Summer for All: How Coordination in Dallas is Making this Goal a Reality Interactive Transcript
April 14, 2022

Katherine Plog Martinez ([00:01](#)):

Hello, everyone. And welcome to this afternoon's webinar. We want to be respectful of everyone's time and get started right away. We are thrilled to have you this afternoon for a very exciting conversation that continues a series of webinars that we've done over the last couple of years, looking at reports stemming out of the Wallace Foundation's National Summer Learning partnership, and on RAND's Summer Learning Series.

Today's webinar, we're going to be talking about the latest report in that series and digging in deeply to the work underway in Dallas, Texas to support summer. And while the last few webinars have focused deeply on summer programming itself, what happens in the space between staff and young people while they're interacting in partnership between schools and districts in the actual program space, this latest report in our conversation today look much more at the systems and infrastructure behind those programs, and what it actually takes to put them together.

So that latest report is called Summer for All. Building Coordinated Networks to Promote Access to Quality Summer Learning and Enrichment Opportunities Across a Community. And the report focused on three of the National Summer Learning Project communities. Boston, Massachusetts, Dallas, Texas, and Pittsburgh, PA. And then also brought in and looked at Washington DC.

And the goal of this report was really to provide community leaders, government agencies, community based organizations, school districts, anyone working on these coordinated city-wide efforts to increase participation in quality summer learning opportunities in their own community. So new guidance helped all of us do what these communities have been doing so well.

The research sought to answer four key questions. How have cities developed collaborative efforts to strengthen and promote summer opportunities? What progress have they made? What challenges have the networks faced? And what lessons have emerged from this work that might benefit others?

We're going to structure this webinar a little bit differently than we have the others where we've looked at the summer series. We're not going to dive too deeply into the research right away. Instead, we want to begin with the stories that we heard from one of the communities in the report.

So each of these communities in answering these research questions, RAND lifted up the stories, the opportunities connected to what we know are elements of successful coordination. Shared vision, strong leadership, coordinated action, funding for sustainability, and collecting diagnostic data. There are lots of models, and the report gives several of them of what successful coordination and successful networks take. But these key elements were the ones that were used in the research.

Before I invite our representative from Dallas to join me on stage, I'd love to learn a little bit more about what each of you are doing in this space. So we're going to launch a quick poll. And we'd love to hear in your community, which of these elements of successful coordination are already in place.

So I'll give you just a minute to complete that poll. See those answers coming in. I will trust that Ian will pop the results up when he feels like most of you have had a chance to answer.

Excellent. So emphasis on that shared vision and followed by strong leadership a little bit less. Less than half on the coordinated action, funding for sustainability, and collecting diagnostic data. So as we have our conversation today, and you hear a little bit about what this work has looked like in Dallas and what it continues to look like as they learn and grow, we'd love to have you share in the chat things that are working in your community, things that resonate in our conversation, or questions that you have for Sergio as we dig in more deeply.

So with that, I'm going to stop sharing. And I would love to have Sergio invite me on. I just said that all wrong. I would love to invite Sergio to join me on screen. He did the right action, even though I couldn't get the

words out, right? Sergio, we are thrilled to have you here today. And Sergio Garcia is Big Thought's Senior Manager of Learning Systems. I loved reading your bio on Big Thought's page. I'm going to read it to everybody. So Sergio describes himself as a creative person who seeks the opportunity for education in the every day. And I will tell all of you that in my conversations with Sergio, I felt that. So I'm excited for all of you to feel that in today's conversation as well. So welcome Sergio. Thank you so much for joining us.

Sergio Garcia ([05:46](#)):

Thank you. Thank you for having, and thank you for this opportunity. And welcome to everyone here in this webinar also.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([05:52](#)):

Excellent. Well Sergio, I gave the high level of the report and I mentioned that you are from Dallas, and in your bio mentioned that you are from Big Thought. Before we even get into the summer space, can you just tell us a little bit about what Big Thought is?

Sergio Garcia ([06:09](#)):

Yeah. So Big Thought is a 30 plus year organization here in Dallas. We started out actually as young audiences back in the early '80s, saw that need for arts enrichment when the arts were taken out of schools and how we could feel that gap for arts enrichment and arts engagement.

So over the years, Big Thought has grown. Like I said, we started out young audiences. We saw a larger need for work within the youth development space and how the arts help support social emotional learning and foundations. And then we became Big Thought. So through that work at Big Thought, we have our hands in a lot of different pies. So we do systems work, which I oversee. We also do direct delivery with stakeholders like being DISD, Dallas Independent School District and the city of Dallas.

And it really is all in service to youth, centering youth voice and agency at our strategies. And in the work that we do and being mindful of that. And in conjunction, also centering community and parent caregivers for how we can move forward by making this impact and really just making sure that what we are doing as a community, what we are doing as an organization is continuing to center youth at that, and developing the skills necessary for them to imagine and create their best lives. So that's kind of our tagline at Big Thought is allowing youth to imagine and create their best lives.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([07:41](#)):

I love it. I love the centering on youth. I love that ability to lift up everything that they already have within them. And that broader connection to community I think is going to be a key theme throughout our conversation today. So I want to take us right into the summer space. And as I said, this new report and our conversation today is going to be a lot about what happens behind the scenes. But first, let's talk about what does summer look like in Dallas. I know that coordinated summer programming actually predates the National Summer Learning Project that it started in 2008 as part of the Thriving Minds initiative. But then with the National Summer Learning Project, you all launched Dallas City of Learning. So tell me what young people will be engaging in Dallas City of Learning this summer.

Sergio Garcia ([08:33](#)):

Yeah, so we're super excited that we are getting back to in person programming here in Dallas and through Dallas City of Learning. It goes through, well Dallas City of Learning, they stand on these three pillars of access, dosage, and quality. So what does that mean? We are trying to make sure that we're making connection in collaboration with all youth development nonprofits organizations. So youth can have fun. Youth can continue their learning in new ways and activating the spaces that they're in. So they know that when they go even outside their front door, that they can actually learn something. But what we're doing with that with our partners is giving them the language, giving them the skills and the tools to do that for themselves as well.

So for summer of this year in Dallas, we're really looking at coming back to in person, getting people out, really making sure that we are being culturally relevant and civic minded in the work that we do. Even in our younger age group. So a lot of the partners that we collaborate with that are doing summer learning programs is to be perfectly honest, trying to mitigate some of the COVID ... if I can be blunt, the COVID trauma

that they have had, and really being mindful of that. So we're seeing a lot of health and wellness being incorporated. A lot of social and emotional implementation, and just lesson planning and curriculum. So really being mindful and taking time out to actually continuing to talk with our youth and communities to see where we can start to leverage our strengths, leverage their experiences, and building from there, and coming from a strength mindset, a growth mindset as we move forward. So in-person programming is back in Dallas. We're super excited about that. We're doing a lot of things to make that happen. So with that, it's just trying to make sure that youth are aware of what is out there for them to take advantage of. Whether that's at a museum, whether that's in the park, or in their local community center. And it's really making a collective effort and collective impact to make that happen.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([10:56](#)):

That's amazing. I actually just hung up a phone call right before this one, where I was talking with someone about that in a lot of communities last year, there was a real push to get to learning loss quickly. And that this summer, there does seem to be a pause and a real reflection on we do need to focus on wellbeing. It's not to say we ignore the academics, because I heard you talking about both, but it has to be of both that the young people really need that support. So it's in person this summer. Tell me, where is that? Does Dallas City of Learning happen in schools, in the community, both?

Sergio Garcia ([11:32](#)):

So yeah, it's both really. Dallas City of Learning is kind of, to take a theater term, it's yes, right? It's yes. And we want to make sure that we are opening activities, opening spaces for youth to engage in. And so that is at schools. It is at some of the elementaries, and high schools, and middle schools, because that's easier access for a lot of our youth families to get to.

It's happening at community centers. It's happening at the YMCAs that are around here. It's even happening at some of the nature centers that are around here in Dallas. So really trying to activate different spaces for learning.

Big Thought is also known for one of our programs called Creative Solutions that deals with adjudicated youth in the judicial system. So we're having programming happening in there. So it's this idea of how we can really look at a space in place. What are the learning opportunities that can happen? And so how can we make learning and engage as my bio said, it's like making learning happening in everyday spaces and everyday. And that's what we're trying to do. So again, to answer your question, it's happening everywhere. Schools, parks, community centers, even in some of these adjudicated youth spaces. Wherever people can open up a door to allow us to go into, we are there.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([13:01](#)):

That's amazing. That's amazing. So many great and unique opportunities. It sounds like there's a real place for every young person to find something that connects for them.

Sergio Garcia ([13:10](#)):

Yeah. And I'd be remiss to even mention one of our big partners is the libraries as well. So we're super excited. The libraries are eager to engage with their public as well and opening up their doors once again for them not just to check out books, but to be in their libraries for programming as well.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([13:27](#)):

Yeah. Great plug, especially coming right off of public library week. And it is public library month, so thanks for remembering them. Great. So as you're describing all of that, I can only imagine that folks listening. How in the world do you make all of that happen? Right? And that's what this whole report was about. And you all have put a lot of intentional effort into this isn't just Big Thought doing, this isn't just the school district doing it. It isn't each partner. It really is this coordinated network focused on summer. So I wanted to take us to some of those success criteria, some of the things that we know help network succeed in this type of work. And I want to start with where they start, which is setting a vision. So whether it was in 2008 with those first efforts, or as you all entered into the national partnership for summer learning. What did it look like? What was the process for

setting a collaborative vision? And what does this process of engaging the community and continually setting a collaborative vision look like for you?

Sergio Garcia ([14:37](#)):

Yeah. So thank you for that. And yes, it is big work, it's large work. But it needs to be mindful and intentional. So we started out with really asking our city and asking our school district here DISD, where do they feel are the kind of heat spots? Where are under resourced communities? And so we looked at things like food deserts. We looked at things like resource deserts and health and wellness deserts. So that was our first indicator on where we wanted to structure our focus, structure our strategies. So when we got an idea of what those looked like on the map in Dallas, we continued to see that those were in those communities that were typically have been, but it just reinforced that for those of you who may be in the Dallas area or have been to Dallas, these are our Southern sectors of Dallas, like Fair Park area, Pleasant Grove. Again, just looking at where the resource deserts specifically food was one. Because we understand that that's also a huge access point. And then health and wellness, as I mentioned.

So we did that and we just basically convened partners. And we broke bread. We had lunch. We said, "Let's buy you lunch. Let's come together as community leaders, tap into those community leaders." And being mindful about who is talking to them as well. Because I'll be perfectly honest, a lot of the work that I do because of who I am, how I present myself does help push the conversation. So we are mindful in that in who's coming to the table. We start to build trust. We start to build some sort of relationship that really says okay, these people are here for us. So that strategy and that focus really said okay, we see where there are food resource deserts. We see where there are health and wellness deserts. We as an arts organization, as a youth development organization who does more than just the arts, we want to leverage our relationships and our strengths along with your strengths, and recognizing, and asking them what do you feel that your strengths are? So when we can understand what each other's strengths, and resources, and experiences are, then we can start to map out what that collective effort impact can be.

And then continuing to check game with them because I'll be honest. Sometimes I've had to do some damage control and making sure that we're not doing a one and done thing. That we're continuing to involve them in conversation, continuing to check in with them. So that was also part of our strategy is being mindful about not a one and done thing. I'm just not going to ask you for this one question. I'm going to continue to come back to you, and then leverage your experiences. So that really solidified the foundation of what Dallas City of Learning was and is, and then identifying those community leaders. And I think that was a big part of that as well because yes, we have our stakeholders like the city of Dallas and Dallas ISD. But it's really the community partners who are embedded and who had been typically doing the work prior to us coming into the space that we really wanted to connect with. So giving them a platform and giving them a stage. And like I said, leveraging our resources here at Big Thought or with our relationships with the city of Dallas and DISD to say, "This is a community partner who has been doing work, who can add to what you're doing."

And so always having that kind of augmented mindset moving forward and really not focusing on any deficits, but saying let's come together, let's collaborate, let's share each other. And let's not work in silos. And that's a big part of what we continue to do is try to break down silos. That's how we came up with our three pillars of access, dosage, and quality. How can youth access more opportunities? How often with the dosage, how often can they go from one, maybe something that's happening at the school, to what a community partner is having, what the library is doing? How can we make that dosage happen? And quality. That's where Big Thought really leveraged our relationships and our so support like from the Wallace is through professional learning opportunities, and SEL foundations, and giving our partners those same tools and skills to incorporate SEL, to incorporate and build capacity in their frontline staff. So we do those things really mindfully as we continue to check in with them, as we continue to build the relationships with them.

So that's how we really started to kind of structure our ecosystem, structure our efforts. And I use the word ecosystem because we have to be mindful that all ecosystems change. They grow, they can expand, they contract. We saw it contract a lot in COVID. And now it's starting to expand again. So when we're mindful of that, and we understand that ecosystems are living people. And to be mindful with that, the meta part of that is there are people who are living in the ecosystem. And they're not just a data number. They're not just somebody that want to check off in a box. We want to continue to check in with them. We want to continue to acknowledge that these are people that they have basic human needs and rights. And it's those basic human needs and rights that also help us to really be mindful of how we are representing and how we are being represented in these spaces and places.

Katherine Plog Martinez (20:32):

So many amazing things that you just said, Sergio. And I feel like I could ask you six different follow up questions. I think first, I just definitely want to do a plus one to something that you shared and give a little shout out. The latest book in IAP's Current Issues in Out-of-School Time series is called It Takes an Ecosystem. It was edited by Dr. Kim Robinson and Dr. Tom Akiva. And in one of the chapters, Dr. Akiva, and Dale Blyth, and Dr. Hecht write about the fact that ecosystems exist and they can be health or unhealthy. We often talk about building an ecosystem, but you just said it they're there. And what I'm hearing is so much of this setting a shared vision was understanding the ecosystem, understanding its current health, and figuring out the role you could play in making it healthier and stronger, right?

So that is such a good framing for those of us who spent time studying Bronfenbrenner and that original, his original human ecological model, right? That's not necessarily just about building that for kids. They're going to find it. And how do we make it as strong and healthy as possible?

I think the other thing that I heard that really resonated, and I am realizing folks on the webinar, I didn't introduce myself to you. I'm Katherine Plog Martinez. I'm a consultant with the Forum For Youth Investment. And while I am thrilled to be here and moderating this conversation with Sergio, I like Sergio have experienced supporting and out of school time intermediary in Denver, Colorado who's one of the, of founders of the Denver Afterschool Alliance. And as you were talking about that relationship building with partners and that so much of the shared vision came out of listening, and aligning, and building on all of the work that they do. Just resonated so much with my experience in Denver. Our work also thanks to this support of the Wallace Foundation. That was not a planned connection, but we were part of Wallace Foundation's after school systems building two grant process. And through that support, we were able to launch a formal intermediary.

But it grew from what was already a grassroots coordination effort amongst all the providers in the community. And the providers really pausing to say it's not benefiting the kids for us to compete against each other. There are more kids than we can serve. So if we can instead think about what each of us offers and does best for kids, but also for our staff, think of about how we can do that together. And think about how we can share the resources that we have. Everybody's going to be better off. And I heard so much of that grassroots element in what you were saying.

And I just wanted to really lift that up. Because I think as people think about forming coordinated networks, and formal structures, and systems to support summer learning, we think grass tops. And we think about the policy and we think about the data sharing agreements that are needed. And those are totally important. And we totally got there. And you did too, and we're going to get to those. But that not having that grassroots foundation of the folks who most directly connect to the young people and the passion they bring can be a real loss.

Sergio Garcia (23:56):

Yeah. I really appreciate what you're saying about being mindful of ourselves in that space and place as well. Because we can't all be everywhere at once. So to what you've been saying, and to what I've mentioned is what are our strengths? What can we bring to the table to make this collection and this collaboration worthwhile as we continue to build these ecosystem and check in our health and wellness within ourselves as well, to make sure that our ecosystem is healthy and well?

Katherine Plog Martinez (24:26):

Yeah, absolutely. Well, when we think about that point of bringing our strengths and bringing our best selves to the table, as you mentioned, many, many essential partners to Dallas City of Learning. But the three big partners that came together to kind of form the backbone and launch the partnership you mentioned were you all, the Dallas Independent School District and the city of Dallas. And I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about what collaborative leadership and coordination has looked like. And kind of as with my other question, how has that ebbed and flowed throughout the course of the partnership?

Sergio Garcia (25:04):

Yeah. So that's a great a question, and that's always a question that I ask myself as well. I still take a grassroots approach to it myself, right? So connecting with our city council people to see where they are feeling that what are the things that they need and support. Because our council people know these spaces and

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places a little bit better than I would. And I'll be the first to admit, I know where we are. I know what we can do. So it's still continuing that grassroots effort mindset. And likewise with the schools, it's actually talking to not only the teachers that are in the schools, but the administrators, the principals, even the counselors. We're fortunate enough to have a lot of our campuses here in DISD a community engagement person who really understands their constituency. And then understanding the conversations that they're having. So it's that continued grassroots mindset by talking to those people, to see where we can come together and support. So they know where we need to be. They know the actual brick and mortar locations that they can help support us with. They know who those organizations or even businesses who are willing to support as well.

So it's that continued grassroots effort mindset by talking to our city council persons, talking to the schools, principals, administration, and counselors, and community engagement persons. Because they're continuing to talk to the families. They're continuing to talk to youth in these spaces and places. So when we have an idea through their lens of how we can support each other's work, that's where we're continuing to see where our impact needs to be more. And if we need to shift. And continuing to say, "Hey, we thought we wanted to bring this theater camp to your school, but actually you want more STEM and technology. Okay, let's do that." So I'm fortunate enough to who those partners are to be able to bring them to the table. So that's how I'm leveraging my relationships and leveraging my experiences and connections to the table when I'm in conversation with these institutions like Dallas ISD, like city of Dallas.

And I'll be perfectly honest. For myself as a person who does social advocacy as well, I leverage and utilize my own relationships. Right? To make sure that I'm doing what needs to be done and being mindful of that as well. So in that, trying not to burn those relationship outs as well. So there's also that as well to be mindful of not to ask too much and make sure that you're bringing equally if you can, to the table.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([28:16](#)):

Yeah. That's a critical piece when you think about that vector of sustainable funding, right? I mean, so much more to not asking too much than just funding. But it sparked that for me, as you're thinking about those businesses that might be able to give, or the city, and the school district, and the contributions they can make financially, that you need to be aware of the ebbs and flows. And when there are times like now where there's federal funding coming in, what can we do with that. But how do we be prepared when that isn't there, and what are we doing to always be setting up those next connections?

But more broadly than just that funding piece that sparked for me, it really sounds to me like you in your role, and Big Thought as the intermediary partner in all of this sort of serves as a bridge between the grass tops and grassroots that we talked about, right? That you take the time to get to know both in service of the other and the collective whole. And that you can kind of do some of that translation and some of that advocacy. How does that resonate?

Sergio Garcia ([29:18](#)):

Yeah. I mean, a lot of my work has transitioned into that being the voice of the partners, the smaller nonprofit organizations in this space in place. So taking their concerns, taking what their strategies are to a city council meeting to do all of that, to make sure that I can be their advocate in these spaces and places. So that has been essential. And that's how I've kind of seen my role transition a lot more now while continuing to do that. And it hasn't been the easiest, I'll be honest. But it definitely is inspiring because it really sets a fire underneath me to be able to go out and be more of that. Because I'm always coming from myself, and I think we need to recognize and remember that for ourselves. Why are we in this? Why are we continuing to do this? What continues to inspire you to do this work? And for me, it's always remembering when I was a young person and I didn't have access to these types of things, how can I continue to support the people who look like me, who talk like me, who came from my same background? And then those who have similar backgrounds. How can I continue to provide them opportunities? So that's what keeps me going.

And if I can continue to bring that to the table, that passion, my passion for education, my passion for experience and opportunity, my passion for social justice really has been how I've kind of leveraged the voice of not only what Big Thought does, but the voice of our partners. Because we all think similarly, right?

And I think that's where the share vision comes into play a lot of the times is we should all be somewhat on the same, maybe not on the same page, but in the same book. And we're telling a collective story together. And each one of us has not only our own chapters, but have paragraphs in those chapters to tell this story. So if we're all in the same book, we're continuing to make that collective impact together. So it's really

continuing to be culturally aware and mindful through cultural relevancy and elevating that and saying if a rapper is building X, Y, and Z skills, that an employer at maybe AT&T can understand what that might mean for them as a future employee. So it's how we are making those connections happen by being culturally relevant, by being mindful of where not only youth, but communities, where they thrive and where their passions are. And saying these two can also be utilized for upward mobility in some way into either employment or generational wealth. It's really starting to be mindful about that process as well as we talk about what we consider here at Big Thought learning pathways. It's like building these skill sets and these kind of nontraditional spaces in these informal ways. And that's how we're continuing to evolve and leverage the voice of our community.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([32:36](#)):

Yeah, yeah. You brought back up again, leveraging the voice of the community. And I want to get tactical for a second in terms of the role that you play for Big Thought, right? We talked about strong leadership. You're sitting in that strong leadership role. What does your time look like? During the summer, the whole rest of the year, how much are you sitting at this desk we see you sitting at now, versus how much are you out and about? What does your specific role look like in terms of that engagement?

Sergio Garcia ([33:10](#)):

Yeah. If I'm at my desk, I'm not doing my job. I'm really out there. I go to community meetings that my partner are collecting themselves by bringing there. And I'm not the most important person in the room, they are. And I make sure that they know that. I'm having lunches with people. I'm taking them out to lunch and say, "I need to get to know you because you are the most important person who's out there in the community right now."

So if I'm at my desk, I'm really not doing my job. But then that also means that I am going to city council meetings. I am understanding what's happening there. I continue to look at my cultural centers as well and seeing what's happening there. And then I'm even going to schools when I can. Right? Luckily, I have my DISD badge and I'll just pop into a school that we might be doing a programming at, and just sitting there and talking to the kids, talking to the youth. So as I continue to do that, it's really continuing to have conversations by me going to them. By shifting that balance of power and saying, "This is where you are, this is where you thrive." So I always take the time to go to my partners that are in the DISD ecosystem. I take my time to go to a city council person's district office. I go to wherever I need to go to. Because when they see that I'm invested in coming to them, that's where we're just automatically starting to build these relationships. And that's where trust is starting to happen as well.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([35:03](#)):

Yeah. So much of what you talked about in that initial process of building the vision is the ongoing work of keeping it going, right? Sustaining it depends on those connections and relationships just as much.

One of the other pillars is leveraging data in the work that you do. And you mentioned in one of the questions helping young people and their parents find these opportunities. I imagine that maybe one way that data's being used. You talked about using the data to look at the neighborhoods and really understand them. Can you talk a little bit about how you're using data, how you're collecting data? What that looks like for Dallas City of Learning.

Sergio Garcia ([35:46](#)):

Yeah, so we do have an extensive process that we go through our data collection. And we are fortunate enough to have a relationship with Southern Methodist University and their Center of Research and Evaluation. So in the summer, we do a lot of survey work. We do a lot of kind of observation work as well. So those surveys are kind of multi-layered. We have surveys that we do with youth that they fill out. We have surveys from frontline staff that they fill out as well in leadership. We also have surveys for caregivers.

So when we do those three things, we're trying to be as mindful with the questions that we ask. And that's how we're starting to the brass tax of our data collection is through that survey work.

We have a cohort every summer that we call the neighborhood resource initiative. And these organizations are about 30 or 40 organizations as I mentioned, who I call my partners, who are all over Dallas. So they us administer those surveys. And then we kind of synthesize all of that, all those three different types

of surveys to share back out with them as well. So we make sure that when they are doing these surveys, that we share that information back out with them. Because it is their information. It really is. So SMU's Center of Research and Evaluation helps us synthesize, collect all of that. We do a big share out of their impact usually in the January. So we stop our data collection sometime in August.

We go through it all fall and winter, and then we do a preliminary share out in January on the impact that they've had in the summer. So we've been doing that for the past seven years now. So we've really started to see some longitudinal data impact that, that is happening specifically on academic achievement. So we understand that when a youth participates in one summer, it's good. Two summers is better. And two summers and beyond, we're seeing that summer learning has had an impact on academic achievement. We're also starting to see how this is affecting the value and really elevating the value of our out of school time providers that they have just as much importance in a young person's education and learning as they do in formal education in their schools.

So we're really starting to see that data collection come through in a really impactful way. So it's just through survey work again, through observation, and continuing to do coaching in those observations. We do things through [inaudible 00:38:46]. We do things through six dimensions of quality, which is a template that we use. So when we share it back out to our partners and to the work that they're doing, then we see the quality of programming elevate. We see that happen. We have seen that happen over these many years. So it's just through survey work and our great relationship with SMU Center of Research and Evaluation that helps us make those identifiers happen.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([39:13](#)):

Yeah. So the forum's Weikart Center uses a model that they call quest, which really talks about how the quality of the programming helps young people be deeply engaged, which leads them to development of skills, which ultimately transfer outside into other settings. That's a major oversimplification of quest. So people should definitely read it. But as you were talking, I hear a lot of that coming through, that you're thinking about the quality and how is it being delivered. Thinking about where and how kids are connecting. And then like you said, with that longevity of participation, you start to really see that skill development occur. And it makes me think about so many conversations right now around accountability and limited time on the [inaudible 00:40:03] and art funding, the American Rescue Plan Funding and the emergency, I'm not going to remember the [inaudible 00:40:11] acronym, sorry guys. We have to stick with my acronym there.

But that often, we're trying to get results fast. We've got to make up for what happened. And actually, it sounds like what your data is showing is that taking that long view may get us there. But gosh, if we had only stopped at a year because we didn't yet see the impact, we would've lost that eventual impact that we're getting to.

So I have a couple of more questions for you, but I want to honor that there is a question in the chat. And I want to encourage other people to share their questions in the chat as well. But Alicia has asked if you can share a little bit more about the six dimensions of quality.

Sergio Garcia ([40:47](#)):

Yes. So the six dimensions of quality are how we go and observe how programming is being facilitated. And the six dimensions are listed up as such. It's climate that supports learning, engagement and investment in learning, the dialogue and sharing of that, skills, technique, knowledge, and the discipline of learning, creative choices in that learning and teaching, and expectation and assessment and recognition of those learning processes. Some of that is also with having to do with cultural relevancy, how we're bringing that in. So those six dimensions of qualities that kind of helps us identify how learning is happening, where there are growth opportunities, and really being mindful about who is in the room and how rooms of learning are being facilitated and managed.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([41:42](#)):

Perfect. And I am pretty sure that I just found a link to the right PDF on your website so that people can learn a little bit more about those. So Wanda, rather than typing them in the chat, if you click on that PDF link, you should see them. And if that doesn't work, let us know and we will definitely make sure they get dropped in the chat for you.

So before I get back to the report and some of the recommendations therein, I know that you all learned a lot through the process of building this partnership for Dallas City of Learning. And I know that since that time, you've been engaged in other new partnerships and initiatives. The one that I'm most closely connected to folks on your team related is the another Wallace Foundation supported initiative, the Partnerships for Social Emotional Learning Initiative and the launch of SEL Dallas. And I'm just wondering how lessons learned from Dallas City of Learning have informed the way that you've engaged in other efforts moving forward like SEL Dallas, or how they've informed how you all work and operate as an intermediary organization.

Sergio Garcia (42:52):

Yeah, that's a great question. So Big Thought has always been SEL focused. That social emotional foundation in learning. So we saw how to really make SEL a part of the cultural relevancy. Where can we start to make sure that are being culturally mindful and relevant through SEL practices? And I often get asked, well, what do you mean by cultural relevancy? Right? What does that mean to you? That means several different things. So I can only speak from my experience. As a Mexican American, how are we incorporating those kind of cultural thoughts to be mindful about SEL? So from an older youth perspective, how we're talking about toxic masculinity, and how can we talk about SEL and using SEL as a way to provide learning tools to manage those as well? So it's really about incorporating SEL in our lesson plans, in our delivery of program facilitation, in our conversations with youth and community. And SEL Dallas was a huge part of that, in collaboration with Dallas Afterschool who was also a part of that and commit, and really understanding how we can be more mindful when we're having conversations. And then continuing to use those as as templates and not as definitives, right?

I think that's where a lot of people continue to get like is this a definitive thing? How can it be adapted? So really being mindful of how our SEL practices can be adaptive as well. Because I mentioned ecosystems are growing, they change, they expand, they shrink. We as people culturally mindful, social mindful, our viewpoints change. So how can we make things adaptable? And that's how we really started to incorporate a lot of that stuff into SEL Dallas. And the work is where are the adaptability opportunities that we can really be mindful of social emotional learning? And how can we take that and start to incorporate that even more and really just have open conversations and continue to check in with each other?

Katherine Plog Martinez (45:22):

That's great. That's great. One of the other communities that's part of the facility initiative, I was doing some reflection interviews with them. And one of the coaches from that initiative said it's not just about teaching adults SEL so that they can teach the skills to kids. It's about adults learning and focusing on their own SEL, because they're exactly the skills we need to try to do this type of collaborative change management and collective work together. And that's a little bit of what I hear from you is that some of what you learned in Dallas City of Learning was that it took a lot of SEL to be able to coordinate. And now having this formal structure for SEL actually helps it become part of everything that you do. And I think the word you've probably said most on this call is relationships. And that is such a critical piece of we have to be able to work together for our organizations to be able to work together for us to be able to serve kids together.

Sergio Garcia (46:17):

Yeah. And I think it's important to double click on what you said about working on ourselves first with SEL. As an organization, we did that internal work our first year through the SEL work on our own selves, on our own organization to make sure that we are ready to go out there and do that work. And I think that's imperative that we got to clean house first before we can go out and do that for somebody else. So that has also been a large part of how we've kind of really been mindful about this SEL work that we continue to do. And as I mentioned, being more culturally relevant and mindful as we continue to build these relationships.

Katherine Plog Martinez (46:57):

Right. Well, I'm going to jump in now to the recommendations from the report. And feel free to jump been as I'm going through them. And for those of you joining us, feel free to continue to share your questions in the chat as well.

The recommendations after listening to stories like those you've just heard from Sergio as well as from the other communities about lessons that they've learned, things that worked and challenges, were divided into four areas. So the first is launching a coordinated network. And I think we heard a lot from Sergio on this first one. Set a broad vision that allows for strategic evolution. Sergio talked about how is that continual conversation with people about what's needed and what's needed now.

Garner mayoral support for citywide efforts. Even though we both talked about grassroots, having that grass top, having someone who can, our friends at the National League of Cities. Always talk about the mayor using their bully pulpit. And sometimes you need that bully pulpit and that strong voice. And then leverage the experiences of past local coordination efforts. As you heard from Sergio, this built from work that was already underway. As I shared in Denver, our formal coordination built from what was already underway. The ecosystem exists. How do we tend to its health? And how do we remember not to build something new. Sergio, anything more you want to add connected to these three recommendations?

Sergio Garcia ([48:17](#)):

Yeah. So that broad vision really is how we can continue, because broad visions allow you to be flexible. Right? Let's be honest. So if you have a broad vision, that's great. And then you can get a little bit more kind of or put a skeleton to that. The one thing I do want to hit on is leveraging past local coordination efforts. Dallas City of Learning started from a work that was done locally here in Dallas called the GrowSouth initiative. So that was already happening. So that had a lot of data that we could utilize already. So I think it's important to bust your head open on trying to find where this data is. It was probably already happening.

And so that's how we really started to give ourselves this broader vision on the strategic evolution of what we wanted to do. And the mayoral support is very important. And we understand that regimes come in and out. So it's continuing to be mindful of that. And that's why I like to take an approach with our city council persons, because they're the ones where continue to help support you to talk to the mayor. So that's where I see a lot of our strength and relationships building is through city council persons.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([49:42](#)):

Excellent. Excellent. And the next side of recommendations, get then a little bit more to what you were just saying of okay, we've got the strategic vision, let's fill in some of the details below. So setting and achieving goals, align the goals and strategies to the organizational structure of the coordinated effort. Align strategies to goals has to all cascade, and carefully consider strategies and the resources needed to implement them well. Again, I hope that everybody's heard a lot of this from Sergio already. That the organizational structure, the role that Big Thought played was built around what they were trying to achieve and the role that Big Thought could play. Whereas the city took on the pieces that they could play most effectively, and the school district of the pieces they could. And that those goals and strategies, they were very clear on the vision. So then how we do that began to fall into place. Sergio, what more would you add related to these recommendations?

Sergio Garcia ([50:35](#)):

Yeah, so I think I mentioned this earlier. It's that mission alignment, right? That mission and passion alignment. Because we don't want to continue to build up more barriers if we don't have to. So if we are in line with our mission statement, if we are aligned with our passions, it makes this work a lot easier. And in that, I would also say it's okay to say no, right? Be mindful of your own capacity. Be mindful of how you want to show up in these spaces and places. And it just may not be right for you at that point in time. But continue to check back when you are ready, when you do have the capacity to do these things.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([51:16](#)):

That's great. Promoting equity. This was great. You started on this one in the very first answer to the very first question. Consider targeting efforts to neighborhoods with the greatest needs. We also talked about the fact that we probably can't serve all the kids that we want to or need to. Resources are limited. Human capacity is limited. So this targeted neighborhood strategy is a great place to start, grow from, maybe even a great place to stay.

And then gathering and using data to assess programs. Determine how to assess progress early in the process, create incentives to ensure summer program provider buy-in. I'll add a couple on that data piece, and

then toss it to use or geo. But on the data piece, I did a report connected to a number of intermediary networks working on broadening their use of social emotional learning data. And they really found that it was a much heavier lift for partners to collect data at the level they were needing to collect it than they realized.

So if we want people to be part of robust data collection, as Sergio described, that has to be part of what we're supporting them in doing. It takes extra time. It takes extra human capital. And it might take extra capacity and learning opportunities as well.

And then again, going back to my experience in Denver, it was really important to us that providers knew what we'd measuring and how we'd be measuring it, and that they were comfortable with using the data to understand those things before we did formal evaluation. That they need to know what we're looking at, whether it's the six pillars of quality or the outcomes that we're trying to achieve for kids. Sergio, what more would you add on either the neighborhood approach or using data?

Sergio Garcia ([53:00](#)):

Yeah. So the data collection yes, is a big hill to tackle, right? And a big hill to climb. So as I mentioned, Big Thought leverages our resources in our relationships. So when we have an institution like SMU Core to help synthesize that, we actually as an organization incentivize our partners to participate in data collection. So we've actually put into our budgets and we're fortunate enough to do that and privileged enough to do that, to give them money to do that. Because to your point, it takes a person to do that. And if they can hire somebody to do that for them, they can start see the importance of this work. So we incentivize that through actual capital that they can use for incentivizing on this data collection process.

And we do other things as well. We do trainings on data collection and how to do their own. We've done workshops on what's called empathy interviews and how to change empathy interviews into actual data, qualitative data. So that's a great place to start as well on training how to do that.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([54:08](#)):

Great. Great. Well, we have just a few minutes left. We would still welcome question from the audience. But to move us towards wrapping up Sergio, I'd love to hear, those were the recommendations that RAND synthesized from the data. What recommendation would you give to those with us on the webinar today if they're wanting to think about stronger coordination or networks to support summer learning in their community?

Sergio Garcia ([54:37](#)):

Yeah. So really be mindful of your own capacity. Start somewhere where you know that there are some strengths or some people who are already doing the work, as we mentioned. It's already happening. So how can you leverage each other's resources, and strengths, and opportunities? As I mentioned, I take a lot of people out to lunch, break bread with these people. To me, that's where it really starts. When they see that you are invested in their time and in their ideas, that's where you really start to do the real work of collective impact and this community engagement and uplift. I actually have a budget for that, which I'm privileged to say and honored to say. But it really is continuing to do that, but don't take them out to lunch just once. Take them out to lunch or just even grab a cup of coffee multiple times. Make sure that you are there for them when they are needing somebody to talk to.

And I have had several of those conversations where I've just sat back and they needed somebody to talk to. So when you're there for somebody, an ear to listen to, they also appreciate that. But it's continuing to check in with them, continuing to say how are you even in random parts of year, times of the day. To make sure that you are still on their mind. So that is just part of this SEL work that we continue to do. That is part of the empathy that we can exude and portray for ourselves.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([56:12](#)):

Yeah, that's so good to hear. And I shared with Sergio the first time he told me his focus and emphasis on breaking bread that that was something a mentor taught me early on in my youth development journey as well. That to really build those partnerships and relationships, you have to have a meal together. And that sometimes when a partnership and relationship needs a reset, you break bread together. You got to sit down and have that meal, and talk it through. And it builds that trust and connection in a really unique way.

So I'm going to close this out with one last question. You started us out at the beginning talking about this summer in Dallas, and that the focus is going to be more on wellness and the trauma that young people have endured. And we've just talked a lot about all the different ways that we're coordinating. So how will you be supporting those delivering programming this summer to achieve those needs? What's going to look new and different in terms of the way you are connecting because of this different focus?

Sergio Garcia ([57:11](#)):

Yeah. I mean to me, it's going back to that making sure that the organization, the people who are facilitating the program, who are doing the work are also healthy and well themselves. So I'm having a party, or I've had two parties already just to check in them to say, "I'm here for you." So I need to start with them first. So when we continue to do that, that's where I really start to see, we start to see that they're being reinvigorated.

I'm also just trying to see what other resources are out there. Transportation is a big one that we continue to come up against. So how can we leverage our relationships again, with DISD? So I continue to have conversations on how we can leverage our relationships. I don't know if I answered the question.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([58:09](#)):

No, I think that was great. I think that was great. But for us to truly support wellness and overcoming the challenges that we faced with the kids, we've got to focus on ... the adults have to be whole. You can't fill from an empty cup, put on your oxygen mask first, right?

Sergio Garcia ([58:27](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Katherine Plog Martinez ([58:28](#)):

Sergio, I can't thank you enough for your time and energy today, and to Big Thought for being willing to be part of this conversation. I really want to thank the RAND Corporation for the new report that sparked our conversation today, the Wallace Foundation for their support of the work in Dallas and other communities for the report from RAND, and for sponsoring today's conversation. So with that, thank you all so much for joining us, and we hope to see you all again soon.

Sergio Garcia ([58:57](#)):

Thank you so much.