Forging a Learner-Centered Movement in Los Angeles Through Community-Based Philanthropy

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Forging a Learner-Centered Movement in Los Angeles through Community-Based Philanthropy

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by
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For Diana, Helene, Anthony, Jamie, Tricia, Antonio, Rahssan, and Aisha.
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Past, Present, and Future of Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centering the Communities of Los Angeles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering Around “Equity”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading as a Community-Based Funder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Knowledge for Action</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner-centered Education and Equity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Movement-Building in LA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-Driven Philanthropy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence to Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the California Community Foundation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the Education Sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

As the US education sector moves into a post-No Child Left Behind era, many stakeholders in the field have begun to support an emerging movement to transform learning environments with a renewed focus on the whole child. This movement has become associated with the science of learning and development, 21st Century lenses of learning (i.e. socioemotional learning, deeper learning, etc.), a deepened view of educational equity, and the role of community in shaping educational change. Taken together, these ideas provide the basis for learner-centered education, which entails a school system built on student’s needs, interests, and aspirations.

Based at the long-established Southern California grantmaking body, the California Community Foundation, the project described herein wove together the concepts named above during a year-long effort to build the strategic groundwork for a learner-centered movement in K12 classrooms across Los Angeles County. The project leads’ belief in community engagement and racial equity prompted a focus on radically improving the learning experiences of the region’s Black and Latinx student populations in particular.

The work advanced through four stages: (1) researching local perspectives, gathering scholarly knowledge, and landscaping regional exemplar schools, (2) synthesizing the local and national research into a compelling vision for change, (3) convening grassroots and system-level leaders to facilitate thought partnership and build backing, and (4) designing a multi-year strategy for the foundation. Project findings suggest that the emerging movement for learner-centrism, though promising, faces
challenges that relate to residual tensions among different groups as well as the present
dearth of research on non-conventional forms of learning.

An overarching consensus among those involved in the project was that the key
premises of the education reform movement - which saw the rise of systemic
accountability, evaluation, and assessment - are insufficient as a basis for transforming
education for our most vulnerable youth. Still, the same controversial issues that have
marked the era of education reform - narrow definitions of student achievement, the role
of charters, systems of privilege, and others - surfaced throughout. Planners concluded
that future efforts to promote a paradigm shift towards learner-centered environments are
more likely to succeed if more members of the education community come to see the
value that these environments hold for youth of color. To do so, the field must create
more practical research and uplift examples of implementation that demonstrate
learner-centrism as an appropriate strategy for realizing educational justice.

Introduction

The purpose of the project at the heart of this capstone was to create and align the
foundational research, strategy, and supports to allow The California Community
Foundation (CCF) to lead a movement for learner-centered schools in Los Angeles. CCF
is a grant making organization that has served the most vulnerable of LA County
residents for over one hundred years. The foundation sought to develop a strategy that
would accelerate academic achievement for low-income students and students of color, as
well as broaden definitions of student success. The core tenets of this work focused on
learning science, equity, and the transformation of schools through community
engagement. Key collaborators and I sought to bridge the camps of educational civil
dights and educational innovation with community voice as a driver. Underneath all of
this lay a local history of structural racism and educational inequity that connected the
project to a broader effort for social justice.

The first task was to understand the LA educational landscape so that I could then
spend the residency designing a strategy with consideration towards the history,
institutions, resources, and relationships that were relevant to this body of work. With
that in mind, this section lays out the organizational context of CCF and the key issues in
Los Angeles education that provided the backdrop of the strategic project, its findings,
and lessons learned.

The Past, Present, and Future of Learning

As a foundation, we determined early on that we would ground our project to
reimagine learning in four core purposes of education that have been validated by
educators and social leaders (albeit to different degrees) throughout the history of
American public schools. These purposes, as we defined them, include educational
equity (addressing inequality through educational opportunity for the marginalized),
career readiness (equipping future workers with essential skills), civic engagement
(developing community knowledge and the dispositions of a democratic citizen), and
personal agency (developing a sense of personal purpose and vision). We also agreed to
begin with a critique of the pedagogical status quo to rationalize the transformation of
schools.
The status quo for schools in America is defined by what is popularly referred to as “industrial education,” which alludes to a focus on standardization (of curricula, teaching practices, and academic trajectories) and efficiency (through routinized, age-based composition, social promotion, and space-efficient building designs) (Darling-Hammond, 2015, p. 62). In spite of pockets of innovation, standardization and efficiency continue to define how most school systems operate. As explained below, this approach to structuring schools is no longer viable. The world of the present (and future) is at odds with the prevailing patterns of American public education.

To begin with, it is well-documented that current systems have incubated vast disparities based on class and race (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Even the most revered school networks that serve low-income youth of color struggle to close educational attainment gaps (Whitmire, 2017). These disparities signal systemic problems that are attributable to this nation’s racist legacy of separate, deeply unequal systems of educational opportunity (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Meanwhile, the emerging elements of modern industry add a layer of complexity to systemic inequity. The economy of the 21st Century will depend upon skills of collaboration, critical thinking, and adaptability that schools have rarely valued (Mehta and Fine, 2015). Instead, the same rote knowledge that has defined learning for generations shapes most learning environments today (Mehta and Fine, 2015). Traditional and mainstream teaching practice is a poor fit for the emerging economy - the growth of automation will (continue to) obviate routine jobs that the industrial model of education has prepared generations of American students to undertake (Mehta and Fine, 2015). Add to this the stunning rise of technology, virtual
connectedness, and personalization and you have, for many youth, a dizzying window into a complicated future (Tweng, 2017).

In addition to issues of workforce readiness and economic opportunity, our schools must also consider the sociopolitical climate that young people will inherit given that they will be tasked with sustaining our democracy. The fraught state of American politics makes civic engagement a uniquely important purpose of education that should ground efforts to transform schools. Political discord fueled by media and grounded in America’s history of social oppression, resistance to pluralism, and vast demographic shifts has confronted our democratic institutions (Allen, 2016). The current generation of leaders will need to be succeeded by those more able to navigate the changing nature of American society while addressing historical disparities.

Public education lay at the crossroads of the issues outlined above because schools are centrally tasked with preparing young people to address, cope with, or solve them. We set out to explore, through this project, how different philosophies on teaching and learning might inform the work of reimagining schools.

**Centering The Communities of Los Angeles**

Our focus on the future of learning and learner-centered education can be explained by our understanding of the communities served by Los Angeles public schools. In brief, given the immense diversity of needs and aspirations in LA communities, a standardized approach to teaching and learning is untenable. Structural factors such as funding and discipline policy matter greatly, but we also attributed
persistent gaps to the fact that the industrial model of education causes schools to neglect the unique needs and opportunities presented by LA’s diverse student population.

Around 70% of LA County public school youth are entitled to free-or-reduced lunch. Nearly ⅔ of students are Latino, around 14% are White, around 10% are Asian-American, and 8% are Black (Data from the California Department of Education, 2018). Around 20% of students are English Learners (EL), and another 15% were formerly designated EL and have since met the standard for reclassification (Data from the California Department of Education, 2018). In addition, the most recent census reflects that 60% of families speak a different language than English at home (US Census Bureau, 2008). The ethnic diversity in LA, as these data suggest, is immense, and a significant percentage of public school families came to Los Angeles County (from other US states and abroad) over the past several generations in search of educational and economic opportunity (Pastor, 2018). However, due to the development of concentrated poverty, systemic neglect, and discriminatory practices that coincided with those migrations, low-income students of color have come to face a myriad of challenges in their schools, neighborhoods, and homes (“RACE COUNTS”, n.d.). Countless reports signal “epidemic levels of trauma”, which result in increased need for socioemotional support for young people (White, 2018). As in many urban areas, the topic of trauma and its effects on student learning is ubiquitous in Los Angeles.

It is important to acknowledge our stance that the cause of this trauma, and social inequality more broadly, is grounded in intentional decisions made by powerful economic and political actors to concentrate power and opportunity within certain communities
through an agenda based on social exclusion (Pastor, 2018). The powerful in the Los Angeles region consist historically of middle-class and elite white communities (Pastor, 2018). Their decisions to divest time, money, and resources from communities of color denotes a root cause of structural inequality (Pastor, 2018). Notably, this is a root cause whose core issues extend far past the scope of this project, which is confined, in content, to educational equity, an issue deeply related but not equivalent to fundamental economic and political transformation. The stance illustrated here is important to clarify because in discussing issues of deprivation and its effects, it is frequently the case that Black and Latino communities are blamed for abhorrent social conditions. In our estimation, this claim could not be further from the truth. Communities of color in Los Angeles are resilient and committed to uplift - but barriers to progress remain, as ever, formidable. This project was based on the assumption that education should play a critical role in upending the status quo by preparing the next generation of changemakers who represent the communities hardest hit by the inequality cited above.

Taken as a whole, this picture of LA County suggests that educational systems should tailor their services to the immense variety of linguistic, economic, racial, and cultural experiences of students. Add to this variety the range of academic needs that surface due to the effects of adverse childhood experience and you have need for, as one interviewee put it during my research, “radical differentiation” within schools. Radical differentiation, as she meant it, is encompassed by equitable learning environments, which comprise one of the primary focuses of my project.
Gathering around “Equity”

In the Los Angeles of 2018/19, a series of state and local education reforms demonstrate that educational advocacy has been primarily focused on equitable funding, building new school facilities, driving college attainment, and instituting fair discipline practices (Kohli, 2018). Among the most vocal (and influential) of educational advocates are the community organizers known broadly as the civil rights activists of South and East Los Angeles. It is no coincidence that these communities are also home to some of the most grave disparities in the state. Concentrated poverty and public disinvestment - made possible by culturally hegemonic attitudes among the privileged - explains the legacy of economic injustice here (Pastor, 2018). Though economic opportunity is also an area of interest, many local advocates have focused their energy on organizing for more resources and community decision-making authority within schools. The results of these community organizing efforts are clear. The past decade and-a-half has seen the construction of advanced campus facilities in low-income areas, increases in educational funding for the most disadvantaged students, a significant reduction in suspensions of students of color, and an increase in access to college-readiness coursework (Ryan, 2018).

These accomplishments have helped to create the conditions necessary to improve students’ experience in schools. However, advocates have neglected to focus on the fundamentals of strong teaching and learning environments for vulnerable students in their efforts to realize equity. Outside of discussion related to outcomes and accountability, teaching practice and student cognitive development are rarely addressed in most discussions of educational equity here. This has helped to create a false
dichotomy between efforts for educational equity and efforts to radically improve learning. Those working to implement 21st Century learning, deeper learning, and other innovative approaches to education stand outside the discourse of educational equity. This separation is to the great disadvantage of LA’s most vulnerable youth. After all, classroom learning comprises the key mechanism through which youth on the margins can develop the capacity to participate powerfully in America’s economic structures, social fabric, and political system. The fact that equity and learning have become so distinct has put our most vulnerable students at great risk of missing out on the very transformative skill and knowledge meant to enable personal thriving, community uplift, and democratic equality.

**Leading as a Community-Based Funder**

A final piece of context is that I am situated at the California Community Foundation, a public foundation whose role is to convene stakeholders, advance shared agendas, and (ultimately) provide the financial resources necessary to achieve this agenda. Given our core values around equity, justice, and community, the foundation is deeply mindful of the role that coalitions should play in facilitating change. Ideally, in advancing this project during and after my residency, we would work closely with the same advocacy community responsible for achieving policy-related wins based on the issues described above. Speaking directly to the funding community, philanthropic leaders Brian Barnes and Dorian Burton illustrate this idea in their important journal article, “Shifting Philanthropy from Charity to Justice”: 
It’s important not to create power dynamics by placing your own organization at the top of a hierarchy. Be on tap, not on top; if organizations cannot co-create positive strategies, where all parties seek to learn from each other, then the chances of producing sustained results are limited. (Barnes and Burton, 2017)

Being “on tap” as opposed to “on top” was a central aim of ours, even as we knew we would be introducing new ideas as an entity with great positional power. And on a practical note, because of the diffuse nature of power in education in our region, working with community advocates in alliance with others in the sector is frequently the most straightforward path to organizing broad support for a common cause. Working strictly with policymakers, who hold power temporarily and who are influenced by competing political forces, is not an appropriate priority for those seeking to create lasting change. Elected and appointed officials have come and gone while organizing entities and the communities they represent remain consequential. As a values-based community foundation that pursues sustaining growth in opportunity for the most vulnerable, we align with community advocates to democratize power and support sustaining campaigns in support of vulnerable communities.

Another important component of this project involved bridging the charter/district divide in Los Angeles. Like in many areas, tensions between traditional public school districts and charter schools have risen to an extreme in our region. One indicator of this is the unprecedented ask made by the largest local teacher’s union - the United Teachers of Los Angeles - to put a moratorium on new charter schools as a feature embedded into their new employment contract with the district. Because we are a convener who is
charged with creating coalitions that bring together local actors who disagree on strategies for social change, we determined to include a significant number of representatives from both the district and charter communities.

With this in mind, our aim was to energize a movement among both LA’s political elites and community representatives based on learner-centered education. We hoped to situate this movement squarely in the conversation for educational equity. In doing so, we aspired for our partners to act with the same urgency for the transformation of learning environments that has been demonstrated in battles for equitable funding, discipline reform, and other structural issues in schools.

**The Strategic Project: Transforming Learning for Equity and 21st Century Readiness**

As a resident at the California Community Foundation, I was tasked with building the research base, strategy, and set of recommendations for the foundation to set an agenda for learner-centered education in Los Angeles K-12 schools and systems. This led to convening groups of LA’s most influential educational stakeholders to grow the ecosystem of learner-centered schools that respond to needs and aspirations of diverse LA youth. To conduct this project, I moved through 3 distinct phases: (1) Understanding the landscape, diagnosing root causes, identifying opportunities; (2) Convening stakeholders and building shared purpose; (3) Setting direction and taking action. Before examining the “what” and “how” of this project in greater depth, I will provide an overview of the research literature backing the main premises that justified the shifts we sought to make.
Review of Knowledge for Action

The section above has introduced a set of premises upon which the logic of my strategic project stands. I intend to illustrate and defend these premises through this review of knowledge.

The core premises are:

1. Learner-centered education is a means to achieve equitable learning inside schools and prepare young people to excel in the 21st Century.

2. Building a movement for educational change in Los Angeles means bringing together a broad base of supporters who become united by a shared message and agenda.

3. Philanthropy should be community-driven yet informed by broader lessons from researchers, practitioners, and other philanthropic efforts in the sector.

Learner-centered education is a means to achieve equitable learning inside schools and prepare young people to excel in the 21st Century.

To begin with, “learner-centered” education can be defined as placing “every learner at the center, [structuring] the system to build appropriate supports around them, and [acknowledging] the need to adapt and alter to meet the needs of children” (“A Transformational Vision”, n.d.). When done with integrity, this type of education integrates the social, emotional, and intellectual facets of learning because these are inextricably linked elements of child development (“A Transformational Vision,” n.d.). This section will build a case to transform learning environments based on the intersections of these facets of learning. What follows then is an examination of the
evidence base that explains the fit between learner-centered schools and the diverse, often structurally vulnerable young people of Los Angeles who are growing up in a rapidly changing world.

Synthesizing this evidence base is complicated by the varied research of (1) educational advocates who espouse *social justice through educational equity*, (2) those who argue for the significance of *socioemotional skills and well-being*, (3) and the many who advocate a focus on *deeper learning*. All three of these groups speak to learner-centrism by virtue of their belief in meeting the unique needs, sparking the passions, and championing the identities that young people bring with them to school. Further, each group contributes greatly to what is known about social, emotional, and intellectual development - but have usually done so in ways disconnected from one another. Therefore, this section is split into three parts. The first will detail the three camps enumerated above, which I call “lenses of learning.” The second will detail thoughtful critiques that kept our work grounded with consideration to both practical and ideological concerns. The third will put these lenses in conversation with one another to reach a synthesis that is useful for this project.

Exchanging three lenses for learning.

Though many practitioners and researchers evoke the term “educational equity” with a sense of clarity and conviction, the term’s meaning has become uncertain due to its varied usage. Rather than choose a single way of defining the term, I will shape the territory of educational equity based on demonstrations of “applied” equity. One can think of “applied” equity as the ways equity has been used in practice to transform
opportunity for low-income youth of color (again, the demographic that defines the
definition of the majority of youth in LA public schools). Each element below has been supported by one
or several academic influencers, though no single influence is similarly oriented around
this particular set. To pursue educational equity is to:

1. Focus resources, time, attention, and priorities on students who face structural
disadvantages, such as poverty and social prejudice; this is also to increase access
to quality learning institutions for those with few or no such options (Reich, 2006)

2. Share power and decision-making with parents and students (i.e. about budget,
teaching & learning, if/how to launch a particular school model and where, etc.)
   (Oakes, 2017)

3. Respect and celebrate the culture and experiences of families through authentic
school-to-family relationships, and by making the community reflected in the
school itself (Delpit, 2006)

4. Lead learning in a way that prepares youth to examine social circumstances so
that they may develop critical consciousness and become change agents in their
communities and the world (Freire, 1972)

5. Achieve measurable results by closing gaps and observing improvements in
students’ performance and experience (Hickock, 2002)¹

¹ This references a version of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) meant for policymakers and
educational administrators. Citing NCLB may appear strange for a section on educational equity due to
disagreement in the education sector about the act’s value for low-income youth of color. Factually
speaking, NCLB explicitly named educational equity as a goal, the act went on to have profound effects on
national, state, and district policy, and received support from a cross-section of civil rights advocates
typically most closely associated with equity. In many ways, its rhetoric provided a modern foundation for
talking about closing inequitable “achievement gaps” in education - and that legacy, though fraught, lives
on today.
Though the individuals referenced here come mostly from academia, each element that they discuss alludes to the “how” of educational equity as demonstrated by real sector actors - namely, practitioners, community advocates, and policymakers. To act on these elements with integrity means to also deepen the social consciousness of educators so that they can take equitable actions with fidelity to the spirit of social justice. In her tome about educational equity, *The Flat World and Education*, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond prompts reformers to “address the negative psychologies that an unequal and highly racialized society has often constructed for both teachers and students” (Darling-Hammond, 2015, p. 65). These psychologies result in “negative attitudes about Black children”, and lead to children of color being “punished for offenses that White students commit without consequence” (Darling-Hammond, 2015, p. 65). Put together, the “lived” (so-to-speak) elements numbered above and the belief in consciousness-raising comprise the meaning of educational equity that became one of the centerpieces to the strategic project.

The first element from the list above suggests that schools should understand the felt experiences of young people in light of the hardships that derive from structural inequality. These hardships frequently manifest through psychological trauma. A significant amount of knowledge on the subject of trauma has been developed by brain scientists and, to some degree, researchers of socioemotional learning, which has recently surfaced as one of the more promising methods to help young people to cope with hardship.
The American Psychological Association correlates trauma with “adverse childhood experiences” (ACEs) that involve interactions with poverty, neglect, institutionalization, community violence, domestic violence, and/or physical or sexual abuse (McLaughlin, 2017). Though not explicitly focused on issues of trauma, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) illustrates the socioemotional skills that help young people to understand and manage their emotions. CASEL’s framework is premised on a meta-analysis - featuring quantitative and qualitative studies, experimental and observational methods - from education, psychology, and social work that concluded “education that promotes social and emotional learning gets results” (Durlak et al., 2011).

Though it seems logical that socioemotional learning is bound to help youth who are impacted by ACEs, there is limited research proving that socioemotional supports such as those advocated for by CASEL will reduce the perilous effects of trauma. To argue that SEL efforts (such as those endorsed by CASEL) will help trauma-impacted youth entails connecting evidence from the fields of psychological counseling, neuroscience, and social work in addition to education (Ko et al., 2008). In brief, equipping learners with knowledge of their emotions, the emotions of others, and how they can self-manage is likely to be immensely valuable to youth whose personal hardships surface throughout the school day in ways that disconnect them from learning (Immordino-Yang, 2018). CASEL’s frameworks name a small set of “non-cognitive” skills based on awareness of self, relationship with others, and decision-making processes that, when applied by skilled educators, can translate into deep learning for students
(“Center for Academic,” 2018). Teaching these skills explicitly throughout the school day - and, ideally, embedded within academic learning - is highly recommended.

Prioritizing equity and socioemotional development in the ways described here naturally point educators towards a more learner-centered approach because each paradigm depends upon knowing students individually and tailoring services to their needs. Conventional teaching practices, which are usually defined by routinized skill-and-knowledge transfer, are likely to undermine efforts to customize education (Darling-Hammond, 2015, p. 62). This is because conventional approaches evoke principles of standardization - everyone gets the same learning experience - and efficiency - students are divided into groups that are convenient for educators to construct and manage. Frankly put, a “standardized” approach to facilitating intellectual development is directly at odds with a learner-centered philosophy. In an age of amazing student diversity of background and experience - and amidst rapid social and economic change - one size does not fit all.

With that in mind, the final pieces to the vision for learning presented here include deeper learning and learning science. One of deeper learning’s greatest champions², the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, suggests that “deeper learning results when learners are able to develop significant understanding of core academic content, exhibit critical thinking and problem-solving, collaborate, communicate, direct their own learning, and possess an ‘academic mindset’” (Mehta and Fine, 2015). This approach to

² Partners at The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation have since alerted us that they will no longer use “Deeper Learning” as a term, though they will continue to support the ideas and skills associated with the frameworks associated.
learning is far better suited to preparing young people for the challenges of the 21st Century than the rote, knowledge-based education that has defined the work of most school systems in American history. The nature of employment, civic participation, and personal life has changed immensely, and will continue to do so (Mehta and Fine, 2015). The changes call for a paradigm shift in education so that students can move productively in complex and uncertain circumstances, such as participating civically in a pluralistic society with competing political views, or solving problems in the workplace that involve equal parts critical analysis and authentic collaboration. While research on deeper learning is limited, some of the early studies show positive effects across traditional and 21st Century metrics alike (“Does Deeper Learning,” 2016).

The insights of learning science support the assumptions of deeper learning theory. Deans for Impact summarized the key lessons from cognitive science in their report, “The Science of Learning,” detailing a short but powerful set of conclusions about how students learn best (“Deans for Impact,” 2015). Among these conclusion are statements about how to spark cognitive learning by accessing prior knowledge, providing structured scaffolds, contextualizing new concepts, and building a mindset of self-efficacy (“Deans for Impact,” 2015). The implications of the report point (again) to an educational paradigm shift away from the factory model while making way for the types of teaching and learning (involving projects, inquiry, presentations, problem-solving, and creativity, for instance) usually championed by deeper learning advocates.
Our challenge in bringing together the three learning camps detailed here - education for equity, socioemotional learning, and deeper learning - is based on the difficulty of imagining systemic change that successfully blends all three. Though many from any of the camps may suggest that their approach naturally combines the three, in practice, this is rarely the case. The two sections that follow will detail some of the top critiques of the learning camps described above and, then, provide a synthesis of the three to demonstrate the unifying principles for student development that bind them.

**Considering critiques of equity, socioemotional learning, and deeper learning.**

Though energy is growing in support of the three lenses described here, skepticism towards them is considerable. This section will seek to address only a few of the significant arguments made by skeptics given space limitations. While skepticism did not ultimately dissuade us from integrating each lens to the content of the project, it reminded us that that the contours defining the future of education are not known. Clear answers to hard questions related to issues of implementation, political viability, and measurement (to name only a few) are elusive. Facing thoughtful criticism illustrates the holes that need to be filled in through lessons learned from sector leadership, political bridge-building, practical attempts in the field, and applied research.

The first line of criticism accuses culturally responsive instruction and socioemotional learning of propagating a divisive strain of educational politics that mirrors our current political landscape nationally. Rick Hess, of both the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the American Enterprise Institute, purports that
culturally responsive and socioemotional learning practices are, at their core, code for a leftist educational agenda:

“While there’s nothing wrong with ‘cultural relevance’ in the abstract, what’s offered here is a familiar shorthand for identity-driven, ideological agendas … This [effort] feels more like a partisan’s attempt to squelch inconvenient questions under jargon and gibberish than a serious effort to address hard questions about how to serve children well.” (2018)

Hess’ point is to assess the political ideology he perceives to be embedded into the neo-progressive education movement, which subsumes socioemotional learning and, to a degree, culturally responsive teaching. He seeks to expose both the partisanship and the distraction from the rigorous academic learning that these approaches signal. Teresa Mull of The Hill shares a similar concern in expressing the concern that “our schools are no longer [teaching] reading, writing, and arithmetic,” but rather, “what to think and feel” (2016). Mull’s point is to denounce the shift away from conventional topics and towards subjects that (she finds) are softer, less relevant for public schools, and (as Hess suggested) reflective of a liberal educational agenda.

In defending our project’s key premises against Hess and Mull’s concerns, it seems inevitable to acknowledge that there are certain assumptions embedded into the fabric of SEL and culturally responsive education that should be named. One of these assumptions is that students who grow up with a deeper ability to collaborate, empathize with one another, and understand their own backgrounds will be better suited to thrive in a pluralistic society, such as the United States. While Hess and Mull’s concerns about
ideology are understandable, these concerns seem out-of-touch with the realities facing young Americans in the year 2019 who deserve to be far better equipped with skills of social perspective-taking and political empathy than the generations that preceded them. This much is made clear by any interaction with mainstream news, on any day, at any time. Even Hess admits in the same article that present political times are “polarized” (2018). If we aspire to bring about a less divisive world, then the young people who are going to lead us should be more prepared than the adults currently at the helm, who are obviously failing.

To the concern that these lenses of learning distract from what the writers perceive to be education’s core purpose - this is a feature, not a bug, as suggested by critics. Shifting an educational paradigm from being highly-concentrated on measurable academic achievement to a broader, more holistic view of learner development means loosening the grip that traditional thought has had over teaching and learning. The industrial model valued assimilation through standardization (Freire, 1972). Conventional choices about content were made by elites who had little regard for community context or cultural relevance (Delpit, 1995). Economists facilitated the ascendance of standardized assessment by associating test performance with future income (Strauss, 2017). Colleges and universities built their admission models on a worldview that defended social hierarchy and economic efficiency (Karabel, 1975). All of these measures sought to evaluate, rank, and sort young people. None of them were sincerely geared towards preparing students to thrive in a socially, politically, economically complicated world. Traditional forms of education were also not
considerate of student diversity, an issue that has long been an integral topic and will become even more important as the student population continues to diversify.

Further, as discussed in a section above, rigorous studies from cognitive science have illustrated that the best way to make learning consequential - in the ways espoused by Hess and Mull, as well as those championed in a learner-centered model - require transformative shifts to how learning has been facilitated historically.

Some critics of deeper learning echo the views of Hess and Mull. Others express concern over a decreased focus on conventional notions of achievement and college readiness for reasons related to equity. Often posed by civil rights advocates, this concern states that if stakeholders are not able to observe where and how gaps develop, systems will reopen the door to lowered expectations for youth of color. It is true that one of deeper learning’s aims is to transform practices to become more attentive to learner needs by removing the design principle of standardization (as in, everyone gets the same set of educational experiences; this is, notably, distinct from a focus on educational standards, which is compatible with deeper learning). Tom Loveless of The Brookings Institute encourages educators to be “skeptical” towards deeper learning, claiming that it is “anti-knowledge,” that it “disparages academic content” and is likely to exacerbate “social inequality” (2013). Admittedly, deeper learning has become more thoroughly defined since Loveless’ article was published, but his concerns remain among skeptics. It matters, too, that during my experiences listening to the interests of community advocates in Los Angeles, their favored educational indicators - test score growth and college entrance coursework - suggested that they shared this concern.
Of the two lines of critiques named above, the latter is more difficult to refute. The research about deeper learning is nascent. From an empirical perspective, it is difficult to claim, with great certainty, that deeper learning scaled throughout American classrooms will close assessment gaps faster than doubling down on traditional methods of teaching and learning. It is our belief based on both the evidence cited earlier in this section and observations of equitable teaching in practice that, implemented well, deeper learning placed in a framework focused on the whole learner will accelerate learning for youth of color on a scale previously unseen. However, we are also committed to broadening notions of educational measurement so that tests hold the right amount of weight (no more, no less) in discourse about teaching and learning.

**Synthesizing three lenses.**

To bring these different camps of learning together into a cohesive message, it is useful to imagine them to be in conversation with one another. The synthesis below conceptualizes this conversation by surfacing the key tensions that, once made commensurate, transformed into the framing for our project’s fundamental goals.

To begin with, the originators of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) would contend that education for the disadvantaged should be primarily concerned with closing academic gaps between different groups as measured by standardized tests and educational attainment (Hickock, 2002). NCLB supporters rightly center the role of academic learning as a core function of education (one that had become, in their estimation, deprioritized). However, a narrow focus on academics fails to acknowledge that the process of growing students is a deeply social and emotional endeavor, not
strictly an intellectual one. Further, standardized tests and their implications for teaching and learning neglect the evidence-backed case for higher-level skills. Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine’s focus, like NCLB’s, veers towards the academic, but does so in ways that bridge the socioemotional to the intellectual. Mehta and Fine contend that neither the emerging economy nor our changing society will be well-suited for young adults whose training discounts complex problem-solving, collaboration, and cognitive adaptability (Mehta and Fine, 2015). These elements of deeper learning expand what became a narrow definition of achievement during NCLB’s most influential years. This matters because the act’s legacy remains powerfully influential in American education (especially in urban areas, such as Los Angeles).

But even an education that expands the territory of the “academic” could struggle to prepare youth who grapple with longstanding issues of racism, social prejudice, and inequality. These issues signal pressing threats to social stability and deep disadvantages for under-resourced youth of color. Lisa Delpit and Linda Darling Hammond expose the incompleteness (and bias) of color-blind notions of education that academic-oriented advocates often support (albeit unconsciously). These scholars illustrate the role of prejudice in American schools and, in so doing, show the real interactions between a student’s academic development and their cultural experiences. Common political mindsets in the US that are grounded in deficit narratives of Black and Latino people frequently dictate educator behavior and expectations when working with those groups (Darling-Hammond 65). A movement to transform learning against a social landscape with deficit views of children of color should concurrently expand access to quality
environments and build culturally affirming perspectives among the people responsible for the creation of those environments (read: educators).

Part of growing up in poverty-impacted communities - like many neighborhoods in Los Angeles - means becoming exposed to adverse experiences stemming from systemic neglect and social prejudice. Raising consciousness and driving towards a deeper learning experience must therefore be coupled with trauma-informed socioemotional support. Neuroscientist Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and other advocates for SEL push the education sector to acknowledge and embrace the non-cognitive type of training discussed in her work - especially for the most vulnerable.

The tensions in the conversation shown here could be interpreted to suggest that a whole-child, learner-centered approach is untenable. On the contrary, observing the relationships between these differing views helped to distinguish two core goals that this project supports: future advancement and personal wellness. Learning environments that enable students to achieve will strengthen access to educational and professional opportunities to achieve economic uplift. Learning environments that create a sense of well-being enable students to actualize into self-aware, self-expressed individuals who can use their skills to achieve a meaningful life. The language of this dichotomy, though imperfect, helped to ground our project in the research while messaging the holistic approach to learning we sought to scale.
Building a movement for educational change in Los Angeles means bringing together a broad base of supporters who become united by a shared message and agenda.

In the recently released *State of Resistance*, a history of modern social movements in California, USC professor Manuel Pastor concludes that “change takes time,” and that “turning moments into movements will require grassroots organizing, base-level leadership, and new avenues for civic engagement” (Pastor, 2018, p. 192). Pastor closes the book hoping to prompt readers who are engaged in social leadership to lead through relationship, convene diverse groups of stakeholders, and go slow to go fast (if you’re going to go at all). He is speaking, especially, to those who seek to transform systems of opportunity in California.

With Pastor’s lessons - and our own - in mind, we determined to bring together a broad array of grasstops and grassroots leaders who represent the resources, positional authority, and political will necessary to lead a movement to transform learning in Los Angeles. This approach signals an important distinction from the work of more technocratic funders, who make unilateral moves based mainly on the work of economists and researchers. I will return to this in the final section in this review.

Before that, it is important to set up the two knowledge bases that informed our approach to building support for transformative change in Los Angeles. The first is grounded in organizational change literature. John Kotter’s 8-step framework, while molded with the private sector in mind, can be appropriately adapted to social movements (Kotter, 1995).
Aspiring to complete the full trajectory of the 8 steps during residency was unrealistic. The first 4 steps, which are foundational, were the focus of our actions through the spring. “Going slow to go fast”, as Pastor implied, is the best way to achieve the broad buy-in and hone a shared vision that can result in collective action. “Going slow” meant the following -

1.  *Establish a sense of urgency* by diagnosing and highlighting problems that resonate with local leaders and communities in Los Angeles

2.  *Create a guiding coalition* of grasstops and grassroots actors who can inform the trajectory of the project and wield the power necessary to gain traction

3.  *Develop a vision and strategy* that brings together a statement of the problem, values, and potential solutions

4.  *Communicate the change vision* to potential allies - and gain their support (Kotter, 1995, p. 23)

Where Kotter’s framework falls short is in showing how to navigate the web of values, relationships, and local politics that compose a social movement’s backdrop. These are the elements that influence a movement’s key messages, which determine whether or not a given cause is able to attract key stakeholders. Therefore, literature on creating shared purpose, compelling messaging, and developing appropriate relationships constitute the second body of knowledge grounding our project’s strategy.

Marshall Ganz’ *Leading Change* outlines how to build collective will by detailing the purpose of relationships and storytelling in social movements. Relationships in social movement-building are distinguished by “a mutual commitment of resources made to a
shared future” (Ganz, 2010, p. 5). A few of the most important resources for our project include time, political advocacy, building space, and (yes) financial capital. Our aim was to compel stakeholders such that they would be committed to leveraging their resources - first and foremost, time - towards a common agenda. But to build a common agenda meant we would have to signal how transformative learning environments constituted a worthy cause. As explained in the introduction, the bonding agent for social movements for education in Los Angeles is educational equity - every “worthy cause” in recent memory gained traction because it addressed issues of equity. Therefore, our efforts would have to be grounded in a vision for educational equity that subsumed learning in the way illustrated in the first section of this review.

Ganz’ explanation for how to incite action based on a given issue is most instructive. For Ganz, to move people to act in response to a grievance is to illustrate how the circumstance connotes an injustice (Ganz, 2010, p. 7). Actionable grievances are understood as a “wrong that demands righting” (Ganz, 2010, p. 7). As it happened, issues associated with inequity that had prompted collective action in the past several decades were, without fail, interpreted as grave injustices in the same way as conveyed here. Ganz’ framework instructs coalition-builders to message how and why the issue at hand is in fact unjust.

A key part of developing a compelling narrative is understanding how to create messages that appeals to an audience’s sentiments. Ganz encourages leaders to appeal to audience member’s emotional logic by contrasting “the world as it is” and “the world as it should be” (Ganz, 2010, p. 9). Done well, the comparison builds a sense of emotional
The dissonance that, for values-aligned actors, is “only resolvable through action” (Ganz, 2010, p. 9). The implication for our work was to construct a narrative that addressed our audience’s values in ways similar to the issues that had galvanized they and others to act in the past. Our messaging would have to leave people with a sense of urgency around the depth and relevance of learning environments in Los Angeles County.

**Philanthropy should be community-driven yet informed by broader lessons from researchers, practitioners, and other philanthropic efforts in the sector**

The final premise upon which our strategy stands relates to the ethics of wielding power as a philanthropist. CCF’s influence exists because of its financial resources, strong reputation as a force for good in the LA community, relationships with powerful leaders and organizations, and its ability, therefore, to make change happen. As a community institution, CCF makes decisions based on the will of community members through ongoing engagement. This is due to both CCF’s values centered on community voice and the broader ideals of democratic decision-making that govern American society.

We observed early in the project that one of the unique challenges we would face related to low awareness (and, therefore, will) for the fundamental changes to teaching and learning that we were advancing. We partly attributed this challenge to the lack of knowledge of learning science and the positive benefit that learner-centered education has already produced for young people in our region. Some of the most promising efforts in LA education have resulted in schools with a learner-centered orientation. Their stories as fundamentally learner-centered institutions had not been conveyed under a unified
vision, which has kept these schools from having broader influence. As an institution whose agendas are crafted by community voice, we then had to ask ourselves - what role, if any, should we play in infusing energy into this effort?

Megan Tompkins-Stange explains in *Policy Patrons* a dichotomy within philanthropy that has helped to inform our approach to this project. On one side of the dichotomy live “outcome-oriented” funders who make decisions based, largely, on technocratic analyses of “what works” according to analytics and business theory (Tompkins-Stange, 2016, p. 120). These funders deprioritize the will of community members in favor of their own analyses and agenda for change. This approach has led to a legacy of negative effects of philanthropic investments on civic trust and collaboration that can be observed throughout poverty-impacted communities across the country (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). To their credit, however, “outcome-oriented” funders have played a significant role in capturing key lessons and infusing knowledge into the sector so that others can learn from the efforts they have funded (Tompkins-Stange, 2016).

The foil to technocratic funders is the “field-oriented” funder, who makes decisions based on the will of community leaders and takes a hands-off approach to managing their investments (Tompkins-Stange, 2016). It is natural that this approach tends to please grantees who appreciate autonomy and trust from their authorizer. As a critique to Tompkins-Stange, though, she does not discuss the drawbacks to this approach. One of these drawbacks is signaled by the limited insights gained when grantors leave evaluation and storytelling up to the recipients of their funds. In these cases little in the way of knowledge for the sector is created. Another critique (likely,
from more strategy-oriented funders) might be that by spreading resources without vision, funders are unlikely to be able to create coordination and the sort of systemic gains that the sector as a whole aspires to achieve. The project at CCF toed the line between the two types of foundations illustrated here. CCF’s aim is to facilitate positive systemic change, and believes that this calls for a strategic approach to investment and movement-building.

In addition to navigating this dynamic between “outcome-oriented” and “field-oriented”, we took on the task of creating a narrative for this project that replaced typical deficit-framing with asset-based language. Brian Barnes and Dorian Burton, quoted in the introduction, make clear the importance of this shift by illustrating that the principle of justice should replace the principle of charity within philanthropy. A sense of charity, which has defined much of the philanthropic activity in the history of the US, is aimed, usually, at assuaging inequality while leaving the economic and social pillars responsible intact (Barnes and Burton, 2017). Barnes and Burton suggest that giving should result in systemic shifts to opportunity that sustain growth - and this means trusting in the ability of communities to solve and lead through the problems they face. This trust is predicated upon the belief that there is “competent leadership within the communities we aim to serve—people already on the ground, building and changing lives” (Barnes and Burton, 2017). Trusting community leadership has long been a feature of CCF’s articulated mission. Maintaining this trust while entering into educational transformation work would prove challenging given the rampant assumptions in education about the supposed inability of parents, students, and communities to address
the issues they face (Darling-Hammond, 2015). Community-informed design, done in coalition with an array of supporters and grounded in what is known about transformative learning, became the overarching systemic strategy for our project to spark a movement in LA public schools.

**Theory of Action**

If we diagnose the key challenges and opportunities related to the outcomes and experiences of public school students of color in LA as observed by youth, advocates, policymakers, and leading practitioners, and if we message the value of learner-centered education as an effective means for positively transforming students’ outcomes and experiences, and we illustrate how stakeholders might take part in creating the policy conditions, programmatic efforts, advocacy efforts, and research that will accelerate school transformation …

… then we will be able to attract, organize, and financially support a diverse group of education stakeholders to develop a shared vision and agenda for a learner-centered movement in LA County …

… so that we will advance policy, increase capacity, and transform practices within systems of schools to become based on a learner-centered paradigm, and who will then be better able to close inequitable learning gaps while providing authentic and inspiring learning opportunities attentive to the needs and experiences of young people in LA County.

**Analysis: Description of the Strategic Project**
The overarching purpose of the project was to develop a set of strategic recommendations to CCF that would lead to the outcomes named within the theory of change. This section outlines the more specific aims that fell underneath that purpose and presents an overview of key actions I took to design the recommendations. The first aim was to determine if learner-centered approaches were an appropriate fit for public schools in Los Angeles County based on both an analysis of student outcomes and the values and perspectives of stakeholders from policy, program, community advocacy, and research. This first aim was accomplished through a data-gathering process that involved interviews with key influencers, school visits to promising sites, a formal data analysis, and consideration of key publications. The second aim was to, after determining learner-centered education to be an appropriate fit, recruit early adopters who are well positioned to create the conditions (as policy influencers) for instructional reform and/or put into action (as practitioners) learning environments reflective of learner-centered principles. This aim would be reached by making the case to grow these environments to values-aligned actors in the region. These actors include the practitioners, policymakers, funders, advocates, and researchers responsible for instigating change. The third and final aim for the strategic project was to illustrate to both the foundation and to the early adopters what initial moves could be made to engage community, influence the conditions defined by accountability and resource distribution, produce demonstration projects, and generate usable knowledge (in other words - to invest in advocacy, policy, program, and/or research).
As suggested here, the project unfolded over the course of 3 stages that, though overlapping, signal 3 distinct streams of work. The sections below examine each stage and the actions that took place during that period.

Stage 1 - Listening and Diagnosing: Understanding the Landscape, Articulating the Case for Change, Building Relationships (Months 1-5)

To understand the landscape of education in Los Angeles County, I gathered qualitative and quantitative information that conveyed root causes, prospective solutions, and important context about the state of learning. This information was meant to detail the current system’s results, perspectives from influential educational stakeholders in the region, narratives from vision-aligned sites, and broader insights from practical research.

1:1 Interviews. (see Appendix A)

I conducted over 60 one-to-one interviews with individuals from district administration, charter leadership, school sites, advocacy organizations, policymakers, researchers from higher education, non-profit practitioners, and funders over the course of the first 5 months at CCF. The purpose of these interviews was to diagnose how these individuals and the organizations they represent defined the core challenges, promising solutions, and relevant context in LA education. In addition, the interviews were meant for me to begin building relationship with stakeholders who could become consequential as the project advanced. Some of these stakeholders could have turned into core supporters; others, influential detractors. Many could be in between, or generally indifferent to our interests in learner-centered education. Therefore, my conversations had two distinct elements: (1) A series of questions asking about context, problem,
solution as the speaker defined these components; (2) Exchanging information about personal and professional background as well as the initial motivation for this project. My hope was for all interviewees to, minimally, see the promise in transforming learning environments (if they hadn’t already) and, aspirationally, support the cause by staying engaged with the project over the course of my residency.

To begin the interviews, I was given a list of initial contacts from my manager at CCF who had developed a sense of the sort of people and institutions that could best inform the project. After conducting outreach and scheduling the initial round of conversations, I grew this list over time through recommendations and sourcing. By the mid-fall, I had finished these one-to-ones and amassed a set of information detailing a range of unique opinions.

With the data from these meeting in hand, I sought to determine what themes based on context, problem, and solution surfaced. Admittedly, much of what I heard fell outside the scope of a focus on transformed learning environments. However, many of the perspectives spoke directly to what gradually became a theory of change in support of transforming learning. I will return to these perspectives in the discussion of evidence below.

**Site Visits.**

While conducting interviews, I requested recommendations from regional leaders for schools that have created innovative learning environments. My intent was to set up opportunities to see these sites in action. The purpose of these visits was to learn from local, compelling examples of the type of learning environments we sought to scale.
These examples would play an important role (as shown in later sections) in making the case that learner-centered environments should be implemented across LA County communities. To note - I defined “innovative” as reflecting an orientation towards transforming opportunity with equity as the north star and learner-centrism the primary method. This was due to the hunch we had that schools should, as the research I compiled suggested, provide learning that is relevant, community responsive, and contextualized in ways that students can relate to or find meaning in.

Recommendations in hand, I reached out to and visited 16 sites over the course of the fall to understand the type of learning happening in those environments. I aimed to study how each school approaches the task of ensuring depth, variety, responsiveness, and rigor of learning environments designed for students. I gathered information to understand how learning worked at at each visit through a combination of (1) discussions with teachers, students, and administrators and (2) observations of learning time. The discussions focused on the aims and vision for learning environments, how each school develops teacher skill and mindset (i.e. via professional development, continuous improvement, teacher collaboration, etc.), the academic and personal effects of learner-centered environments (for students and adults), and the necessary conditions at the site and district level for these environments to come about.

**Data Gathering and Analysis.**

Arguing that learning environments focused on personalization, relevance, and contextualization are of great value to LA youth required that I show how existing schools inclusive of these instructional principles have produced desirable outcomes for
young people. Therefore, I conducted descriptive and inferential analyses that placed these schools next to their peers in LA County. The results can be found in the next section.

It should be noted that, due to the presence of potentially confounding variables and statistical biases, the analysis discussed in further sections can only inform speculation about the effects of these schools through correlative evidence. And correlation is not causation. Moreover, achieving random equivalency between school sets was not possible given constraints. Still, the results are helpful initial findings that can inform further research on the effects on learning of innovative school models.

Stage 2 - Messaging and Investing: Communicating the Value of Learner-Centered Education and Generating Buy-in (Months 5-8)

Once equipped with an emerging understanding of LA’s educational landscape, I was positioned to build a more informed case for the growth of learner-centered schools. The second stage of my project was marked, then, by developing products that synthesized key messages to illustrate that learner-centered education was a strong fit for LA County. Additionally, I began applying insights from leadership literature cited above and convened the advisory committee that would play an essential role in shaping the trajectory of the project.

Whitepaper. (see Appendix B)

The first product developed in support of this project was a whitepaper meant to explain the motivation behind a paradigm shift from the educational status quo to a learner-centered approach. We aspired for the whitepaper to reach a range of
stakeholders who may play a role in our work (community advocates, district/network administrators, funders, and technical assistance providers), which prompted us to make decisions about content based on a clear understanding of audience. First, we determined to base the paper on four core purposes of education that speak to a wide range of personal worldviews and political sensibilities. In so doing, we hoped that most readers would resonate with several of the purposes and, therefore, find the overarching messages of the piece to be compelling.

Secondly, we chose to make the piece grounded in research yet designed for a lay audience. Readers were likely to skew practical. Their sensibilities would be best piqued through language that related to ideas like career access and facilitating learning (as opposed to, say, quantitative findings from empirical research, though these findings were important, too). Finally, we chose to uplift the voices of trusted, local leaders. CCF’s reputation among core audience members is (generally) positive, but our foundation is not considered an authority on educational innovation or movements to radically change K12 learning environments. Therefore, I interviewed four influential, local voices from research, policy, advocacy, and school leadership whose perspectives would fill the body of the paper. My manager and I wrote the introduction and conclusion to state the motivation for the project more directly while synthesizing some of the interviews’ key takeaways. The whitepaper would be sent as a pre-reading for our convening (more below) and as an introduction for newcomers to the growing coalition.

Once finished, the whitepaper reflected a combination of (1) the voices of four trusted and influential leaders in the Los Angeles education community, (2) an opening
and closing that frames the purpose and iterates key messages from the main text, (3) and visuals that illustrate key frameworks, data, or ideas that complement each interviewee’s perspective. Each speaker was prompted to explain how a more learner-centered approach to education could better prepare schools to realize four core purposes of education. This paper was essential in messaging the value of the paradigm shift for which we advocated. Figure 7 depicts several of the key quotes from interviewees that convey the piece’s major themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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| Pedro Noguera  
_Distinguished Professor of Education, UCLA_ | I think to prepare young people for a workplace that requires not simply technical skill but a higher level of social skills you have to start to give them that through instruction and through experience. |
| Maria Brenes,  
_Executive Director, InnerCity Struggle_ | Youth organizing is catalytic to social change. Youth can strengthen democracy. |
| David Rattray,  
_Vice President, Center for Education at the LA Chamber of Commerce_ | What you can predict about the future of work is that you're going to have to relearn to adjust to the next wave many, many, many times. Which means we can't just talk about lifelong learning anymore. It can't just be a slogan. |
| Jose Navarro,  
_Founder of Social Justice Humanitas_ | Our kids are not broken. Their needs aren't being met. How do you wrap your curriculum around the kids instead of trying to bend your kids around your curriculum? |

Figure 7: Key Quotes from Whitepaper Authors

**Videos. (see Appendix C)**

The second major product designed to help communicate the project vision was a 15-minute video detailing the work of three of LA’s most successful learner-centered schools. These schools included Social Justice Humanitas, Renaissance Arts Academy, and Da Vinci RISE. They were selected based on observations I made during school
visits that took place in the fall and through recommendations I received from interviewees. The three varied in many ways but were similarly impressive with regard to their commitment to orienting around the learner. In brief, each school demonstrated a clear vision for instructional excellence, a culture of belonging, a relatively flat hierarchy between administrators, teachers, and students, and an openness to structuring educational services around activities that would best help students learn.

I also considered the school performance data available and ensured that, at least along several metrics of importance (i.e. tests, graduation, attendance, for Black and Latino students, for instance), the schools were distinctive in their results when compared with peers.

The content of the video illustrated the purpose and methods of learning environments that blended a focus on the social, emotional, and intellectual facets of learning at once. Each video was, therefore, a sort of virtual field trip sharing the brief stories of students, faculty, and administrators at schools that were successful places of learning for Black and Latino youth. The purpose of the film project was to show local leaders that student-response environments were feasible in our regional context and, in fact, some of LA’s most promising sites were just that. To stress CCF’s support of this work, we featured footage of our CEO, Antonia Hernandez, discussing the importance of innovative learning environments to begin and conclude the brief film.

The video is, like the whitepaper, an essential piece of evidence that attests to our efforts to message the value that learner-centrism has for youth. The perspectives appealed to both intellectual and emotional forms of logic to communicate clearly that
young people benefit when the learning is contextualized, relevant, and socially-embedded, and that there are local schools working with Black and Latino youth who are succeeding in providing this type of education. One of the students in the film discusses her journey through experiencing racial discrimination at a former school and then, through critically conscious coursework at her new site, developing a commitment to anti-racism and social justice. Several teachers in the piece explain how they built a sense of belonging in their classrooms with evidence-backed socioemotional tools. Administrators at the art school that was featured share about how they have integrated a school-wide, interdisciplinary “ensemble” culture forged on mutuality and collaboration.

Given more time, it would be useful to survey people engaged in local education issues to determine the effect that the whitepaper and video have/had on their awareness of and support for a shift towards a whole learner paradigm. It may also be useful to track if and how the pieces are referenced in furthering a learning agenda, and by whom.

Advisory.

One of John Kotter’s first recommendations for leading change is to create a guiding coalition capable of accelerating the work. Such a coalition was key for this project, and was represented by an 11-person advisory that I convened in the fall. As a funder, CCF’s influence comes from its financial resources, reputation, and relationships. We are neither school operators nor policymakers. To influence what goes in in classrooms, then, means to partner with others (in this case, by inviting them to advise the project) who have influence over the conditions of sites (i.e. through accountability, resources, and regulations) and who manage the quality of learning directly (i.e. districts
and networks, as well as practitioners). And because community voices play a critical role in driving what educational change should look like and entail, organizers were to play an important part. We involved researchers given the importance of codifying learning in an emergent area of educational research, such as socioemotional development in classrooms. Other funders were invited, too.

Though I was in touch with advisors for a variety of reasons, I leaned on them for feedback and thought partnership regarding 3 tasks especially: (1) Developing the (early) case for pivoting towards learner-centered environments, (2) Planning content for our kickoff event, (3) Designing actions for policy, program, research, and advocacy that could guide CCF’s initial investments.

Stage 3 - Cohering and Planning: Convening and Setting Direction with Early Adopters  
(Months 7-9)

The final section of the residency was defined by (1) a 110-person convening of stakeholders and potential collaborators from policy, program, advocacy, and research, (2) setting direction given what was shared, accomplished, and learned at the convening, and (3) providing a series of recommendations to CCF on how to structure its grantmaking, convening, and policy/advocacy efforts in support of learner-centered environments in LA County.

**Convening. (see Appendices D and E)**

In a sense, my strategic project culminated on February 1st, when I hosted a sequence of meetings to make public our research about learning environments, a
high-level vision for change, and potential collaborations. The first of these convenings was a meeting of funders and members of the project’s advisory committee that included 22 attendees. This first convening lasted roughly 90 minutes and took place in the morning. The second had an attendance of 105, lasted a full 5 hours, and included stakeholders from policy (school board members, political aides, superintendent cabinet members, etc.), practice (site-based youth, educators, and instruction-focused administrators), advocacy (activists and community organizers), and research (university faculty, community-based research), and funders from the morning’s event.

The purpose of the first convening was to share our purposes with peers from philanthropy who could accelerate the work to transform learning environments in Los Angeles by contributing to a pooled fund or providing guidance. Advisors were important contributors, too, because they could speak to the key issues of relevance and the lessons they had learned through the work of their organizations. We provided an overview of the lessons we had learned through interviews and school visits, shared an emerging framework that put learner’s needs at the center, and discussed the viability of coordinating efforts for a learning agenda in LA County.

The purpose of the larger convening was twofold.\(^3\) First, we sought to make the case to transform learning environments so that designers of learning build upon key

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\(^3\) To note - the largest local teacher’s union (the United Teachers of Los Angeles) and the Los Angeles Unified School District had concluded a tumultuous contract negotiation just several weeks before this event. These negotiations culminated in a week-long teacher strike. Much of the controversy surrounding the strike was related to political tensions between traditional and reform-oriented stakeholders around the role of charter schools in Los Angeles. We welcomed stakeholders whose perspectives ranged greatly with regard to these issues, which required us to make clear that the focus of the day was to explore why we should transform learning for LA’s youth. We found this an opportunity to unite diverse voices on the topic of the future of learning, believing it to be a potential unifier for educators and advocates of various persuasions.
insights from learning science, deeper learning, and socioemotional learning while
demonstrating a commitment to equity and community engagement. This case would be
communicated by a combination of the whitepaper and video (described above), the
(in-person) voices of LA-based students and educators, and activities meant to expose
attendees to the imperatives and opportunities surrounding school transformation. The
second goal was to get feedback from stakeholders on how to prioritize and successfully
execute a set of funding concepts to advance the future of LA schools. By experiencing
the case for change and by providing feedback to our ideas, we hoped, attendees would
be compelled to stay engaged as we moved to action.

To achieve the goals described above, the event’s agenda was designed to (1)
uplift the voices of trusted and influential leaders, such as noted researcher, Dr. Pedro
Noguera, and accomplished LA-based community organizer, Maria Brenes, (2) give
voice to site-based educators and youth who can attest from experience the value of
learner-centered environments, and (3) involve attendees in advising the trajectory of our
project through discussions of strategy and a feedback survey. The outcomes of the event
are discussed in greater depth below, but in brief, we felt it was mostly a success. We
opened several important conversations about the future of learning, systemic change,
and political alliances with groups that generally find themselves in different corners of
the educational ecosystem. Based on post-event feedback, every attendee surveyed
expressed interest in remaining a part of the conversation and asked to be invited to future
convenings. We received initial commitments from local influencers to begin
collaborating. Most of the funders were pleased by the event and interested in the
opportunity to coordinate funding to support a learning agenda in LA. But perhaps most
gratifying was the opportunity to provide youth and educators a platform to share frank
perspectives about the past and future of schools based on their experience. This occurs
too rarely in education, but it is, as the survey results bore out, one of the most important
ways to ground conversations in the voices of greatest consequence - the voices of young
people and the people teaching them.

**Setting direction.**

The weeks and months following the event involved two primary bodies of work.
The first was to cultivate relationships with other funders to determine if they are
interested in supporting a pooled fund. This effort was critical because it would have a
dramatic effect on if and to what degree this project stays funded in the long-run. The
second body of work was to outline a strategic plan that shows how different stakeholders
will play a role in realizing shared goals. A combination of the insights we gathered at
the event and during follow-up conversations revealed there to be multiple opportunities
in the fields of policy, advocacy, practice, and research, but resources (including time) are
limited and it will require prioritization to decide where and how to segment the work
over time. My final months at CCF will consist of addressing the questions raised about
strategy, prioritization, and resource capacity.

**Analysis: Evidence to Date**

To date, I have gathered a significant body of evidence to assess progress towards
the project’s theory of action. The section below uses the first four components of the
theory of action to organize evidence and depict outputs and outcomes.
Part 1: Diagnosing Key Challenges and Opportunities

**Interviews.**

Analyzing interview data enabled me to surmise how major stakeholders in Los Angeles education defined the relevant context, root cause problems, and promising solutions that resonated with local actors. The presence of interview data and its distillation into key themes signals progress towards the first component of my theory of action, which involves diagnosing key challenges and opportunities associated with the state of learning in LA County. The key themes reflect the shared perspectives of over 60 leaders in education across LA County (with a few national voices included as well).

Below, Figures 1-4 demonstrate the 3-5 major themes within the categories of problem, context, and solutions as shared by the interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students have diverse interests and needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- LA is home to a linguistically, culturally, and geographically diverse set of communities; many families are newcomers or recent newcomers; Schools vary in terms of their reflectiveness / responsiveness to student culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schools have large populations of English Learners and Special Education students, which results in expanded need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inequality in the region is high; This stems from many generations of disinvestment by the region’s powerful economic and political actors, signals the effects of white hegemony that arose throughout the history of California, and has produced devastating consequences for low-income communities of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools remain industrial in structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Efficiency, sorting, ranking, and standardization remain hallmarks of most schools here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Divergent school models exist, but rarely are they connected to an attempt to transform learning across a system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty and systemic neglect cause personal hardship and trauma - and that has effects on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Certain schools have disproportionately high percentages of students that encounter some combination of neighborhood or home violence, neglect or insufficient physical affordances due to poverty, abuse at the hands of those in their neighborhood or home, prejudice or negative social messaging about their racial or ethnic group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schools with high percentages of students with unmet mental health needs are ill-equipped to lead learning for all youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 1: Key Context from Educational Stakeholders

#### Problems / Root Causes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools are not equipped with the support, policies, or capacity to address the range of learning and development needs of LA youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historically, leaders of systemic reform have demonstrated impatience within the early years of implementation by pivoting away from a given strategy(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- This is demonstrated by the patchwork of initiatives that exists in LAUSD and other LA County districts; Funders and/or political leaders abandon projects to transform educational opportunity before they have been embedded long enough to create sustaining change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter/district divides are harmful to the educational environment and make systemic approaches to change difficult; LA is home to a host of both individual/independent and networked charter schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is a significant amount of publicly-visible conflict between groups with different views on the role of charter schools, such as the United Teachers of Los Angeles and the California Charter School Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Collaboration is difficult given the lack of trust between/among institutions and groups; Districts are frequently caught between opposing forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There remain among the teaching force deficit mindsets towards students of color, especially towards Black students and English Learners of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Schools vary in terms of their reflectiveness of local student populations, racially, linguistically, socioeconomically, and culturally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 2: Key Root Causes from Educational Stakeholders

#### Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools that are responsive and capable of meeting the unique needs of students and communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Autonomy to make decisions that respond to student need and aspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems/networks should have a vision for a successful school with a focus on how to develop vision-aligned learning environments; Conditions related to accountability, resources, and structures should work in support of this vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School transformation efforts should be based upon an understanding of students’ experiences, and led by community members and educators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 3: Key Solutions from Educational Stakeholders
In visiting the 16 school sites that had been recommended to me for valuing a learner-centric ethos, I found a series of commonalities among those sites that became useful in defining key challenges and opportunities associated with learner-centrism in LA. These sites were chosen based on recommendations by interviewees who had observed them to be positive places of learning that undertook a more student-centric approach to teaching and learning than their peer institutions in Los Angeles County. Before visiting each school, I researched its demographic and performance data to determine the populations served (based on race and class) and whether the schools had achieved notable results compared with peers. To the degree possible, I visited every school recommended to me regardless of its demographic or performance data. As the
data reflected in the quantitative analysis suggest, it was not the case that every school was “high-performing” based on traditional metrics. After conducting all of the site visits, I synthesized common challenges and potential opportunities that youth, teachers, and administrators discussed. I focused the synthesis on themes that pertain especially to instructional approaches given this project’s focus on learning (see Figure 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Challenges to Growing Successful Learner-Centered Schools in Los Angeles</th>
<th>Opportunities and Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Conventional patterns of teaching &amp; learning run contrary to the intuitions upholding learner-centrism; Conventional patterns are commonplace, and deeply embedded into the paradigms that most teachers bring with them into the profession</td>
<td>● Changes to teacher mindset and practice must result from teacher leadership; Structures at the school should enable and incubate teacher creativity and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Accountability measures and structures often stifle the sort of creativity needed to address unique students’ needs; Notably, the culture of test-prep produced by high-stakes testing requirements has inhibited educators from doing this</td>
<td>● Distributed leadership at the site level is vital to building the sort of trust and broad buy-in among all school stakeholders, including youth, parents, and educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Changes to teacher mindset and practice must result from teacher leadership; Structures at the school should enable and incubate teacher creativity and collaboration</td>
<td>● External resources can be helpful if those align to or supplement a vision created by site-based actors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Challenges and Opportunities from Site-Based Educators and Youth

**Data-gathering and analysis of quantitative indicators.**

Below, I have shown the inferential and descriptive analyses I conducted to get an initial sense of how the 16 schools that I studied (herein, “learner-centered schools”) stacked up against their peers in Los Angeles County. If I were to continue this research, I would undertake a more rigorous process for identifying schools that reflect the principles of learning environments central to our project. Namely, in future efforts, I
would seek to increase internal validity by decreasing the chances of bias and addressing issues of endogeneity. Even without having conducted a more rigorous process, though, I determined that it was important to get a preliminary look at how the schools I had visited compared with others based on metrics widely used in policy and practice.⁴

**Descriptive indicators.**

To begin building a sense of how the schools that I visited stack up against other high schools in Los Angeles County, I produced a mean comparison table that showed the differences in average academic achievement, graduation rate, and suspension rate between learner-centered schools and the rest of the county. These three variables are frequently brought up in discussions of educational equity given their presumed association with future opportunity (achievement, graduation) as well as fair treatment and inclusion (suspension). Determining the accuracy of those presumed associations is beyond the scope of this paper (though research and practice tells us there are strong relationships). It is sufficient that these data are highly influential over system-level accountability and decision-making in education across the state of California (California Department of Education, 2019).

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⁴ I would be remiss here not to iterate that the purpose of our project was grounded in a more expansive way of defining outcomes and educational experiences as described in previous sections. Also, we were aware of the controversy associated with educational measurement - namely, that the rise of metric-based accountability has been tied to vast gap closures by champions of data, while accountability has been accused of being antecedent to oppressive teaching tactics by critics of reform. These factors limited the amount of influence we would place on several of the measures described below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Average Academic Achievement - 2018 ELA CAASPP</th>
<th>Average Academic Achievement - 2018 Math CAASPP</th>
<th>Average Graduation Rate - 2018*</th>
<th>Average Suspension Rate - 2018 (% of total enrollment suspended)</th>
<th>Average Suspension Rate for Free/Reduced Lunch Students - 2018 (% of total enrollment of group suspended)</th>
<th>Average Suspension Rate for AfAm Students - 2018 (% of total enrollment for group suspended)</th>
<th>Average Suspension Rate for Latino Students - 2018 (% of total enrollment for group suspended)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learner-centered schools (n=16)</td>
<td>64.35</td>
<td>32.53</td>
<td>85.16</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Learner Centered schools (n=528)⁵</td>
<td>52.53</td>
<td>27.17</td>
<td>71.23</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52.91</td>
<td>27.34</td>
<td>71.61</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Mean Comparison Table

*Regression analysis.*

To conduct an inferential analysis, I began with 4 research questions based on the variables in the table above. Under each research question is the complete statistical test, consisting of a null hypothesis, test statistic, decision rule, and fitted model (if appropriate). When possible, I included control variables of broad interest to the field of educational measurement, both locally and nationally. However, the limitations of the data sources deterred me from using certain controls (notably, free/reduced price lunch status, in some cases).

⁵This total includes strictly high schools, K-12 schools, and others that offer a high school diploma. I chose to include only these schools in the analysis because the majority of schools visited were, in fact, high schools or K12 schools. I limited the analysis to these schools to reduce differences in comparison groups. Note the explanation in this section that discusses how I might structure future research to increase statistical validity.
1. What is the association between academic achievement (ELAACH, measured through California’s state exam, the CAASPP) and a school’s status as a learner-centered school (LRNCENTERED), holding constant free-reduced lunch status (FRL)?

- Our null hypothesis states that a school’s status as learner-centered does not predict academic achievement (ELA) in the population. \( H_0 : \beta_2 = 0 \)
- When holding constant free/reduced price lunch status, the association between learner-centered status and ELA achievement on the CAASPP is statistically significant, (\( t(2(369) = 2.29, \ p < .05 \)).
- In light of the test statistic and its corresponding p-value, we reject the null hypothesis that \( \beta_2 = 0 \). Learner-centered status predicts a school’s achievement scores on the ELA assessment. When holding free-reduced lunch constant, learner-centered schools are predicted to perform at a rate of 11.7 percentage points higher than non-learner centered schools.

\[ \text{ELAACH} = 75.97 - .32FRL + 11.7LRNCENTERED \]

2. What is the association between academic achievement (MATHACH) and a school’s status as a learner-centered school (LRNCENTERED), holding constant free-reduced lunch status (FRL)?

- Our null hypothesis states that a school’s status as learner-centered does not predict academic achievement (Math) in the population. \( H_0 : \beta_2 = 0 \)
- When holding constant free-reduced lunch status, the association between learner-centered status and math achievement on the CAASPP is not statistically significant (\( t(2(369) = 1.16, \ p > .05 \)).
In light of the test statistic and its corresponding p-value, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that $\beta_2 = 0$.

3. What is the association between graduation rate (GRADRATE) and a school’s status as a learner-centered school (LRNCENTERED), holding constant the size of the cohort of students (COHORT) and the number of students graduated (GRADNUM)?

- Our null hypothesis is that a school’s status as learner-centered does not predict graduation rate in the population. $H_0 : \beta_1 = 0$
- When holding constant cohort size and the number of students graduated, the association between learner-centered status and graduation rate is statistically significant (t(3(504) = 2.84, $p < .01$).
- In light of the test statistic and its corresponding p-value, we reject the null hypothesis that $\beta_1 = 0$. Learner-centered status predicts a school’s graduation rate. When holding constant the number of students in the cohort and the number graduating, learner-centered schools are predicted to achieve a graduation rate of 18.1 percentage points higher than non-learner centered schools.

$$GRADRATE = 61.82 - 18.1LRNCENTERED - .14COHORT + .21GRADNUM$$

4. What is the association between suspension rate and a school’s status as a learner-centered school? (And what is the association between suspension rate for
*low-income youth* and a school’s status as learner-centered, and for African-American and Latino\textsuperscript{6} students as well?)

- Our null hypothesis is that a school’s status as learner-centered does not predict suspension rate in the (1) school’s overall student body, (2) for low-income youth, for (3) African-American, or (4) for Latino youth.

1. The association between learner-centered status and suspension rate for all students is not statistically significant ($t(1(2197)) = -.88, p > .05$).

2. The association between learner-centered status and suspension rate for low-income students is not statistically significant ($t(1(2195)) = -.97, p > .05$).

3. The association between learner-centered status and suspension rate for African-American students is not statistically significant ($t(1(2163)) = -.89, p > .05$).

4. The association between learner-centered status and suspension rate for Latino students is not statistically significant ($t(1(2185)) = -.86, p > .05$).

**Discussion.**

The results shown here suggest that there may be associations between learner-centered school status and several outcomes of interest - namely, ELA achievement and graduation. However, these results should be best understood as preliminary. The methods used to construct the list of learner-centered schools (again, \textsuperscript{6} Low-income, African-American, and Latino students are groups that are of unique interest to educational equity advocates in LA County given the level of marginalization these students have experienced over time by public systems (education, juvenile justice, child welfare). These advocates have put a specific focus, based on their pursuit of educational justice, on developing schools that actively close suspension gaps. Therefore, I have chosen to conduct separate statistical tests for these groups.)
through recommendation) do not meet standards of rigor such that I would feel comfortable publishing the findings as conclusive with a sense of academic integrity. And further, there is likely to be endogeneity within the schools assessed given the presence of selection bias in schools that require separate entrance processes (i.e. charters, magnets, etc.).

However, it is still useful to know that there is promising evidence in our region that learner-centered schools could be well-suited to achieve important outcomes for youth. This evidence could spark additional research questions that could help illustrate causal mechanisms of success. If the schools of interest to us are in fact producing different experiences for students, what are the precise mechanisms that they use to do so? Test scores are imperfect proxies for learning, and relying upon them too heavily as an indicator of whether learner-centered schools are “working” would be short-sighted. The very nature of learner-centrism, as explained in earlier sections, pushes the sector to move past traditional measures that too deeply shape teaching and learning methodology around the principle of standardization. Also, it matters that this analysis only demonstrated evidence that one of the two academic achievement tests included - the ELA exam - may be associated with learner-centered methods. It is also, of course, notable that the three student groups involved in the suspension analysis - low-income, African-American, and Latino - seemed to have notably different outcomes in descriptive terms that were not different from the population based on the regression results. For all three groups, learner-centered schools had half the suspension rate than their counterparts, yet this difference did not demonstrate statistical significance.
Part 2: Message the Value of Learner-Centered Education

Convening.

The convenings on February 1st furnished us with an opportunity to make visible a set of initiatives from policy, advocacy, practice, and research that could further a learning agenda in LA County. We gave an exit survey to attendees and asked them to rank which of these initiatives were (according to them) viable and appropriate for our region. Our message to attendees was to see themselves in the initiatives for which they voted so that it became clear what we were proposing represented a compact between a variety of community stakeholders (as opposed to, say, a funder-led strategy). Figure 8 shows the breakdown of how our attendees voted.

![Figure 8: Whole Learner Initiatives, Vote Breakdown](image)

Of the survey respondents, 89% supported the initiative they discussed in table groups, and 100% of respondents supported at least 2 of the initiatives proposed.
Notably, leading up to the event, we’d already found that we could move further faster by engaging attendees with pre-determined pathways forward. While designing ideas anew had occurred to us as one way of advancing an agenda, starting with something to react to seemed a better choice given our experience with the challenge of coalescing strangers around common ideas. This finding came out of conversations with potential partners who expressed interest in collaboration because what we’d proposed was concrete. These commitments were born out of conversations during one-to-ones focused on existing ideas or that generated new ones. For instance, a research partner expressed interest in producing case studies about LA learner-centered schools, a large foundation partner proposed a pooled fund to support learner-centered initiatives in LA County, and the local Chamber of Commerce offered to collaborate on district/charter compact work.

Figure 9: Event Attendance Breakdown

Setting direction.
Attracting and organizing a diverse group of stakeholders meant appealing to the interests of leading practitioners, policymakers, researchers, advocates, and funders of consequence in the region. Figure 9 signals significant representation from each of the core groups from each lever of systemic change (policy, practice, advocacy, and research). We hosted around 105 attendees at the event (this, in spite of the fact that we limited registrations to 100). Every attendee that completed a survey (about 35, due to late-day attrition) indicated an interest in staying engaged in any future efforts to transform learning (the topic of the event).

One of our sub-goals for the event was to engage and invest potential funding partners in the prospect of a pooled fund that would be directed by CCF and intended to support whole learner initiatives in LA County. Seven foundations attended a funder breakfast to discuss the prospect of this pooled fund. Most of the funders expressed excitement towards this initiative. One of the tasks for the months following the event was to determine which funders are interested in a coordinated funding strategy, such as a pooled fund, and to what end and with what resources would that strategy be executed.

A final group of interest was internal stakeholders. Two executive team members from CCF attended the event, including our Chief Operating Officer and a Vice President of program. We received positive feedback from both leaders during and after the event. Our COO, in particular, mentioned how helpful the event was in illustrating potential synergies between work streams that are currently disconnected within our foundation. Should this body of work come to support CCF’s pursuit of strategic coherence, it is very likely it will receive sustaining support from CCF’s leadership.
Analysis: Explaining the Basis of Project Results

To date, the project described here has encountered a combination of challenges and successes that are attributable to my strengths and growth edges as a leader, as well as other factors related to my organizational and regional context. With that in mind, this section explains why the project has achieved its results, both promising and discouraging, with consideration to both my efforts and the conditions in which the work was set. I use the Kotter and Ganz frameworks mentioned earlier to organize this analysis. The section is arranged to address each component of these frameworks in turn.

*Establish a sense of urgency by Diagnosing and Highlighting Problems That Resonate With Local Leaders and Communities in Los Angeles*

In building a sense of urgency for the project - or, perhaps more appropriately framed, generating a consensus around its purpose and importance - we sought to build relationship with and craft a message compelling to leaders and community members whose collaboration would become key. Early indications suggest that the marketing pieces we created conveyed these messages effectively. We observed multiple social media postings that cited our event’s deliverables and echoed messages about learner-centered education, equity, and the immediate stakes for 21st Century learners in Los Angeles. In follow-up conversations, we found that attendees had begun to see the immediacy behind transforming learning environments given the gap between the current state of learning and the emerging skill demands of modern industry. We were able to establish a sense of urgency because we had come to understand a wide range of perspectives during interviews and sector landscaping. The messages synthesized and
communicated through the whitepaper, video, individual correspondence, and the event were informed by a multitude of opinions of grasstosps and grassroots actors. The whitepaper and video were, in particular, concise, message-aligned, and appealed to multiple sensibilities and interests. This was due largely to our awareness that we would need to appeal to a broad array of actors while honing in on messages to a few key stakeholder groups. Though those actors’ perspectives were diffuse, the majority shared a sensibility that transforming learning should be, fundamentally, about place. This observation led us to prioritize lifting up local voices and exemplar schools so that the work would be validated by local stakeholders.

Since the event, we heard from leaders inside and outside of our organization that the video was uniquely impressive, and created a sense of vision clarity and evoked an energy that will be necessary to sustain interest. A follow-up conversation with a major foundation partner summarized much of the positive feedback we heard:

The event was really cool – it was cool to see how you framed the whole child work in the context of your community’s interest and the core things that community leaders were already wrestling with … I was also really impressed with the amount of student voice that was in the room. As funders, you can become convinced by your own bullshit, but it didn’t feel that way. It was authentic in a way that really represented your community.

As a result of conversations such as these, we feel our success in messaging main points can be attributed largely to our efforts to listen to voices most core to the shifts we were proposing, a persistent commitment to gaining a variety of perspectives, and tactful use
of media to contextualize the science of learning in the great work already happening in LA schools.

There were challenges to creating a sense of purpose and clarity for this work as well, most of which point back to my personal growth edges. One of those edges relates to managing large amounts of information and translating it into usable knowledge. Over the course of my first 6 months at CCF, I accrued an immense amount of interview, school visit, and school performance data. While I spent a significant amount of time to make sense of it, the task of processing that volume of information throughout residency was at times overwhelming. My response was to conduct a faster, less thorough analysis than I would have liked. We have heard that the diagnoses and insights we generated resonate with key groups, but we have not succeeded in communicating the nuances and specifics that define the contours of learner-centered education. The danger moving forward, based on what we have learned, is that supportive stakeholders will interpret our work to be what they prefer it to be. This could have been alleviated on some levels by a deeper dive into the data and (relatedly) a messaging campaign that more finely defines the territory of the types of learning environments we want to scale. In reflecting on why the events unfolded in this way, I realized that I prioritized progress over process. I focused on the pieces of my project that were most intuitive and straightforward. As was reminded to me during this project, it is not straightforward to read, interpret, synthesize, and communicate complicated qualitative information like what I have gathered throughout my time becoming familiar with the LA education scene.
It is also the case that there are certain leaders and communities not well represented in my interview and school visit lists. Namely, local teachers’ unions are sparsely present in the interview data - just one labor representative was interviewed - and nor did I visit many of LA’s comprehensive high schools, which serve a large percentage of public school youth here. Both unions and large public high schools are essential to the fabric of education in LA. Labor groups are some of the most powerful entities in the Los Angeles social landscape, and though the number of local small schools has increased, a large percentage of young people attend comprehensive high schools. In spite of this, the voices of both were under-represented in the data, and this limited how inclusive our analysis and associated messages were. Diversity of voice matters, based on both principle and pragmatism, and excluding groups from our analysis meant opening the door to skepticism and critique.

There are a few reasons why, in retrospect, I neglected to include unions and large comprehensive high schools. The largest local union, the United Teachers of Los Angeles, was in the midst of a protracted negotiation with Los Angeles Unified officials regarding a new teacher’s contract. I assessed that the urgency of that negotiation was far greater than the project we were leading, which was only just emerging and would not become consequential for some time. Therefore, I did not attempt to re-engage labor leaders and have since reflected that a truer effort to do so was called for, especially given CCF’s identity as an activist foundation. With regard to big comprehensive high schools, I assumed they were unlikely to be centers of learner-centered innovations given what I
already believe about big comprehensive high schools - that they are, frequently, symbols of historical inertia and incredibly difficult to reform.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the project deliverables described above - the whitepaper and video - were made possible by financial resources from CCF and guidance from my manager. Both pieces required the services of vendors to assist in the production. I probably would not have produced these pieces without his prompting because I did not think about what was made possible by the resources at my disposal. If I hadn’t produced these pieces our efforts would have been seriously lacking in substance - people would not have been clear on our vision, and would have not given what our aims as much credence and credibility.

**Create a guiding coalition of grasstops and grassroots actors who can inform the trajectory of the project and wield the power necessary to gain traction**

The project advisory group represented grassroots and grasstops leaders, provided useful feedback both in one-to-one settings, and remained relatively engaged throughout the build-up to the event (which was, in a sense, a culminating benchmark for the advisory). This group’s buy-in came largely because of existing positive relationships with CCF, aspirations to build a relationship with CCF (or other funders), and/or a genuine interest in the content of the project. Because I valued their perspectives, I sought feedback and thought partnership regularly from members of the advisory throughout the project. I also knew that more engagement meant more buy-in, a needed component for a collective body of work.
The advisory was not, however, a unified body. The group was and remains a collection of individuals intrigued with and (to varying degrees) supportive of the learning agenda we’re beginning to develop. This will have implications for the project moving forward, as at this moment we have many dozens of individual leaders from the event aware and interested in our work, but no owners of the work moving forward (other than CCF). There are several explanations for this. First, I did not rely upon the advisory as a group in an ongoing way - feedback and thought partnership was provided mostly through one-to-one connections. This is because after our first group meeting (which took place in October), I assumed the challenge of turning the group into a true “coalition”, or even a community, was too difficult given the differences in opinion. The advisory includes a set of diverse personal backgrounds, labor and charter leaders, community advocates and researchers, a district-oriented funder and a charter-oriented funder. I felt it would be easier to seek feedback and input through one-to-one correspondence and small group feedback sessions composed of like minds. I probably missed out on opportunities for the sort of disagreement that leads to the right sort of thinking for a project meant to unite different corners of the sector. I avoided the task of community-building because I would have had to manage through conflict, which is intimidating, especially given the high status of the advisors compared with myself and my relative inexperience (I was the youngest of the group, well under the mean age and experience level, and new to LA). In reflecting on this experience, I can see that I had more options at my disposal than I realized at the time. For instance, I could have asked my manager to co-lead the group conversations moving forward. I could have asked one
or several of the members with whom I’d created a sense of trust to take on parts of group facilitation. I could have, more simply, asked them for counsel. But instead, I acted as if I were the only one capable of leading the group. This could be related to an over-inflated sense of ego; it could also be related to a sense that this was my strategic project, and that the expectation was for me to lead it in all regards. Probably, the explanation is a combination of both.

To note, the part of my theory of change based on the premise for this sub-section - that a guiding coalition is needed - did not play out the way I projected. In spite of what is shared just above, the advisory was still incredibly useful. A sense of trust and coherence within the group was not an essential ingredient for the individuals to play an important role in advising the project. Individuals’ feedback was vital; I owe much of the success of the project to insights from advisors, who also played an important role in the funder’s meeting prior to the main event on February 1st. However, as suggested, the advisory could’ve been more useful if there would have been more social capital and trust built between the members, which would have meant there would now be, as my work with the project concludes, a clear structure and sense of ownership for the work moving forward.

**Develop a vision and strategy that brings together a statement of the problem, values, and potential solutions**

The event provided an opportunity to share a vision and strategy for the project’s execution. Components to this vision and strategy include (1) A framework for whole learner education, (2) An illustration of the relationship between policy, advocacy,
research, and practice as levers for change, (3) and a problem, context, solution analysis. These pieces embodied most of the content (learner-centrism), the components of change (policy, practice, advocacy, funding, and research), and provided a sense of local relevance and narrative (the strategic triangle). We designed this vision to provide the right amount of strategic clarity at the right level for where the project currently stood. We knew we would need these pieces to convey, at a high level, the value of a more learner-centered Los Angeles. We hoped our presentation of the vision would serve to satisfy the needs for clarity and inspiration for the various stakeholders who would need to join in support.

An oversight is shown by the fact that we had neglected to include a more thorough discussion of the role that innovation, equity, and community played collectively into a case for change. This was caused by a combination of both what I will call content overload and (once again) my personal struggle to bring together many bodies of information into a cohesive vision. In reflecting on our efforts, even the title of our event hints that, perhaps, we were attempting to cram too much into a vision that was still emergent. “Transform Learning LA: Bridging Community, Learning Science, and Equitable Design” is an ambitious title. While I still resonate with each of the pieces, I am now more clear on how difficult it is to bring together multiple, distinctive concepts, messages, and research bases into one. An aspirational notion of change is needed, but it occurred to me that outlining every component of the vision would have been exhausting for attendees at a single event. Certainly, there were elements of equity, innovation, community, design, etc., but building understanding of any one of these as a distinct idea
could comprise a body of work unto itself (and, of course, there are many organizations whose only goal is wrapped up with just one of these). I gear towards intellection, significance, and achievement. It seems likely that the event’s vision - with its title as an appropriate symbol - is a reflection of that.

**Communicate the Change to Potential Allies - and Gain Their Support**

Communicating the change to potential allies meant facilitating a convening with a clear and compelling case for change. The event on February 1st was well-attended by individuals and organizations that have the ability to shift policy and practice in LA education. This is due to both CCF’s reputation as being an important player in educational change, our identity as a funder, and the appeal of the event’s content. I valued marketing early (we began advertising in October), clarity of message (we spent an excessive amount of time designing content and goals), and regular cultivation (we kept attendees updated on the evolving plans for the event). Every one of the attendees that completed the survey expressed an interest in staying engaged in the work that could emerge from the event. We were pleased by these outcomes.

The event itself covered a lot of ground by including the voices of stakeholders who matter most and who are influential in the ecosystem, and who would be likely to galvanize the group. This was strategic - we knew our bases to be (a) advocates, because they drive sustained efforts for policy change, (b) site-based educators and those who coach/manage sites, because they are the ones facilitating learning, (c) policy/political allies who will create the conditions alongside the advocates, and (d) researchers with aligned values and vision for the future of public education. We carefully chose who
would be featured as speakers and panelists, knowing that each constituency would be compelled by those with whom they could identify and those with sympathetic values. Also of importance is the event’s legacy. A kickoff such as what we facilitated on February 1st can have long-standing effects on how it is viewed. That ours was understood to be inclusive and collective, substantive and action-oriented will (we hope) mean that future actions coming out of the body of work will be associated with those values as well.

By the end of the event, however, it remained unclear what collaboration with stakeholders could look like. This is due to the fact that we focused mainly on a high-level theory of action, which centered on messaging and broad investment, and delayed a focus on the “how” of arranging this work. To some degree this is understandable because as a funder we hesitate to outline a plan with precision, especially prior to seeing whether a given proposed reform is popular with our community. Still, it is possible that we de-prioritized imagining the “how” of our project too much. In thinking once again about Barnes and Burton’s article on the role of philanthropy, we could have engaged our advocate partners who are supportive of a learning agenda on the front end to design more specific community-centric next steps that attendees at the event could have considered during the action-planning section.

The emphasis on high-level vision and less on practical next steps is due to a few things. As an intuitor I’m more geared towards vision than I am tactics. In this case that meant stressing the “why” and “what” (via the whitepaper and video) and gaining investment via a successful event. I was less concerned with the “how.” I resisted when
pushed to get more clear on the theory of change earlier in the project. Now, as residency concludes, questions remain about what the project’s actionable implications will be. There will be negative implications if we are not able to steer the project in a more concrete direction in the coming months. One debrief conversation with an attendee who leads a national advocacy organization centered on communities of color (she is also a board member of the California Department of Education, but was attending primarily as a member of her organization) was telling in this regard.

The attendee related a troubling conversation between she and one of our panelists, the founder and co-administrator of a featured learner-centered school. The panelist, who introduced herself as a former television producer with no formal education training, described her school as an educational “experiment” gone right. She reported gladly that they did not use textbooks, and that more schools should be open to “experimentation.” The attendee, a Latina, found this troubling given that the panelist was white, and she was describing a school serving mostly youth of color. “Whose kids are being experimented on?” the attendee rightly demanded. She heard the panelist present her school, in effect, as led by inexperienced people who are not reflective of LA communities and who are untethered to educational standards and best practice, and who therefore put students’ educational fates at great risk in the name of “innovation.”

All of these interpretations were understandable based on the context. What we had failed to communicate during the event was that the panelist co-founded the school with a veteran educator, a Latina with personal roots in Los Angeles and over two decades of teaching and administrative experience in LA public schools. The school’s
faculty is remarkably experienced and well-trained (many are award-winning educators, professionals, and performers; several have written dissertations in STEM and the humanities at leading universities). Instructional design is informed by cutting edge research from cognitive science, psychology, and human development. And the school’s academic results for low-income youth of color are amongst the highest in Los Angeles County (though gaps remain). None of these traits necessarily address the concerns that the attendee felt while speaking with the panelist. These facts do, however, provide essential information that members of the constituency we hope to persuade deserve to know. However, this information was not on display at the event.

This conversation and others like it signal that we have not yet shown the intersection of social justice (which compel advocates) and the future of learning (signaled through learner-centrism, deeper learning, and a sharply different vision for student success) with full clarity. Speaking with advocates during and after the event, it became clear that “closing the achievement gap” as measured through college access results and increasing test scores for marginalized groups remains a top concern. In truth, the idea that a more progressive and equitable education will address these gaps is at this moment as theoretical as it is grounded in empirical research. As discussed in the research section above, we have reason to believe that a paradigm shift towards learner-centrism will have a host of positive effects, especially for youth who have been most marginalized by an industrial model (and in LA these are, once again, Black and Latino youth). However, these effects are frequently difficult-to-describe and quantify compared to standardized achievement scores. This speaks to Ganz’ point about a visible
injustice - an “actionable grievance.” Those who act based on a sense of justice and injustice need to see how access to something or treatment of a group signals a lack of fairness. We will need to work harder to signal how access to holistic education of the type we are advocating for is an issue of educational justice. This theory rests on a combination of core values, notions of the purpose of education, hard-to-measure outcomes like civic responsibility and agency, and beliefs that reflect some logical leaps between the tenants of the science and the likely outcomes for young people. I will expand upon this point and its implications for self, site, and sector in the next section.

**Implications for Self**

My efforts at the California Community Foundation made clear several growth edges that I should prioritize as I continue to develop as a leader for social change. In *What Makes a Leader: Why Emotional Intelligence Matters*, Daniel Goleman argues that self-awareness and self-management are fundamental to effective leadership. Both surfaced as areas of growth for me during residency. The following passage discusses how these areas showed up and illustrates the insights that can inform approaches in the future.

In reflecting on the sections above, I found that I consistently emphasized *outcome* at the risk of compromising a thorough *process*. In truth, I have observed this tendency in prior roles as well. Goleman (2014) suggests that my experiences in those roles should have led to a consequential realization about self and leadership: “Leaders are constantly required to make judgment calls that require a candid assessment of capabilities” (p. 6). I was given significant autonomy over how to structure my time and
the trajectory of the project, meaning that my judgment would be tested at each stage.

Being aware that I am prone to emphasize products over process would have led to the
candid self-assessment to which Goleman refers, and below I will explain how this could
have benefited the project’s results.

I decided what the content and major phases of the strategic project would consist
of in the early months of residency. I then set to work producing deliverables and
working to achieve outcomes that aligned to the project’s vision. At key points, I faced
intellectual challenges to our core assumptions in defense of a renewed movement for
Dewey-style progressive education (though we opted for today’s verbage,
“learner-centered education” and “whole learner”). For instance, I spoke with several
quantitative researchers who were troubled by the prospect of a pivot away from what
they perceived to be the great accomplishments of the No Child Left Behind era - namely,
using school and district accountability, standardized exam scores, teacher evaluation,
and uniform curricula and learning standards to guide policy change. Further, I was
aware that there remained many from the civil rights community whose primary goal for
schools is closing the “academic achievement gap” and increasing access to college
readiness coursework. While I hold similar values to the activists and advocates, I was
(and am) convinced that doubling down to address disparities in standardized test scores,
resources, graduation rates, and college access requirements alone are not going to
deliver the field to educational justice.

Rather than spend time making our vision commensurate with points raised by the
critics, I focused on making progress on deliverables, planning the event, and conducting
school visits. I put “process” - in this case, the process of using dissonance as a prompt for sound analysis, of taking time to make the right decisions and formulate the right vision - on the shelf in favor of “outcome,” which meant producing outputs and plans to show progress. This limited my ability to address skepticism and made our case for learner-centered education weaker. If I had thought more carefully about this earlier on, I would have conveyed the value of learner-centered education in a way that could have more proactively addressed concerns by those whose support is essential. Minimally, I would have been more able to acknowledge and contextualize tensions within the broader challenges that face every attempt to transform American public education. For instance, learner-centrism is (as explained) supported by a combination of values, theory, and science. It is not a panacea for the many challenges that confront our system, but there is good reason to believe that putting learners at the center holds great promise for vulnerable youth. Further, to claim that any other teaching and learning approach - a more conventional, direct-instruction style of education, for instance - is more appropriate is to also stand upon a mix of values, theory, and science. There is, in 2019, a trove of failed attempts to scale high-quality, traditionally-structured schools. The “right” way to have school in America is (rightly) contested. My point here is that the path to realizing educational excellence and equity for all is neither evident nor linear. Any claim otherwise is fraught given the endemic insufficiencies reflected by our nation’s educational performance. Acknowledging these tensions as part of our core messages could have gone a long way towards responding to criticism, but I did not pause to do so. As mentioned in the analysis section, the opportunity to invest skeptics is by no means
closed, but the next phase of the project must focus on building a more inclusive vision that appeals more directly to the sentiments (concerns and points of resonance) of key constituents.

Another lesson for self relates to managing conflict in diverse spaces. Goleman (2004) writes that “comfort with ambiguity and change” is key for leaders to be adaptable in uncertain spaces, and that “displays of negative emotion,” such as fear, can stifle progress (p. 7). That I avoided re-convening the advisory because of conflict avoidance, uncertainty about how to manage the group, and a sense that I wouldn’t be able to lead through disagreement, is relevant. It is likely that I will participate in, if not lead, groups with a diversity of opinion and background through future professional roles. In fact, part of my personal theory of change for improving American society hinges upon social integration of historically segregated groups. It is useful knowledge for me that when faced with a chance to facilitate dialogue and decision-making amongst a diverse group, I showed avoidance. As described in earlier sections, the implication is that now, there isn’t the sort of social capital among the advisory that would enable it to carry the work forward. In reflecting on why avoidance took place as it did, I think the primary barrier was a sense of doubt that I was capable of facilitating productive dialogue through controversy and disagreement. Future advisory conversations were likely to raise all sorts of issues that I, frankly, have not worked out answers to. Of course, the role of a facilitator is not to have the answers, but still, I struggled to reconcile the self-doubt with the prospect of building trust through conflict with the advisory.
I made a related observation about my over-reliance on self during the event-planning process. A central goal for the event was to create a sense of mutual buy-in among attendees that reflected our motivation for the changes we sought. Goleman (2004) writes that “[leaders who motivate], when publicly visible, [are] excellent collaborators; their passion for the work spreads to others” (p. 10). One of the ways to have created that sort of shared motivation would have been to spread the work of planning, organizing, and executing the work out over an array of other leaders. Make no mistake that a large community of people came together to make the event happen. All told, over 30 individuals played roles as speakers, facilitators, moderators, panelists, and support staff during the event - nearly one-third of total attendees. However, I made the majority of decisions about content, logistics, and marketing with just one other collaborator - my manager. Multiple advisors gave feedback, yes, but decision-making was still concentrated with the two of us. This seems now like a missed opportunity to have included more people in a scope of work that will need to, especially now, expand far past CCF’s purview. I maintained control over the event’s planning because, admittedly, I had a vision that I wanted to see through. Secondly, it seemed more secure to manage the event centrally given the high stakes nature of the convening. This resulted in a leadership structure that was based primarily on myself and my own decision-making. What could have been a distributed balance of power that became a foundation for future collaboration turned, instead, into a loose connection of stakeholders. This is an important implication as I look down the road to managing other bodies of work, initiatives, and teams. If shared ownership is key, then I will need to
distribute responsibility through spreading motivation, as Goleman wrote, far more than I
did during this project.

It occurred to me at several times during this project that a series of technical
areas of growth were holding me back, too. One of those areas pertains to managing and
processing lots of information. Translating the information gained during one-to-one
interviews and school visits into useful knowledge was the greatest technical challenge
that I faced in residency. Because I am drawn to tasks that are straightforward and
interesting, and parsing through this data was rarely both, I found myself de-prioritizing
the qualitative coding process in favor of other work tasks (of which, there were usually
plenty). The implication of this, as suggested in sections above, could be that there
remain more enriching insights that could deepen the analysis and/or proposed actions
that underpin CCF’s learning agenda. However, I see the tremendous value in measured
processes for turning information into insights. I am convinced after reflecting on this
year that the barrier lives with the habits I have for processing information and producing
concise bits of knowledge.

The final implication relates to what I have learned working alongside EdLD
alumnus, Dr. John Garcia. John is skilled at messaging complicated information
concisely. This became apparent to me when, especially during the first few months of
residency, I found myself struggling to briefly but meaningfully describe the purpose and
content of our project. Doing so, as I was reminded in observing John’s ability to clearly
and briefly articulate our aims (to great effect), is essential. In navigating the local
ecosystem of organizational politics, in which leaders have autonomy over how and with
whom they engage, much depends upon an individual’s ability to take in new information and synthesize it into clear and compelling points. Because the project was ever-evolving, I was constantly taking in new information - from stakeholders, from research, from practitioners - about learner-centered education. Adapting the key messages about what the project is and why it is important by taking in this information was, therefore, essential. But I struggled throughout, primarily due to the difficulty of rapid synthesis and communication of information, and this can limit my ability to draw in new supporters. Moving forward, it will be key to continue to practice synthesizing effectively and messaging concisely.

Implications for Site

My time as a resident at the California Community Foundation has provided me the opportunity to build relationship with a vast array of people of consequence in Los Angeles, introduced me to the power of the philanthropic sector, and provided supervision from a set of experienced, well-connected leaders in the region. I am grateful for the chance to have spent my residency here. As I conclude my experience as a resident, I hope to leave behind a series of recommendations that can be of practical use as the foundation continues its work to expand opportunity for LA’s most vulnerable youth through measures focused on systemic reform. This section describes those recommendations in detail by presenting a challenge that I have observed during my time here followed by a potential solution emanating from what I have learned about the Los Angeles community and through prior experience.

Implication 1: Create an Advisory Board for CCF’s Education Team
As a community foundation, CCF aspires to support change based on the will and voice of the community. This explains the foundation’s deep and historical relationships with some of Los Angeles’ most influential advocacy institutions. Moreover, it is the goal of the foundation to advance the aims set by activists through grantmaking to them directly and through supporting aligned efforts in practice and research. It is challenging, however, to create a unified set of strategies for community-level change when different institutions and actors - all of whom represent relevant constituencies within the region - express different analyses of social inequality and posit separate solutions. Competing interests, a web of complicated organizational relationships, and a diffuse distribution of local power makes it difficult for a single entity like CCF to organize for change inclusively and meaningfully. This is likely the case for all of the foundation’s giving areas, but I observed it acutely while developing this body of work with the education team.

Therefore, I propose that CCF establish a permanent board of advisors made up of key stakeholders in the Los Angeles education ecosystem who reflect the core values and constituencies of greatest importance to the foundation. This board should include a combination of practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and community advocates capable of equipping the education team with views of the state of education in LA County. The board, in addition to providing visibility into these views, would participate in agenda-setting activities that result in designs for the foundation’s future investments, convenings/collaborations, and other activities. Members could be relied upon as thought partners, supportive critics, and collaborators based on the needs at a given time.
The value of a representative group such as this could be immense. I predict that there are efficiencies gained by gathering a representative body that are impossible to achieve by deducing individual perspectives over time. The expertise and positional authority of the board would instantly give it a sense of consequence, and a diverse composition would ensure that a range of voices are contributing. To be sure, such a body should not replace engagement directly with larger gatherings of, say, parents and youth, teachers and administrators, and others who will offer the most grounded (and, often, honest) feedback when speaking to power. But a board like the one proposed here would significantly deepen the education team’s ability to stay grounded in community perspectives and leadership.

**Implication 2: Adopt a Foundation-wide Systemic Change Framework**

Defining the what and how of systemic change in a place as complicated and vast as Los Angeles County is difficult. CCF is, fortunately, home to some of the region’s most noted changemakers. Individuals on the executive team have supported or led many important political and social transformation efforts over the past several decades. The CEO herself, Antonia Hernandez, co-founded multiple community-based institutions held to be central drivers of change. Relatedly, CCF has a powerful reputation among grassroots and grasstops leaders, maintains relationships with consequential people and institutions in LA, and deftly understands LA institutional history and politics. However, there is not a centrally agreed upon process or framework for how to facilitate change. When designing the body of work shared above, the great majority of guidance for how to conduct an analysis and case for change came from my manager, whose knowledge
was derived mostly outside of CCF. Yet the foundation is charged with being a local leader in coming up with new ideas or strengthening existing ones to transform opportunity.

This in mind, I would encourage the foundation to codify how it leverages its resources and relationships to produce transformative changes for communities. This could be achieved through the production of an organizational social change framework or amending one to better meet the foundation’s needs. There are, of course, no shortage of such frameworks in existence. Adopting and adapting one would give the foundation an agreed-upon starting place for designing their priorities in a way that gives coherence both to individual initiatives and the foundation as a whole. Such a framework would also give needed structure to existing processes and structures, such as grantmakers meetings and our communications to donors about our work and impact.

To go with this framework, I would also recommend producing an organizational theory of change. Such a statement of strategy and intent would supplement the clarity produced by a change framework.

Implication 3: Revisit the Structures for Organizational Partnership and Sharing Information

CCF has an array of relationships across the Los Angeles political, social, and business landscape. These relationships are key to the foundation’s ability to move agendas forward. As a new staff member, I was excited to connect with fellow staff members to secure introductions to those in the community from whom I could learn and with whom I could collaborate in support of the emerging strategic project. However, I
soon found the system for managing and sharing information about these relationships to be difficult to navigate. It was the case that on several occasions I sought information in our digital system about a “new” potential contact and, in not finding it, I reached out to a new organization to make a connection. I often learned that the “new” contact on the other side had worked with multiple CCF staff members over the years (some had even once been CCF grantees). Now, having spent the better part of a year at CCF, I have become convinced that the digital system for maintaining constituent relationships deters the exchange of information and the discovery of synergies across work streams at the foundation. The current systems responsible for maintaining this information makes the information held therein difficult to access, even opaque. I know this is not the aim of the foundation - on the contrary, I have come to learn that building internal and external social capital is an important element of our organizational model.

With this in mind, I recommend adopting a new system for digitally recording and sharing information about organizational relationships. This system should be matched with internal processes that make information about relationships easy to learn more about through staff-to-staff connections. I will speak more to this point in the next implication, which builds off of this.

**Implication 4: Catalyzing Internal Collaboration**

As I mentioned in the analysis section, most of my thought partners for the project were external to the foundation (with the notable exception of John, my manager at CCF). Though only a small percentage of my coworkers were focused on education, I learned quickly that the staff body was very accomplished, experienced, and
well-connected in ways that could enable the education team to help one another to learn about new opportunities, understand challenges in the LA context, and make strategic decisions. However there were few opportunities to share with others internally about my work - the expectation, as I heard from colleagues, was that ideas should be well-developed before shared with the team.

I recommend that CCF institute processes for staff members to support one another’s thinking through more structured feedback and collaboration opportunities. The biweekly grantmakers meeting is an existing space that could embrace the change. The meetings tend to focus on discussing updates from executive team members and the leads from program areas teams. While there is value in this sort of sharing, I rarely find that staff members depart with insights or feedback about their work that would be of greatest use. However, as suggested above, with a more intentional agenda and protocols for preparation and sharing, the space could help staff members think through challenges that they face in their work. One protocol could involve, for instance, a member of the program team sharing context and a pressing question surrounding their work. Others in the group could ask clarifying questions and then help the presenter to understand the issue from different angles - various ways of seeing the challenges, opportunities, and pathways forward.

Such a protocol would be reflective of the sort of collaborative culture that I know the foundation seeks to continue to develop. This culture would benefit greatly from a more transparent method for sharing the foundation’s history of grantmaking and
relationships (as described above), because open information illuminates potential synergies to staff.

**Implications for Sector**

The strategic project described above reflects several of the big ideas that are prominent in American public education in 2019. Issues related to educational equity, innovation, the role of philanthropy in social change, and the future of learning were embedded into the purposes and strategies of the body of work that defined my residency at CCF. This section will detail the lessons that I learned about these issues as I sought to build energy for a movement on learner-centered education in Los Angeles.

**Implication 1: Bridging Educational Equity and Innovations in Learning**

Educational equity, educational justice, and/or another version of the term remains one of the primary motivators for many across the landscape of American education. This much has been clear to me since I began teaching as a Teach For America corps members in 2007. The social analyses used by equity advocates vary, but generally center on an understanding of inequality of opportunity that has resulted from unfair social arrangements made possible by the powerful and the privileged over time. Because this view usually focuses on measurable disparities, the solutions tend to be targeted towards addressing quantifiable gaps. To some degree, I agree with this analysis and find it now, as I did when I began teaching over a decade ago, a primary motivator.

However, as I have advanced in my career as an educator, I observed the impact of reforms that were concentrated on closing “achievement gaps” and began to conclude that there were important educational experiences and outcomes that were becoming
depriortitized. Young Black and Latino students in “no excuses”, white-led school settings were being subjected to a style of education that, seen completely, was culturally demeaning. Frequently, staff at such schools sent messages to young people of color that their education should enable them to “escape” their communities and transcend their circumstances by seeking a better life elsewhere. These messages are based upon implicit negative assumptions about communities of color and their potential for uplift. Numerous researchers and practitioners, including those cited earlier in this paper, have illustrated the need for students to experience culturally affirming learning environments that reverse stereotypes about the marginalized. Just as no excuses schools began to proliferate, teachers who were drawn to the profession to grow well-rounded young adults became disillusioned with test-centrism and have left the classroom in droves. Moreover, research began to surface that suggests getting kids to excel on standardized tests did not guarantee the positive life outcomes that advocates of those reforms proposed. Still, many activists and advocates for educational justice find the achievement gap narrative to be their primary meaning-making frame for educational disparity. This is true for most of the community activists that I worked with in Los Angeles during this project.

Most educational innovators - those introduced in the review of research focused on deeper learning, socioemotional learning, and other forms of education that, broadly speaking, harken to progressive ideals - are not motivated by the same aims of the activists described above. I have found that they work off of a relatively color-blind and meritocratic set of assumptions. These assumptions are not good for youth of color.
What could be of use to youth of color and their communities, however, is a more socially conscious innovation agenda that gears systems towards the range of needs, assets, and aspirations that young people bring with them as they design for learning. A few innovators are, in a sense, already onto this, and their movement is gaining steam.

However, the broad disunity between educational equity activists and the innovators puts young people, especially our most vulnerable, at tremendous risk. We learned through this project that there are opportunities to address this disunity by making more apparent the relationship between the future of learning (and its association with the future of American society) and equitable opportunity in schools. Though not every local activist has become drawn to the cause, we have seen evidence that there are several who are. In speaking with them as of the writing of this capstone, they have found the narrative attractive because they have developed a different analysis and understanding of what is at stake for young people of color with regard to their education. The rhetoric used to justify the shift, I have learned, needs to hinge upon several core premises. The first premise states that public schools serving low-income and youth of color will not be able to provide inspiring, empowering experiences in their current form. The second premise drills deeper into the first to illustrate a series of essential conclusions that define root cause. I have inserted a rating with regard to the ease/difficulty of compelling advocates whose values center on a vision for social justice after each conclusion. The first states that part of the root cause of educational inequity has to do with structural issues related to resources and funding (easy), another that deficit mindsets about Black and Latino youth result in lowered expectations and marginalizing treatment (also easy),
and the third that the nature of industrial-model teaching and learning will never produce truly uplifting opportunities for large groups of youth of color (much, much more difficult). In short, advocates for transforming learning must acknowledge the crucial role that structural change within educational systems while at the same time centering the role of teaching and learning.

Those in the sector who seek to transform learning environments to become more learner-centered, to embrace the whole child, and/or to reinvigorate progressive values in the classroom should understand the role that historical racism has played in your schools - much more than they currently do. Only then will they be equipped to advocate for paradigm shifts within the sector that will be sincerely beneficial for youth of color. If they do not, they are likely to replicate the same disparities that we have observed throughout much of the history of American education.

**Implication 2: The Role of Educational Philanthropy**

Educational philanthropy should operate through local distribution partners who are themselves deeply reflective of (and allied with) the communities who are to become the beneficiaries of educational change. This has become clear to me as I have studied the history of educational philanthropy and observed how important context, relationships, and iteration is within local environments. Broad, national agendas for change posited by well-endowed philanthropic organizations are more likely to be useful if they are guided by the perspectives of region-based foundation partners. CCF has sought recently to play this role; this project signals a major effort that is aligned to this thinking. We are well-positioned to manage and distribute resources in LA given our
ability to coordinate with local government, our institutional knowledge, and political
trust. Based on what I have observed in reviewing the literature on philanthropy and
throughout this project, it is difficult for national organizations to do this well.

Presently, it is unclear whether philanthropists across the sector are in agreement.
They should be. Local foundations who are interested in educational change, such as
those associated specifically with public or civic institutions, and of course community
foundations, should structure themselves in a way to manage non-local investments. In
all cases, this should take place in alignment with the priorities of local government,
which is the most democratic (and therefore appropriate) driver of systemic change in
any region. Non-local foundations, who are often well-endowed, can pursue their
priorities by coordinating with regional entities. Because national funders play an
important role in advancing federal policy, tighter relationships with localities will enable
them to more finely understand how to design the right policy conditions to maximize
local benefits at higher levels of government.

**Implication 3: Measuring Alternative Outcomes**

The over-emphasis on standardized measures of achievement has softened the soil
for the emerging neo-progressive education movement. That this movement is backed by
rigorous cognitive science and analytical rigor sets it apart from past efforts. The agenda
supported by this movement is, however, already fraught. Without reliable measures of
effectiveness and student learning, the rising chorus in support of learning science, deeper
learning, and socioemotional learning seems likely to be overcome by the traditional
measures of achievement, which still speak loudly.
Supporters of this movement might consider several pathways forward. One of those pathways is to attempt to change mindsets about the role of measurement in education, thus making room to prioritize less measurable elements of students’ educational experience. The reasoning to support that approach would posit that the last era’s fixation with metrics and data is misguided. The future of education should reflect what we believe to be true about how people learn more than what we believe can be learned through measuring achievement (see the section on learning science in the review of knowledge for action for more). Building upon these messages may aid supporters in getting the public, policymakers, and practitioners to expand their expectations for educational outcomes.

At the same time, it is difficult to imagine given the rootedness of data culture that interest in educational measurement will decline - and nor should it. There is an important role for measurement in insuring rigor and spotlighting inequality, but that role should be better mitigated by factors that . Therefore, the work to forge new metrics that assess emergent areas of development for youth - agency, executive functioning, socioemotional skills, etc. - is vital. The same collaboration between national and local foundations as the one described in the sub-section above can play an important role here as a commissioner of research. Many regions are home to institutions of higher education (such as, in Los Angeles, UCLA and USC) that have faculty researchers from schools of education committed to local educational initiatives. And because they are local, they are more likely to benefit from the relationships and context that other researchers cannot. Based on what I have learned this year, building a 21st Century
assessment toolkit that is befitting our age seems more likely to come out of a series of localized efforts that learn from one another than swoop in-and-out national efforts.

**Conclusion**

The experiences related here prompt several important questions about how powerful actors - such as foundations - should carry out educational change to address inequities in a way that heeds values centered on community and shared power. Who should create and sustain the case for change, and how should the strategy be carried out? Does the positionality of the actor advocating for the change make a difference? What power differentials arise, and how can those with resources and influence share decision-making with those most affected by inequality?

Without question, our work at CCF over the course of my residency was geared towards setting an agenda for transforming learning that made use of formal power. The narrative above describes the steps we took to orient ourselves and others around a movement for learner-centered education in LA County. Our work built off of the efforts of institutions and individuals that had advocated for similar shifts, from the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce to local technical assistance providers and inventive site-based educators. We sought to show how the voices of local stakeholders led us to conclude that learner-centered initiatives are well-suited for LA County education systems. As our landscaping of local schools revealed, the schools favored by practitioners, advocates, and community members turned out often to be schools already displaying a version of learner-centered education (though they may use a different term to describe the nature of teaching & learning there). Introductory analyses of quantitative data showing strong
results are promising, if inconclusive. Further, the great variety of student identities, needs, and aspirations have made industrial approaches here, as elsewhere, ineffective at keeping youth engaged in meaningful learning. This is made clear by stagnant indicators of engagement, wellness, and achievement year-after-year. And based on what we know of 21st Century careers, which are increasingly interpersonal, analytic, and non-routine, the economic case for transforming learning is intuitive.

The amount of interest that has been generated by this project is substantial. Attendees from our event - including, most thrillingly, the youth - have expressed a hope that the energy created leading up to and after the convening translates into action. We sense part of the excitement is due to broad support for moving past the sense of exhaustion surrounding the Los Angeles Unified School District teacher strike. And we sense, too, that the next era of American education is likely to reflect the values and insights of a resurgent movement for progressive education. Supporting a more learner-centered Los Angeles could help make our region a national leader in challenging the educational status quo, especially in reimagining learning environments that subvert longstanding inequities that marginalize students of color.

All of that in mind, CCF remains (through the writing of this paper) the primary champion of the change we seek, which forces us to return to the question that opened this section - who should lead the setting of an agenda? Are we the “right” ones? As a community foundation, we seek to direct efforts for change based on what is in the interest of community members hardest hit by systemic inequality, prejudice, and neglect. We developed a sense during this project that (a) there was evidence that learner-centered
education was already popular, but suffered from having not been made explicit and visible and (b) we, given our role in the LA community, could gather support for broad reform based on learner-centered principles. Is the fact that there is no clear coalition or set of actors to take the work from here evidence of failure? Or is it too early to assess? I am led again to the admonitions of Burton and Barnes, whose cautionary words in “Shifting Philanthropy from Charity to Justice” ask the funding community to insure the community-centrism of their initiatives by “valuing the existing leadership” of community (2017). It is unclear at this time if we are “on tap” or “on top” (Burton and Barnes, 2017). If the work we have outlined is to excel in the coming months, and efforts to transform the lives of young Black and Latino youth in LA are realized, then it will be because the leaders of LA schools and communities have made it so.

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## Appendix A

Organizations Interviewed

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<td>UCLA - Center for the Transformation of Schools</td>
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<td>Da Vinci Schools</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Inner-City Arts</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Los Angeles Unified School District - Office of Director Melvoin and Office of Director Garcia</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>TeachPlus</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Long Beach Unified School District - Office of Data, Research, Evaluation, and School Improvement</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Asian-Americans Advancing Justice</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Innovate Schools</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Irene Stewart-Herrera</td>
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<td>New Schools Venture Fund</td>
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<td>Partnership for LA Schools</td>
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<td>The California Endowment</td>
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<td>Green Dot Public Schools</td>
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<td>Big Picture Learning</td>
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<td>Knowledge Works</td>
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<td>Advancement Project</td>
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<td>Reframe Labs</td>
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<td>UCLA CRESST</td>
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<td>Education Reimagined</td>
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<td>LA Promise Fund</td>
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<td>LAUSD - Office of Innovation</td>
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<td>Future of Learning Collaborative</td>
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<td>USC Center for Race</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Youth Policy Institute</td>
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<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Organizations Interviewed (cont.)</td>
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<td>35 LA County Economic Development Center</td>
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<td>36 Community Coalition</td>
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<td>37 Denver Public Schools - Imaginarium</td>
<td>53 Social Justice Humanitas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 Children's Defense Fund</td>
<td>54 Learning Lab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 USC School of Education</td>
<td>55 LAUSD - Office of Linked Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>40 American Federation of Teachers</td>
<td>56 The William and Flora Hewlett</td>
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<td>41 Learning Policy Institute</td>
<td>Foundation</td>
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<td>42 ACLU</td>
<td>57 Inner City Struggle</td>
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<td>43 Camino Nuevo</td>
<td>58 The California Charter Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>44 Walton Family Foundation</td>
<td>Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 LA Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>59 The Thomas B. Fordham Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>46 Center for Powerful Public Schools</td>
<td>60 UCLA School of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>47 Children Now</td>
<td>61 Los Angeles County - Office of Education</td>
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<td>48 EdLoC</td>
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<tr>
<td>49 CADRE</td>
<td>62 AltSchool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 ITEP/EXP</td>
<td>63 Power My Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 Citizens of the World</td>
<td>64 LA Makerspace</td>
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<tr>
<td>52 WestEd</td>
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<tr>
<td>53 Social Justice Humanitas</td>
<td>65 The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>54 Learning Lab</td>
<td>66 The Stuart Foundation</td>
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Appendix B: Education Whitepaper (p1)

Transform Learning in Los Angeles:
Voices from Practice, Research, and Advocacy on the Future of K12 Education in our Region

Pedro Noguera
Distinguished Professor of Education, UCLA

Maria Brenes
Executive Director, InnerCity Struggle

David Rattray
Executive Vice President, Center for Education Excellence at the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce

Jose Navarro
Founder of Social Justice Humanitas, Los Angeles Unified School District

For many who focus on education in Los Angeles County, schools are organized around 4 key purposes that provide guidance and how students learn. These purposes include:

1. **Educational equity** – providing opportunities for social and economic uplift for the most disadvantaged students
2. **College and career readiness** – training the next generation of students for the jobs of the future
3. **Civic engagement** – developing individuals committed to the strength of our democracy
4. **Personalization** – guiding young people to develop self and social awareness, as well as a personal vision for their lives

In 2019, many of our school systems find themselves struggling to realize these purposes and fulfill the promise that public education makes to youth and families. Inequitable access to great schools coupled with systemic poverty and its effects put our most vulnerable youth at an extreme disadvantage.

The nature of work is changing fast, and demands a very different skillset from 21st Century workers than from generations past. Trust in our democratic institutions has wavered and social divisions mar the political landscape. A rapidly evolving world makes navigating college, career, and life an increasingly complex task for young adults.

These challenges have been offset by remarkable pockets of imaginative educators and communities. Los Angeles is home to a growing number of schools that are preparing youth to excel by blending the social, emotional, and intellectual elements of learning. Students at these sites take part in interdisciplinary projects, inquiry-based exploration, real-world application, and socioemotional development. They work collaboratively on topics of interest to learn with and from each other. Educators in these environments are geared towards both young people’s academic achievement and personal wellness.

But frequently, this work takes place in silos. There is limited conversation about an expansive and coherent strategy to transform learning across Los Angeles schools and systems.

So how do we spark a broader movement to rethink schools, one that spreads across our region and that unites stakeholders from across the education landscape? A movement that centers equity while preparing youth to thrive in the decades to come?

The voices that follow begin to answer these questions. By sharing, in their own ways, why it is imperative to transform educational opportunity for young people in LA—and how we might begin to do so.

This paper is a call to action to reimagine education with the core purposes in mind and equity at heart.


Pedro Noguera
on Educational Equity
Distinguished Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences at UCLA

What are the key issues related to Educational Equity in LA County?

"I think to prepare young people for a workplace that requires not simply technical skill but a higher level of social skills you have to start to give them that through instruction and through experience."

Pedro Noguera
Distinguished Professor of Education, UCLA

How should teaching & learning change to better meet the needs of 21st century

Some of the equity issues are structural, like overcrowded classrooms, inadequate funding for teacher salaries, and inadequate facilities. These issues disproportionately affect poor children throughout California and the country. But aside from the structural issues there are fundamental equity issues related to teaching and learning that pertain to how kids are engaged in the classroom (or not) and how they are prepared for life beyond school. In too many schools, there are strained relations between students of color and their teachers, and too often, the expectations they encounter are very low. I often visit schools in LA where I see kids roaming the halls and it's kind of accepted as being simply the way it is. There's been a big push in LA to reduce suspensions and that's a good thing. But there hasn't been a concerted effort to improve school culture. If you just reduce suspensions but you don't improve school culture you end up with schools that are not orderly or safe.

It starts by knowing the students and understanding how they learn, what interests them, what challenges they face, and what gaps in past learning may influence their ability to perform in the classroom. Too often, a lot of that basic information is not known by educators. Too often, the opinions we hold about kids are based on stereotypes. For kids of color this often produces deficit thinking about what they can do. Such assumptions can be reinforced by the assumptions people make about test scores and the nature of intelligence.

Educators are finally beginning to recognize that the development of social and emotional skills must be
central to teaching and learning. These skills must be taught explicitly, such as empathy, how to defer gratification, how to handle conflict, etc.

**How is what you're describing different from traditional teaching?**

I think traditional paradigms of teaching focus a lot on teacher talk. It’s not very centered on student learning especially in the secondary level—and I think that places kids with greater needs at a disadvantage.

**What role should community play in reimagining schools?**

On the one hand the educators need to spend a lot more time thinking about the communities that are being served and what it would take to serve those children. We need to think about building capacity in response to student needs and community needs.

At the same time you need to get input from the community. We need genuine partnerships with parents that are rooted in trust and respect. I think we don’t put enough emphasis on this. We don’t engage parents about their aspirations for their children, what would they like to see for their children.

**Some advocates for equity say that you have to address issues of poverty and trauma before focusing on teaching & learning. What is your reaction to that?**

Well you know it’s not an either or. You have to do both, because kids are coming to school and we have to think about their learning needs and social needs, which are inextricably linked. You also can’t say that until we improve the neighborhood and eliminate poverty we can’t do anything about education. That’s not sensible and it’s an excuse for doing nothing.

**Six Deeper Learning Competencies:**

- Master Core Academic Content
- Think Critically and Solve Complex Problems
- Work Collaboratively
- Communicate Effectively
- Learn How to Learn
- Develop Academic Mindsets

*Source: Tom Vander Ark and Carl Schneider, “DEEPER LEARNING For Every Student Every Day”*
Maria Brenes on Civic Engagement

Executive Director, InnerCity Struggle

What are the key issues related to Educational Equity in LA County?

The key issues impacting educational equity in Los Angeles County are the entrenched achievement and opportunity gaps impacting students of color. For too long a problematic mindset has existed that devalues and imposes low expectations onto students of color. Institutional racism persists in education which violates the human rights of our communities. These conditions have led to disinvestment in our schools and to poor educational outcomes of our students.

Why should schools prepare youth to engage in Civic Life?

The civic engagement of youth strengthens our democracy. At InnerCity Struggle, we develop the leadership capacity of high school students to become engaged in the democratic process. We have to involve young people in their communities to ensure they are civically engaged for life.

Civic engagement should be embedded in the school curriculum, schools should engage students in decision-making and young people should shape how their schools function to ensure a positive learning environment.

Students are in the best position to propose solutions to improve education because they have the most at stake—they can advance solutions. Young people’s strength includes questioning and being optimistic and we have to support them to demand better. Historically, youth-led movements have successfully helped to change our society and have shifted power to the benefit of the most marginalized.

“Youth organizing is catalytic to social change. Youth can strengthen democracy.”

Maria Brenes
Executive Director, InnerCity Struggle
What leads to Civic Engagement among young adults?

A recent study conducted by the Leveraging Equity and Access in Democratic Education (LEADE) project, a joint effort between UC-Riverside and UCLA, found the following experiences to have the greatest impact on young people’s interest in civic engagement. The experiences are in ranked order beginning with the most impactful. As the study suggests, learning environments within schools are highly influential in shaping students’ interest in civic engagement and political involvement.

1. Classroom learning experiences based on democratic engagement
2. Service learning
3. Prior civic commitments
4. Parent/student influences
5. Neighborhood civic capital
6. School sense of belonging
Career Readiness

How should teaching & learning change to better meet the needs of 21st century learners?

It needs to be very student-centered, very hands on, very engaging.

I think project based learning is the best pedagogy. Lecture-based learning should fade out of our world forever and ever. I don’t think it ever worked and it works even worse now because kids are already in charge of their own life given the accessibility of information and social networks. So to think that they’re going to sit in the classroom and really care about some teacher barking at them for 60 minutes is just foolishly hard. Student-centered learning should be the driver.

The career context is a tool to make the academic subjects come to life and be interesting. It’s not an end in itself.

“What you can predict about the future of work is that you’re going to have to relearn to adjust to the next wave many, many, many times. Which means we can’t just talk about lifelong learning anymore. It can’t just be a slogan.”

David Rattray
Executive Vice President, Center for Education Excellence at the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce

How is what you’re describing different from traditional teaching?

The tendency we had over the last century was to make everything in our society based on the factory model. So that includes the way we built schools.
We should empower youth for a lifetime, so learning is much less about skills and knowledge. It is much more about your understanding. That growth is the number one thing that’s in your best interest—and that you should embrace it. And you just keep learning over your whole lifetime. So that to me is the most important skill for career development.

**Figure 1** Non-routine Tasks on the Rise in the U.S. Labor Market


### 2022 Skills Outlook

**Growing**
1. Analytical thinking and innovation
2. Active learning and learning strategies
3. Creativity, originality, and initiative
4. Technology design and programming
5. Critical thinking and analysis
6. Complex problem-solving
7. Leadership and social influence
8. Emotional intelligence
9. Resolving problem-solving and idea
t10. Systems analysis and evaluation


**Declining**
1. Manual dexterity, endurance, and precision
2. Memory, verbal, auditory, and spatial abilities
3. Management of financial, material resources
4. Technology installation and maintenance
5. Reading, writing, math, and active listening
6. Management of personnel
7. Quality control and safety awareness
8. Coordination and time management
9. Visual, auditory, and speech abilities
10. Technology use, monitoring, and control
Jose Navarro

on Personal Development & Self Actualization

Founder of Social Justice Humanitas, Los Angeles Unified School District

What are the key issues related to Educational Equity in LA County?

The number one barrier is—I think talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not.

And the reality is there are kids who are homeless, who are poor—but they are not broken. Their needs aren’t being met. So if we can meet their needs within the four walls of our classroom, within the four walls of a school, within the walls of our community, then they can achieve self-actualization.

It’s very tempting to just turn compassionate teaching into a transaction—follow step one and you can be compassionate, follow step two and you can be empathetic. But those challenges of teaching are adaptive, not prescriptive.

How should teaching & learning change to better meet the needs of 21st century learners?

These kids come into a class and they want relevance. They want this quadratic formula to actually equate to some kind of knowledge they can use. I think there needs to be a big focus on relevance and culturally relevant responsive pedagogy.

What is self-actualization?

Do the best you can with what you’ve got. That is self-actualization, and I tell students that your best is always good enough. So when you make a mistake, learn from it. We send a message of relevance, of love, compassion, high expectations, and using Maslow’s hierarchy of need as a check.
How is what you’re describing different from traditional teaching?

“We teach our students] to be the best human they can be and it is based on a very, very simple idea of just being a good person—to be the best person you can possibly be. So we have professional development for teachers to help kids be the best person they can be. And because it’s hard for people to wrap their head around that, that’s very hard to do because there is no book, there’s no curriculum.

“Our kids are not broken. Their needs aren’t being met. How do you wrap your curriculum around the kids instead of trying to bend your kids around your curriculum?”

Jose Navarro
Founder of Social Justice Humanitas, Los Angeles Unified School District

The Center for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning—Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning
Synthesis and Conclusion:

How can we begin to transform learning environments based on the voices shared here?

The future is not predetermined—it is wide-open and rapidly changing, while learning in schools has remained largely unchanged. A new future requires our education systems to meet the needs of today's world and a set of diverse learners. Luminaries, such as those featured here, have illustrated a vision for learning, equity, and justice that can serve as a guidepost for the future of education in Los Angeles. While this vision is intended to move our stagnant achievement measures in the right direction, it also offers a more holistic view of success. Our hope is that the vision set forth by these leaders are the beginnings of a united education community bounded by "learning" and a common set of values. The values outlined here are clearly reflected in the words of Dr. Noguera, Maria Brenes, David Rattray and Jose Navarro.

The education systems of today and tomorrow require a fundamental transformation from an industrial design to an equitable design that is informed by the community and how today's students learn best. These transformational designs engage young people with relevant learning, think about their full development, allow them to learn by doing, provide culturally responsive experiences and personally meaningful relationships—all while maintaining lofty expectations. They treat teachers with dignity and allow for their own personal growth. They focus on 21st-Century skills and community empowerment, with the goal to prepare their youth to thrive in an ever-changing professional and civic environment. They marry academic achievement, personal wellness and school culture together and refuse to see them as detached. It is this bold vision for education in Los Angeles that we see as interconnected with a long tradition of community schools, school-discipline reform and resource equity. Yet, we also believe it will take tremendous courage and a united vision to emerge from traditional camps of opposition. We hope this paper provides the community with an idea of why this work is needed and a vision of what it could be. It is a vision that will require community-based design, capacity and innovative approaches that we are calling "Transform Learning LA."
Appendix C

Case Study Video

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3islqIDpkY&feature=youtu.be
Appendix D

List of Funders in Attendance

1. The Ballmer Group
2. The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative
3. Great Public Schools Now
4. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
5. The W.M. Keck Foundation
6. New Schools Venture Fund
7. The Stuart Foundation
8. The Weingart Foundation
Appendix E

List of Attendees at “Transform Learning LA: Bridging Community, Learning Science, and Equitable Design”

<p>| 1. Alder Graduate School of Education | 15. Community Coalition |
| 2. Alliance For a Better Community | 16. Da Vinci Schools |
| 3. AltSchool | 17. EdloC |
| 5. Bearman Educational Services | 19. EdTrustWest |
| 6. Big Picture Learning | 20. EduCare |
| 7. CADRE | 21. Education Reimagined |
| 8. California State University - Northridge | 22. Educators 4 Excellence |
| 12. CHIME Institute | 26. Independent Consultant |
| 13. Citizens of the World Charter School | 27. Inner-City Arts |
| 14. Communications &amp; Technology School - LAUSD | 28. InnerCity Struggle |
| | 29. Knowledge Works |
| | 30. LA Promise Fund |
| | 31. Lindsay Unified School District (CA) |</p>
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65. United Way LA
66. University of Laverne
67. USC - School of Education
68. YMCA