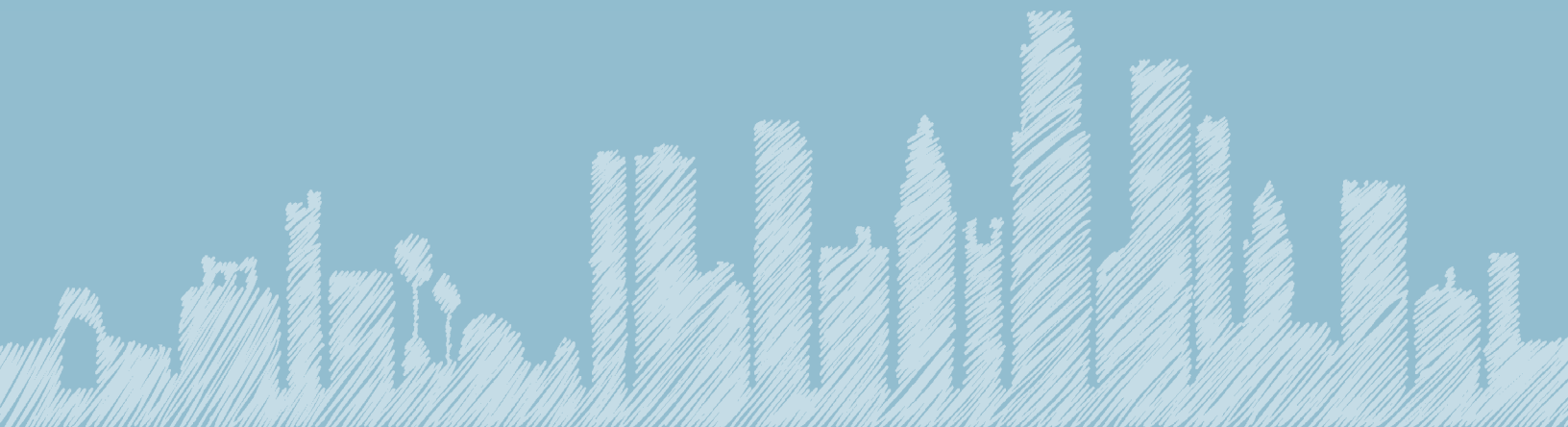


# Collaborating for Equity

A Scan of the Los Angeles  
Educational Ecosystem

SUMMARY



Annenberg  
Institute for  
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank all the Los Angeles ecosystem stakeholders who participated in interviews and briefing meetings for their time, candor, and invaluable contributions to this scan. Participating stakeholders are from the California Community Foundation, the Center for Powerful Public Schools, Community Coalition, the Ford Foundation, InnerCity Struggle, Los Angeles Education Partnership, Los Angeles Unified School District, Proyecto Pastoral, UNITE-LA/The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Greater Los Angeles, and the Youth Policy Institute.

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## ABOUT THE ANNENBERG INSTITUTE

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University (AISR) is a national policy research and reform support organization that collaborates with school districts and communities to improve the conditions and outcomes of education in America. Through three program circles of work – District & Systems Transformation, Community Organizing & Engagement, and Research & Policy – AISR helps these stakeholders join forces and establish sustainable systems that ensure excellence, equity, and social justice for all students, especially in urban, high-poverty communities. This work is grounded in the vision of a “smart education system,” that is, a high-functioning school district that collaborates with community partners to provide a comprehensive web of opportunities and supports for students, inside and outside of school.

Over the past three years, AISR has partnered with the Ford Foundation on the Time for Equity project. Time for Equity builds the capacity of schools, districts, communities, and partner organizations to improve educational opportunities in the nation’s most underserved school systems through expanded and reimagined learning time. Our work so far has included the development of twenty-four indicators that school communities can use as “yardsticks” to measure and refine their efforts to create expanded and improved learning opportunities for young people. These indicators and a host of accompanying resources can be found at [www.timeforequity.org](http://www.timeforequity.org).

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Los Angeles has an educational ecosystem rich with partners committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for students. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University (AISR) met in 2014-2015 with a range of partners to discuss how they could better work and learn together.<sup>1</sup> Partners participating in these meetings included the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), community-based organizations (CBOs), and representatives of three different educational improvement approaches that have taken root in several of the district's schools and neighborhoods: community schools, Linked Learning, and Promise Neighborhoods.

The goals of this scan were to:

- advance discussions about a common vision and goals across these three approaches;
- highlight the practices and structures that are in place in the district and community to support these approaches; and
- identify gaps or needs for further support system-wide.

We hope that the shared lessons emerging from this scan will inform leaders of partner organizations and LAUSD on how to better align, support, and expand these approaches and maximize their impact. We also hope it will help inform funders about how they can best continue to support equitable educational opportunities in Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This work was part of the Time for Equity project, which evolved from AISR's support for the Ford Foundation's More and Better Learning Time (MBLT) initiative. See <http://annenberginstitute.org/what-we-do/projects/time-equity>.

<sup>2</sup> This document is a summary of the Annenberg Institute's report *Collaborating for Equity: A Scan of the Los Angeles Educational Ecosystem*, available at <http://annenberginstitute.org/publications/collaborating-equity-scan-los-angeles-educational-ecosystem-0>.

# Findings

## Partnering across the ecosystem

### ■ CORE GOALS AND VALUES

To collaborate effectively across sectors and achieve large-scale social change, partners should first embrace a shared vision, values, and primary set of goals. Some common goals and values expressed by scan participants across the three approaches included the need to:

- understand and address student needs (academic, social-emotional, well-being), including providing personalized supports;
- provide equitable opportunities for students, prioritizing the highest-need students and communities;
- cultivate substantive community collaborations designed to meet the needs of students and their families;
- build capacity at the district, school, CBO, and community levels to implement and sustain this work.

Partners agreed that the three approaches have the potential to benefit a wide range of students in Los Angeles, including students with higher needs, but none have yet reached that potential. One barrier is the lack of resources or structures to scale the approaches beyond a limited number of schools. Another barrier is the difficulty of matching resources with student needs in an efficient, coordinated way. Some students who are or have better advocates may receive duplication of services, while others have limited or no access.

There are some efforts by organizations, schools, and the district to serve more students, but scan participants indicated that all the approaches could better serve vulnerable youth and communities. Partners anticipate that better alignment across approaches that are often seen as disconnected would help teachers better understand and use a variety of tools to support their high-need students and communities.

## ■ CBO RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Effective cross-sector collaboration across a broad educational landscape like that of Los Angeles must be aligned and deliberate. But even within one sector, like CBOs, collaboration can be complex. A number of different CBOs provide support such as training, coaching, technical assistance, and additional capacity at schools and the district for the three approaches. Participants highlighted the need for alignment, coordination, and collaboration, especially at individual schools where more than one approach may be present.

### *System level*

There have been efforts to build understanding, alignment, and joint capacity for support. For instance, the Center for Powerful Public Schools, which supports Linked Learning, has provided professional development to staff affiliated with the Youth Policy Institute, which supports the Promise Neighborhoods approach. Community organizing and advocacy groups are also valuable partners in applying policy pressure and supporting on-the-ground implementation. But there are two main barriers:

- CBOs' intensive focus on implementing the specific approach that they support – including the need to meet specific goals, targets, and metrics – leaves them with limited time and capacity to work across approaches. Data that could help partners better serve students across the system are not regularly shared.
- Even though the approaches share general values and goals, they sometimes see themselves as competing for “brand recognition” and funding and may feel threatened at the prospect of greater alignment.

### *School level*

Successful efforts to coordinate and align across approaches are also present at the school level. All approaches have school-based staff supporting implementation, and we heard examples of these staff coordinating, collaborating, and leveraging resources to support one another, especially in the area of college and career readiness. Some school-based staff felt that a competitive or territorial orientation seen at the organizational level was less likely at the school level, where staff tend to identify more with the school where they do their work, even though the majority are technically employees of CBOs or the district central office.

When multiple approaches are present in a school, lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities emerged as a primary challenge. Furthermore, since the approaches tend to be flexible from site to site, even within the same approach staff roles may vary at different sites, depending on a school's needs.

## ■ DISTRICT AND CBO COLLABORATION

### *CBOs supporting approaches and district work*

CBOs and technical assistance providers support both LAUSD and specific schools through added resources, including staffing, coaching, capacity building, and help with grant writing. For example, the Center for Powerful Public Schools collaborates with LAUSD to train and develop a community of practice for Linked Learning instructional coaches. At the school level, CBOs add important capacity, including community schools coordinators staffed by the Los Angeles Education Partnership; work-based learning coordinators from five organizations who are trained and mentored by the United Way; and coordinators such as college and career ambassadors from the Youth Policy Institute who work with a range of partners from the community, including local business and industry representatives, health and social service providers,

and universities. Some CBO partners described their role as support to make schools more self-sustaining. Others highlighted the close relationships they developed with principals, serving as partners who help to enact a principal's vision.

### ***District supports to approaches and CBOs***

When asked to identify school system supports that work well, CBO participants spoke largely of deeply committed individuals aligned with the priorities and values of the approaches and the CBOs. Individuals who work at the district's central office, school board members, and leaders and staff of schools were all named as being valuable resources, supports, and champions.

The Linked Learning approach has the most concrete structural presence within LAUSD, largely due to its Office of Linked Learning, which has a small administrative staff as well as instructional coaches and work-based learning coordinators who support school implementation. This office is an example of concentrated expertise and support for one approach, but the sheer size of LAUSD presents challenges to the district's developing a broad understanding of any of the approaches across the whole system. Silos within the central office and city, a lack of integration between individuals and departments, and leadership changes at multiple levels prove to be barriers to the type of understanding and championing that could increase the presence and effectiveness of all the approaches throughout the district.

## **Strengthening the ecosystem: Areas for growth**

### **■ “BIG PICTURE” VISION, STRATEGY, AND COLLABORATION ACROSS ECOSYSTEM PARTNERS**

Participants across all roles and approaches said increasing alignment would require a facilitated network that would address “big picture” strategies by articulating a common vision and goals, mapping resources and supports, identifying gaps, and coordinating or collaborating to address them. This network should be convened by a neutral third-party facilitator – not seen as identified with the district or any of the specific approaches – who could help all partners engage on an equal footing.

Participants noted the importance of thinking inclusively about who should have a voice at this table. The perspectives of teachers and others working to implement the approaches in a school site, as well as family and community members who can speak to on-the-ground context and conditions, were seen as critical. Funders can play an important role in helping to promote collaboration and eliminate competition among partners if they have the vision to require coalitions and collaborations while also supporting the work of the individual organizations.

The need for an overarching vision, strategy, mapping, and coordination exists at the school level as well, particularly when multiple partners are working to support students. We heard examples of school-level ecosystems, such as Promesa Boyle Heights, that have worked to develop coordinated, supplemental roles for partners and which may serve as a model for the larger system.

## ■ DISTRICT PRIORITIZATION, SUPPORT, AND INVESTMENT IN APPROACHES

While we heard some promising examples of district-level supports for different approaches, and collaboration with the partner organizations working to implement them, there was consensus that there is still much work to be done for these approaches to expand, become more effective, and have a system-wide impact for students who need them most. Partners expressed a desire for LAUSD to exhibit greater understanding and ownership of the approaches, to embrace external partners, and to connect the approaches to an overall plan or vision for the district.

Participants also discussed the difficulty of navigating district bureaucracy. The district's current organization is seen primarily as an accountability structure, but both district and CBO staff said that some intentional shifts could lead to more effective use as a support system. Having a central office liaison for CBOs supporting community schools and Promise Neighborhoods to help navigate the system was mentioned as a potentially useful practice. Improving communication and integration between central office staff working with particular approaches was also mentioned; some efforts in this direction were recognized, especially around supporting health and wellness initiatives.

Participants stressed the critical importance of the district using an equity lens to guide the growth and expansion of these approaches and ensure that they are reaching the students and neighborhoods that can most benefit from them.

## ■ RECOGNIZING AND SHARING BEST PRACTICES

For the different approaches to be scaled up equitably, all the partners must understand what's working well, and why – and use this knowledge to expand effective practice throughout the system. The school district necessarily plays a central role in recognizing and sharing best practices, both in connecting schools with effective practices to their peers so that they can engage in ongoing learning and continuous improvement, and in responding at a policy level in a way that enhances and expands success.

Participants broadly agreed on the need for district engagement in collecting and disseminating data, linked to outcomes, that supports the effectiveness of the three approaches and helps to make the connections to the ways in which partners are contributing to the district's larger priorities. There was general consensus that these data must include, but also look beyond, academic measures. Knowing where and why approaches have been successful can also help all the partners understand the conditions and factors needed for good implementation, and create an implementation “roadmap,” both for schools themselves and to guide district support.

Funders were also seen as having a role in taking best practices to scale. Foundation dollars themselves may be invested in pilots rather than expansion, but one possible point of leverage is the expectation, tied to funding, of a plan showing how pilot success is informing the larger system and can be expanded. Limited fiscal resources were seen as a major barrier to the expansion of the three approaches. Increased transparency around school budgeting was named as a priority, particularly around whether the district practice of “norming” or averaging school budgets was creating misalignments between the money generated by a school and the money spent.

# Recommendations

## Increase communication

Participants identified a need for building clearer and more intentional lines of communication across district staff and offices responsible for supporting the three approaches; between district and CBO staff; and between all partners, school-based practitioners, and grassroots community members – parents, youth, and other residents. Deepening communication will help ensure greater alignment of ecosystem partners' efforts and provide increased opportunities to share best practices.

A clear first step in this area should be to designate a structure and neutral facilitator for a regular convening of ecosystem stakeholders. Through this convening, the emerging collaborative network can adopt a finalized version of the foundational vision and priority goals that have emerged from this scan and use these to designate common strategies and activities to pursue within and across approaches. Having all stakeholders on the same page communicating a clear, collective vision and roadmap for success will help build an effective, ground-up coalition and anchor the ecosystem through leadership transitions.

## Conduct detailed asset mapping

Participants strongly identified the need to understand the specific needs of the students, schools, and geographic neighborhoods and communities that they serve and map the resources available in the ecosystem, across the different approaches, to address those needs. Otherwise, partners will not have the data to scale up effective school-level practices equitably, and students throughout the system will not be served as well as they could be. This asset mapping should include human capital (teaching and school-based CBO staff,

youth and parent organizers), services, and funding, and should strategically connect available resources to student and community needs.

Participants especially pinpointed school budget transparency and equity analysis as their top priority. Stakeholders, including school staff and parents, must understand the kinds of funding received by school sites, how funding is generated, and which students are meant to benefit from various funding sources. An equity analysis would help understanding of any lack of alignment between how funding is generated versus how it is spent at the school level. If gaps exist, stakeholders can advocate for reprioritizing school budget expenditures into areas of greater student need.

## Deepen focus on sustainability and scale

This recommendation is geared largely toward funders. Funder practices can create strategic levers for system-wide thinking, capacity-building, and change – or they can inadvertently create insularity and competition between partners. Funders should set clear goals; allow for flexibility in how those goals are implemented across schools, as contexts change; and put in place metrics that take into account the whole child and system, beyond just academics.

Participants in the scan also emphasized the importance of investing not just in pilots of new programs, but also in associated plans for scaling up what works and including community and teacher leadership, development, ownership, and empowerment. Funders must continue to support individual programs, but it is also critical that they invest in collaborative processes, committing resources over the time it takes to build the trust, relationships, and shared vision and goals required for effective cross-sector collaboration.



# Toward a Strong and Sustainable Ecosystem

Los Angeles is fortunate to have a range of committed partners working within well-developed and proven frameworks like the three approaches we studied, including a district committed to supporting best practices, and the Ford Foundation making a significant financial investment. In this scan, we explored how the partners could build on this promising foundation to further align and enhance their work.

The partners had much to say, calling for increased time, space, and funding to come together more intentionally and strategically to sustain and scale their best work. We hope that the recommendations from this study, informed by their insights, will help guide next steps toward increased communication, alignment, and investment among the partners. With support to develop into a true cross-sector coalition, stakeholders will have the power to create their vision for a sustainable educational ecosystem to ensure equitable opportunities for students and communities across Los Angeles.







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