calm, consistent, safe settings, which in turn promote productivity, curiosity, and exploration.

Our environments influence the expression of our genes. Each of us has about 20,000 genes in our genome, yet in our lifetime, fewer than ten percent of our genes will get expressed. Gene expression happens through a biological process called epigenetic adaptation, in which the environments, experiences, and relationships in our lives determine which genes are expressed. Thus, the life cycle of a child is shaped by the contexts they experience and is not predetermined in a genetic program.

Young people's ability to learn and take risks is enhanced when they feel emotionally and psychologically safe; it is undermined when they feel threatened. The internal resources that children and youth bring to learning—including prior knowledge and experience, integrated neural (social, emotional, and cognitive) processes, motivation, and metacognitive skills—are affected by the environments they experience. When young people encounter trust, caring, and positive relationships with adults and peers, they can draw on these resources for learning. On the other hand, when they experience significant adversity or trauma, both their brains and their bodies are affected through the biological mechanisms of stress. This stress can become toxic when threats are constant. The surge of cortisol and adrenaline that is part of the stress response triggers hypervigilance and anxiety, reducing working memory and focus. Unless other supportive relationships and contexts are available, this process can affect the developing neural architecture that is critical for learning.

WHAT CAN COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT SETTINGS DO TO FOSTER ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING?

There are three primary ways that community-based learning and development settings can foster environments filled with safety and belonging. First and foremost, learning and development settings need to feel like safe spaces for young people, with **consistent routines and expectations**. A key strategy for helping young people feel like they belong is to **intentionally create a sense of community** among peers and adults. Finally, environments that promote belonging feel **inclusive of and culturally responsive to all participants**.

How to Build Environments Filled with Safety and Belonging

▶ Cultivate safety and consistency

▶ Build community

▶ Be culturally responsive and inclusive

Cultivate Safety and Consistency

Environments that cultivate safety and consistency have shared values (e.g., respect, responsibility, perseverance, contribution) that are translated into agreements and expectations for each member's actions and interactions to build a foundation for creating a strong sense of community and belonging within the setting and across the larger community. Creating an environment in which young people learn to take risks, feel physically and emotionally safe and are given the opportunity for agency and contribution can transform social, emotional, and academic behavior and outcomes.

Key Practices to Cultivate Safety and Consistency

▶ Implement consistent routines and rituals that support risk-taking and help young people feel physically and emotionally safe

▶ Help young people build personal connections and a sense of purpose for themselves, within and beyond the system or setting

▶ Use restorative practices to help young people to reflect on any mistake, solve conflicts, and get counseling when needed

Implement consistent routines and rituals that support risk-taking and help young people feel physically and emotionally safe. Routines and rituals provide a sense of structure and stability and make the learning and development setting feel calmer, orderly, and predictable. This is particularly helpful for young people who have experienced instability in their family lives and having a predictable environment with consistent rituals and routines relaxes them. However, these rituals are not meant to be rigid and further control or police young people, especially young people of color.

AHA! (Attitude Harmony Achievement) is a community program in Santa Barbara, CA that supports teens' social and emotional development. Over the years program staff learned that teen brain development needs consistency, reliability, and ritual to help youth feel more contained and relaxed. The familiarity and repetition become comfortable and help them move into being able to lead activities. One of their strategies to promote consistency is to start programming with a mindfulness exercise consisting of a few of moments of just breathing and paying attention to the breath helps them settle in and learn how to calm their minds.

Help young people build personal connections and a sense of purpose for themselves, within the setting and beyond. When young people have a personal connection to the work they are doing, they are likely to be more motivated and engaged. Adults need to make an effort to know them deeply and solicit discussions about their personal experiences in a safe and supported environment to help them identify personally meaningful goals and purpose.

Boys and Girls Club of Greater Milwaukee is a youth-led advocacy program where each year young people decide to focus collectively on a current issue through creative art. Young people identify an issue that is important to them, their peers, and the community and this opportunity to exercise their choice and voice is a powerful motivator and keeps them engaged in the learning process. Young people feel a personal sense of purpose and collective sense of responsibility to impact their community positively. One of the projects included organizing a city campaign called *Saving our Sons* that promotes black male achievement in Milwaukee. Through the support of staff, young people were able to move through challenges and became more comfortable when they saw the positive impact their work had on their community.

Use restorative practices to help young people to reflect on any mistake, solve conflicts, and get counseling when needed. Restorative practices enable adults to understand how they may unintentionally trigger or escalate problem behavior; these practices help young people and staff cultivate strategies for resolving conflict and creating healthier, more positive interactions.[1] Restorative practices could include daily group meetings and community building circles where both young people and staff share their experiences and feelings; using peer mediations where young people actively listen, negotiate, and problem solve to resolve a conflict between young people; and also for more formal counseling. Implementing restorative practices can be particularly challenging for adults who work in larger systems such as juvenile justice, where historically those systems have not been set up for healing.

Eastern Michigan University's Bright Futures is a 21st Century Community Learning Center based in Ypsilanti, Michigan. One of their sites that serve young children have chat zones to facilitate peer mediations. When children have disagreements, they are empowered to ask if they can go to the chat zone and talk it out. Staff provide them with the choice if they want an adult mediator or another young person to negotiate and let them make an independent choice as much as possible. Staff intervene and ask permission to support the negotiation only if the argument gets visibly heated.[2]

Restorative practices are "processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing."[3] Relationships and trust are supported through universal interventions such as daily meetings, community-building circles, and conflict resolution strategies. (Figure 10).

Figure 10: What are Restorative Practices?: Adapted from Schott Foundation, Advancement Project, American Federation of Teachers, & National Education Association. (2014). Restorative practices: Fostering healthy relationships & promoting positive discipline in schools

Build Community

Building community involves implementing a set of strategies for promoting positive group functioning and supporting young people's sense of belonging. It is important to be mindful about how young people interact with each other; setting expectations and establishing rituals helps adults manage young people in a way that is safe and responsive to their needs. It is also an opportunity to share control with young people and provide them agency to co-lead the process of building a safe space to learn. Adults need to be mindful to include all young people, especially those that belong to marginalized communities and ensure that both adults and young people refrain from exclusionary behavior.

Key Practices to Build Community

▶ Use positive behavior management practices aimed at fostering a healthy, inclusive community

▶ Foster strong peer to peer relationships

▶ Co-develop program expectations with young people

Use positive management practices aimed at fostering a healthy, inclusive community.
Being able to manage the learning process in both group and one-on-one settings depends on an adult's ability to guide young people to their co-developed expectations, goals, and processes. Redirection and knowing hot spots for young people are critically important during sensitive discussions. Adults should also be actively involved and ensure that all young people are included, feel welcomed, and there is no instance of exclusionary behavior. Young people can also be empowered to facilitate peer mediation.

An afterschool program through Bright Futures at Hicks Elementary School, Michigan, understands that children often need a space to process their emotions on their own first before they can fully cognitively engage with the content and with their peers and adults. They have structured a *by-yourself space* that they refer as *Alaska* that is equipped with a stress ball, coloring tools, and visual cues that can help young people calm down. Children are empowered to use this space whenever they feel like they need some alone time. Staff then check in to see if they need additional support or time and to join the group when they feel ready[4].

Foster strong peer to peer relationships. Young people may come from a wide variety of backgrounds and it is essential that adults create explicit spaces for young people to know each other, process emotions, hear each other's stories in order to foster a safe environment that creates a sense of belonging. Helping young people build their empathetic listening and perspective taking skills as they share their personal stories helps to build strong relationships and understanding among peers. One effective strategy to fostering peer relationships is a game called Connections where children sit in a circle and share something personal if they want to.

WYMAN'S TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM (TOP)

Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP) in St. Louis, Missouri, is an evidence-based program that uses a combination of group discussion and community-service learning opportunities to empower teens to lead and build strong communities. Their initial program activities include getting-to-know-you icebreakers, name games, and teambuilding activities to help all teens feel safe and welcome.

Young people get together to identify routines and rituals that they can use to work together as a team. They identified an acronym called ROPES for the group to set the tone for how they want to behave with each other. ROPES refers to:

- Respect and Responsibility

- Opportunity, Openness and "Ouch" (a term used if something offends)

- Participation and Positive attitude

- Education, Empowerment, and Escuchar (Spanish for "to listen")

- Sense of humor and Sensitivity

Facilitators articulate their expectations for the teens, and teens share their expectations back for facilitators to develop a common understanding. The ROPES are signed by all group members and posted in the club meeting space where they can be referenced throughout the TOP club. When conflict or emotional tensions get the group off track, facilitators and young people both use the acronym ROPES to remind each other of their group agreement.

TOP also motivates young people to design a community service-learning project that is personally meaningful to themselves and to the group. It provides young people with an opportunity to exercise their voice and agency to decide what they want to do and also motivates them to persevere despite challenges. For example, one of the projects that young people chose to pursue was related to advocacy against drunk driving. It was the first time they were doing advocacy work, but the subject was personally meaningful to the teens as they had recently lost a group member who was killed by a drunk driver. They wanted to try something out in the community of the friend they lost who was from East St. Louis, even though their program was based in St. Louis. The adults supported them in reaching out to the agency in East St. Louis and the young people decided to do their advocacy work through a community garden in East St. Louis.

Source: Adapted from Smith, Charles, Gina McGovern, Reed Larson, Barbara Hillaker, and Stephen C. Peck. (2016) *Preparing youth to thrive: Promising practices for social and emotional learning.* Forum for Youth Investment.

Other children are encouraged to actively listen and share if they see a connection to the story being shared. This helps young people find similarities and offers them opportunities to ask questions of each other in a respectful way.[5]

Co-develop program expectations with young people. Co-developing program expectations with young people promotes a sense of team identity and mutual accountability. It ensures that young peoples' voices and needs are incorporated, and they can take leadership roles in managing a positive environment. Co-developed program expectations provide agency to young people to take an active role in creating a safe space. For example, young people can establish expectations for how they can interact during discussions to ensure that every young person is heard. One such expectation could be around using a speaking tool that allows young people with an opportunity to share and others have to actively listen. Similarly, both adults and young people can create a list or visual of group agreements and co-sign to facilitate mutual accountability.

Be Culturally Responsive and Inclusive

Young people need safe places for learning, ones in which they feel respected and valued, and that the environment builds upon the cultures, identities and experiences of them and their families. Enacting culturally responsive approaches to teaching involves working actively to reduce implicit and explicit bias in adults' own practice, both in the specific setting as well as in the larger community.

VOYAGER OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL (VOB)

The mission of **Voyager Outward Bound School (VOB)** (based in St. Paul, Minnesota) is to change lives of teens through challenge and discovery. VOB works with African American boys in middle school and provides them an opportunity to learn wilderness skills such as canoeing, leadership expeditions, and rock climbing. Practitioners at VOB employ many strategies to build community.

They **facilitate a process of co-development of expectations and agreements** through a series of guiding questions that ask young people to consider what is important to them as a group. Part of the questions help identify the non-negotiables of being a group member, such as respecting others and themselves. Adults are also encouraged to share their expectations so that collectively youth and adults build trust and mutual accountability.

VOB **uses beginning rituals, often referred to as tone sets, which include welcoming, setting expectations, and letting young people decide their activities for the day**. These rituals are also an important component to developing trust which is essential as young people climb together and literally have their lives in each other's hands. VOB also has a restore ritual for addressing conflict. The idea is to restore or bring back what has been lost: trust, open communication, respect, etc.

VOB **uses an acronym tool, PROPS, that young people use to provide every young person to participate during group discussions**. PROPS stands for People Respecting Other People Speaking. When young people are standing in a circle and someone talks out of turn, the instructors remain quiet and young people generally speak up and just say, "PROPS," and that is the cue for the young person to continue to focus.

Young people are actively encouraged to make goals for themselves and choose activities according to the skills that they want to practice. A young man in the program shared how even though he has great fun with his family members, there is not much opportunity to share emotions. He says that the program helped him to be open about his emotions and realize that it is okay to take support from others and that there is no shame in that.

VOB staff use a debrief ritual after each activity to process and sort out emotional responses. These conversations also provide adults with an opportunity to assess what is working and how far they should push and what additional supports young people need.

Source: Adapted from Smith, Charles, Gina McGovern, Reed Larson, Barbara Hillaker, and Stephen C. Peck. (2016) *Preparing youth to thrive: Promising practices for social and emotional learning*. Forum for Youth Investment..

When learning settings do not have diverse communities to draw from, practitioners can actively work to provide young people with windows and mirrors to grow understanding of their race and culture, and those of others, so that the cultures and lived experiences beyond the walls of the setting and community are made visible. Culturally responsive approaches include recognizing young people's' culturally grounded experiences as a foundation on which to build knowledge, exhibiting cultural competency in interacting with young people and families, demonstrating an ethic of deep care, and possessing a sense of efficacy that is consciously transmitted to young people.[6]

Use affirmations that establish the value of every young person's many identities and abilities and actively counter stereotypes and bias. Young people in marginalized and minority communities often experience fear and anxiety of confirming the stereotypes associated with their identities. Practitioners can work to become self-aware of their own biases, aim to have high-expectations of every young person's ability to learn, and work to actively counter stereotypes. They can discuss with their colleagues the harm that these stereotypes cause, strategies for how young people can manage the stress and anxiety, and investigate why these stereotypes persist in society. Constant affirmation of their belief that every young person is and will always be able to push through all challenges if they continue to try and practice is a part of a culturally inclusive setting.

YW BOSTON

As the first YWCA in the nation, **YW Boston** has been at the forefront of advancing equity for over 150 years. YW Boston's mission is to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity to all. It wants young people to understand that social injustice is not primarily about individuals treating other individuals unfairly, but it is about systemic and institutionalized factors that perpetuate privilege in some groups and injustice in others.

YW Boston provides young people with historical and current political contexts, frameworks, and vocabulary, interactive activities that spark discussion, and guiding questions. While the tools provide the structure, staff believe that the reactions, stories, and personal experiences of the young people drive the core of their conversations. Invariably there are conflicts and disagreements as young people work together, and staff work to empower young people to solve these in a safe and supportive environment.

YW Boston shared an instance when there was a sharp disagreement among young people over the use of potentially offensive language. Some young people felt that the word has been reclaimed within hip hop culture and has an affectionate meaning when used among black youth. However, other young people felt that it was a shameful part of US history and does not need to be reclaimed. Some of the white participants wondered why they cannot use the word while others can, and the arguments got intense.

This conversation provided an opportunity for the adults to remind the young people about the importance of youth-led conversations, and that racism is a systemic and systematic structure that cannot be solved in a day. However, listening to one another and having the conversation in a safe and supported way is the first place.

Doing this work also involves adults actively challenging stereotypes and discrimination and speaking up about institutional injustice. This includes making their values known when youth (or other adults) act in ways that are insensitive or discriminatory, or when youth discuss incidents in their lives in which they experience insensitivity, personal or institutional discrimination. Adults cannot take a position that race and ethnicity do not matter.

YW Boston's closing ceremony of their Immersion Week involves young people and counselors standing in a circle, holding hands, and sharing something about the week that really impacted them. Young people express their emotions through spoken word, music, songs, etc.

Source: Interviews with expert adults as part of the Social Emotional Challenge. For details visit **https://www.selpractices.org/**

It also helps adults to create tasks and projects that are meaningful, engaging, and relevant to the lived experiences of the young people. Practitioners can create opportunities for young people to share their stories and encourage feeling proud of their many identities.

Practitioners can employ structures for young people to share their different cultural and family backgrounds, personal beliefs, and stories without judgement. One strategy for acknowledging the value of cultural assets of young people who are non-native English speakers is to include conversations and activities about ethnic holidays and heroes from Native America, Africa, Asia, Arab, and Latinx cultures. An activity that acknowledges the diversity of young people's personal stories involves helping youth develop a personal timeline for themselves. This can be done by interviewing family members, caregivers and friends; adding personal narratives about key historical events; and identifying and sharing their family values. The key is to make these learning and development opportunities engaging and meaningful for all young people.

Develop young people's knowledge, skills, and agency to critically engage in civic affairs.
Providing opportunities for young people to engage with current events, understand the needs of their communities, and critically engage with injustice that exists in society is critical in building their agency to take actions. It also helps in developing a sense of belonging among all young people and creating an engaging learning environment. Young people need to connect with community experts, other community-based stakeholders, and grassroot organizations to critically engage with the needs and interests of their communities and how they can make a difference. It also provides an opportunity for adults in community-based learning settings to know more about the communities their setting serves.

Key Practices to Create Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Environments

▶ Use affirmations that establishes the value of every young person's many identities and abilities and actively counter stereotypes and bias

▶ Build on the diversity and cultural knowledge of young people and their families to make learning engaging

▶ Develop young people's knowledge, skills, and agency to critically engage in civic affairs

Assata's Daughters, in the Washington Park neighborhood of Chicago, centers the experiences of black-identified youth through the creation of black-led, youth-driven projects modeled from the liberatory Black organizing tradition. Started to provide a "container" for young people to meaningfully participate in the movement for black lives, Assata's Daughters maintains a "homequarters"—safe space in which young people meet regularly to affirm their personal experiences, work out feelings of grief and anger, connect personal experiences to the collective experiences of other youth, and reaffirm their cultural identity in the historical tradition of resistance.

Build on the diversity and cultural knowledge of young people and their families to make learning engaging. Building practitioners' own cultural competence (i.e., their ability to build relationships across differences and develop an understanding and knowledge of the communities they serve) is a component of environments that build in diversity and cultural knowledge. It helps them to appreciate the wealth of diversity that young people bring into the programs along with their many learning styles that need to be incorporated to make the learning and developmental settings both fun and engaging.

SUMMARY

Fostering an environment filled with safety and belonging includes young people being in spaces that are physically and emotionally safe and supported. All adults should have high expectations of all young people and support and motivate them to persevere through challenges. Young people are encouraged to try, make mistakes, and improve. They experience stability and consistency as they participate in shared routines and rituals that enable them to take responsibilities and exercise control over their learning. They feel connected to what they are learning and have been guided to identify a sense of purpose for themselves within and beyond their community learning and development settings.

In an environment filled with safety and belonging, young people have strong and positive relationships with their peers as well as all adults. They co-develop what is expected from them and adults and young people are both mutually accountable to these expectations. They also have the agency to remind both peers and adults of these shared expectations and agreements. Adults have created spaces and provided guidance for young people to solve conflicts and process emotions without hurting one another. All young people are provided with many opportunities to share their personal stories, their cultures, identities, abilities, and backgrounds and are guided to listen empathetically and understand each other's many perspectives. Adults are actively anti-racist, and engage young people in understanding, analyzing, dismantling, and acting against systematic structures of oppression and injustice.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO CREATE ENVIRONMENTS FILLED WITH SAFETY AND BELONGING

- **Design for Belonging** K-12 LAB provides PowerPoints, tools, and resources to design learning and development opportunities where all unique identities are welcomed and everyone feels like they belong.

- **How Learning Happens** Edutopia video series illustrates strategies that enact the science of learning and development in schools and includes a set of videos focused on cultivating a belonging mindset and classroom and a set on establishing positive conditions for learning. Edutopia also has a list of **ten powerful community building ideas** according to various age groups.

- **Playworks** provides videos and tips on how to use attention-getters and signals along with a Recess Checkup quiz to help adults identify areas of strength and provide strategies for improvement.

- The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality provides guidebooks that includes strategies on how to **build community** and **resolve conflicts** to create a safe and supportive environment and strengthen peer-to-peer relationships.

- Teaching Tolerance provides a series of **four self-paced professional development modules** on unpacking identity, unpacking diversity, understanding justice, and unpacking action.

- Facing History & Ourselves provides various **resources**, including videos, online courses, and webinars that provide strategies around teaching and engaging with history, promoting civic engagement, and creating critical and reflective learning settings.

- Center for Justice and Reconciliation provides a **series of six lessons** introducing restorative justice and strategies for successful implementation.

FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Three papers synthesizing the knowledge base on the science of learning and development form the basis of the design principles for community-based settings presented here. For those seeking access to the research underlying this work, these papers are publicly available:

- Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. Applied Developmental Science, 23(4), 307–337. **https://doi.org /10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649**.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B. J., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(2), 97–140. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791**.

- Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(1), 6–36. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650**.

END NOTES

[1]Losen, D. J. (2015). *Closing the discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion.* Teachers College Press.

[2]Borah, P., Conn, M., & Pittman, K. (2019). *Preparing children to thrive: Standards for social and emotional learning practices in school-age settings. Supplement to preparing youth to thrive.* Forum for Youth Investment. Hereafter cited as Preparing Children to Thrive.

[3]Schott Foundation, Advancement Project, American Federation of Teachers, & National Education Association. (2014). *Restorative practices: Fostering healthy relationships and promoting positive discipline in schools.* **http://schottfoundation. org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pd**f.

[4]Preparing Children to Thrive

[5]Ibid.

[6]Carter, P., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). Teaching diverse learners. In Richardson, V. (Eds). *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (593-638). American Educational Research Association.

RICH LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

CREATING RICH LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL AT 4-H.

4-H is a national youth development organization whose mission is to give all youth equal access to opportunity. 4-H provides kids with community, mentors, and learning opportunities to develop the skills they need to create positive change in their lives and communities. It focuses on hands-on projects in health, science, agriculture, and civic engagement. It relies heavily on a five-step experiential learning model that volunteers can use to facilitate educational 4-H activities. "Learning by doing" is a commonly used expression in 4-H. It focuses on using inquiry-based strategies to support active learning. The five steps of their experiential learning model are:

Step 1: Experience. Youth engage in a hands-on educational learning experience. This step focuses on the importance of young people being actively involved and at the center of the learning experience. The young person is encouraged to learn by doing and provided with guidance and feedback by the adults. Adults encourage young people to problem solve by asking if-then and open-ended questions.

Step 2: Share. Youth are asked to describe their observations and reactions based on what they did/experienced during Step 1. Adults ask them questions on what they did, saw, felt, heard, etc.

Step 3: Process. Youth are asked to identify themes, problems, and opportunities. This is also an opportunity for the adults to help facilitate a debriefing of the experience. Adults ask open-ended questions to help them reflect on their experience, discussing what went well, what were the problems they faced, and what could be done differently next time. This is also an opportunity for adults to listen effectively to understand the young person's thought process and provide feedback to support the young person's unique style of learning.

Step 4: Generalize. Youth are asked to connect key learning to real life experiences. In this step, 4-H emphasizes the need for young people to be able to make a personal connection to the learning experience. The adults ask questions focused on what they learned, how it relates to other topics they learned in the past, or are learning at present.

Step 5: Apply. In the final step of this process, youth are asked how they may use what they learned in a similar or different situation. They are then asked how their learning relates to other settings in their lives and are encouraged to think how they can use what they have learned in other situations in the future.

Source: Adapted from Norman, M. M., & Jordan, J. C. (2006). *Using an experiential model in 4-H.* EDIS, 2006(9).
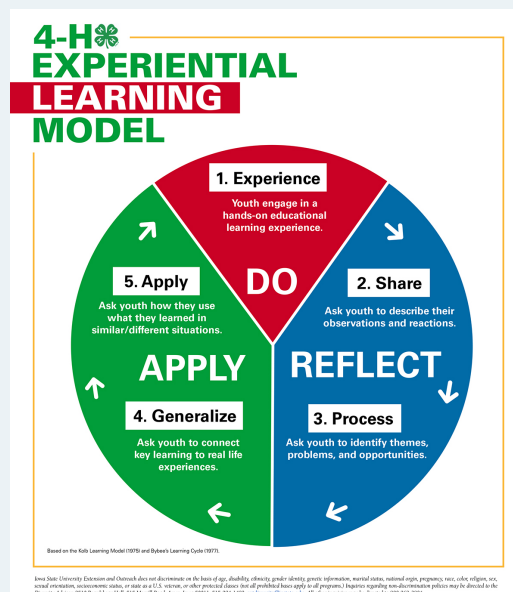
OVERVIEW OF RICH LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

Learning is a function both of teaching—what is taught and how it is taught—and youth perceptions about the material being taught and about themselves as learners. Young peoples' beliefs, emotions, and attitudes have a powerful effect on their learning and achievement. Motivation is also critical to learning. Young people will work harder to achieve understanding and will make greater progress when they are motivated to learn something. However, motivation is not just inherent; rather, it can be nurtured by skillful teaching and coaching.

Practitioners that successfully motivate young people to engage in learning provide both meaningful and challenging work, within and across disciplines that build on young peoples' culture, and prior knowledge and experience. **Young people learn best when they are engaged in authentic activities and collaborate with peers to deepen their understanding and transfer of skills to different contexts and new problems.** With these goals in mind, rich learning experiences and knowledge development can be supported by inquiry-based learning structures with thoughtfully interwoven instruction and opportunities to practice and apply learning, meaningful work that builds on youth's prior knowledge; experiences that are individually and culturally responsive, and well-scaffolded opportunities to receive timely and helpful feedback.

WHY RICH LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT ARE IMPORTANT: WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

Research from the science of learning and development shows that people learn by building on their prior knowledge and experiences, drawing on their individual, cultural, and community contexts, and connecting what they are learning to what they already understand. In order to make meaning of new ideas, individuals need to apply them to new contexts. People are also motivated to learn by questions and curiosities they hold—and by the opportunity to investigate what things mean, and why things happen. Below are the key findings from science that can inform practice.

Children and youth actively construct knowledge based on their experiences, relationships, and social contexts. The brain develops and learning occurs through connections among neurons that create connections among thoughts and ideas. Learners connect new information to what they already know in order to create mental models that allow them to make sense of new ideas and situations. This process works best when young people actively engage with concepts and when they have multiple opportunities to connect the knowledge to personally relevant topics and lived experiences, which is why culturally responsive practice is essential to the learning process. Effective practitioners support learners in making connections between new situations and familiar ones, focus attention, structure experiences, and organize the information learners receive, while helping them develop strategies for intentional learning and problem-solving.[1]

Variability in learning is the norm, not the exception. The shape of each young person's growth is unique, as biology and development interact with experiences and relationships. While development generally progresses in somewhat predictable stages, children and youth learn and acquire skills at different rates and in different ways. Because each young person is unique, there are multiple possible pathways to healthy learning and development. Rather than assuming all young people will respond to the same approaches equally well, effective practitioners personalize supports for different individuals. Supportive learning environments avoid attaching labels to youth or designing learning experiences around a mythical average. When practitioners try to force all young people to follow a single sequence, path, or pace, they miss the opportunity to reach each young person, and they can cause them to adopt counterproductive views about themselves and their learning potential that undermine progress.

Motivation and performance are shaped by the nature of learning tasks and contexts. In contrast to long-standing beliefs that ability and motivation reside in the young person, the learning sciences demonstrate that young people are motivated when tasks are relevant to their lives, pique their curiosity, and are well scaffolded so that success is possible. Tasks are made doable when they are chosen to be within the learner's zone of proximal development (that is, when a task is attainable

with support from an adult), connected to what is already known, and chunked into manageable pieces that are not overwhelming. Children and youth are motivated to learn by questions and curiosities they hold—and by the opportunity to investigate what things mean and why things happen. Humans are inquiring beings, and the mind is stimulated by the effort to make connections and seek answers to things that matter. Learning and performance are shaped by the opportunities to explore actions and ideas, receive feedback from others and the environment, and continue to refine and practice with assistance until mastery is achieved.

Transferable learning requires application of knowledge to authentic tasks, as illustrated in the 4-H example at the opening of this chapter. Much information that is learned in school and community-based settings is forgotten because it is not practiced in ways that would allow it to be applied once the lesson is over. This inert knowledge is often the result of transmission-style teaching (a teaching style where the learner's task is to passively acquire teacher-specified knowledge and skills) that offers disconnected pieces of information that are covered but not analyzed and as a result, are never actively used for a meaningful purpose. Knowledge that is transferable is learned in ways that engage youth in genuine, meaningful applications of knowledge: writing and illustrating a book or story, rather than completing fill-in-the-blank worksheets; conducting a science investigation, rather than memorizing disconnected facts that might quickly be forgotten. Such learning engages higher-order skills of analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, and problem-solving and allows knowledge to be understood deeply enough to be recalled and used for other purposes in novel situations.

Young people's beliefs about themselves, their abilities, and their supports shape learning.
Young people's expectations for success influence their willingness to engage in learning. These expectations depend on whether they perceive the task as doable and adequately supported as well as whether they have confidence in their abilities and hold a growth mindset. Those who believe they can succeed on a task work harder, persist longer, and perform better than those who lack that confidence. Those who believe they can improve through effort tend to be willing to try

new things and to work harder when they encounter an obstacle, rather than giving up. These traits are developed in environments in which learners believe they are viewed as competent and trust adults to support them, and in which they do not feel threatened by stereotyping, bullying, or other challenges. A young person's performance under conditions of high support and low threat will be measurably stronger than it is under conditions of low support and high threat. In such "identity safe" environments in which cultural connections are made and adults are responsive and supportive, young people's performance and enjoyment climbs.

WHAT COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES CAN DO TO CREATE RICH LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

There are three primary ways that community-based learning and development opportunities can co-create rich learning experiences and knowledge development. First, they can use **scaffolding and differentiation techniques** to support each young person's individual learning style. Doing so also means that practitioners use **inquiry-based approaches to learning** that help young people be active and engaged learners. Adults also can **adopt a culturally responsive approach to learning** so that young people can learn better and are able to nourish their holistic selves.

How to Support Rich Learning Experiences and Knowledge Development

▶ Use scaffolding and differentiation techniques to support individual learning styles

▶ Use inquiry-based approaches to learning to help youth be active learners

▶ Adopt a culturally-responsive approach to learning

Use Scaffolding and Differentiation Techniques

The key to helping youth be successful learners is to keep challenge and frustration at levels that support growth and perseverance and to relate to youth in a way that empowers them. Adults can support learning by scaffolding, breaking down tasks, providing choice, and adjusting the program and activities to fit the interest, strengths, and needs of the young people. Secondly, practitioners can differentiate supports so that they are personalized to every youth. For community-based learning and development settings that engage groups of youth (afterschool programs, sports clubs, museum programming) practitioners need to consider group management and dynamics in order to foster cooperative learning.

Key Practices to Support Scaffolding and Differentiation

▶ Assess and adjust programming to fit the interests, strengths, and needs of young people

▶ Provide asset based personalized supports to encourage all young people to persevere and improve

▶ Manage groupwork to support cooperative learning

Assess and adjust programming to fit the interests, strengths, and needs of young people. Adults should work together with young people to ensure that the learning experience fits their interests and needs. Adults may need to monitor the level of challenge, tailor supports accordingly, and encourage leaner agency. It may involve breaking down tasks into smaller steps, asking effective questions, ensuring young people connect with prior learning, modelling problem solving skills, and providing choice and voice to pursue tasks according to their interests, among others.

AHA! (Attitude, Harmony, Achievement), Girl's Relationship Wisdom Group guides teens to set goals and stop bullying and hatred and is delivered in a group mentorship setting. Adults work with young people to identify personal goals that fits their interests and strengths. Some of the questions that they ask throughout the semester include:

● What do you need help with?

● What are the biggest things you are having to overcome from your past?

● Where in your life right now do you feel like you are off course and need support to get back on track?

● If there was one thing in your life you could really transform, what would it be—a habit, something you're doing that you're not proud of?

● What's the thing you have the hardest time talking about?

These questions model how adults can effectively use open-ended questions to receive feedback, know where young people are at, challenge them accordingly, and adjust program content and structures to create a learning environment that is tuned according to the needs of the young people. Asking explicit questions about what was difficult to learn and understand, goals, and interests can help adults provide differentiated instruction, modify activities, and provide choices that are aligned to their needs. This also leads to young people being active partners in co-creating a learning experience that is more meaningful and tailored.

Provide asset-based personalized supports to encourage all young people to persevere and improve. An asset or strengths-based approach is rooted in the principle that all young people have great potential, every young person learns and develops differently, and development is progressive and continuous. All adults should hold high expectations of all young people to attempt higher levels of performance through perseverance. Practitioners that empower young people to identify their strengths and needs can motivate and support them to constantly improve their skills and abilities. This approach to supporting young people recognizes that every young person learns and responds differently and has different strengths, and that systematic oppression may inhibit equitable outcomes for all.

The Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory is an apprenticeship based maritime educational program. It uses a strength-based process to effectively scaffold young people and support them to stay motivated and persevere through challenging tasks. Program staff often hear youth saying they are not good at math when they need to use math skills to build or sail the boat. The adults adopt a strength-based approach that focuses on subtle but important changes when they interact with young people. They use both formal and informal opportunities to explicitly provide examples of their strengths and hold them to high expectations. This helps young people to know that they have a champion who believes that they can overcome the challenge and it motivates them to improve. The actual gains may sometimes be modest, but they have seen young people's pride soar when they are acknowledged for the work they have accomplished. Young people feel motivated to push even further. The adults in the program know that motivation cannot be provided through a fancy speech nor just good advice. Young people need to feel empowered and if their autonomy is negated, it may undermine how they value their own competence. (Note: as the time of the Playbook's publication, the Philadelphia Wooden Board Factory was no longer operating..)

Manage group work to support cooperative learning. Adults can structure groups in a way where young people are both having fun and are motivated to learn together and from each other in an emotionally and physically safe learning environment. Well managed group work has co-developed expectations and provides multiple opportunities for young people to work together in different group sizes and group formations according to their interests, strengths, and needs. Well managed group work also provides clear roles (e.g., facilitator, record-keeper, timer, spokesperson) and responsibilities that requires interdependence for the group members to be successful in completing the task. These group structures also help in learning as the content is more scaffolded, young people have opportunities to talk to each other and think together regarding the real-world problem they are solving together. These meta-cognitive and meta-strategic skills also help in better retention of knowledge that helps in learning more effectively.

For cooperative learning to be successful, adults also need to model these skills and facilitate a shared understanding of the purpose and goals of the group. These collaborative group structures also help in building empathy, problem-solving, etc., which are highlighted in the chapter on skills, habits, and mindsets.

Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP), based in St. Louis, Missouri, emphasizes the importance of rituals and practices to promote a sense of group identity and cohesion. They emphasize the need to include getting-to know-you icebreakers and games to help all young people feel welcome and begin to form a group. Adults use name games, team-building activities, and other challenges that let young people get acquainted with each other, with the organization, and with all facilitators. These structures facilitate the development of positive relationships among young people and help them to learn from one another as they work as groups and solve real-world problems. This also helps in improving young peoples' intrinsic motivation and attendance, and they ultimately learn better. For example, youth at Wyman cook monthly meals for family members of cancer patients who are undergoing treatment at a local facility. This project involves planning, preparing, serving, and storing food for large groups as well as considering the unique needs of participating families. It provides opportunities to solve real-world problems by talking through problems supporting metacognitive and meta-strategic skills that is known to improve learning and academic outcomes.

Use Inquiry-based Approaches to Learning

Inquiry-based learning requires young people to take an active role instead of a passive role. This means going beyond receiving and memorizing information provided to them. Community-based programs, because of their voluntary nature, provide young people with a wide range of choices and thereby are well-poised to let young people take charge of what questions or problems they are curious about and want to investigate and analyze. Practitioners can support them by asking effective questions that enable them to problem solve, think through various considerations of possibilities and alternatives, and apply that knowledge in various settings.

Facilitate active learning by encouraging young people to deepen and apply their learning. Active learning involves young people exploring problems and projects that they are interested in and reaching solutions by experimenting with multiple methods of inquiry and problem-solving across various types of community learning and development opportunities. These problems and projects benefit from being about real-world issues where young people are working collaboratively to solve complex problems. It requires them to take a more interdisciplinary approach and think holistically about the problem they are solving. An effective way to guide young people is to ask open-ended and if-then questions to define the problem, analyze, make connections with their previous experiences, make comparisons and inferences, generate solutions, and apply knowledge to solve problems. Asking questions to young people also enables practitioners to understand gaps in knowledge and accordingly adjust supports.

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YW Boston Youth Leadership Initiative, a project of YWCA Boston, Massachusetts, engages young people from high schools across the Boston area in the development of community action projects that address inequity in their communities, schools, and neighborhood. For example, a delegation at one school wanted to create social justice workshops for their classmates but were unable to gain support from the school administration. They were concerned they would not be able to build enough youth participation in the workshops. At a biweekly meeting, the adults helped the delegation walk through an inquiry based critical thinking process in which they matched the resources available to them to the needs of their project. Through this process they identified a teacher who they could use as a faculty liaison. They also created a plan for building youth participation (reaching out to affinity youth groups, e.g., Gay/Straight Alliance), using their personal networks, and a social media campaign.

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Key Practices to Support an Inquiry-Based Learning Approach

▶ Facilitate active learning by encouraging young people to deepen and apply their learning

▶ Provide regular and thoughtful feedback to support young people's learning

▶ Create opportunities for young people to reflect and revise

Provide regular and thoughtful feedback to support young people's learning. Regular, well-designed feedback on young people's work is a critical support for learning and development.[2] Without feedback about conceptual errors, the learner is likely to persist in making the same mistakes. In addition, the quality of the feedback is key. Studies find that gains are most likely to occur when feedback focuses on features of the task and emphasizes learning goals whereas neither nonspecific praise nor negative comments supported learning.[3]

Giving specific and descriptive feedback lets young people know exactly what they did well so they can repeat or build on it. It also recognizes their effort and improvement. Simply asking a young person to describe or explain what they have done, suggesting options, and asking questions that make them consider other alternate solution are all forms of giving thoughtful feedback. However, practitioners should also support young people in receiving the feedback provided to them and ask if there are any barriers that restrict them from applying the feedback.

Having opportunities to revise one's work in light of the feedback they receive is another important support for the learning experience. Revision of work is a critical aspect of the learning process, supporting reflection and metacognition about how to approach a particular kind of content or genre of tasks in future learning. Unless young people have opportunities to incorporate the feedback as they revise their work or performance, they cannot benefit optimally from the feedback that practitioners or their peers often take considerable time and effort to produce.

Create opportunities for young people to reflect and revise. Providing opportunities to reflect on both the process of completing a task and its outcome supports young people to discuss their learning, stay motivated despite challenges, promotes metacognition, and helps them to continuously revise and improve. This can be accomplished by creating a learning environment where mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn and receive and utilize feedback. Practitioners can challenge young people with tasks that are consistently more complex and manage the complexity of the work based on the feedback they receive from young people. Creating opportunities for young people to present their work also facilitates reflection and revision.

Use Culturally Responsive Approaches to Learning

Culturally responsive learning environments celebrate the unique identities and backgrounds of all learners, while building on their diverse experiences to support rich and inclusive learning.[4] This asset-based orientation rejects the idea that practitioners should be colorblind or ignore cultural differences, as these orientations can have harmful effects on learning and development. Instead, culturally responsive practitioners place young people at the center by inviting their multifaceted identities and backgrounds into the learning setting to inform content, instruction, and learning structures.[5]

Culturally responsive practitioners recognize the importance of infusing young people's cultural references in all aspects of learning.[6] Doing so enables practitioners to be responsive to learners—by validating and reflecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences young people bring and also by building upon their unique knowledge and schema to propel learning and critical thinking. As practitioners implement culturally responsive approaches to teaching and learning, they have to be learners themselves of new cultures, new languages, and new traditions to foster and nurture linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism and equality.[7] Responding to and sustaining young people's cultures and backgrounds is necessary given the harsh fact that many marginalized young people in the U.S. have been subject to deficit approaches to teaching and learning, which have often sought to minimize, penalize, or eradicate the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being that do not adhere to white, middle-class norms. Given this history and reality, culturally responsive approaches that center and celebrate diversity can disrupt these problematic tendencies while furthering belonging and inclusion.[8]

Key Practices to Support Using a Culturally Responsive Approach to Learning:

▶ Build bridges between young people's experiences and program content

▶ Promote racial-ethnic identity development, voice, and agency

▶ Facilitate critical conversations around equity and social justice

What is understood as normative in terms of knowledge, beliefs, or culture has been created by those in positions of power and continues to perpetuate if unchallenged. When adults create spaces for young people from marginalized communities to become active participants in the process of creating knowledge, it helps in dismantling this knowledge-power nexus. It is also not just about creating awareness among young people of injustices but a critical examination of the structural oppressive forces and the knowledge-power-privilege nexus that systematically works against marginalized communities, especially for our brown, black, and indigenous young people. It is about empowering them with critical cognitive skills to decolonize their minds, challenge existing socio-political and historical structures that control them, recognize that nothing is inherently wrong with them, and gearing them towards action. This means recognizing and broadening the definition of learning and skill development to incorporate the skills that young people from marginalized communities develop as they constantly negotiate and problem solve.

Culturally responsive approaches also support young people's development and learning. In its attention to developing a young person's sense of belonging, agency, and purpose, there is evidence that these approaches positively affect educational outcomes, including academic achievement, engagement in learning, and racial identity development.[9] Furthermore, learners from all backgrounds benefit from inclusive learning environments that honor and celebrate diversity and inclusion.

These settings can not only help all young people learn and embrace the diverse backgrounds and cultures that make up the fabric of U.S. democracy, but also cultivate their awareness and orientations toward issues of injustice.

Cultural responsiveness in learning settings can be cultivated through rich learning experiences that build bridges between young people's experiences and program content; promote racial-ethnic identity development, voice, and agency; and facilitate critical conversations around equity and social justice.

Build bridges between young people's experiences and program content. To be effective learners, young people need to understand how the material covered is meaningful to them[10] and believe that it is worthwhile to expend effort on tasks and activities. Adults can identify and explain the use, value, and importance of each task and do so in a way that young people are able to relate and connect to.[11] Practitioners can also create effective cultural hooks to the content being learned by young people as that helps them to reach their zone of proximal development. Adults can be intentional about bringing multiple perspectives, elevating the diverse experiences of young people, and provide opportunities to critique dominant cultural norms that is often considered normative. Using cultural references that represent the diverse racial and cultural backgrounds of young people helps them to connect the new knowledge that they are learning to their existing schemas and makes it more engaging. Practitioners need to go beyond just providing content or subject knowledge to provide useful analogies, illustrations, examples, and demonstrations that help make the content comprehensible to the unique experiences of young people.

Promote racial-ethnic identity development, voice, and agency. Positive development is about supporting young people to be agents of their own development, with support from adults. When young people who belong to historically marginalized communities are provided with opportunities to develop their racial-ethnic identity, it helps them to gain a sense of self and agency to questions negative biases and stereotypes about them. Fostering youth voice involves findings ways for young people to actively participate in shaping the decisions that affect their

lives, while supporting young people's agency requires that adults help young people develop and realize their own goals, interests, and values). Projects focused on exploring identity and issues of social justice are often opportunities for this work, as they allow young people to explore their interests, take ownership of the learning process, and develop the critical thinking that enables them to challenge the status quo. To nurture youth voice and agency, young people need to be provided with more opportunities to lead, plan, implement, give feedback to adults, and be provided with specific trainings on youth rights, social justice, fundraising, and interacting with adults in power. In the vignette below, the adults in Neutral Zone share power with young people, supporting them to form a youth led council that makes decisions on how they would spend time in the program, what community-led efforts they will participate in, including fund raising. It leads to young people being more engaged and co-creating the learning environment in a way that is personally meaningful to them and supports their identity development, voice, and agency.

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Neutral Zone in Ann Arbor, Michigan is a youth-driven center founded by a diverse group of teens to provide a space for social, cultural, educational, and creative opportunities to high-school teens. They established a Teen Advisory Council (TAC) to create an ongoing structure that advocates for meaningful youth voice across all the programs that Neutral Zone offers. In 2003, the TAC recognized that Neutral Zone programs consistently needed money to help achieve their goals and so added fundraising to its focus. In 2004, the TAC hosted a Gala event generating approximately $3,000. They then created a system for distributing funds to support other programs at the Neutral Zone. Since that time, the TAC continues to raise and grant funds on an annual basis. In 2007, TAC members participated in the annual Neutral Zone program evaluation. Following a successful program evaluation in 2008, TAC became a standing committee of the Board of Directors, replacing the Program Committee, which was mostly comprised of adults. The TAC defines its purpose as: to drive Neutral Zone's program success through program approval, fundraising, grant-making, and evaluation. As part of the Council, young people build community, plan for the year, host meetings and activities that are meaningful to them, reflect on activities through the year, and recruit participants for the following year.

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Facilitate critical conversations around equity and social justice. Culturally responsive environments engage learners in project-based learning that asks them to critically analyze issues of injustice and take action to impact change.[12] These projects, which are grounded in the pursuit of social justice and explore the depths of systemic power and oppression, often launch by posing an essential question or equity-focused problem to young people or by asking them to identify equity issues impacting them and their communities. Young people have an authentic audience and purpose for their work and use their learning to impact change.

Community-based learning projects are one way practitioners can immerse young people in this form of rich and culturally responsive learning. As the term suggests, community-based learning allows young people to learn in and from their own communities by providing them opportunities to acquire, practice, and apply subject knowledge and skills in their neighborhoods and local surroundings. These projects often include problem-solving around a local issue or concern and give young people opportunities to develop productive mindsets wherein they see themselves as agents of change while deepening their knowledge and skills.[13]

Assata's Daughters is a black, women-led, young people directed organization that organizes Black young people in Chicago by providing them with political education, leadership, mentorship, and revolutionary services. They organize training opportunities for young black people to use their practical experience, build and or to work with coalitions throughout the city to tackle city-wide issues. They work with and for neighborhood which is where they locate as the real agents of power and change. The have several programs. For example, responsive organizing, environmental justice, training programs, and youth organizers through which they receive lessons on the tactics and strategies that can be used to address specific social issues like gentrification, police in schools, and capitalism. The young people who participate in these programs also receive training in urban farming and food justice and also learn basics of gardening, land conservation, food justice, and the importance of self-sustainment as a tool of resistance.

SUMMARY

The science is clear that learning and development is not linear. It is a progressive and continuous and it is crucial now more than ever before that all young people have access to rich learning experiences and knowledge development. Young people need to be in learning settings where every adult believes that every young person has great potential and the learning environment needs to be aligned to their strengths, interest, and needs. Young people can attain mastery of complex knowledge and skills when they are provided with opportunities to learn by experiencing, sharing, reflecting, and revising; solving real-world problems; and they take an active role in constructing knowledge and build on their prior experience and knowledge.

It is also crucial to adopt a culturally responsive approach to learning so that the diverse experiences and cultural norms of young people from historically marginalized communities are brought to the center to help them connect previous and new knowledge and to learn more efficiently. Young people also need opportunities to be active learners where instead of just receiving or memorizing information they are questioning, investigating, and analyzing to solve real problems and advocate for social justice and equity. They are working on project that are of interest to them and are personally meaningful to their sense of self and identity. In a rich learning experience, every young person feels motivated to problem solve and persevere despite challenges. They are provided with guidance and feedback that is supportive and strengths based. Young people are supported as they are challenged to try new skills and understand that mistakes are part of the learning process. Adults assess and adjust programming to fit the needs of young people and provided with structures for effective group work and collaborative learning.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO CREATE RICH LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- **Students at the Center Learning Hub** provides a **framework** and **resources** for personalized learning, developing student agency and voice, competency-based education, and learning that supports the real-world experiences of young people and enables them to see connections.

- **The Weikart Center**'s guidebook for **Cooperative Learning** and **Active Learning** lists several activities along with additional resources to support and inquiry based approach to learning as well as scaffolding and differentiation strategies. The Weikart Center also provides **assessment tools** to assess quality of learning environments and identify training needs.

- **The National Center for Quality Afterschool** has **resources and tools** for creating rich learning experiences around literacy, math, science, homework help, technology, and the arts.

- **Sanford Education Programs** at National University provides **lesson plans and activities** for pre-K-grade through grade 6 to create connected and inclusive learning settings.

- **Education Reimagined** provides resources for creating a learner-centered environment.

- **Abolitionist Teaching Network** provides various **anti-racist teaching tools** including podcast, ted talks, and tools to support creation of an anti-racist learning experience and knowledge development.

- **Culturally Responsive Education Hub** provides **resources and videos** on practicing culturally responsive educations.

- **AfterSchool KidzLit** provides **resources** for how to use literature and activities to build reading skills, deepen thinking, and abilities to work in teams by honoring diversity and viewpoints of others. It also provides **video tutorials** on practices related to engaging youth voice, engagement, and learning.

FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Three papers synthesizing the knowledge base on the science of learning and development form the basis of the design principles for community-based settings presented here. For those seeking access to the research underlying this work, these papers are publicly available:

- Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. Applied Developmental Science, 23(4), 307–337. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649**.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B. J., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(2), 97–140. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791**.

- Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(1), 6–36. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650**.

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DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS, HABITS, AND MINDSETS

DEVELOPING SKILLS, HABITS, AND MINDSETS AT THE CHESAPEAKE BAY OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL

The Baltimore **Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound School** is a non-profit educational organization and expedition school that serves people of all ages and backgrounds through active learning expeditions and is located inside one of the country's largest urban parks.

As part of their Character Curriculum, they have an activity called *Alternate Ending: Historical Leaders* which is focused on supporting young people to analyze a leader's choice and response to a life challenge and identify how to utilize strengths to overcome challenges. In doing so, it helps young people reflect on their own leadership skills and attitudes and develop a growth mindset as they respond to challenging situations.

The activity starts with encouraging young people to think why some people are able to overcome a challenge while others give up. Young people are provided with short bios from different leaders. This is another space where adults can be more culturally responsive and provide bios of diverse leaders including those who belong to marginalized communities. This is also an excellent opportunity to challenge what is typically understood as leadership qualities and provide an opportunity for young people to expand the definition to be more inclusive of different styles of leaderships and leaders from diverse backgrounds.

Young people read the bios and are encouraged to respond to the following questions. The adult person first models these processes and then supports young people through the following steps.

(a) Identify the challenge and how the leader responded to the same. What did they do when faced with the challenge? What motivates them to persist?

(b) Reflect on three positive characteristics that the leaders used to respond to a challenge and contrast it with three negative characteristics that the leader could have used in an alternate reality.

(c) Create a hypothetical response that could have happened if the leaders were to use the negative characteristics to respond to the challenge. Write the fictional outcomes that the leader will face.

Young people can do this work in pairs or in small groups and share their reflections with their peers. The adult facilitates discussion around character traits, importance of persevering despite challenges, leadership, and responsibility that lead to specific outcomes and responses. This activity encourages critical thinking and problem-solving skills when faced with similar challenges.

Source: Adapted from Baltimore Chesapeake Bay Outward Bound School's Character Curriculum titled, *Alternate Ending: Historical Leaders*. Available at **https://www.outwardboundchesapeake.org/wp-content/uploads/Alternate-Ending-Historical-Leaders-Handouts.pdf**

OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPING SKILLS, HABITS, AND MINDSETS

For young people to learn and thrive, they need ample opportunities to develop their whole selves. This, of course, includes expanding their knowledge and academic abilities, but also entails opportunities to develop the skills, mindsets, and habits that enhance their cognitive, emotional, and social growth.

Learning is tightly intertwined with one's social, emotional, and mental state. For example, the emotions young people have while learning affects how deeply they engage with activities and content. Positive emotions, such as interest and excitement, open up the mind to learning. Negative emotions, such as fear of failure, anxiety, and self-doubt, reduce the capacity of the brain to process information and to learn. It is our emotions that engage us or shut us down, and it is the development of productive skills, habits, and mindsets that substantially drive our emotions.

Learner skills, mindsets, and habits also play a role in a young person's academic development and well-being. For instance, when young people have developed skills for recognizing and managing their feelings and interactions and have developed productive dispositions and habits, including those related to a growth mindset, metacognition, and self-direction, they are better able to persist through challenges and to believe they can grow and succeed.

Figure 11: Foundations for Young Adult Success Framework

Developing these mindsets and habits also supports young people in developing positive and healthy identities that further enable them to grapple with the inevitable trials and tribulations that emerge in one's daily life. Cultivating these strengths is accomplished by creating learning environments that welcome and value all young people and help them to develop positive integrated identities that affirm who they are, while they also learn skills that help them enact their purposes.

The Chicago Consortium on School Research's *Foundations for Young Adult Success Framework*[1] offers a way to see how the development of skills, habits, and mindsets is related and develops over time. It illustrates what young people need to grow and learn, and how adults can foster their development in ways that lead to college and career success, healthy relationships, and engaged citizenship. It identifies three key factors to success:

1. Agency, shaping the course of one's life rather than simply reacting to external forces;

2. Integrated identity, a strong sense of who one is, which provides an internal compass for actively making decisions consistent with one's values, beliefs, and goals; and

3. Competencies, the abilities to be productive, effective, and adaptable to the demands of different settings. These three factors rest on four "foundational components," qualities that adults can directly influence:

- **Self-regulation**, the awareness of oneself and one's surroundings, and management of one's attention, emotions, and behaviors to achieve goals

- **Knowledge and Skills**, information or understanding about oneself, other people, and the world, and the ability to carry out tasks

- **Mindsets**, beliefs and attitudes about oneself and the world and the interaction between the two. They are the lenses individuals use to process everyday experiences

- **Values**, enduring, often culturally-defined, beliefs about what is good or bad and what one thinks is important in life. Importantly, to develop these foundational components, adults need to create opportunities for both active and reflective developmental experiences

The tumultuous times we face also underscore the importance of the intentional development of productive mindsets, skills, and habits. The COVID-19 crisis which began in the Spring of 2020 and ongoing instances of racial violence have stretched many to the breaking point, as they struggle with a precarious reality and the trauma that the events of the day have precipitated. Enabling young people to develop the dispositions, habits, and skills to persist during trying times like these can mitigate the effects of the adversity that is felt by so many while enabling them to develop productive and civic-minded habits that can propel lifelong success and learning.

The Forum for Youth Investments' David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Weikart Center) provides a framework for how to develop critical skills, habits, and mindsets through its pyramid of program quality (see image below). The pyramid of program quality provides a simple framework for how adults can organize learning settings and build positive relationships to create opportunities for developmental experiences and skills development for all young people.

The pyramid of program quality is modeled after Maslows's hierarchy of needs which suggests that individuals have different levels of needs that must be met before advancing to the next level. In particular, the notion that when physiological and safety needs are not met, people tend to have fewer resources to devote to other areas of life. It consists of four domains that define the quality of a learning setting beginning with safety, and building with supportiveness, interaction, and engagement, each representing sets of adult practices.

Figure 12: Pyramid of Program Quality

The practices highlighted under supportive and interactive environment in the pyramid of program quality are particularly important to develop critical skills, mindsets, and habits for social, emotional, and cognitive learning. The practices highlighted under supportive environment includes practices such as explaining, supporting, and scaffolding activities, and helping young people to better understand their emotions. For example, helping them to recognize and be comfortable with their emotions and to process them in productive ways, or offering encouragement rather than praise in order to foster a growth mindset.

The practices related to creating an interactive environment focus on how adults can support learning experiences that occur through interactions with other people—both between adults and young people and between young people. Interactive learning environments often involve collaboration and small group discussion. This supports young people to build skills around empathy, such as how to work in teams and bridge differences.

WHY ARE CRITICAL SKILLS, HABITS, AND MINDSETS IMPORTANT? WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

Learning is social, emotional, cognitive, and academic. How does any young person become a productive learner? What skills must they have? The science tells us that learning is integrated: there are not separate parts of the brain, rather, parts of the brain are cross-wired and functionally interconnected to support academic skills and social skills. Therefore, practitioners need to simultaneously develop content specific knowledge and skills along with cognitive, emotional, and social skills. These skills, including executive functions, growth mindset, social awareness, resilience, and perseverance, metacognition, curiosity, and self-direction, are malleable. They are not "hard wired," but develop in response to experience. All are correlated with achievement and all can be taught, modeled, and practiced just like traditional academic skills.

Social, emotional, and cognitive skills are interrelated and develop as a progression.
Cognitive skills like self-regulation, executive functions, and problem-solving interact with emotional skills, such as empathy, emotion recognition and regulation, and with social skills, including cooperation and communication. These interacting skills develop progressively, but not as a fixed, linear sequence. As with other skills, there are bursts and plateaus. Higher order skills and abilities, when present, are a combination of foundational social, emotional, cognitive, and academic skill development. When practitioners understand that these skills progress in concert with one another, they can design learning experiences that simultaneously build diverse learning skills, supporting engagement and effort.

Learning of these skills is influenced by relationships and experiences. Learning is highly context sensitive. A young person's skill and mindset development relies on an ongoing, dynamic interconnectedness between biology and environment, including relationships and cultural and contextual influences, resulting in significant variation within and across individuals over time. This contrast with the idea of universal, fixed steps or stages of development.

The norm is diverse developmental pathways—not missed opportunities but rather multiple opportunities to develop new skills and/or catch up. Because each learner's development is nonlinear, with its own unique pathways and pacing that are highly responsive to positive contextual influences and support, the unique challenge for learning settings is to design personalized, supportive developmental learning experiences for all children and youth, no matter their starting point.

This extends to the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills, which should be taught throughout childhood and adolescence and may need particular attention when young people face chronic, unbuffered stress due to adversity or oppression. In these cases, the development of foundational skills and mindsets, including self-regulation, stress management, and executive function, are at risk.

WHAT COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS CAN DO TO DEVELOP SKILLS, HABITS, AND MINDSETS

Supporting young people's learning and development means supporting them in developing the capacities—skills, habits, and mindsets—to direct and engage in their own learning. These capacities include understanding of and growth in social and emotional learning skills, habits of mind for learning and persevering in learning, and sufficient health and wholeness to engage in the learning process. Simply put, these skills, habits, and mindsets contribute to **readiness**—"the dynamic combination of being prepared and willing to take advantage of life's opportunities while managing life's challenges."[2] A young person's readiness is shaped by relationships, experiences, and environments—other essentials of equitable whole child design.

How to Develop Skills, Habits, and Mindsets

▶ Integrate social and emotional and cognitive skills into learning in culturally responsive ways

▶ Develop productive mindsets and habits

▶ Incorporate healing-centered practices

Weikart Center's **Preparing Youth to Thrive** guidebook identifies promising practices for building social and emotional skills, habits, and mindsets and includes both specific youth experiences and staff behaviors that: appeared across eight out-of-school time (OST) programs; were described as important by expert practitioners; and were supported in the evidence base. Staff practices are defined broadly to include both staff behaviors that occur at crucial moments in response to situations that arise in the program, as well as behaviors that create norms and structures that staff

build into their programs. These staff practices support the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills, habits, and mindsets and are categorized under six domains: Emotion Management, Empathy, Teamwork, Initiative, Responsibility, and Problem Solving.

These six social emotional and cognitive competencies that young people develop cut across the two broad areas identified by brain research that are critical to children's development: **self-regulation skills** (for example, self-awareness, emotion regulation, persisting through goals) and **executive functions** (for example, planning and organizing, revising and reflecting, staying focused despite distractions). Helping young people develop these capacities requires that **social and emotional learning (SEL) is integrated into learning in culturally responsive ways** that **helps young people develop productive mindsets and habits** in an environment that **incorporates healing-centered practices.**

Integrate Social, Emotional, and Cognitive skills into Learning in Culturally Responsive Ways

Research shows that the best activities for social and emotional learning are sequenced, active, focused, and explicitly target certain skills.[3] Afterschool programs that aim to intentionally promote social and emotional development have been shown to benefit young people in improving social and emotional skills and school performance.[4] Using established evidence-based curriculum is one way to incorporate social, emotional, and cognitive skills into community-based programs. However, associated costs, strict program fidelity structures, and drop in based nature often make incorporating a curriculum incompatible with many community-based programs. Using small, easy to incorporate "kernels" as part of existing programming is another way.[5] Positive youth development practices with an intentional SEL focus are described in **the Social and Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment**, and can provide a framework for fostering young peoples' awareness of their emotions and thinking processes as well as promoting self-regulation that helps them to manage emotions and not just suppress them.

Figure 13: Preparing Youth to Thrive

Emotion Management	**Empathy**	**Teamwork**	**Responsibility**	**Initiative**	**Problem Solving**
Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.	Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.	Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.	Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.	Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.	Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.

Integrate Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Skills in Culturally Responsive Ways

▶ Foster awareness and understanding of emotions and support meta-cognitive thinking processes

▶ Promote self-regulation by actively providing them with strategies that supports them to both express and manage emotions

▶ Ensure cultural humility and responsiveness

Foster awareness and understanding of emotions and support meta-cognitive thinking processes. Helping young people to identify and name their emotions is a basic social and emotional skill widely taught and practiced. This is a core part of emotional intelligence.[6] Research has shown that when emotions are identified, especially when they are labeled with nuance and precision, they are easier to manage. Managing emotions also helps with building empathy and inter-personal skills through developing perspective-taking and conflict resolution skills.[7] In addition to helping young people become aware of their inner emotional world, the use of meta-cognitive thinking strategies like pausing, reflecting, and posing internal questions can help them to grow self-awareness and make the process of learning and skill development more visible to them. This metacognition, or thinking about thinking, and learning to learn, can be taught to young people by modeling and discussing these processes and providing young people with regular opportunities to reflect.

The Possibility Project (TPP), is a creative-arts program based in New York that brings together diverse groups of teenagers to transform the negative forces in their lives and communities into positive action. It uses the performing arts and community action as way to build relationships across differences, resolve conflicts without violence, take on responsibility, and lead.

In the following example, a staff person from TPP illustrates how staff can provide a safe and supportive environment and support young people to be more self-aware of their emotions and understand causes and consequences. During this incident two young people got into a conflict about where they would stand on stage, and it escalated into a physical fight. One of the young people involved in this conflict had a history of several such incidents. She was devastated once she realized that she got into a physical fight once again and ran out of the room in tears. Afterwards, when the arts director invited a conversation to reflect, she was shaking and in tears. She reflected that she ran out of the room in tears because she suddenly felt terrible about attacking someone. She added that she had never felt this feeling before and had suddenly discovered the harm that she had done to many others and was unaware of what she had done. A production team member with whom she had grown close was intentionally with her throughout the day to ensure her safety, help her to describe her emotions and practice meta-cognitive skills, identify causes for why she felt anger and then remorse, provide her with agency to reflect on what she can do differently in the future, and to reassure her that she really did belong to the program and other peers have also made similar journeys like the way she was making on that day.

Promote young peoples' self-regulation by actively providing them with strategies that support them to both express and manage emotions. The development of self-regulation is a lifelong process and adults can support co-regulation by creating a safe and supportive environment. Adults can create and adapt structures to support young peoples' processing of emotions and model healthy strategies that do not suppress expression but provides them with opportunities to discuss and learn from their ongoing emotional experiences. Better self-regulation ability supports young people in learning and maintaining social relationships. The need for practicing or learning self-regulation often occurs in-the-moment when strong emotions or distractions disrupt learning opportunities or pro-social participation. It is best when program staff can constructively intervene to support self-regulation and social-emotional growth when those teachable moments occur. Some moments of frustration and growth cannot be planned for. Adults can model healthy strategies such as active listening, channeling intense moments into action steps depending on the issue, and using problem-solving methods for conflict resolution. Other practices that can be modelled by adults include communicating effectively about emotions, including their own and respectfully acknowledging and validating their emotions.[8]

Ensure cultural humility and responsiveness.
An emphasis on emotional management and regulation can carry ideas that center the culture and behaviors of privileged groups and in turn, constrict the development and expression of young people's full and authentic selves. Social interaction strategies like how we make eye contact or greet when we have different cultural norms around them that need to be included and discussed as adults support the development of young peoples' social interaction skills. Integrating awareness and practices of social and emotional skills into community programs must be done in a context that is respectful to the culture and experiences of the young people participating.

It is important to be vigilant as to how social, emotional, and cognitive skills can be implemented in ways that uphold problematic norms that can enact or exacerbate psychological and emotional harm against historically marginalized groups, including black and brown youth and LGBTQ+ youth. What is understood as good behavior and ways to practice anger management needs to be questioned under the lens of racism, classism, sexism, ableism, etc. Supporting social, emotional, and cognitive skills is often used to equip young people to navigate unjust and oppressive structures. While these skills are important given the realities that young people face— the skill to question, challenge, and change oppressive systems (e.g., racism, sexism, ableism, etc.) needs to be as much or more of a focus as equipping young people to deal with them. Program staff need to recognize cultural differences in emotional expression and be aware of issues related to identity and structural oppressive systems that impact young people emotionally.

Developing Productive Mindsets and Habits

Young people's beliefs and attitudes have a powerful effect on their learning and achievement. Holding negative perceptions of one's ability to learn can quell motivation and create disengagement in learning settings. Conversely, productive dispositions can support youth in persevering through academic and personal challenges and put them on the road to academic success and holistic development. These key mindsets include:

1. Belief that one belongs at school and/or learning setting

2. Belief in the value of the work they are doing

3. Belief that effort will lead to increased competence

4. A sense of self-efficacy and the ability to succeed[9]

Holding these beliefs about learning and one's abilities is not innate. Rather, it is influenced and shaped by the interactions and environments in which young people learn and grow. Practitioners can help young people develop productive mindsets and habits by using growth-oriented language, providing opportunities for planning and goal settings, and supporting interpersonal skills.

Nurture young people's growth mindset by using growth-oriented language and practices. Using growth-oriented language and practices includes adults encouraging young people to believe in themselves and framing challenge and failures as a typical part of the learning process[10]. Adults can use language that implies that hard work, persistence, and regrouping to try another strategy leads to greater learning and success. For instance, adults can say, the young person has not learned to do something "yet," emphasizing the importance of continuing to try and persevering despite challenges. Adults can give specific feedback instead of general praise, or better yet, encourage young people to evaluate their own progress. Young people with confidence in their abilities to succeed on a task work harder, persist longer, and perform better than their less efficacious peers[11].

A site coordinator at an afterschool program at Holmes Elementary School, Ypsilanti, Michigan through the Eastern Michigan University's Bright Futures shared how she developed a "Makerspace" curriculum in partnership with the Hands On Museum at Ann Arbor, MI. The practices highlighted in the example below can easily be integrated into programming and other program models that community-based programs follow without necessarily following a specific curriculum.

Young people explore STEM concepts through hands-on building projects where they are expected to create to "the point of failure" in order to figure out for themselves what needs to change. During the "Make it Float" unit, young people were given certain materials and were explicitly told that all projects will fail, but it was their job to find the failure point and to then revise their structures. Young people experienced many successes and many failures over the course of their projects, but the biggest change adults saw in them was a growth in their confidence, growth mindset, and creative problem solving. Young people went from saying "I can't do it" or "This won't work" to "I haven't solved it yet" and "I haven't figured out how to make it work yet." The facilitators ensured that they were guiding young people with questions rather than with steps for completion. It took many repetitions for young people to get comfortable not having concrete steps and not having a "right" answer to work toward, but it led to more creative exploration and more of a willingness to try something new.

Provide opportunities for planning, problem solving, and goal setting. Planning and goal setting promote self-regulated learning where young people are aware and in control of their learning. They also promote executive functioning skills including planning, predicting, and decision making. Adults can support planning and goal setting by structuring explicit time for them. Planning could include brainstorming and generative planning; thinking strategically about the purposes, methods, content, and outcomes of the project; anticipatory thinking; if-then thinking (e.g., about how the work and various constraints interact); and contingency planning.[12] Adults can ask young people to talk and record their plans and provide tools to plan for SMART goals (i.e., specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time sensitive). Adults can also provide them with checklists to help them define and stay on track towards their goals. Adults can also explicitly model planning skills by breaking down the steps for how they planned an activity.

Support interpersonal skills like empathy and collaboration. The development of interpersonal skills including social interaction skills, perspective taking, ability to work in teams, and resolve conflicts support young peoples' ability to learn. Adults can support the development of empathy skills by providing structures where young people get to know each other, are able to relate to each other, listen and share personal stories, and become exposed to and experience diversity of identities, cultures, backgrounds, and experiences.

Adults can support young people to work together by co-developing norms and structure for collaborative learning, co-creating clearly defined and interdependent roles and responsibilities for young people to work together a shared goal. Adults can support young people by facilitating problem-solving strategies like backwards mapping, starting with a similar less complex problem, discussing through the steps to be taken, visualizing the problem by laying it out, and figuring out a plan for getting expertise and help from others.

At **The Possibility Project (TPP)**, adults facilitate a process for group work as youth begin the process of channeling their emotional experiences into transformative, dramatic productions. The first strategy is to incorporate group agreements to make sure that the room is safe for everybody. Both adults and young people understand and work together to make each other feel safe. The second strategy is to provide reassurance to the youth going through this process that they will be supported, and they will be okay. The third strategy is to engage and include another youth (or more) in the process. This facilitates empathy for all and builds understanding and support while also strengthening youth leadership of the various cast members. The fourth strategy is to listen very carefully to what the youth is talking about in these moments. The fifth strategy is to respond honestly and to make him/her aware of what might be happening emotionally and of the value of learning in these moments. "Offering perspective" is what the programs calls it and involves expressing different options for interpreting emotions and experiences. The sixth strategy is to engage him/her in the activity at hand again if the young person is ready and they can continue even though the feelings at that time are powerful.

Incorporate Healing-Centered Practices

A healing-centered approach focuses on creating a learning and developmental environment that prioritizes and fosters the well-being of young people, mitigating and helping to address negative emotions and behavior, stress, and creating an emotionally safe environment. The practitioner understands the nature of both environmental and individual causes of trauma and has working strategies to respond to the needs of a young person who has experienced either or both. Adults understand that young people from marginalized communities often hold collective trauma because of economic, racial, and environmental injustice and harm. Adults support young people to understand the root causes of structural oppression and see young people beyond the trauma that engulfs them and supports them to heal.[13]

Support young people through an asset-based approach to understand their trauma, grief, and loss find ways to take action. When children or adults are distracted by concerns that flow from their lives outside the learning environment or social dynamics within the program, their capacity to focus on learning can suffer.[14] When young people face moments of challenge, they may experience flashbacks from previous intense experiences, such as traumatic events in their homes or communities. It is of crucial importance that every young person has at least one adult who they trust and feel connected to with who they are able to discuss in a safe and supported manner. It is also essential that adults create a safe and supportive learning environment where peers are respectful, seek to understand each other with empathy, and have agency to share or not to share depending on their comfort and needs. These stable relationships are important are they build secure attachments; develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-reliance; and contribute to a strong sense of identity and belonging and results in positive long-term outcomes in education, health, and overall well-being. Young people need the space to not just advocate for what they need but also have agency to determine causes and reflect ways to heal from their individual and/or collective trauma and act on what they want to achieve beyond their trauma.

Incorporate Healing-Centered Practices

▶ Support young people through an asset-based approach to understand their trauma, grief, and loss and find ways to take action

▶ Promote physical and mental wellbeing through mindfulness strategies, breathing exercises, and other stress reduction strategies

Promote physical and mental well-being through mindfulness strategies, breathing exercises, and other stress reduction strategies. Strategies to promote physical and mental well-being are neither a quick fix nor about suppressing emotions or replacing negative emotions with positive ones. Physical and mental well-being is an act of self-compassion and self-respect to one's whole being. It is about taking a pause, a breath, or a heartbeat to think, reflect, and discern the best course of action. Adults need to encourage young people to take that pause in a way that is respectful of the young person's culture, background, and experiences. The idea is to not suppress anger, rage, etc. but to channel it to ask effective questions, understand root causes, and advocate for change.

A site coordinator from an afterschool program at the Perry Early Learning Center, Ypsilanti, Michigan, shared how their program incorporated Mindfulness Mondays into their schedule. This time consisted of games, activities, breathing exercises, five senses work, yoga, and meditation. They use resources and tools from the Sun Dance (kids' version of the Sun Salutation), **Go Noodle videos** recommendations from Susan Kaiser Greenland's The Mindful Child[15], and other meditation work such as body scans, mindful listening, mindful looking, mindful smelling, etc. These activities support young people to become more aware of the way they felt emotionally and physically in the present moment, which ultimately helps their emotion management and overall well-being.

SUMMARY

Learning is social and emotional. Young people need to be equipped with social, emotional, and cognitive skills to be able to learn and develop knowledge, skills, mindsets, and habits. Young people are not able to learn if they do not feel safe, are emotionally charged, or suppress their emotions in an unhealthy way. They need to learn to recognize all kinds of emotions, understand causes and consequences, and be provided with strategies to regulate and channel their emotions. It is essential that adults are inclusive and respect cultural differences as they help young people develop social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Using growth-minded language and practices helps young people to believe that they can overcome challenging tasks by trying, asking for help, planning, setting effective goals, and problem solving. They also need to experience working in teams and learn to build their interpersonal and social interaction skills. Adults can create structures that help young people to understand each other, listen attentively to the experiences and opinions of their peers, and build empathy. Young peoples' physical and mental health are both important for their well-being. Far too many young people face one or the other individual, collective, or economic trauma or hardships. Adults need to be mindful of the collective trauma that young people from marginalized communities often hold. Young people need to be supported in way that respects them as people beyond their trauma.

WHERE TO GO FOR TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality has developed various tools and resources to **assess your SEL curriculum** in terms of planning, designing and mapping your program's content sequence and SEL sequence. These resources also include additional assessment tools to measure **Youth SEL skills** and **staff SEL practices**, and to measure program quality specific to SEL through the **Social and Emotional Learning Program Quality Assessment**. There are also specific guidebooks for supporting SEL skill development for both **adolescents** and **children**.

- The Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides a suite on **online tools, webinars, and resources** to support implementation of high-quality evidence based SEL in programs.

- After School Matters provides **community builders, energizers, and reflection activities** for building social-awareness, problem solving, collaborations, personal mindset, and planning for success.

- Edutopia has **curated resources** including online kits, webinars, handouts, and articles that highlight strategies for addressing mindsets, persisting through challenges, understanding growth mindset, and how adults can give better feedback.

- Greater Good in Education provides **strategies** for both adult and young people's well being and how to create learning environments that are trauma-informed and healing centered.

- The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments provides **webinars and presentations** for understanding trauma and its impact.

- The Education Trust offers **recommendations** for how to implement an equitable learning environment with an intentional focus on SEL and provides insights on how communities of color approach social, emotional, and academic development.

- Shawn A. Ginwright's article on **The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement** describes the importance of shifting from trauma-informed care to healing centered engagement, which is strength-based, advances a collective view of healing, and re-centers culture as a key feature of well-being.

- America's Promise Alliance's brief on **Creating Cultures of Care** describes how trauma-informed practices support youth development and highlights how communities in Oregon and Missouri are engaging in this work.

FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Three papers synthesizing the knowledge base on the science of learning and development form the basis of the design principles for community-based settings presented here. For those seeking access to the research underlying this work, these papers are publicly available:

- Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. Applied Developmental Science, 23(4), 307–337. **https://doi.org /10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649**.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B. J., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(2), 97–140. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791**.

- Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(1), 6–36. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650**.

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INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS

THE OASIS CENTER

The Oasis Center, a non-profit youth organization deeply rooted in the Nashville, Tennessee community, connects young people and their families to systems of supports that best meet their needs. The center seeks to empower youth in their personal lives and collaboratively create justice and equity in the institutions that impact them. The Oasis Center does this through more than 20 programs and services based on a foundation of four areas of youth success: safety, belonging, empowerment, and generosity.

Serving young people from middle school to young adults, the Oasis Center operates in two modes—crisis intervention and essential supports and youth leadership and empowerment. A young person can come through one door—the need for transitional housing services, for example, and get connected not only to a permanent housing plan and counseling, but youth development programming, coordination with the school, and later, leadership development programming, thus coordinating the right set of integrated supports for each young person and their family.

"We have had young people come in through our 24-7 emergency shelter program in which both the young person and their family participates in a two-week overnight structured program where they are connected to a case manager, develop an action plan to stabilize their living situation, participate in family counseling, and establish a six-month follow up plan," Oasis youth manager Justin Aparicio explains. "And we are also in their schools, more often than not, making connections back to the school for extra support."

Because there are multiple doors into Oasis Center, that same young person can feed into social action and activism on some of the very issues that brought them to Oasis Center through the center's Action, Advocacy, and Education programming, a ladder of leadership development and civic action programs that provide young people with skills to take action on issues that affect them and their communities.

As an outcomes-driven organization, Oasis Center monitors its results. The **2019 Annual Report** indicates that the Oasis Center:

- Helped 2,455 students from middle school to college improve access to higher education through 1-on-1 support, group workshops, ACT prep, and college retention services. Nearly 70% of first-generation college students participating in Oasis Resource Centers at Nashville State Community College (NSCC) stayed in college—a rate 30% that's higher than their peers at NSCC.

- Provided therapeutic support for 320 youth and 562 family members. At 3 months, 80% of clients reported improvement in the problems that brought them to Oasis.

- Worked statewide with 23 foster care and juvenile justice sites to get youth involved in their communities through the Teen Outreach Program (TOP). As a result, 1,530 youth across the state engaged in TOP, building their life skills, healthy behaviors, and sense of purpose.

For more information about how the Oasis Center contributes to an integrated systems of supports for youth and families, visit: **https://oasiscenter.org/**

OVERVIEW OF INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS

All children and youth have unique assets and interests to build upon in their learning journeys. All children also experience challenges that need to be addressed without stigma or shame to propel their development and well-being. These challenges can result from personal or family struggles or adverse childhood experiences, such as discrimination, food or housing insecurity, physical or mental illness, or other difficulties and inequities.

Research has documented that well-designed supports such as those provided by the Oasis Center in the opening vignette can enable resilience and success even for youth who have faced serious adversity and trauma. These supports include everyday practices that communicate to young people that they are respected, valued, and loved, as well as specific programs and services that prevent or buffer against the effects of excessive stress.

The situation facing young people, families, educators, and community-based practitioners today underscores the importance and urgency of this endeavor. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, and economic uncertainty are omnipresent and acutely felt, particularly by Black Americans and other communities of color. Orchestrating integrated supports that systematically assess young people's comprehensive needs and strengths and coordinate resources in a unified and collaborative way is essential. Such a system can mitigate barriers, enhance coping, strengthen resilience, re-engage disconnected learners and their families, and help reduce the opportunity gaps.

Effective learning environments take a systematic approach to promoting development in all facets of the school and its connections to the community. A well designed and implemented support system weaves together school and community resources to enhance equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. It provides assistance vital to social and academic success in learning settings and connects young people and families to services that promote holistic development as well as additional opportunities to learn. Further, such supports can promote agency by helping young people discover what motivates and inspires them to meaningfully contribute to their community.

WHY INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS ARE IMPORTANT: WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

Healthy human development depends on nurturing contexts. Human development is shaped by the ongoing interactions between individuals' biology, relationships, and cultural and contextual influences. Most of the brain's growth happens after we are born. The tissue that it is composed of is more susceptible to change from experience than any other tissue in the human body. The brain's architecture is made up of trillions of connections, forming complex and integrated structures that experiences create, strengthen, and reorganize to develop new skills and competencies. It becomes highly connected, efficient, and specialized over time based on the web of experiences in children's lives. The brain is astonishingly malleable, and our growth and development are highly "experience dependent." Thus, the context of development is extremely important.

The domains of development are interconnected. No part of the brain develops in isolation: There is no separate "math" part of the brain or "emotions" part of the brain. Whole child development is tightly intertwined with social and emotional experiences, mental health, and physical health. This means that schools and community-based settings must be prepared to address a variety of individual needs and barriers with supports that are holistic and personalized to fully meet young people where they are.

Adversity-related stress is the most common factor that negatively affects contexts for development. When we experience stress, the hormone cortisol is released through our brains and bodies, producing that familiar feeling of fight, flight, or freeze. This mechanism is intense when it happens, but if the stress is mild or tolerable, it is actually adaptive— that is, it makes us alert and sharp and helps us prepare for an event like a test or a performance. This is the limbic system at work—attention, concentration, focus, memory, and preparation. But when children have high levels of continuous stress, and that stress is not buffered by the presence of a trusted adult, something else happens. Children can get locked in a condition of toxic stress, which has biological, psychological, and developmental effects as cortisol damages the structures in the limbic system and creates feelings of fight or flight, hypervigilance, and high levels of anxiety.

Relational trust is the most powerful element of a positive context. The emotions that positive relationships generate are caused by another hormonal system which is mediated by the hormone oxytocin. This hormone produces feelings of trust, love, attachment, and safety. Oxytocin hits the same structures of the brain as cortisol, yet oxytocin is more powerful because it can literally protect children, at the cellular level, from the damaging effects of cortisol. Relationships that are strong and positive cause the release of oxytocin; this not only helps children manage stress, but also offsets the damaging effects of cortisol and produces resilience to future stress. When we speak about the human relationship (see "Positive Developmental Relationships" for more), we are not just talking about being nice to a child. We are speaking of a close connection that supports the release of oxytocin as it is built through consistent caring, protection, presence, and trust.

Today, stress is everywhere. Stress caused by adversity is not something some children have and others do not. It exists along a spectrum of different intensities for children at different times in their lives. However, many children are attending schools where their health and their ability to focus and concentrate will be affected by the stressful contexts of their lives unless they have mediating relationships and opportunities to learn how to manage stress. Today, because of the pandemic and the many experiences of racialized violence, many children's stress mechanisms are on high alert, especially if they have experienced previous trauma. These stress responses can manifest as fatigue and detachment at the mild end or impulsive, distractable, or angry behavior at the more extreme end.

Discrimination and inequality create increased risks. While adversity and healthy development are faced in all communities, inequality creates increased risks. Poverty and racism, together and separately, make the experience of chronic stress and adversity more likely. The events of 2020 have made this reality even more apparent. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, youth and families of color, as well as those in low-income communities, have experienced greater infection and mortality rates, higher unemployment, more housing and food instability, and less access to technology and the internet. The ongoing displays of racial violence have also put a spotlight on the persistent effects of systemic racism and reignited the collective, individual, and intergenerational trauma that U.S. citizens, particularly Black Americans, bear as a result of our nation's embedded systems of power and oppression. These are also the communities that have been under-resourced over many years.

Integrated support systems can counteract these conditions by reducing stigma and judgment around support and empowering young people on their own pathways. Too often, learning settings assume "some" young people will have issues, label them, and create isolated programs, but when learning settings establish environmental conditions for all young people's learning and support, they validate their rights to wellness and destigmatize the need for assistance.

WHAT CAN COMMUNITY-BASED SETTINGS DO TO FOSTER INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS?

Most children experience adversity in some form at some point in their lives and need opportunities for learning and supports that enable them to thrive. Indeed, each year in the United States, at least 46 million children are exposed to violence, crime, abuse, or psychological trauma, representing more than 60 percent of the total.[1] Thus, learning environments need to be set up with many protective factors, including health, mental health, and social service supports, as well as opportunities to extend learning and build on interests and passions, integrated across the many settings where young people spend their time.

How to Foster Integrated Support Systems

▶ Connect youth to supplemental learning opportunities

▶ Promote access to other supports and opportunities that foster health and well-being

Community-based learning and development settings contribute to integrated support systems in two primary ways: they help children and youth **access supplemental learning opportunities that contribute to academic growth**, and they **promote access to other supports and opportunities that foster health and well-being**. Unlike a school setting that strives to bring services into the building, community-based settings may bring supports into the setting but they also may serve as a resource and referral support to families, bridging connections between youth and family needs and services at other settings across the community—health centers, public assistance agencies, and other community-based learning and development opportunities.

Connect Youth to Supplemental Learning Opportunities

At the center of a well designed and implemented system of supports are structures and practices that enhance learning—to provide academic and non-academic supports that foster growth, to offer opportunities for academic and social enrichment, and to remove barriers to learning and development. Community-based learning and development settings are, by nature, set up to enhance learning through offering supplemental learning opportunities, thereby being a valuable asset as part of a seamless and aligned system of supports for young people. Many afterschool programs offer homework help and academic enrichment. Specialty programs such as STEM and robotics can enhance young people's understanding of key mathematic concepts through hands-on experiential learning. Further, extended learning time programs provide opportunities where youth can engage in enrichment activities and receive academic support during out-of-school time. When used well, these opportunities can accelerate learning and reduce opportunity gaps between what youth from low-income families and their peers from middle- and upper-income families experience during out-of-school hours. However, additional time will not in and of itself promote positive outcomes; additional learning time must be high quality and meaningful in order to move the needle on student achievement and engagement.[2]

Key Practices to Connect Youth to Supplemental Learning Opportunities

▶ Partner with schools to provide seamless and aligned supports for youth

▶ Monitor youth's academic progress and growth

▶ Add adult capacity to the school day to support learning

Community-based learning and development settings' efforts to supplement and enhance learning are strengthened when key practices are in place. Specifically, when they:

● Partner with schools to provide seamless and aligned supports for youth

● Monitor youth's academic progress and growth

● Add adult capacity to the school day to support learning

Partner with schools to provide seamless and aligned supports for youth. In order to understand the strengths and needs of all youth, schools, and community partners need a collaborative process to help them learn from and leverage the insights of diverse members of the learning community. There are multiple ways to accomplish this, but the goal should be to include representation from young people, families, educators, and community partners (e.g., early childhood, after-school, extended learning, and youth development programs, as well as mental health providers) to plan for and tailor academic, social, and emotional supports based on the specific experiences of each learner.

High quality after-school programming is a core strategy for connecting youth to supplemental learning opportunities. There are several factors that make after-school programs more impactful—one of which is *alignment with a school's learning goals and approach*. When after-school programs further and reinforce a school's curriculum, pedagogy, and core values, they are more effective in supporting youth outcomes, growth, and engagement. Indeed the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, the only dedicated federal fund for after-school programming, provides over 1.7 million youth in kindergarten through 12th grade the opportunity to engage in hands-on experiential learning opportunities that enhance academic growth. National evaluation results indicate that youth who regularly participate in 21st Century Community Learning Centers improved their school attendance, school engagement, health-related behaviors, and math and reading achievement.[3]

Community partners can offer expanded learning time (ELT) that *engages deeper learning pedagogies with content that is connected to youth' lives outside of school.*

Citizen Schools (CS) is an example of ELT programming that engages deeper learning pedagogies for youth. CS youth participate in apprenticeships that consist of hands-on learning projects led by volunteer citizen teachers. Apprentices work in small groups to do project-based work such as litigating mock trials, publishing children's books, and building solar cars. These apprenticeships are complemented with activities that help youth develop their organizational and study skills, along with homework help. Programs culminate with opportunities for participants to publicly present their projects. CS's 8th Grade Academy also includes programming to help youth develop their leadership and decision-making skills to prepare for college.[4] A rigorous, quasi-experimental evaluation of the academy identified positive effects on attendance and enrollment, math and reading achievement, promotion, and graduation.[5]

HIGHER ACHIEVEMENT

Higher Achievement in Washington, DC utilizes 21st Century Community Learning Center funds to support middle school student learning during out-of-school time through small group, academic instruction afterschool and during the summer.

Higher Achievement creates unique, grade-level curricula aligned with district curriculum standards to ensure learning during out-of-school time complements and aligns with learning happening during the school day.

When preparing to launch Higher Achievement in a new state or district, the Curriculum Associate conducts a correlation assessment between existing Higher Achievement curricula and the English/language arts and math standards for that state/district. Following the correlation exercise, Higher Achievement may develop new curricula to ensure that mentoring sessions will align with the school day lessons students are learning. As changes to the standards occur, Higher Achievement standards correlation documents are revised accordingly.

Through review of report cards and conversations with parents, Higher Achievement Center Directors prioritize scholars who are in greatest need of individual support and request conferences with those scholars' school teachers. These are accomplished during a teacher's planning period, after school, or during parent/teacher conference days held at the school.

During these conferences, the Center Director talks with the teacher to learn specifically how the child is struggling and then work with the teacher to identify ways that Higher Achievement can best support the child. The Center Director communicates with the scholar's parent(s) when these conferences are taking place and attempts to include the parent(s) in the conversations whenever possible. At the time of enrolling their child in Higher Achievement, each parent signs a waiver that grants Higher Achievement staff access to the child's school records and teachers for such conferences.

Source: https://afterschoolalliance.org/21cclcalignment.pdf

Even when community-based learning and development settings do not have formal programming connected to school-day learning, alignment to support learning can be strengthened across settings when community-based partners participate in school instruction and leadership teams. This requires intentional allocation of time, resources, and space to bring adults across the many settings where youth spend their time together to discuss individual learning strengths, needs, and challenges.

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The **Tacoma Whole Child Initiative** (TWCI) is a multi-year effort to support learners in and out of school. The hallmark of that initiative is a coordinated citywide approach that includes Tacoma Public Schools, numerous city agencies and a host of community-based settings. But coordination is not just at the agency level, it is in every school building. At the Roosevelt Elementary School, the afterschool program coordinator, an employee of the YMCA, participates on the school's TWCI team. His role is to bring community partners into the school to deliver engaging learning experiences that support the whole child. One of the main purposes of his participation on the TWCI team is to establish consistent and coherent expectations for learners across their day, in and out of school.[6]

....

Collaboration does not happen without dedicated staff time devoted to ensuring effective school-community partnerships to support learning. Partnerships require an intentional outreach and engagement strategy, with resources dedicated to nurturing and maintaining partnerships. Even when schools have community partners and programs, they typically operate in silos and are not well-aligned with the school's academic plans and goals. As described below, **community schools** are one approach to aligned partnerships where coordinators facilitate and provide leadership for the collaborative process and development of a continuum of services for children, families and community members within a school neighborhood. In some instances, partnerships are coordinated by a family resource center or an afterschool site coordinator. Regardless of who coordinates the partnerships, they need to be strategic and data driven so that partners have access to the information and data they collect about youth so they can better align supports across settings.

Monitor youth's academic progress and growth.
A key aspect of creating a strong system of learning support is to develop systems and practices that support the identification of learning challenges and assets, which can allow educators and community practitioners to understand what supports may be needed. Community-based learning and development settings will be more impactful and effective in supporting youth's growth when they have easy and regular access to shared data so that they can monitor youth academic progress. Accessing school data generally requires data sharing agreements between community partners and the district.

Student data is protected under a federal law called the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). In order for a community partner organization to have access to any protected student data, they must sign a data-sharing agreement with the school system, their staff/volunteers much complete a FERPA training and sign a confidentiality form, and students' parents must provide consent to permit the school to share data with a specific organization.

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The Early Warning and Response System, utilized by United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County and its community partners, automatically pulls data from the schools' database so that teams of teachers, counselors, and social workers can immediately identify students who are slipping off track, identify the underlying causes of why a student is off track, put in place targeted interventions, and track progress. This data is presented in an easy-to-read dashboard format. The dashboard can show individual, school, and systems-level data for use by a teacher working with an individual student as well as a superintendent searching for important trends that need to be addressed. Early results show significant growth in family and community engagement and in students accessing services—precursors to student achievement gains.

Sharing data across partners can be facilitated by an out-of-school time intermediary such as the **Denver Afterschool Alliance**. Denver Public Schools (DPS) has a partnership with the Denver Afterschool Alliance (DAA), a network of over 300 afterschool and youth development organizations, to share school data with afterschool programs in order to better design and implement programs to support DPS students. Three factors were deemed critical to the success of establishing data sharing agreements: willingness of legal counsel of school districts to grant sharing student data, champions in the both the school and the youth development sector that advocated for data sharing, and leadership at the district level that believed youth development was integral to achieving a whole child vision.[7] As a result, DAA providers have access to data on school attendance, suspensions, and standardized test results for students who attend their programming, benchmarked against the entire district. Providers are then trained on how to interpret their program's results for program improvements.

Another way to monitor a young person's progress is for community-based settings to gain access to school data portals in order to monitor how youth are doing in school. Some community partners have taken this approach as they operate remote learning hubs so that they can identify learning needs and challenges and connect youth to the supports they need to be successful.

When Richmond Public Schools closed in March 2019 due to COVID-19 the **Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Richmond** (BGCMR) ramped up efforts to ensure that its Club members were getting the learning and development supports they needed. Because they had parent/guardian permissions to access and receive Club member data as part of the Club membership agreement, BGCMR staff were able to gain access to student portals allowing them to immediately see assignment status/standing, grades and attendance in remote learning. Staff used their access to data to create and execute plans to support youth that were off-track. Staff continued to engage with on-track youth but off-track youth gained more attention as they were focused on getting them re-engaged with their education.

A major change for BGCMR as a result of being able to access the data was that BGCMR invited its Club members with the most need back into its buildings to re-establish relationships. Having the students in the building and being able to see what they were experiencing in virtual class plus access through student portals allowed BGCMR staff to have a more well-rounded view of what was driving the lack of engagement to school. This access also created an accountability platform with students and their families.

Add adult capacity to the school day to support learning and development. Community-based practitioners can add capacity to the school day to help youth gain access to more role models and caring adults that can support their learning and development. **The Men's and Women's Leadership Academy** (MWLA) in Sacramento City Unified School District's (SCUSD) is an effort to intentionally combat the school-to-prison-pipeline for underserved low-income students of color by creating supportive and productive learning environments. Male and female mentors come into district high schools and middle schools to teach leadership and life skills to at-risk young men and women. The district has found that students who participate in the academy show improvement in grades, attendance, and graduation rates.[8] **City Year** helps high-need schools close gaps by supporting youths' academic, social, and emotional development in classroom and whole school settings. It deploys teams of AmeriCorps members to bring developmental frameworks, social emotional assessments and progress monitoring resources to review with teachers in combination with information such as grades, homework completion, academic assessment. The holistic intervention approach informs responsive strategies for whole child academic growth and improvements in school culture and climate.[9] See below for more information about how City Year partners to add adult capacity to the school day.

THE CORPS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS FRAMEWORK

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented disruption to schooling for millions of students and has exposed and exacerbated inequities for young people our education system already underserved. **City Year**, the **COVID Collaborative**, and the **Everyone Graduates Center** have authored the **Corps for Student Success Framework** (Figure 14), a set of recommendations for educators, community leaders and policymakers to consider in selecting the right evidence-based, "people powered" responses to meet both short-term and long-term needs of young people.

The Corps for Student Success Framework is an organizing framework that elevates "people powered" learner supports that ensure all learners have access to the relationships, opportunities, and environments they need to learn and thrive. These supports include:

- **Academic tutors**,
- **Student success coaches**,
- **College and career advisors**,
- **Wraparound support coordinators**, and
- **Mentors**.

The framework emphasizes the need for responses to:

- Be locally driven, aligning local needs while harnessing community strengths

- Take a holistic approach grounded in the science of learning and development

- Be relationship focused, culturally, linguistically and ability affirming, and asset-based

- Be broadly available to respond to the pandemic, but focused on sustainably serving our most marginalized young people to build a more equitable education system in the long-term and

- Support or align with what is happening during the school day to accelerate student learning

As schools reopen this fall, there is an opportunity to bring this framework to life and enable more young people in communities across the country have access to the resources and opportunities they deserve to realize their potential.

For more information on the Corps for Student Success, visit **http://www.pathwaystoadultsuccess.org/studentsuccesscorps/**

Corps for Student Success

Evidence-based, relationship-driven supports to benefit educators, families and students

Examples of complementary, people-powered supports to form a Corps aligned to student needs

Academic Tutors

Focus on accelerating learning, including in-person and online high impact tutoring and homework support

Student Success Coaches

Partner with teachers in under-resourced schools through diverse teams to provide near-peer, relationship-driven, integrated social, emotional, academic and youth development supports

Post-Secondary Transition Coaches

Support post-secondary exposure, application completion, and navigation of post-secondary transition

Wraparound Support Site Coordinators

Enable schools to build strong connections and systems with community health, mental health, and social service providers

Youth Development Professionals and Mentors

Provide web of developmental relationships and youth development experiences in-school, out of school and over the summer

How to form a Corps for Student Success

Getting the right support to the right students at the right scale and intensity means different students and different schools will need different types and intensities of student supports—one support does not fit all

Foster local collaboration to identify student needs and align on the right supports

Local leaders + Schools + Community-based organizations (that provide the supports)

Leverage federal, state and local education and AmeriCorps funding

AmeriCorps funding	Title IV	21st Century
ESSER Relief	School Improvement	Community
Title I	Funds	Learning Centers

Promote Access to Other Developmental Supports that Foster Health and Well-Being.

Community-based programs are poised to cultivate a well implemented and sustainable network of partners such as health and mental health services and food and housing support services that can serve youth and family social, emotional, physical, and mental needs. Awareness of the pervasiveness of toxic stress across the income spectrum and the growth of child poverty in economically and racially traumatized communities have created additional demands for health, mental health, and social service supports that are needed for children's healthy development and to address barriers to learning. A comprehensive review of integrated student supports found that integrated support systems can support student achievement, and it highlighted community partnerships as a key lever for implementation.[10]

Key Practices to Connect Youth and Families to Other Developmental Supports

▶ Ensure mechanisms and partnerships are in place to connect families and youth to basic needs such as food, health, and mental health in addition to academic supports

▶ Participate in whole-school comprehensive community partnership models

By supporting efforts to create integrated support systems community-based settings can help address the reality that children whose families are struggling with racial violence and poverty—and the housing, health, and safety concerns that often go with it—cannot learn most effectively unless their nonacademic needs are also met. The goal is to remove barriers to learning by connecting youth and families to the formal and informal assets of services in the community to support their overall well-being and growth.

Many of the ways that community-based settings connect youth to supplemental learning opportunities are also strategies to employ when thinking about a broader set of development needs. However, the primary ways that community-based learning and development settings connect youth and families to supports that foster healthy development and well-being are to:

- Ensure mechanisms and partnerships are in place to connect families and youth to basic needs such as food, health, and mental health in addition to academic supports

- Participate in whole-school comprehensive community partnership models

Ensure mechanisms and partnerships are in place to connect families and youth to basic needs such as food, health, and mental health, in addition to academic supports. As noted above, community-based settings may bring health and wellness supports into the setting but more often they serve as a resource and referral support to families, bridging connections between youth and family needs and services at other settings across the community—health centers, public assistance agencies, and other community-based learning and development settings. Indeed, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic this function has become more critical and more visible as adults in afterschool and other community-based learning and development settings have reached out to families about their basic needs, providing meal delivery service and connecting them to health care and public assistance resources.

When brokering a connection between a youth and their family and another organization or agency to receive additional supports, it is important to do a "warm handoff." In clinical settings, the "warm handoff" is seen as a best practice for patients. In essence, it involves the transfer of care or responsibility between two members of a team. In a warm handoff, this transfer occurs in the presence of the youth and/or family. This creates transparency and better allows the youth to develop trust and engagement with the next member of the team.[11]

ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN REDWOOD CITY, CALIFORNIA

Redwood City 2020 has transformed six of 16 schools in the Redwood City, California, school district into community schools. Each has a Family Resource Center, and one third of the families participate in the program. Parents not only receive services, but they are also offered a range of educational opportunities, become involved, and are empowered to teach other parents, creating a strong community. Many of the parents are immigrants with language barriers. But at the Family Resource Centers, they find a community of other immigrant parents who speak their language and play a leadership role in the schools.

Redwood City community schools work with their partners to engage communities and families to promote school readiness among children.

By creating community mobilization teams made up of family members, educators, and other community members who have participated in professional development programs, they enhance family-to-family education and outreach, preparing the community for success. As a result, the families of 70% of students in Redwood City community schools are actively engaged with school campuses through adult education, leadership opportunities, and school meetings. Students whose families participate consistently have shown positive gains in attendance and in English language proficiency for English learners.

Source: United Way Bay Area. (n.d.). *Community schools: Redwood City 2020.* San Francisco, CA: United Way Bay Area.

Participate in whole school comprehensive community partnership models. There are promising and proven models to ensure that community-based learning and development settings are viewed as part of comprehensive integrated support systems, namely Communities in Schools and Community Schools.

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Communities in Schools (CIS) is a national dropout prevention program overseeing 2,300 schools and serving 1.5 million students in 25 states. For nearly 40 years, CIS has advocated bringing local businesses, social service agencies, health care providers, parent and volunteer organizations, and other community resources inside the school to help address the underlying reasons why young people drop out. CIS provides integrated student supports such as health screenings, tutoring, food, clothing, shelter, and services addressing other needs by leveraging community-based resources in schools, where young people spend most of their day. Some integrated student supports benefit the entire school community, like clothing or school supply drives, career fairs, and health services, while more intensive supports are reserved for young people who need them most. CIS places a full-time site coordinator at each school; the site coordinator is typically a paid employee of the local CIS affiliate (a nonprofit entity governed by a board of directors and overseen by an executive director). Working with the CIS national office, state CIS offices provide training and technical assistance to local affiliates, procure funding through numerous sources, and offer additional supports that enable capacity building for site coordinators at the local level.[12]

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Another proven effective way to ensure that community-based learning and development settings are part of a comprehensive integrated support system is to adopt a **community school model**. Community schools represent a place-based school improvement strategy in which "schools partner with community agencies and resources to provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement."[13] Many operate year-round, from morning to evening, serving both children and adults. Community schools often have dedicated staff (i.e., community school director, family liaison) who support the coordination and sustainability of their various structures. Central to a community schools approach is the role that community-based partners play in partnering with schools and with each other to provide integrated, individualized supports to youth and their families.

Community schools offer integrated student supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices.[14] These schools often draw on a wide range of community and cultural resources, including partnerships with families, to strengthen trust and build resilience as children have more support systems and people work collaboratively to help address the stresses of poverty and associated adversities children may face.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS ARE PART OF COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS

Communities in Schools of Central Texas supports social workers, counselors, and AmeriCorps members to work on school campuses within the Austin Independent School District and five surrounding school districts to provide direct support to students and to coordinate a network of social services, businesses, and community resources. Site coordinators and partners deliver supports to students and their families, from schoolwide services to targeted programs to intensive, wraparound supports. In Central Texas, that includes a partnership with the local housing authority to provide case management for students living in public housing as well as afterschool programming on site; a leadership development program for adolescent males; and an early childhood adult education center that enables parents to earn their GED or ESL certificate, along with a parenting curriculum, while their infants and toddlers receive care.

Community schools also have dedicated staff (e.g., community school director, family liaison) who support the coordination and sustainability of their various structures and programs. Community school personnel are typically part of the school leadership team and other governance bodies in the school. The community school manager or director generally conducts assets and needs assessments, recruits and coordinates the work of community resources, and tracks program data.[15]

Evidence shows that community schools can improve outcomes for youth, including attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps.[16] A recent RAND study of New York City's 250+ community schools initiative shows that community schools can work at scale.[17] Promising results include a drop in chronic absenteeism, with the biggest effects on the most vulnerable students, and a decline in disciplinary incidents.[18] Youth were more likely to progress from grade to grade on time, accumulate more course credits, and graduate from high school at higher rates.

SUMMARY

Community-based learning and development settings are part of the fabric of integrated support systems. They are often called upon to provide supplemental learning opportunities and add and expand adult capacity during the school day. They are also critical partners in helping youth and their families access a range of non-academic supports that contribute to whole child development. Sometimes community-based settings connect youth and families on their own, and sometimes they are part of a coordinated approach to comprehensive and integrated support systems based in schools, with referrals to community-based partners.

For community-based partners to contribute to integrated support systems, adults who work across settings need to:

- Create a shared vision for learning and development for each youth

- Conduct joint, data-driven planning

- Commit to resources to fund a position dedicated to managing the partnerships.

GETTING STARTED WITH A COMMUNITY SCHOOL IN GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA

Grand Island, Nebraska is just getting started with community schools. In its pilot site, a designated community schools coordinator, the school social worker, and principal are working together to integrate support and services. The district coordinator is responsible for establishing the community partnerships, securing agreements, and scheduling the programming. District staff, from the office of Strategic Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement, also support the work by assisting with translation services, working directly with parents to establish goals for their families, and on fulfilling requests for programming. With limited resources available, *the community schools team focuses on bringing programs and services already provided by community partners into the school.* Some of these partners are providing immunization clinics, dental check-ups, financial planning, healthy cooking, youth/child yoga, mindfulness meditation, and homework help. With the success of the pilot school, the district will open its second community school in school year 2020-21 following the same model.

Grand Island Public Schools: https://www.gips.org/departments/community-partnerships-and-engagement/community-schools.html

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO CREATE INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- **Building Partnerships to Support Where, When, and How Learning Happens** provides a framework for broadening our understanding of where, when, and how young people learn, both in and out of school and during the summer. It highlights examples from across the country of local partnerships that support youth. *Building Partnerships* also recommends ways for educators, policymakers, and funders to partner with youth development organizations, capitalizing on formal and informal learning settings that support young people's success.

- **Building Partnerships to Support Where, When, and How Learning Happens Example Bank** offers insights as to how youth development organizations are partnering with schools, other community organizations, districts, and states to expand where and when learning happens.

- **Expanding Minds and Opportunities: The Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success** is a compendium of studies, reports and commentaries by more than 100 thought leaders including community leaders, elected officials, educators, researchers, advocates and other prominent authors that provides examples of effective practices, programs, and partnerships to support positive whole child outcomes.

- **Community Schools Playbook** provides model legislation, real-world examples, and many additional resources for state and local leaders who want to support community schools.

- **What are Community Schools?** video describes the four key features of community schools, the importance of community school coordinators, and strategies for funding community schools.

- **How to Start a Community School** toolkit provides information on how to implement a community school initiative and focuses on several topics, including vision and strategic planning, building a leadership team, needs and capacity assessments, sharing space and facilities, financing your community school, and research and evaluation.

- **National Center for Community Schools** (NCCS). The focus of NCCS, a part of Children's Aid, is to build the capacity of schools and districts to work in meaningful long-term relationships with community partners. Since 1994, NCCS has developed a variety of free planning tools, implementation guides, videos, and other resources and has also provided intensive assistance (training, on-site consultation, and strategic planning facilitation) on a fee-for-service basis. NCCS is a founding and active member of the Coalition for Community Schools.

- **A School Year Like No Other Demands a New Learning Day: A Blueprint for How Afterschool Programs & Community Partners Can Help** offers building blocks for school–community partnerships to address equity and co-construct the learning day in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO CREATE INTEGRATED SUPPORT SYSTEMS (continued)

- **Afterschool Programs: A Review of Evidence Under the Every Student Succeeds Act** (Research for Action). Based on a literature review of studies published since 2000, this review summarizes

the effectiveness of specific after-school programs. The review uses the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) evidence framework to assess the evidence of over 60 after-school programs. A companion guide provides profiles of each after-school program included in the review as well as studies of each program's effectiveness.

- ***Getting to Work on Summer Learning: Recommended Practices for Success,* 2nd Ed.** (RAND Corporation). Based on thousands of hours of observations, interviews, and surveys, this report provides guidance for district leaders and their partners for launching, improving, and sustaining effective summer learning programs.

- **The Children's Safety Network (CSN).** CSN works with state and jurisdiction Maternal and Child Health programs and Injury and Violence Prevention programs to create an environment in which all infants, children, and youth are safe and healthy.

FOUNDATIONAL SCIENCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Three papers synthesizing the knowledge base on the science of learning and development form the basis of the design principles for community-based settings presented here. For those seeking access to the research underlying this work, these papers are publicly available:

- Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Malleability, plasticity, and individuality: How children learn and develop in context. Applied Developmental Science, 23(4), 307–337. **https://doi.org /10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649**.

- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B. J., & Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(2), 97–140. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791**.

- Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., & Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of human development: How relationships and context shape learning and development. Applied Developmental Science, 24(1), 6–36. **https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650**.

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[8]National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2018). *Building partnerships in support of where, when, and how learning happens: Examples and resources from the field.* Aspen Institute. **https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/FINAL-YD-Examples-and-Resources-from-the-Field.pdf**

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[11]Central New York Care Collaborative (CNY Cares) Conducting Warm Handoffs. **https://cnycares.org/media/2682/conducting-warm-handoffs-course-content-rrp-v1.pdf**

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ENABLING CONDITIONS TO ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EQUITABLE WHOLE CHILD DESIGN ACROSS THE LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

There is no question that as communities move to create more equitable conditions for learning they could and should consider how to build and strengthen adults' capacity to implement science-informed approaches to teaching and learning. Many efforts to support whole child education elevate the importance of training and supporting student support staff, training teachers to better utilize non-academic instructional time, or bringing trained personnel into the schools from other youth serving organizations.

But the power to transform learning settings and achieve equitable conditions for learning at scale rests on the ability of communities to embrace and deliver integrated, cross-setting approaches to science-aligned transformation. Therefore, this playbook concludes with recommendations for promoting a connected and aligned learning ecosystem.[1]

Recommendation 1: Recognize community programs as an essential part of the learning ecosystem. For this to happen, schools and community partners can co-create their vision of student success that reflects the values and culture of the community's students and their families and is fully supported by science-aligned approaches. The sheer diversity of community programs means that they do not always present a visible, coordinated force in their communities, yet we know that for many young people community programs can allow them to thrive. Vision setting requires a shared understanding of where and when learning happens, acknowledging all the settings where young people spend their time, not just K-12 classrooms.

Recommendation 2: Prioritize Strategic Partnerships. Related to increasing coordination is the need to be intentional about valuing and prioritizing partnerships between schools and community partners. This requires an intentional outreach and engagement strategy, with resources dedicated to nurturing and maintaining partnerships. Even when schools have community partners and programs, they typically operate in silos and are not well-aligned with the school's academic plans and goals. As referenced in the Integrated Support Systems Playbook, community schools are one approach to aligned partnerships where coordinators facilitate and provide leadership for the collaborative process and development of a continuum of services for children, families, and community members within a school neighborhood. In some instances, partnerships are coordinated by a family resource center or an afterschool site coordinator. Regardless of who coordinates the partnerships, they need to be strategic and data driven so that partners have access to the information and data they collect about youth so they can better align supports across settings.

Recommendation 3: Prioritize and improve coordination throughout the learning ecosystem. A variety of local infrastructures exist that could support more and better coordination in service of ensuring that regardless of the setting, young people have access to and are experiencing consistently supportive and engaging learning experiences. National youth serving organizations with affiliate models, afterschool and summer learning intermediaries, and local children's cabinets can and do play a critical role in taking science-aligned approaches to scale in community programs. Working through their affiliates and networks, these organizations support professional development, program quality assessment, and effective use of data aimed at increasing access to quality youth development experiences and improving the capacity of adults across diverse community settings to implement science-informed practices. Further, local coordination of community programs paves the way for school-community partnerships because it can provide the district with a single-entry point for tapping into the diversity of learning settings in a community.

However, this kind of coordination will not happen without dedicated resources aimed specifically at improving partnerships and coordination. This means dedicated staff time across all the settings and sectors that comprise the learning and development ecosystem—district offices, city agencies, public and private community institutions, and local community non-profits—so that partnership is part of their "day jobs."

Recommendation 4. Strengthen and expand cross-setting adult capacity building. One way to ensure that youth experiences are consistent across settings is to make joint capacity building the norm so that adults across learning and development settings have access to and engage in common professional development resources and trainings. There is mutual benefit in sharing professional expertise and content and, indeed, many efforts exist to co-train educators and youth development professionals. However, these efforts are primarily school driven, designed, and delivered. Youth development and other community learning settings have a history of supporting aspects of whole child design, namely: building relationships with caring adults and fostering supporting learning environments. Schools and districts should invite community partners to lead in trainings and initiative designed to improve youth outcomes through high-quality enrichment opportunities including STEM, project-based learning activities and summer enrichment programming as well as support address issues such as trauma, chronic absenteeism, diversity, and inclusion. Schools and community partners should seek ways to design and deliver trainings jointly and open up any and all relevant professional development and training opportunities to all adults across the learning and development ecosystem that are striving to support the whole child.

Recommendation 5: Increase and stabilize funding for community programs. Community partners can bring unique assets including alternative spaces for teaching and learning, experimentation with a variety of pedagogies aimed at fostering inquiry based-learning, and often serve as the bridge between schools and families. Yet historically, community programs have been substantially under-funded, relying primarily on short-term, unstable resources. Stable funding would allow community programs to deepen their practice and improve quality by accessing critical professional development supports to help them implement science-aligned practices alongside school day professionals.

More funding would also allow programs to serve more students. Advocates need to continue to push for equitable and dedicated local, state, and national funding, including expansion of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Initiative, the largest federal funding stream to support afterschool, before school, and summer learning. Locally, educators and community practitioners need to band together to help local philanthropy and the business community understand why investing in community learning and development opportunities will contribute to a healthy, productive workforce.

A Call for Collaborative Action from the National Commission for Social, Emotional, and Academic Development sums up the need for partnership and collaboration in support of whole child design:

"The sheer diversity of youth development organizations means that they do not always serve as a visible and coordinated force in their communities. The research on how [young people] learn has brought new credence to the adage that schools can't do it alone. School leaders committed to galvanizing community commitment to a whole child, whole community approach to learning can accelerate this work by partnering with [community learning and development] organizations and networks in their communities and inviting [community partner] leaders to join them in setting community-wide goals."[2]

Science-aligned transformations create a tall order for educators and practitioners regardless of their professional backgrounds and system affiliations. But taking an ecosystem approach that embraces the notion that all adults and all settings matter will lay the groundwork for creating the optimal and equitable conditions for healthy learning, development and thriving that each and every learner should experience.

END NOTES

[1]These recommendations are drawn from the **National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development Building Partnerships to Support Where, When, and How Learning Happens**

[2]Findings from the *Building Partnerships* brief.

APPENDIX A: DEVELOPING THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The goal of the Design Principles project was to translate key findings from the science of learning and development into concrete practices and structures that can guide equity-driven transformation of schools, districts, and youth-serving organizations. The Learning Policy Institute, Turnaround for Children, and the Forum for Youth Investment formed the core project team, which sought to accomplish the following objectives:

- Co-create a set of tools for stakeholders in schools, district offices, education support organization and community-based settings that describe and provide examples of what schools, classrooms, and community-based settings look like when they are aligned with science of learning and development (SoLD) principles.

- Generate products and materials that are focused on equity, relevant for key audiences, accessible and practical for use, and extensible to other tools, and that highlight the interconnectedness of SoLD principles across the many settings, in and outside of classrooms, where young people spend their time.

COMMITTEES

While led by these three organizations, the core project team recognized the importance of leveraging the deep knowledge and expertise of the educational ecosystem, including educators, counselors, curriculum and tool developers, and community-based organizations, in the development of the design principles from the project's onset. To enable this form of co-creation, the core project team created three intersecting committees to advise the project.

- **The Senior Science Advisory Committee** consisted of learning scientists and human development experts and was tasked with ensuring that the products and process accurately capture the science and can lead to integration of practice that will drive comprehensive child development and whole child education.

- **The Advisory Committee** consisted of association and system leaders, policymakers, and subject matter experts. This committee advised on the nature of the products, how to address barriers, and how to leverage policy and practice opportunities in this work.

- **The Design Team** consisted of school designers, school leaders, youth development programs, and experts in the fields of out-of-school learning and health and wellness. They were tasked with co-creating the design principles with the core project team and identifying associated resources that translate SoLD into concrete structures and practices that can transform schools and community-based learning settings.

- **Community-Based Advisory Group:** The Forum for Youth Investment convened a group of fifteen youth development researchers and practitioners to inform the development of the Community-Based Learning Settings Playbook. They were tasked with reviewing the principles and practices to ensure that they were relevant and accessible to practitioners working in community-based settings.

INITIAL DESIGN AND PROTOTYPE DEVELOPMENT

Once committees were established, the core project team began creating the vision and overall structure that could guide the development of design principles. As a starting point, the core project team identified the Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole Child Design as a framework, which was a tool and graphical representation emerging from early conversations among SoLD partners. With an initial framework in hand, the core project team moved quickly to tap the knowledge and expertise of their committees in the development of the design principles and their scientific and field grounding.

To do so, the core project team organized and facilitated virtual convenings to engage committee members at different stages of the work and collected feedback to guide ongoing iterations. Initial convenings in February 2020 focused on introducing members to the project and their roles and collecting preliminary feedback on key challenges and concepts that should be considered and reflected in the final products. From these initial meetings, the core project team synthesized feedback and outlined next steps to begin building out the design principles materials; namely, a set of goals for youth learning and development that served as building blocks for the project.

In the spring and summer of 2020, the core project team organized additional convenings with committees to receive feedback on the emerging project materials. At this juncture, the committees provided input on additional concepts that should be presented in the framework, identified structures and practices that should be reframed or elevated, and pointed the project team to exemplars and case studies that could illustrate our ideas in action for our target audiences. It was during this phase that the Community-Based Settings Playbook Advisors began to meet as well.

With this feedback in hand, the core project team began collaborating with Design Team members and select members of the Advisory Committee to develop the content that would be incorporated into the playbook and its accompanying web interface. Specifically, the core project team developed and refined content by soliciting feedback and support from committee members based on their area of expertise and capacity. In turn, the external partners reviewed materials to make sure content was accessible and clear and suggested additional practices, resources, and examples that should be featured in our final products.

The final phase of the project focused on dissemination strategies and frontier issues that the project team should consider as it moved to launch design principles materials. To this end, the Senior Science Advisory Committee provided input on important concepts and strategies to support the development of critical skills, habits, and mindsets, and the advancement of trauma-informed practices, particularly in light of the challenges exacerbated by the pandemic and ongoing public displays of racial violence. In addition, the Advisory Committee suggested approaches that could help practitioners implement the design principles, generated strategies the core project team could consider to combat misapplications, and identified other aligned initiatives that could help amplify or reinforce this work. Advisory Committee members also provided input on the content and format of the materials, noting how the project team could make the materials accessible and useful to school and district leaders as well as to practitioners working in community-based settings.

APPENDIX B: GOALS FOR YOUTH LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT*

*Adapted from **Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action**, 2021*

Our goals for youth learning and development are grounded in the science of learning and development (SoLD) and serve as the building blocks for the design principles for settings across the learning and development ecosystem. They capture the orientations, skills, habits, and mindsets that we hope all young people will develop and maintain as a result of their experiences in k–12 schools and community-based learning and development settings.

These goals acknowledge the complexity of development and span multiple domains of learning, including social and emotional development, identity development, physical well-being, mental wellness, cognitive development, ethical and moral development, and academic development. The skills are reinforcing and build upon one another in ways that allow for greater synergy among developmental goals and contribute to the development of complex, higher-order skills. While we categorize the goals under the area of development with which they most align, we acknowledge that the goals are cross-cutting and integrative.

Research also suggests that some skills are foundational, and children's skills develop in unique and integrated ways based on their web of experiences. A child's progress in developing one skill set can accelerate or impede progress in another area. Our goals hope to capture elements of that progression toward the final end point but recognize that young people follow different pathways as they develop.

We also acknowledge that these goals are not developed in siloes. They require deliberate action on the part of adults, communities, and policymakers to support youth on their learning and developmental journeys by ensuring that they have access to services and environments with the necessary preconditions that enable healthy development. This must include intentional actions to address the oppression of historically marginalized communities and systemic racism that exacerbate inequalities in education. Such support also requires a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.

HOW WE GENERATED OUR GOALS

In generating our goals, we identified aims that align with the framework developed by the **Chan Zuckerberg Initiative** for whole child development and its six domains (i.e., academic development, cognitive development, identity development, social-emotional development, mental health, and physical health). In addition, we included an ethical and moral development domain to emphasize that individual goals are connected to larger community aims and elevate the civic mission of education. Goals are currently categorized under the development dimension with which they most align, but they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

The goals themselves were also inspired by and adapted from materials generated by several organizations and experts who have been working to promote school transformation principles and practices supported by the science of learning and development. These include:

- **CASEL's Social and Emotional Competencies**

- **EL Education's Dimensions of Student Achievement**

- Hewlett's **Deeper Learning Competencies**

- **Interaction Institute for Social Change**

- Turnaround for Children's **Building Blocks for Learning**

- **UChicago Consortium on School Research Foundations for Young Adult Success Framework**

- **Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development**

THE GOALS

Cognitive development

Learners can think critically and creatively to solve complex problems.

They can:

- pose questions and seek out relevant resources and tools to answer them;

- generate new ideas and fresh perspectives;

- adapt to emerging demands and tasks;

- evaluate information, evidence, and ideas from multiple sources and perspectives, recognizing personal biases and those of others;

- analyze and synthesize diverse bodies of knowledge and apply their knowledge to answer questions and create solutions;

- use metacognitive skills to reflect on and manage their own learning process; and

- set and work toward meaningful personal and collective goals with a strong sense of agency and purpose.

Academic development

Learners deeply understand content and can apply their knowledge beyond the classroom.

They can:

- understand central concepts and ways of knowing in a discipline and engage in essential modes of inquiry within and across disciplines;

- explain and demonstrate how major ideas and concepts relate to each other and to the work they are doing;

- transfer and use knowledge to solve problems in novel contexts or situations; and

- positively contribute to and support the learning of peers.

Social and emotional development

Learners are self-aware and engage meaningfully with others.

They can:

- recognize their own emotions, thoughts, and values and how these influence behavior;

- successfully regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations— effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, resisting inappropriate social pressure, and motivating themselves;

- assess their strengths and areas for development, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a growth mindset;

- persevere, problem-solve, seek assistance, and exhibit resilience in the face of ambiguity and challenge;

- establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups, empathetically supporting their learning and development;

- take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures; and

- communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, negotiate conflict constructively, and offer help when needed.

Identity development

Learners hold a positive sense of identity, self-potential, purpose, and direction.

They have:

- a positive sense of their racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, sexual, and spiritual identities and appreciate other aspects of their identity that contribute to their personhood;

- a sense of agency and the ability to make choices grounded in their values and take an active role in their life paths, rather than solely being the product of their circumstances;

- the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions to support the well-being of self and others;

- the ability to reflect on what they care about, what they hope to accomplish in life, and how their actions relate to their goals;

- the ability to identify and develop areas of interest that support a strong sense of purpose and fulfillment; and

- the ability to see themselves as a vital part of their communities and as having value and making a unique and fruitful contribution to their communities.

Physical and mental well-being

Learners make healthy life choices.

They:

- have access to healthy food, clean water, and other positive environmental conditions that enable them to live healthy lives;

- have access to mental wellness services, tools, and resources to develop healthy coping strategies that support them in healing and building resilience from stressful events;

- engage in healthy eating, nutrition, and activity to promote learning and physical well-being and are supported by the adults in their schools and community to do so;

- establish lifelong patterns of healthy behavior;

- have a positive relationship with and awareness of their body;

- develop positive mindsets and have tools to cope with and move beyond negative or destructive emotions, including depression and anxiety;

- hold a mindful commitment to making choices that optimize their physical and mental health and serve their bodies, minds, and spirits well; and

- understand the role health plays in positive learning and development and advocate for themselves and others to improve conditions that support healthy choices for all individuals, including those who are enabled and those who have physical impairments.

Ethical and moral development

Learners are empathetic, ethical, and proactive in contributing to the welfare of their communities.

They:

- treat others with respect and consideration;

- understand how their individual actions contribute to their community in and out of the classroom;

- contribute to efforts to create and uphold a just and inclusive learning environment;

- value and respect the perspectives and experiences of peers and adults from different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic backgrounds as well as those with different sexual orientations, those who learn differently, or those who have disabilities;

- collaborate and communicate effectively across lines of difference; and

- use their knowledge to advocate for themselves and others to advance civic ideals.

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