



## IN AND BEYOND SCHOOLS

PUTTING MORE YOUTH ON THE PATH TO SUCCESS WITH INTEGRATED SUPPORT

A REPORT FROM JOBS FOR THE FUTURE AND THE CALIFORNIA ADVANCEMENT PROJECT  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As it becomes increasingly clear that a rich set of skills beyond academic knowledge is needed to thrive in college and career, schools must create the learning environments that help youth develop the range of knowledge, skills, and mindsets that research links to postsecondary success. In 2010-2011, 83,469 California youth left school without a high school diploma. Just 65 percent of 2008 California high school graduates enrolled in a postsecondary program shortly after high school. Only 63 percent of those attending four-year colleges completed a degree within six years, and 31 percent of those attending two-year colleges graduated within three years.

These patterns are not specific to California. Across the nation, a young person's socioeconomic background correlates highly with academic outcomes. The pattern is particularly troubling because an individual's level of education has a direct correlation with future earnings and other measures of life quality.

Schools are struggling to help more youth develop the increasingly complex body of knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in college, careers, and civic life. *In and Beyond Schools* argues that building these skills and knowledge requires an integrated approach to youth development, one that leverages the expertise of schools and community resources beyond schools. As schools develop richer learning environments that nurture a broader range of psychosocial skills, this work can be enabled and accelerated through community partnerships that help schools build and complement their own strengths. Public and nonprofit organizations and agencies that work with young people beyond the school day often have experience developing many of the qualities and skills that research associates with college and career success. However, their expertise and resources are underutilized in the absence of sufficient incentives, structures, and policies to systematically align their work with public schools.

## THE RESEARCH ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERSERVED YOUTH

Over the past decade, researchers in fields as varied as psychology and labor economics have amassed strong evidence tracing outcomes in education and the workforce to a variety of metacognitive variables, like conscientiousness and effort regulation. This research highlights behaviors, skills, and attitudes that are powerful predictors of academic and workplace success. Across numerous studies, research suggests that these matter at least as much as the content students learn in school. It is what students *do* and *how they think* about their work and their own capacities, not merely what they know, that substantially influences their long-term success.

Ultimately, it is behavior that gets results. Students who attend school regularly, invest time in homework and other assignments, employ appropriate study skills, and struggle with challenging projects and concepts are more likely to be rewarded with good grades and a diploma. But other qualities mediate these behaviors—the skills a student has in her repertoire, how much she perseveres, her beliefs about learning and her own capacity, and the tendencies that make up her particular personality.

Research also has identified strong links between the stresses associated with poverty and reduced cognitive functioning. An important outgrowth of this research is its implication for children’s learning. Childhood trauma compromises the development of crucial executive functions, including working memory, self-monitoring, emotional regulation, and the abilities to hold contradictory information in the brain, see alternative solutions, and negotiate the unfamiliar.

*Harsh school discipline and other hallmarks of a punitive school environment can further exacerbate toxic stress.*

Poverty is a piece of this equation. On average, children who grow up in poverty have weaker executive functioning skills, yet poverty itself does not cause cognitive and behavioral limitations—stress does.

Children who grow up in impoverished settings are more likely to experience a whole host of stressors, including exposure to violence, food insecurity, homelessness, and parental absence or neglect.

Children who are repeatedly overwhelmed by stress

are more likely to give up in the face of new challenges. And in typical school settings, youth who exhibit stress-induced behavior are punished, referred to special education, or even pushed out of school via suspension and expulsion—further limiting their chances of lifelong success. Harsh school discipline and other hallmarks of a punitive school environment can further exacerbate toxic stress. Furthermore, a body of research has found a negative relationship between the use of school suspension and expulsion and school-wide academic achievement, even when controlling for demographics such as socioeconomic status.

This cycle of stress, inefficient learning behavior, and negative consequences does not have to be the default. There is strong evidence that the neurological and psychological effects of childhood stress can be overcome. There is growing evidence that even brief interventions can significantly improve young people's learning strategies and mindsets, and, ultimately, their academic performance.

At the most practical level, much of what determines the degree to which young people will persist and thrive in challenging learning experiences boils down to one factor: motivation. Increased motivation leads to persistent, active engagement with learning, better outcomes, and a strengthened sense of self-efficacy, which all lead to further increases in motivation. Conversely, low motivation leads to weaker engagement, poorer outcomes, diminished self-efficacy, and decreased motivation.

It is important to emphasize that these skills and mindsets contribute to improved outcomes on many academic measures, and their absence contributes to inefficient learning. In effect, educators' efforts are diminished when these aspects of psychosocial development go unaddressed. By developing these skills and mindsets, educators and other youth service providers can help students become more engaged learners and achieve better outcomes—in high school and beyond.

### Building Psychological Resources in School

Because motivation is so complex and personal, assisting students to engage more positively with learning requires knowing each student well enough to know how his or her beliefs work, build bridges between perceived identity and a more positive academic identity, and support shifts in other beliefs and behaviors that affect the chances of success. *In and Beyond Schools* highlights a number of school models and alternative learning programs that have developed promising approaches to building motivation, persistence, and other performance-related habits and mindsets.

## COMBINING RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUTH

As schools increasingly recognize that these behaviors and mindsets are directly linked to college and career success, they face the question of how to create the learning environments that nurture these skills. Schools must do more to foster the development of these behaviors and skills, but they do not have to do it alone. By working together toward shared goals for the youth they serve, schools and community-based youth development organizations can ensure that their efforts are complementary and that every young person has the opportunities and supports they need to develop the skills and mindsets that support success in school and beyond. *In and Beyond Schools* recommends that partners work collectively to ensure that critical supports and services are in place for all youth. Weaving together



findings and recommendations from numerous studies, it identifies core conditions that must be in place in order for all youth to succeed: a supportive community; strong relationships; meaningful learning opportunities; explicit attention to mindsets and learning strategies; targeted interventions; and student ownership.

Some communities have developed service models that integrate academic, social-emotional, and other supports youth need to become college and career ready. Several of these promising models are being replicated nationally, including in California. For example:

- > **Communities in Schools**, with almost 200 affiliate schools in 27 states, helps schools harness and coordinate local services to provide wraparound support for students most at risk of dropping out.
- > In **Diplomas Now**, a partner of Communities in Schools, a team of school staff and community partners develops a strategic plan for the school and individual student plans for students in the highest risk category, connecting them with community resources.
- > Geographically targeted initiatives, like **Harlem Children's Zone**, take a comprehensive, neighborhood-based approach to improving youth outcomes and the functioning of an entire community. HCZ creates a seamless network of services for children in a 100-block section of New York City.
- > A number of communities use the **Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth** model, which identifies marginalized youth and reconnects them to college and career pathways.

## REMOVING BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Such examples of how schools can leverage the strengths of community partners in coordinated ways are important, yet they are islands of innovation rather than examples of sustainable practice for the full range of young people across high-distress communities. Even communities with many potential assets encounter systemic barriers to forging strong, scalable cross-agency partnerships: fractured, inconsistent funding streams; poor systems for tracking and sharing student data; accountability systems that place a priority on a narrow set of measures; school schedules and case loads that spread adults across too many young people; a lack of connective tissue that sustains partnerships in the face of turnover among staff and leaders. *In and Beyond Schools* offers recommendations for how schools and their partners can push against these obstacles and serve youth more seamlessly.

**NEED:** Aligned funding streams that support a seamless range of resources.

State policymakers should revise school funding formulas to incentivize and reward dynamic partnerships between schools and community agencies toward the goal of creating a seamless range of psychosocial resources for youth development.



**NEED: Accountability systems that place a high priority on what matters.**

States and districts should expand the metrics on which they hold schools accountable, including a broad set of skills and outcomes that matter for college and career readiness.

**NEED: Better data flow between systems.**

School districts and partners should enter into data agreements that enable them to access a range of information about students and engage in coordinated data conversations that address student needs as well as inform efforts at continuous improvement in services and systems.

**NEED: Systemic supports for the range of adults working with youth.**

As part of an aligned approach toward public-sector funding for youth development, state funding formulas should earmark resources for shared professional development for staff from schools and partner organizations.

**NEED: Connective tissue that brings stakeholders into sustainable, long-term partnerships.**

States, communities, and philanthropic partners should support intermediaries that can serve as the backbone organization coordinating all stakeholders from systems affecting youth. It would sustain the vision and effort, maintain consistent communications, and ensure that roles are complementary and not duplicative.

Every day, youth are asked to master complex content, resist distractions, and manage their own learning—all without the support they need to overcome past trauma, cope with current challenges, and develop the skills and mindsets that maximize a person's effectiveness as a learner. An integrated approach to youth development—one encouraged by aligned policies, goals, and resources across youth-serving systems—may be the strategy we need to break poverty's grip and put every youth in California and across the nation on the path to a healthy, sustainable future.



# INTRODUCTION

In California and across the nation, communities are struggling with a challenge: how to help more youth develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in college, careers, and civic life. Several waves of school reform have produced pockets of improvement in many communities and slow but steady increases in high school graduation rates nationally, but progress has been incremental at best, especially in communities with the highest concentrations of poverty.

Now the Common Core State Standards, which California and 44 other states have adopted, raise the bar. At full implementation, the standards and accompanying accountability systems will require schools to teach all students a curriculum that is more in tune with the current knowledge economy and the need to think critically and analytically. However, the nation is unlikely to reach the Common Core's aspiration of widespread college and career readiness—and eliminate achievement gaps between rich and poor and across races—without fundamental changes in the current approach to educating youth.

As the public institution charged with educating youth, schools have long been the focus of concern as well as investments. However, research emerging over the past decade suggests that our education system's almost exclusive focus on academic knowledge and skills is an incomplete solution. Additional behaviors, skills, and mindsets are just as necessary for academic and career success, qualities such as persistence and self-management that are teachable but are not a priority in education policy and are largely unaddressed by school curricula. A broader youth development approach, one that addresses the psychosocial development of youth in tandem with their academic preparation, is more likely to put more young people on a path to college and economic stability.

Schools must take on the responsibility of creating the learning environments that foster psychosocial development: student-centered environments in which young people have strong voices, direct their own goals and learning, and reflect regularly

on what skills they must improve and how. But schools by themselves are often not organized or equipped to help students develop such qualities, and teachers and school leaders may feel unable to take on what they view as new responsibilities in a time of limited resources and increasing expectations. Schools, teachers, and school leaders do not need to do this work alone; they can partner across sectors to create the systemic supports that young people need. *In and Beyond Schools* shines a spotlight on an underutilized resource in our communities: the public and nonprofit organizations and agencies that work with young people beyond the school day and that have experience developing many of the qualities and skills that research increasingly associates with college and career success. Usually viewed as separate support systems rather than an integral part of how we prepare youth for adulthood, these organizations offer valuable expertise and resources that, if strategically aligned with the work of schools, could result in the improved youth outcomes our communities need.

By engaging in an integrated approach to youth development, schools and community organizations can employ diverse resources, expertise, and funding to ensure that six core conditions are in place for all young people:

- > A supportive community;
- > Strong relationships;
- > Meaningful learning opportunities;
- > Explicit attention to mindsets and learning strategies;
- > Targeted interventions; and
- > Student ownership.

Ultimately, we must create the systemic conditions needed for aligned partnerships between schools and community organizations to be the norm rather than the exception.

*In and Beyond Schools* begins by summarizing recent research on the skills, mindsets, and traits that powerfully predict academic and workplace success. It also introduces promising approaches to building the psychological resources of underserved adolescents, supported by examples of schools and alternative learning programs that address aspects of psychosocial development as a core part of their academic approach.

The report then argues that schools can do more to prepare students for adulthood by creating school environments that are more positive and student-centered and by partnering more deliberately with community organizations and agencies with expertise in youth development. It lays out the core conditions that should be in place for all youth and offer promising examples of community partnerships that support the development of youth across traditional academic and psychosocial domains. And it describes the systemic conditions that must be in place to make community partnerships that support our youth widespread and sustainable.

## The Challenge

California schools and youth-serving organizations cannot afford to work in isolation any longer.

- > In the 2011-12 school year, 79,975 California youth left school without a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup>
- > Just 65 percent of 2008 California high school graduates enrolled in a postsecondary program shortly after high school. Only 63 percent of those attending four-year colleges completed a degree within six years, and 31 percent of those attending two-year colleges graduated within three years.<sup>2</sup>
- > Looking across the high school-through-college pipeline, only 20 percent of California ninth graders completed a college degree in the typical timeframe.<sup>3</sup>
- > The picture is especially bleak for low-income California youth, who have a 70 percent high school graduation rate.<sup>4</sup>

These patterns are not specific to California. Nationally, a young person's socioeconomic background correlates highly with academic outcomes. A study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that 22 percent of American children who have lived in poverty, and 32 percent of those who have spent more than half of their childhood in poverty, do not graduate from high school, compared with 6 percent of those who have never been poor (Hernandez 2011).

The pattern is particularly troubling because an individual's level of education has a direct correlation with future earnings and other measures of life quality. In 2011, American high school dropouts had a 14.1 percent unemployment rate, compared with 4.9 percent for those with a Bachelor's degree. That same year, an adult without a diploma earned a median weekly wage of \$453, compared with \$638 for a high school graduate, and \$1,053 for an adult with a Bachelor's degree (Kyllonen 2012a). Beyond earnings, educational attainment is linked to many other measures of personal stability and well-being, including physical and psychological health and chances of incarceration (Sum et al. 2009).

## PART 1

# MORE THAN ACADEMICS: RESEARCH ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERSERVED YOUTH

## KNOWLEDGE VS. BEHAVIOR

An emerging body of research asks what, beyond academic knowledge and skills, predicts whether a young person will persist to a postsecondary degree and achieve other outcomes of adult stability. Over the past decade, researchers in fields as varied as psychology and labor economics have accrued strong empirical evidence tracing outcomes in education and the workforce to a variety of “noncognitive variables,” like conscientiousness and effort regulation.<sup>5</sup> This research highlights a set of behaviors, skills, and attitudes—a mixed bundle of qualities also referred to as metacognitive skills, 21st century skills, or academic mindsets—that are powerful predictors of academic and workplace success. Across numerous studies, these qualities predict academic and career outcomes better than IQ tests, SAT results, and other traditional cognitive measures. The findings hold true across several important outcomes, including high school graduation, college degree completion, workforce entry, and average earnings (Kyllonen 2012a).

These studies indicate that course grades are only loosely related to the academic content a student has mastered, as measured by standardized tests. Instead, grades correlate more strongly with other intrapersonal factors, such as conscientiousness, self-efficacy, motivation, and effort regulation (Kyllonen 2012a). A leading researcher on this topic, psychologist Angela Duckworth of the University of Pennsylvania, suggests that high grades and other achievements are determined less by academic ability than by self-control, motivation, and perseverance—what she terms “grit”—as well as good study habits and time management.<sup>6</sup>

When putting these findings together with better-known research showing that course grades and attendance are predictors of high school and college completion, the case for the importance of academic skills and behaviors grows even stronger. In a series of studies of “on-track indicators,” Melissa Roderick, Elaine Allensworth, and their colleagues at the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) isolated course grades and attendance rates as early as middle school as strong predictors of high school graduation.<sup>7</sup> In a similar quantitative analysis for the U.S. Department of Education, economist Clifford Adelman (2006) found high school grade point average (GPA) to be among the top predictors of whether a student enrolled in college would persist to graduation.

In short, research suggests that the behaviors and mindsets of students matter at least as much as the content they learn in school. It is what students *do* and *how they think* about their work and their own capacities, not merely what they know, that has substantial influence on their long-term success.

## THE BEHAVIORS, SKILLS, AND MINDSETS THAT MATTER

The personal attributes that research has linked to college and career success include a mix of very different qualities; some are more easily understood as skills or behaviors, while others appear more like mindsets, dispositions, or even character traits (see, “*Unpacking Success*” on page 7). Making matters more confusing, some terms are used differently in different studies, and some concepts go by multiple names. Both Patrick Kyllonen (2012a) and a team of CCSR researchers (Farrington et al. 2012) have produced excellent summaries of the research, with helpful frameworks for understanding them.

We focus here on five categories of behaviors, skills, and mindsets. While this framework is not exhaustive, it summarizes attributes appearing again and again in studies of college and work success, emphasizing areas that high school curricula do not typically address.

- > **Persistence:** Young people do better in school and careers when they can sustain effort and delay gratification, when they understand that struggle and hard work are part of growth, and when they do not give up easily in the face of adversity or failure.



- > **Intellectual openness:** College-level courses and, increasingly, employers place a premium on those who demonstrate curiosity, open-mindedness, and adaptability to change, who think critically and creatively, appreciate diversity and differing perspectives, solve complex problems, and apply knowledge in innovative ways.
- > **Self-management:** Those who can effectively manage their learning processes have an advantage. Self-management includes taking initiative, setting goals, managing time, setting priorities, resisting distraction, recognizing one's own strengths and weaknesses, and knowing how and when to seek help.
- > **Interpersonal skills:** Employers and educators tend to reward those who can communicate effectively with diverse individuals and groups, work collaboratively, handle conflict, exert influence as leaders, and advocate for themselves.
- > **Navigational knowledge:** Success in any context requires some insider knowledge about that system, such as how to access college financial aid or how to advance in the workplace. Successful participation in a complex system, such as a postsecondary institution or work field, requires nuanced understanding of the system's culture and norms.

### The Layers of College Knowledge

David Conley's college readiness research has been influential in describing the knowledge and skills demanded by American postsecondary institutions. His findings about what students need to succeed in college overlap with research in the field of psychology. He provides a four-part framework for postsecondary readiness, summarized here (Conley 2012):

- > **Content Knowledge:** The big ideas and foundational content of core subjects
- > **Cognitive Strategies:** The ways of thinking demanded by college courses, such as developing hypotheses, problem-solving strategies, and evaluating research
- > **Learning Skills and Techniques:** Effective study skills, such as strategic reading, memorization techniques, and collaborative learning; and self-regulatory skills, including goal setting, time management, progress monitoring, and help seeking
- > **Transition Knowledge and Skills:** The specific skills and information needed to navigate postsecondary systems—including financial aid options and procedures, interpersonal norms and expectations, and self-advocacy skills

A number of these skills—including critical-thinking, time-management, and communication skills—are reflected in the new Common Core State Standards (Achieve 2012). Perhaps most notably, persistence is emphasized in the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, reflective of findings that conceptual understanding increases when students have opportunities to struggle with important math concepts (Shechtman et al. 2013). However, the Common Core does not address all of these areas, and it touches upon some only tangentially.

It is important to emphasize that these skills and mindsets contribute to improved outcomes on many academic measures, and their absence contributes to inefficient learning. In effect, educators' efforts are diminished when these aspects of psychosocial development go unaddressed. By developing these skills and mindsets, educators and other youth service providers can help students become more engaged learners and achieve better outcomes—in high school and beyond.

## UNPACKING SUCCESS: BEHAVIORS, SKILLS, MINDSETS, AND TRAITS

Camille Farrington and her CCSR colleagues (2012) provide a number of definitions and examples of the various attributes that help us understand the factors that contribute to success in college and career.

**Behaviors** are the visible signs that indicate the degree to which a person is engaged with learning. Because they are observable, behaviors are relatively easy to describe, monitor, and measure. *Examples: attendance, homework completion*

**Strategies and skills** are the specific approaches a student applies to maximize success with a particular challenge or task. Students are more likely to persist when they have acquired skills and tactics for taking initiative, working productively, and dealing with challenges and setbacks. *Examples: task definition, asking clarifying questions*

**Mindsets** are the attitudes or beliefs one has about oneself in relation to learning or work. A positive—or growth—mindset motivates students to persist at challenging work. Mindsets can have a powerful impact on performance, especially how people react in the face of challenges. Several mindsets correlate with academic success: I belong in this community; My ability and competence grow with my effort; Challenge is inevitable to success; I can succeed at this; and This work has value for me.

**Personality or character traits** are tendencies and characteristics that remain fairly stable across time and contexts. To what degree these traits are malleable or teachable is a matter of ongoing research, but there is some indication that psychosocial interventions can help children and adolescents tap into existing strengths and make shifts in their tendencies. *Examples: conscientiousness, grit, extroversion, optimism*

Ultimately, it is behavior that gets results. Students who attend school regularly, invest time in homework and other assignments, employ appropriate study skills, and struggle with challenging projects and concepts are more likely to be rewarded with good grades and a diploma. But other qualities mediate these behaviors—the skills a student has in her repertoire, how much she perseveres, her beliefs about learning and her own capacity, and the tendencies that make up her particular personality.

#### MULTIPLE WORDS, RELATED CONCEPTS

The many terms used to describe these concepts can be confusing. Below, we offer one way to think about them.

EFFORT	EFFICACY
<p>Success in most arenas depends in part on the effort that a person is willing or able to exert to achieve a goal.</p> <p><b>Persistence</b> describes the intensity, direction, and duration of a behavior. Students who stay focused on tasks, forego distractions or immediate temptations, and continue to exert effort despite obstacles are more likely to achieve short-term and long-term goals.</p> <p><b>Grit</b> (or tenacity) describes the extent to which a person remains focused on a long-term goal despite obstacles. “Grittiness” is a relatively stable trait; those with grit tend to stick with their goals across contexts.</p> <p><b>Conscientiousness</b> is one of the big five character traits identified in the field of psychology and describes a tendency to be responsible, reliable, and orderly—to favor the rules of one’s conscience over whims.</p> <p>All these effort-related attributes correlate positively with long-term academic and career achievement.</p>	<p>A person’s likelihood of success also depends on the degree to which she believes she can succeed.</p> <p>A <b>growth mindset</b> is the belief that one’s abilities are changeable rather than fixed at a particular level. People with a growth mindset attribute their successes and failures to the amount of effort they exert, rather than innate ability, luck, potential, or factors beyond their control. They see setbacks as opportunities for learning and growth, rather than judgments of ability or worth.</p> <p><b>Optimism</b> is a fairly stable trait, a tendency to focus on positive outcomes and to look for specific, short-term explanations for setbacks, rather than interpreting negative events as permanent or personal.</p> <p>A person’s sense of self-efficacy is positively associated with how long she will persevere at a given task, as well as her likelihood of bouncing back when faced with adversity.</p>

**Effort** and **efficacy** are mutually reinforcing. A student who believes he can succeed, and that he has the resources and strategies to do so, will put in more effort, and therefore be more likely to succeed. Conversely, a student who does not believe success is within her control is less likely to persevere against challenges, thereby fulfilling her own expectations of failure.

## BREAKING POVERTY'S GRIP

In his book, *Grit, Curiosity, and the Power of Character*, Paul Tough asks the question: Can we address the educational outcomes gap between poor youth and their peers by paying attention to their social and emotional development? The short answer is yes. Research has identified strong links between the stresses associated with poverty and reduced cognitive functioning. There is also strong evidence that the neurological and psychological effects of childhood stress can be overcome well into young adulthood.

In their groundbreaking Adverse Childhood Experiences study, Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda found that adults who had experienced four or more forms of trauma as children (e.g., abuse, neglect, and family members' mental illness, substance-addiction, or incarceration) were more likely to smoke, become alcoholic, have sex before age 15, and develop serious medical issues, including several cancers.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent studies reached a consensus that the link between these childhood traumas and poor medical outcomes is stress. The body's response to threatening events, which includes a surge in the hormone cortisol, causes wear and tear on the body and the brain (Hinton, Fischer, & Glennon 2012).

An important outgrowth of this research is its implication for children's learning. The area of brain most affected by childhood stress is the prefrontal cortex, which is where impulses and emotions are regulated; children who experience trauma are more likely to have a hard time sitting still, following directions, rebounding from disappointment, and focusing on learning. Childhood trauma compromises the development of crucial executive functions, including working memory, self-monitoring, emotional regulation, and the abilities to hold contradictory information in the brain, see alternative solutions, and negotiate the unfamiliar.

*Children who are repeatedly overwhelmed by stress may come to believe that they have no power to affect the course of their lives.*

Poverty is a piece of this equation. On average, children who grow up in poverty have weaker executive functioning skills, but it is important to underscore that poverty itself does not cause cognitive and behavioral limitations—stress does. Children who grow up in impoverished settings are more likely to experience a whole host of stressors, including exposure to violence, food insecurity, homelessness, and parental absence or neglect. (Parents living in poverty are often dealing with complex stressors themselves.) Without adequate support, these forms of “toxic stress” can ultimately affect the physical architecture of the brain

(Shechtman et al. 2013). Toxic stress can have a psychological impact, too, causing chronic anxiety, aggression, or dissociation, that over the long term can affect the development of personality and social conduct, the ability to form relationships, and one's sense of personal agency. Children who are repeatedly overwhelmed by stress may come to believe that they have no power to affect the course of their lives (The

California Endowment 2009). They are more likely to give up in the face of new challenges. And in typical school settings, youth who exhibit stress-induced behavior (e.g., impulsivity, aggression, detachment, lack of focus) are punished, referred to special education, or even pushed out of school via suspension and expulsion—further limiting their chances of lifelong success.

Harsh school discipline and other hallmarks of a punitive school environment can further exacerbate toxic stress. Furthermore, a body of research has found a negative relationship between the use of school suspension and expulsion and school-wide academic achievement, even when controlling for demographics such as socioeconomic status (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008).

This cycle of stress, inefficient learning behavior, and negative consequences does not have to be the default. A positive, calm, and emotionally nurturing school environment can go a long way in reducing a young person's cortisol levels (Hinton, Fischer, & Glennon 2012). Moreover, a variety of interventions can help children and adolescents cope with past trauma, learn to cognitively manage emotions, and build the executive functioning skills that will allow them to participate effectively in classrooms and the workplace. The prefrontal cortex remains malleable well into adolescence and young adulthood (Hinton, Fischer, & Glennon 2012). This means that schools and other youth service providers can play a role in reversing the effects of poverty-related stress and building the self-management skills that will allow young people to succeed in school and in future settings.

## DEVELOPING LEARNING STRATEGIES AND MINDSETS

Putting the research on behaviors together with that on the impact of poverty, there is growing research on interventions—and empirical evidence that brief interventions (as little as two to ten hours) can significantly improve young people's learning strategies and mindsets, and, ultimately, their academic performance. Brief interventions can help students clarify their goals, anticipate obstacles, weigh potential positive outcomes against short-term temptations, and develop discipline-specific metacognitive skills (e.g., monitoring comprehension while reading) (Shechtman et al. 2013).

Some researchers have taken such interventions a step further, helping students to tackle internal belief systems to increase their likelihood of success. The best-known research in this area is Carol Dweck's work on perceptions of intelligence.<sup>9</sup> While there is still debate about whether intelligence in its purest form can be modified, she has shown that young people who *believe* they can improve their intelligence do in fact improve their grades. A growth mindset, as Dweck calls it, has positive implications in college and work. Best of all, it can be acquired. Interventions that explicitly teach students to view challenges as bumps on the road to success, rather than personal failings, can have a powerful impact. In several studies, Dweck has

shown that simple intervention—such as a mentor giving students the message that their intelligence can be developed—was enough to change students’ beliefs about their own capacities, resulting in increased persistence and improved outcomes (Farrington et al. 2012).

Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson have used a similar construct to show how mindset-changing interventions can help young people overcome stereotype threat—the detrimental pattern through which a student’s fear of fulfilling a negative stereotype (e.g., “girls are bad at math,” “black children are less intelligent”)—leads to poorer performance. These internalized stereotypes can increase anxiety and divert students’ attention from a task, undermining perseverance and contributing to underachievement. Brief interventions, including positive, convincing messages, can be enough to break this negative cycle (Farrington et al. 2012).

Other researchers have shown that when students have opportunities to affirm their values in relation to a goal and explicitly relate what they are learning to their lives and interests, they are more successful (Shechtman et al. 2013).

It is not that some people have inherently *good* and or *bad* characters, but some have *effective* habits and some have *counterproductive* habits. It is hard, but *not impossible*, to change these habits.

The interventions described here ask students to directly examine and modify their internal beliefs, a practice used by cognitive behavior therapists. Sometimes such shifts take sustained conversation and practice. Psychologist Angela Duckworth, who coined the concept of “grit,” suggests that sustained, explicit instruction and practice can have a powerful effect, even producing changes in the more enduring traits we understand to be part of an individual’s character. Citing one of the founders of modern psychology, William James, Duckworth suggests that character and habit are essentially the same. It is not that some people have inherently good and or bad characters, but some have effective habits and some have counterproductive habits. It is hard, but not impossible, to change these habits.

Duckworth is still not clear whether and how traits like “grit” can be taught. She theorizes that some young people may have unhelpful beliefs about skill development that interfere with their true strengths. So, rather than changing their character, explicit instruction may help them get unproductive thinking out of the way so they can access strengths that already exist (Pappano 2013).

Duckworth and other researchers are also exploring whether strengths like grit have limitations. For example, when applied to developmentally inappropriate or extrinsically motivated goals, too much grit might lead to increased anxiety and other negative outcomes (Shechtman et al. 2013).

In reviewing the work of Duckworth and others, Paul Tough (2012) suggests that by focusing on building performance-oriented character traits, like grit, optimism, and conscientiousness, schools can help young people develop a substitute for the type of social safety net that wealthier children take for granted. While lower-income young people may not have social networks and societal privileges to give them easy access to opportunities or protection from the consequences of bad decisions, they may be able to make up for it by developing psychological resources such as grit, social intelligence, and self-control.

## MOTIVATING ADOLESCENTS TO WORK HARD

At the most practical level, much of what determines the degree to which young people will persist and thrive in challenging learning experiences boils down to one factor: motivation. A young person who feels motivated to work hard and engage deeply in a learning experience gains more from the experience. Motivation works as a feedback loop: Increased motivation leads to persistent and active engagement with learning, better outcomes, and a strengthened sense of self-efficacy, which all lead to further increases in motivation. Conversely, low motivation leads to weaker engagement, poorer outcomes, diminished self-efficacy, and decreased motivation.

Motivation is not a specific skill or an enduring trait, like those discussed above. It is both highly individual and highly changeable, and many factors contribute to a person's sense of motivation at any point in time. A student's history with school, beliefs about learning, sense of academic identity, relationships with peers and teachers, valuation of what's being learned, and emotional well-being are among the factors that influence how she may perceive a particular learning opportunity. For students who have generally had positive experiences with learning, motivation may be easy to muster, even for tasks that lack appeal in the short-term. But motivation can be a significant obstacle to success for those who have experienced marginalization in their prior education and for those who do not feel they belong or can succeed in their current learning community.

Educators play an important role in creating the conditions that inspire and engage students. The same student may feel motivated in one class and not in another, or in an after-school setting but not during the regular school day. She might come to a new learning experience with a strong sense of distrust or alienation, and through the efforts of an effective educator, she may experience a shift in perception that leads to a dramatic increase in motivation.

In a synthesis of research on motivation, engagement, and student voice, Eric Toshalis and Michael Nakkula (2012) explain that for many students, motivation involves a calculation. Whether explicitly or implicitly, students ask themselves questions like: Am I likely to be successful in this endeavor? Does this matter to me? Do I belong in this learning environment? Toshalis and Nakkula explain that students



*Students* are more likely to be *motivated* when they feel they *can do* what is being asked, when they have some *choice* about how they conduct the work, and when they feel *connected* to those around them.

are more likely to be motivated when they feel they can do what is being asked, when they have some choice about how they conduct the work, and when they feel connected to those around them. They are also more likely to engage with a task when it is “optimally challenging,” not overwhelming but within a zone of growth that requires some perseverance to succeed and results in feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction (Shechtman et al. 2013). Ultimately, students’ motivations tend to be stronger, more sustained, and more resilient when they emerge from their own goals and beliefs (Toshalis & Nakkula 2012).

The traumatic stressors that afflict many young people from high-poverty neighborhoods can have negative effects on student motivation. While large-scale efforts to reverse these neighborhood factors must remain a high priority, schools themselves have a strong influence on academic motivation. Researchers at the Chicago Consortium on School Research identify classroom-level factors that contribute to a greater sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and ultimately, motivation (Farrington et al. 2012):

- > The level of academic challenge;
- > Teachers’ expectations for success;
- > Autonomy and choice in academic work;
- > Clarity and relevance of learning goals;
- > Availability of supports;
- > Quality and frequency of feedback;
- > Classroom norms of behavior; and
- > Level of trust and safety.

Other important motivating factors have been explored extensively in research on student engagement:

- > **Relevance and value:** Students ask themselves, “Does what’s being learned relate to something that I care about, or will it result in a product with real-world value?” “Will this experience bring me closer to achieving my personal goals?”
- > **Alignment with identity:** Students ask, “Do I feel welcomed and respected in this community?” “Does the learning environment and curriculum reflect (or at least not insult) my cultural and personal identity?” “How can being a ‘good student’ fit with other elements of my identity?”
- > **Relationships with adults:** Students ask, “Do my teachers care about me?” “Do they treat me fairly and with respect?” “Do they take me seriously and demonstrate belief in my capacities by demanding high standards and offering the feedback and support I need to attain them?”

Because motivation is so complex and personal, assisting students to engage more positively with learning requires knowing each student well enough to know how his beliefs work, to build bridges between his perceived identity and a more positive academic identity, and to support shifts in other beliefs and behaviors that affect his chances of success. While not the norm in secondary education, there are many excellent programs that take such a personalized approach. Student-centered learning models start with the particular values, interests, goals, and needs of individual learners, helping individuals build a stronger connection to learning. Once students have found an intrinsic source of motivation, they are more likely to delay gratification in favor of academic activities and to persist through challenges (Toshalis & Nakkula 2012). They are more likely to succeed.

## BUILDING PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES IN SCHOOL

A number of schools and alternative learning programs have developed promising approaches to building motivation, persistence, and other performance-related habits and mindsets. Each model is designed with a particular theory about what type of experiences youth need to engage with learning and achieve over the long term.

### CRAFTING A COLLEGE-GOING IDENTITY IN EARLY COLLEGE SCHOOLS<sup>10</sup>

The Early College High School Initiative began with an unusual proposition: If you immerse students who would not typically see themselves as college bound in a college environment, they will build not only the knowledge and skills they need in college but also a strong college-going identity. Early college schools serve largely low-income students of color in a variety of models and settings, including community college-based programs for high school dropouts, Native-American tribal partnership schools, and more traditional urban charter and public schools. Students take an increasing load of dual-credit courses over their high school careers, completing one or two years of college credit concurrently with a diploma. Many of those courses are taught on college campuses, where students are supported to acquire the navigational knowledge, interpersonal skills, and study skills they need to operate a postsecondary environment.

By struggling with—and succeeding in—college-level coursework, students build their sense of self-efficacy as well. In this model, “college success” becomes more than a hypothetical goal—it is something students experience firsthand. The result is a shift in academic identity; whatever the starting point, early college students come to see themselves as successful college students.

## INCORPORATING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INTO SCHOOL THROUGH LEARNING TO WORK

Many of New York City's Transfer schools, which serve over-age, under-credited students, are run in partnership with community-based organizations through a NYC Department of Education initiative called "Learning to Work." These Learning to Work Transfer schools are co-led by the principal and by the CBO program director, and a cadre of counselors provide wraparound supports and meet bi-weekly with students to help them develop the resilience, problem-solving skills, and self-management skills they need to succeed. Counselors help youth discover and explore their strengths, including through internships, so that young people begin to envision themselves as successful adults.

## FINDING RELEVANCE THROUGH YOUTHBUILD<sup>11</sup>

YouthBuild enrolls low-income youth, ages 16 to 25, who have not completed high school. Through the program, they earn a GED or high school diploma, prepare for college and career transitions, and learn vocational skills while building affordable housing in their communities. The program includes a therapeutic counseling component as well.

YouthBuild sites include charter schools, alternative schools, and community-based GED programs; all sites emphasize leadership development and community service and strive to create a positive community of adults and youth committed to each other's success. Vocational training provides participants with concrete work skills and experience, and the product of their efforts—housing—has real-world value. The academic curriculum builds from individual students' strengths, needs, and learning styles, and educators emphasize relevance in their instruction, working to make connections to students' lives.

## PRACTICING POSITIVE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE THROUGH THE LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING NETWORK

Schools across California's Central Valley are adopting common-sense school discipline approaches that hold students accountable for their conduct while keeping them in school and on track for graduation. Through The California Endowment's Leadership and Learning Network, the Central Valley's school leaders are piloting alternatives to suspension and expulsion that teach students responsibility, metacognitive reflection, and self-regulation rather than push them out of school. Strategies include conflict mediation and restorative justice practices that bring together the people harmed by misconduct to decide on the best response and focus on taking responsibility, repairing relationships, and amending for the harm done.

## TAKING ON DESTINY THROUGH ONEGOAL

Chicago-based OneGoal is a college persistence program with one goal: college graduation. OneGoal hires a cadre of highly motivated teachers to work with students in underperforming schools, injecting a high dose of college preparatory training into the curriculum. OneGoal teachers identify middle-of-the-road students in their sophomore year and lead a specialized course with that same group of student in their junior and senior years, providing social support and structured planning through the college application process and initial adjustment to college life. The curriculum includes intensive academic ramp-up support and ACT test prep.

Perhaps more important, teachers provide explicit instruction in what OneGoal refers to as the “leadership skills” of successful college students: resourcefulness, resilience, ambitions, professionalism, and integrity. The OneGoal philosophy is that, with hard work, perseverance, and strong character, students from Chicago’s most under-performing schools can do as well or better than students who enter college with higher test scores. With the right mindset and skills, OneGoal students are taught to take control of their destinies (Tough 2012).

## PART 2

# LOOKING BEYOND SCHOOLS

While a number of schools and programs have developed creative methods of building the psychological resources of their student populations, they are the exception. Few schools in low-income communities have the capacity in place to support healthy psychosocial development of students, and what they do have is often fragmented, limited in scope, or short in duration. Although investing in the broader emotional and psychological development of youth can improve graduation rates and academic outcomes, many school leaders and teachers may feel unable to take on new responsibilities. In a time of increasing accountability and limited resources, educators may feel pressed to cover large amounts of academic content in short class periods and have too many students in their caseload to provide truly personalized instruction and support.

The responsibility for youth development lies both with and beyond schools. While schools must own the development of these important skills, and create richer school environments that nurture them, partnerships that harness the full range of assets within a community can enable and accelerate this work.

## COMBINING RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUTH

Most communities are home to public and nonprofit agencies with expertise in youth development that can supplement what classroom educators offer. Through mentoring and leadership programs, support groups, arts programs, college access support, job skills development, and a variety of therapeutic interventions, these organizations have experience helping young people grapple with trauma and other

forms of adversity. They employ a variety of entry points to help young people cope with challenges, build inner resources, and realize their potential.

In addition to expertise, partner organizations bring two simple but crucial resources to the table: time and caring adults. Through out-of-school time and vacation programming, community organizations and agencies can effectively extend the number of hours during which young people engage in activities that build their psychological resources. Staff and volunteers can provide mentorship and attention that youth need and may not be able to get in classrooms with 30 or more students and schools with limited counseling staff.

The key is coordination. By working together toward shared goals for the youth they serve, schools and community-based youth development organizations can ensure that their efforts are aligned and complementary and that every young person has the opportunities and supports they need to develop the skills and mindsets that support success in school and beyond. Community partners can help schools develop the capacity and the competencies to create more positive school environments. Depending upon the resources available, school staff and community partners might take on different roles and functions to achieve similar outcomes.

Schools must bring community partners to the center of what they do, and leaders and staff of community organizations must make an explicit case for how metacognitive skill development connects to academic achievement. They also must frame their work so that schools better understand the value-add and the potential to help solve the problems—such as low achievement and low graduation rates—that schools are focused on most.

We recommend that partners work collectively to ensure that critical supports and services are in place for all youth. Weaving together findings and recommendations from numerous studies, we identify six core conditions that partnerships would provide in order for all youth to succeed:

- > A supportive community;
- > Strong relationships;
- > Meaningful learning opportunities;
- > Explicit attention to mindsets and learning strategies;
- > Targeted interventions; and
- > Student ownership.

The box summarizes youth needs in each area and what partnerships between schools or districts and youth-serving organizations can provide. These are not new practices, and many will be well known to those familiar with the principles of youth development and student-centered learning. Multiple lines of research, over many decades, associate these conditions with positive emotional-social development, including the development of persistence, intellectual openness, self-management, interpersonal skills, and the navigational knowledge needed to thrive in college and work settings.

**IN AND BEYOND SCHOOLS:  
WHAT PARTNERSHIPS CAN PROVIDE TO SUPPORT ALL YOUTH TO SUCCEED**

A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY	STRONG RELATIONSHIPS	MEANINGFUL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	EXPLICIT ATTENTION TO MINDSETS AND LEARNING STRATEGIES	TARGETED INTERVENTIONS	STUDENT OWNERSHIP
<b>Every young person needs . . .</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; A safe, non-judgmental environment where they feel accepted and can take intellectual and emotional risks</li> <li>&gt; Adults who demonstrate cultural and interpersonal competence, looking beyond surface behaviors and stereotypes to understand the assets, values, and needs of each individual</li> <li>&gt; Opportunities to collaborate meaningfully with peers and adults</li> <li>&gt; Explicit discussions about changing mindsets, navigating bias, and communicating across difference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; A stable, supportive relationship with at least one adult</li> <li>&gt; A positive peer group that supports individuals to achieve their personal and academic goals</li> <li>&gt; Opportunities to interact with and appreciate people of different backgrounds</li> <li>&gt; Mentorship from adults with relevant life and work experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Opportunities to grapple with optimally challenging work, receive meaningful feedback, and try again</li> <li>&gt; Authentic learning experiences, where the purpose of the work is clear and of personal interest and value</li> <li>&gt; Personalized learning, with the student's needs, strengths, goals, and interests informing what is learned and how it is learned</li> <li>&gt; Opportunities to explore college and career options, take college courses, and perform real-world work</li> <li>&gt; Exposure to the rules and norms of college and workplaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Youth and adults who practice a growth mindset, praising effort over ability, and treating challenge as an expected and valued part of the learning process</li> <li>&gt; Explicit exposure to and practice using the skills and processes highly effective people employ in academic and work settings</li> <li>&gt; Opportunities to practice the many skills involved in planning and tackling long-term goals, dealing with obstacles, regulating effort, and initiating new projects</li> <li>&gt; Opportunities to reflect on personal beliefs, habits, and skills, to develop more awareness of one's own strengths, and to take increasing responsibility for progress toward long-term goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Group-based and individualized interventions to cope with trauma and other personal, familial, environmental, and systemic factors that inhibit emotional and cognitive development</li> <li>&gt; A backup system to address other basic needs, including health, mental health, housing, food, and family crises</li> <li>&gt; Support to ease and normalize transitions (e.g., first years in high school and college)</li> <li>&gt; Trauma-informed and culturally competent discipline policies that acknowledge typical adolescent responses to stress and reflect a growth mindset</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Explicit pathways to future options, with opportunities to explore multiple possibilities, make choices and shape goals, and gain relevant experience</li> <li>&gt; Meaningful leadership roles in the classroom, out-of-school programs, and the broader community</li> <li>&gt; Opportunities to explore aspects of his/her personal identity in relation to school and systems of power</li> <li>&gt; Opportunities to teach, perform, serve, engage in public conversations, and make other meaningful contributions to the community and world</li> </ul>



While all of these conditions matter, the specific means of achieving each will vary depending on the community context, the expertise of partners, and the strengths and needs of student populations. Partners must pay careful attention to the individual students they serve and the particular barriers they face in developing the skills and mindsets for long-term success. The supports that partners provide should be flexible or varied enough to meet the needs of the full range of youth in a school or geographic community.

## INTEGRATED MODELS FOR SERVING YOUTH

Some communities have developed service models that integrate academic, social-emotional, and other supports that youth need to become college and career ready. Several of these promising models are being replicated nationally, including in California. The first set of examples begin with individual schools, providing a wraparound support system for all students. The remaining examples operate at the community level, with schools and other service partners working in partnership to support all youth. It is important to note that while partners may play different roles, the responsibility of fostering students' psychosocial skills, behaviors, and mindsets is shared and owned both by the school and its partners.

### WRAPAROUND SUPPORT

**Communities in Schools**, with almost 200 affiliate schools in 27 states, helps schools harness and coordinate local services for students most at risk of dropping out. A school-based coordinator is a single point of contact for local agencies, businesses, health care providers, and parent and volunteer organizations. The coordinator works with school staff to identify both the primary needs of the student body as a whole and the individual needs of students who are at risk of dropping out. In California, Communities in Schools has affiliates in Los Angeles, the San Fernando Valley, and San Francisco.

The program seeks to provide all students in a school with:

- > **Basic services**, including medical and dental care, food assistance, and mental health counseling;
- > **Caring adults**, including mentors, tutors, and mental health counselors;
- > **Academic supports**, including homework help, tutoring, and college and career preparation programs; and
- > **A safe place to learn and grow** during non-school hours with afterschool, summer, and weekend programs.

**Diplomas Now**, a partner of Communities in Schools, uses a data-driven approach to provide "the right students with the right support at the right time." Schools in 12 cities, including Los Angeles, work with Diplomas Now partners to flag students

based on early indicators of dropping out: poor attendance, behavior, and course failure. The Diplomas Now team, made up of school staff and community partners, develops a strategic plan for the school based on patterns in the data and individual student plans for students in the highest risk category, connecting them with community resources, such as (e.g., counseling, health care, housing, and food assistance).

Partner organizations build their work around shared goals, using the same data to guide their efforts. For example, City Year corps members mentor high-risk students, make calls home to student who miss school, and provide tutoring, homework help, and enrichment programs.

## THE COMMUNITY LEVEL: GEOGRAPHICALLY TARGETED INITIATIVES

The **Harlem Children's Zone** is a comprehensive, neighborhood-based approach to improving youth outcomes and the functioning of an entire community. With a "whatever it takes" mantra, HCZ creates a seamless network of services for children in a 100-block section of New York City.

The model focuses on the social, health, and academic development of children, beginning with prenatal programs for parents. It coordinates a pipeline of schools and programs, from elementary school through college. In HCZ middle and high schools, student advocates help students create individualized action plans. Advocates collaborate with parents, teachers, and other stakeholders to track student progress, particularly during the transitions to high school and college. In HCZ afterschool and summer programs, youth explore the arts, technology, and careers, while also participating in workshops that assist them with conflict resolution, social development, and financial planning.

HCZ reaches beyond students to arrange wraparound services and crisis support for families. Part of its mission is to empower the entire adult community to create a healthy, supportive environment for children and youth.

**Promise Neighborhoods**, established under the Fund for the Improvement of Education Program, are federally funded, community-based initiatives to improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth in distressed communities. Inspired in part by the Harlem Children's Zone, the program awards grants to 15 to 20 communities each year, increasing the capacity of community organizations and schools to support neighborhood children with "cradle-to-career" solutions. The funds support program integration across schools and agencies and the development of local infrastructure to expand efforts to surrounding neighborhoods. In California, Chula Vista, Hayward, Los Angeles, and San Francisco have received grants to implement a Promise Neighborhood approach. Campo and Corning have received planning grants.

## Collective Impact for the Most Vulnerable Youth

The opportunities afforded by school-community partnerships are especially important to youth who have left school or are system-involved. A number of communities have developed robust interagency models to identify marginalized youth and reconnect them to college and career pathways. By connecting the work under the umbrella of a common agenda, these collective-impact initiatives amplify the efforts of separate organizations, empowering them to address challenges youth face more strategically and, in partnership with others, to achieve better outcomes.

**Philadelphia Youth Network** coordinates efforts by the school district, public agencies, philanthropy, and community-based organizations to support the most at-risk youth in making healthy transitions to adulthood. Through PYN's Project U-Turn, partners review data from schools, child welfare, and the juvenile justice systems to understand and address issues that contribute to dropping out. PYN's neighborhood-based Youth Development Initiative established a "one-stop" system of intake and referrals; youth ages 12 to 18 can access the services of all youth-serving organizations in their neighborhood.

**Every Student Every Day** is New York City's interagency task force to address truancy. The initiative includes public awareness campaigns, community engagement, data tracking, and outreach to targeted populations, including homeless youth. The task force connects staff from community-based organizations, city agencies, schools, social service agencies, medical and mental health centers, faith organizations, and law enforcement—with each contributing expertise and resources to address the many causes of truancy.

The **STRIVE Partnership**, which began in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, is an approach to supporting children from "cradle to career." Through a carefully structured process, STRIVE brings together partners across multiple youth-serving agencies to focus on a single set of goals and measures, beginning with school readiness and continuing through postsecondary completion and career entry. Participating organizations are grouped into role-alike Student Success Networks that work with facilitators to develop shared performance indicators, track and discuss their progress, learn from one another, and align their efforts.

**The Cradle to Career Network** connects communities that have adopted the STRIVE Framework nationally. In California, East Bay, Fresno, Marin County, Richmond, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Silicon Valley participate in the network. Through the network, they share expertise with other sites, identify and adapt programs that meet community needs, and develop tools and resources to address specific challenges faced by youth and youth-serving organizations.

An example of such a community partnership is San Diego's set of **City Heights Health and Wellness Centers**. These give every child in the Hoover High School cluster access to a school-based community health center. Based at four schools, the centers are satellite clinics run by community health providers and serving students at 13 schools in City Heights, as well as their siblings, a total of more than 10,000 children. The clinics have resulted not only in increased health coverage but also in increased school attendance. Students who can see a health care provider at school may not need to stay home sick, and parents miss less work. At each school that hosts a health center, partners have formed a health council for teachers, principal, the school nurse, clinic staff, and violence prevention workers to coordinate activities supporting physical, social and emotional health and improving neighborhood conditions. The work of these councils has resulted in running and walking clubs, an anti-bullying project, and a "Safe Passages" project to identify safer routes to school.

### PART 3

# REMOVING BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Communities must align stakeholders, resources, and policies to create the core conditions for youth to thrive. By using a collective impact approach in which stakeholders across sectors collaborate to tackle a specific social problem, schools and community partners can position themselves for a more successful partnership (Corcoran et al. 2012).

While the examples of partnerships we put forth are important instances of how communities can serve youth in more coordinated ways, they are too often islands of innovation rather than examples of sustainable practice for the full range of young people across high-distress communities. Even communities that are home to many potentially valuable community and school partners encounter systemic barriers to forging strong, scalable cross-agency partnerships. Whether young people get the support they need should not depend on whether they live in an innovation zone. To serve the full range of youth, we must address the question of why such collaboratives are not the norm.

The systemic barriers are many: fractured and inconsistent funding streams; poor systems for tracking and sharing student data; accountability systems that place a priority on a narrow set of measures; school schedules and case loads that spread adults across too many young people; and a lack of connective tissue that sustains partnerships in the face of turnover among staff and leaders. Here, we offer recommendations for how to push against these obstacles.

## **NEED: ALIGNED FUNDING STREAMS THAT SUPPORT A SEAMLESS RANGE OF RESOURCES.**

While partners must work to attract, blend, and maximize a variety of sources of financial support, public funding streams must be designed to encourage a collective approach and an integrated usage of public dollars toward youth development. State policymakers should revise school funding formulas to incentivize and reward dynamic partnerships between schools and community agencies toward the goal of creating a seamless range of psychosocial resources for youth development.

Funds that support after-school programs for students attending high-poverty schools (e.g., the 21st Century Community Learning Centers) can be leveraged to more dynamically integrate in-school and out-of-school activities. Additionally, states should grant school districts the flexibility to use ADA funding, professional development funds, and other dollars in nontraditional ways that draw on the resources of community partners. Various types of funders should make community agencies eligible for performance funding that rewards them for bolstering school programming and on improving student outcomes on measures of metacognitive skill.

## **NEED: ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS THAT PLACE A HIGH PRIORITY ON WHAT MATTERS.**

States and districts should expand the metrics on which they hold schools accountable, including a broad set of skills and outcomes that matter for college and career readiness. Policymakers at each level should broaden school accountability beyond academic achievement to include measures related to metacognitive development. The Common Core State Standards set some groundwork, in that they expect students to manage time, communicate well, and demonstrate persistence. Yet localities and states must go further in measuring whether students are developing such skills.

Historically, a lack of widely used, reliable measures has made such work infeasible. However, a number of community partnerships are leading the way in demonstrating how it can be done. Through rubrics, portfolios, and other means of next-generation assessment, partners can track students' academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological engagement (Toshalis & Nakkula 2012). *See the appendix for quality data tools developed by community partnerships.*

The creation of such measures may require data-sharing agreements among the partners. Moreover, the process of forging agreements can be an important investment in itself: it helps to clarify the common agenda and build a sense of ownership for shared outcomes. How these measures could be integrated into a statewide accountability system is a challenge states must tackle seriously if they are committed to true measures of college and career readiness.

## **NEED: BETTER DATA FLOW BETWEEN SYSTEMS.**

School districts and partners should enter into data agreements that give them access to a range of information about students, enable them to engage in coordinated data conversations addressing student need, and inform efforts at continuous improvement in services and systems. States must support this integration by giving guidance and by facilitating waivers from policies that may restrict data sharing.

Districts and their partners should implement an early-warning triage system to identify students in need of intervention, providing tiers of support to address different types of need. In states that already support such early warning systems for use by districts, systems should expand traditional early-warning measures (e.g. attendance, course failure) to include academic and metacognitive indicators that can help districts and their partners identify needs and design interventions. As case management teams revisit the progress of students on their watch list, they should note which interventions have succeeded and where more or different support is in order. *See the appendix for examples of tools.*

## **NEED: SYSTEMIC SUPPORTS FOR THE RANGE OF ADULTS WORKING WITH YOUTH.**

As part of an aligned approach toward public-sector funding for youth development, state funding formulas should earmark resources for shared professional development for staff from schools and partner organizations. Each can contribute their respective expertise as together they build a strong culture of positive youth development across organizations. For example, staff with expertise in deescalating conflict could lead a workshop for colleagues from partner organizations, as could staff with expertise in effective cross-cultural communication.

Districts, in particular, must take the lead in bringing partners from other sectors to the center of what they do, regarding them as equal partners with teachers and school staff. All adults can benefit from workshops that explore social-emotional concepts, create opportunities to deepen their understanding of youth development theory, and explore their own beliefs about learning and achievement.

## **NEED: CONNECTIVE TISSUE THAT BRINGS STAKEHOLDERS INTO SUSTAINABLE, LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS.**

Building the capacity of communities to partner optimally across public agencies, private and community organizations, schools, and other systems affecting youth requires both attention and resources. Recognizing that need, some states, communities, and philanthropic partners have supported intermediary organizations that serve as the backbone organization coordinating all stakeholders. Such an

organization is one way to ensure that the partnership sustains a collective-impact vision and effort, maintains consistent communications within the partnership, and designates roles for the partners that are complementary and not duplicative.

The coordinating organization can also play a major role in heightening awareness of a pressing need, changing the public narrative around opportunity for young people, combating negative attitudes about the potential of disadvantaged youth, and spreading the message that their well-being is the responsibility of all segments of a healthy community. Public communications that speak to a wide range of audiences with one core message are essential to fully harness the assets of a community in helping youth develop the full range of skills.



# A NEW APPROACH IN CALIFORNIA

This year, thousands of California youth leave school without the credentials or the skills and mindsets they need to establish healthy, strong, financially stable futures for themselves and their families. New research gives us evidence that schools, together with youth development organizations, can do much more to prepare youth of all circumstances for the challenges of college and the workplace. Meeting the needs of all youth will require coordinated attention from many stakeholders—including state policymakers, school district administrators, and leaders of community-based organizations and foundations—who can address structural barriers to supporting youth across systems. Ultimately, we must shift the way our communities think about educating youth.

California's new Local Control Funding Formula is a prime example of a state funding stream that can be leveraged to support youth to meet these challenges. It provides supplemental funds for school districts based on enrollments of low-income students, foster youth, and English language learners, increasing not only these school districts' ability to serve high-need students, but their capacity to engage with and support partnerships with other resources in the community.

Furthermore, changes to state performance metrics will impact how resources are allocated at the district level. Last year, the governor signed into law changes to California's Academic Performance Index to be rolled out by 2017. Currently, this accountability index is based entirely on student achievement on standardized tests. The new legislation changes the metrics by calculating the school's score in four areas: 60 percent standardized tests, 20 percent college readiness, and 20 percent career readiness. The emphasis on a more global set of measures in the state's accountability system creates an opportunity to prioritize development of the broader set of skills needed to achieve college and career success.

Communities must seize these opportunities to work more collectively around youth development. Every day, California youth are being asked to master complex content, resist distractions, and manage their own learning—all without the support they need to overcome past trauma, cope with current challenges, and develop the skills and mindsets that maximize a person’s effectiveness as a learner. Our youth will learn more now, and far better in the long run, if we invest in their psychosocial development today. An integrated approach to youth development, one that utilizes the expertise of community resources beyond schools, may be the strategy we need to break poverty’s grip and put all California youth on a path to a healthy, sustainable future.

# APPENDIX RESOURCES

## SHARED MEASURES TO GET STARTED

Many schools and organizations have developed excellent tools for assessing and tracking students' strengths and experiences as learners. These tools can be adapted to meet the needs of other communities.

### DATA DASHBOARD

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/truancy/html/tfi/tools.shtml>

Use to help schools and partners track the three indicators of dropout risk: attendance, behavior, and course grades.

*Source: New York City Every Student Every Day Initiative*

### CRADLE TO CAREER PROGRESS ASSESSMENT TOOL

<http://www.strivenetwork.org/sites/default/files/images/Strive%20Progress%20Assessment.pdf>

Use to help community partners plan the stages of development of their shared work.

*Source: The STRIVE Network*

## EARLY WARNING SYSTEM TOOL

[www.betterhighschools.org/docs/EWStool.xls](http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/EWStool.xls)

Customizable spreadsheet that helps schools and partners track student progress on research-identified indicators of high school completion.

Source: *National High School Center*

## THE GRIT SCALE

[www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/gritscale.htm](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~duckwort/gritscale.htm)

Eight- and twelve-item versions of assessment of grit.

Source: *Angela Duckworth*

## TRIPOD SURVEY

[http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/files/METLDB/grants/MET\\_Project\\_Secondary\\_Student\\_Survey\\_Year2.pdf](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/files/METLDB/grants/MET_Project_Secondary_Student_Survey_Year2.pdf)

A student survey on seven conditions of learning and students' level of engagement; tested through the Measures of Effective Teaching Project.

Source: *Ronald Ferguson, the Achievement Gap Initiative*

## VIA CHARACTER STRENGTHS INVENTORY

[www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)

A widely used, commercially available assessment of personal strengths.

Source: *VIA Institute on Character*

## YOUTH DATA ARCHIVE

[http://jgc.stanford.edu/our\\_work/yda.html](http://jgc.stanford.edu/our_work/yda.html)

A system that helps community partners link data across systems to generate actionable student profiles and to promote effective collaborations. Communities in San Francisco and San Mateo counties participate, and projects are also underway in Alameda and Santa Clara counties.

Source: *John W. Gardner Center, Stanford University*

*Research and corresponding tools are evolving quickly. The Annenberg Institute and the John W. Gardner Center at Stanford are designing a College Readiness Indicators System, with tools under development in five cities, including San Jose, California. The Chicago Consortium on School Research is developing related tools as well as a research instrument that looks across academic behaviors, mindsets, and skills, helping educators gain a complete picture of students' strengths and understand the relationships among factors.*

## OTHER RESOURCES

### COMPASSIONATE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

[www.k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools](http://www.k12.wa.us/CompassionateSchools)

Resources for developing school climates and social-emotional competencies that support resilience, particularly in communities exposed to chronic stress and trauma.

### COMPETENCYWORKS

[www.competencyworks.org](http://www.competencyworks.org)

Resources for developing a competency-based curriculum.

### POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS

[www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

Resources for developing positive, growth-oriented discipline practices.

### STUDENTS AT THE CENTER

[www.studentsatthecenter.org](http://www.studentsatthecenter.org)

Research and best practices on creating engaging, student-centered learning opportunities.

# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> California Dataquest. Accessed February 2013. [dq.cde.ca.gov/Dataquest](http://dq.cde.ca.gov/Dataquest)
- <sup>2</sup> NCHEMS Information Center. 2008. Accessed February 2013. [www.higheredinfo.org](http://www.higheredinfo.org)
- <sup>3</sup> NCHEMS Information Center. 2008. Accessed February 2013. [www.higheredinfo.org](http://www.higheredinfo.org)
- <sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr12/yr12rel65.asp>
- <sup>5</sup> The term “noncognitive” distinguishes work habits, attitudes, and other psychosocial attributes from the types of skills and knowledge tested by traditional cognitive aptitude tests. The distinction is imperfect: these other attributes have cognitive dimensions, and aptitude tests measure more than pure knowledge and reasoning.
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Tough, in his 2012 book *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, details the work of Duckworth and many other researchers on this and related topics.
- <sup>7</sup> See: [ccsr.uchicago.edu](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu)
- <sup>8</sup> See: [www.acestudy.org](http://www.acestudy.org)
- <sup>9</sup> Dweck’s work is summarized in Shechtman et al. (2013).
- <sup>10</sup> See: <http://www.jff.org/earlycollege>
- <sup>11</sup> See: <https://youthbuild.org>

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## **JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

TEL 617.728.4446 FAX 617.728.4857 [info@jff.org](mailto:info@jff.org)

88 Broad Street, 8th Floor, Boston, MA 02110  
122 C Street, NW, Suite 650, Washington, DC 20001

[WWW.JFF.ORG](http://WWW.JFF.ORG)

