

2016  
**WHITE PAPER  
ON THE ASPIRE  
MENTORING  
ACADEMY**



**CIVIC  
ENTERPRISES**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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# INTRODUCTION

Continuing AT&T's 105-year<sup>1</sup> commitment to community service, AT&T's Aspire Program focuses not only on significant philanthropic support, but also on the time, talents, and passion of many of their employees nationwide, who have teamed up with nonprofits to help create and implement meaningful programs for school and career success, particularly for students at risk of not graduating high school. This includes giving back to the communities where its employees live and work; a strong focus on improving high school graduation rates through research, national action, and raising awareness and supporting evidence-based programs; and support for mentoring opportunities that expose students to the world of work and help them gain the skills they will need to succeed in the jobs of the future.

## THE CHALLENGE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Earning a high school diploma is a critical first step for young people as they move toward postsecondary education and/or a career. Students who achieve their high school diploma can expect to see higher average salaries over their lifetimes<sup>2</sup>, more consistent employment histories as they are better able to weather changes in the global economy<sup>3</sup>, better health outcomes, and lower rates of poverty<sup>4</sup>.

Unfortunately, far too many young people still struggle to stay in school and on track to graduation. Those who remain behind are disproportionately youth of color and low-income households. In 2014, low-income students had an average graduation gap of 14.4 percentage points compared with their middle- and upper-income peers, while Black students trailed by 14.7 percentage points and Hispanic/Latino by 10.9 percentage points.

To help address this national crisis, AT&T supports research and movement building to raise the national graduation rate through the GradNation campaign. This support has helped to increase national awareness about the dropout crisis, and

spur action on the part of government, schools, nonprofits, and foundations to take on this challenge together. Over the past decade, these organizations have worked to reduce the number of failing high schools, created stronger systems for accountability and data, and kept the issue of high school graduation front and center. Through these and other concerted efforts by all these actors, the national graduation rate has risen from 74 percent in 2006 to an all time high of 83.2 percent in 2015. But while this work addresses one aspect of the dropout crisis, more must be done to help prepare our young people to be successful in a rapidly changing economy.

### THE GRADNATION CAMPAIGN

The GradNation campaign was launched in 2010 as a partnership between America's Promise Alliance, Civic Enterprises, the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, and the Alliance for Excellent Education. The campaign engages nonprofits, communities, schools, and state and national government leaders around a two-pronged goal: to achieve a 90 percent graduation rate by 2020, and to regain America's place as the first in the world for college completion.

As part of this work, the GradNation campaign releases the *Building a Grad Nation* report each year, updating the nation on the progress toward the 90 percent goal, identifying areas of challenge, and promoting best practices and innovative strategies that are having a positive impact.

1 Bell Pioneers Founded 1911

2 U.S. Census Bureau. (2012). *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0232.pdf>

3 Child Trends. (2014). *Making the Grade: Assessing the Evidence for Integrated Student Supports*.

4 The Statistics Portal (n.d.) *Unemployment Rate of High School Graduates and Dropouts Not Enrolled in School in the United States from 2000–2013*. (Data file). Retrieved from <http://www.statista.com/statistics/184996/unemployment-rate-of-high-school-graduates-and-dropouts/>

The jobs of the future will overwhelmingly require not just a high school education, but additional certifications or degrees. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce estimated that by 2018, only 30 percent of jobs in the United States will be for workers with either a high school diploma or an incomplete high school education—down from 72 percent in 1973, 44 percent in 1992, and 41 percent in 2007.<sup>5</sup> The study defined the future American economy as one that “puts a premium on education, training, and flexibility.”<sup>6</sup>

STEM occupations (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) are projected to be a large percentage of new jobs in the future. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated STEM employment would grow about 13 percent between 2012 and 2022—faster than the estimated 11 percent rate of growth for all other occupations over the decade.<sup>7</sup> This means it is essential that students have access to rigorous academics that will put them on the path toward STEM careers, and increased exposure to what these jobs require in terms of skills. Without a strong understanding of the academics and experiences they will need in order to succeed in STEM fields, students will be unprepared to chart their course toward stable employment after graduation.

Given the changes coming in the workforce (as pointed out in the Georgetown University report) it is imperative that students begin preparing as early as possible, both by succeeding in their academics, as well as through exposure to the world of work, so they can better understand what their path to success can look like. However, students tell us that they frequently feel disengaged in high school, and are unable to see the connection between what they study in the classroom and what they will do in the workforce as adults. A groundbreaking report, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, released in 2006, which surveyed students who dropped out of high school, found that nearly half (47 percent) of respondents said a major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting. They reported feeling bored and disengaged in school. In that same survey, 81 percent of respondents said there should be more opportunities for real-world learning that would help students see the connection between school and getting a good job.<sup>8</sup>

It is at this critical juncture where the support and guidance

of caring adults is so impactful and necessary. As mentors, adults provide youth with support and encouragement to tackle challenges in and out of the classroom. Mentors also act as role models and guides to assist young people as they think about life after high school, their options for postsecondary education, potential career paths they could choose, and how they can reach their goals.



Students who meet regularly with their mentors are **52 PERCENT** less likely than their peers to skip a day of school and **37 PERCENT** less likely to skip class.<sup>9</sup>



At-risk young adults who had a mentor were **55 PERCENT** more likely to enroll in college, and **78 PERCENT** more likely to volunteer in college.<sup>10</sup>



A 2011 study found that college students who took part in mentoring programs were **10 TO 15 PERCENT** more likely to persist on to another year of college.<sup>11</sup>



Research has shown that youth who have a mentor are **46 PERCENT** less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs and **27 PERCENT** less likely to start drinking alcohol.<sup>12</sup>



Young adults who are facing an opportunity gap but have mentors are **81 PERCENT** more likely to participate regularly in sports or other extracurricular activities than their peers who do not.<sup>13</sup>



Youth who received mentoring also saw a reduction in depressive symptoms.<sup>14</sup>

5 Carnevale, Anthony et al. (2011). Career Clusters: Forecasting Demand for High School Through College Jobs 2008–2010. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from <http://www.nrccte.org/sites/default/files/uploads/clusters-execsum.pdf>

6 *Ibid.*

7 Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014). STEM 101: Intro to Tomorrow’s Jobs. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/spring/art01.pdf>

8 <https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/thesilentepidemic3-06final.pdf>

9 Grossman, J. B., Resch, N., & Tierney, J. P. (2000). *Making a Difference: An Impact of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Re-issue of 1995 study)*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

10 MENTOR: The National Mentor Academy. (n.d.). Mentoring impact. Retrieved from <http://www.mentoring.org/why-mentoring/mentoring-impact/>.

11 Bettingger, E. P., & Baker, R. (2011). *The Effects of Student Coaching in College: An Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Mentoring*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University School of Education.

12 Grossman, Resch, & Tierney. *Making a Difference*.

13 Bruce, M., & Bridgeland, J. (2014). *The Mentoring Effect: Young People’s Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.

14 Herrera, C., & DuBois, D. L. (2013). *The Role of Risk: Mentoring Experiences and Outcomes for Youth with Varying Risk Profiles*. New York, NY: MDRC.

Unfortunately, far too many young people—as many as one in three according to a recent study<sup>15</sup>—grow up without access to a mentor of any kind and subsequently without the positive impacts of mentoring on their futures.

Beyond the positive impacts for students served, the Aspire Mentoring Academy also seeks to significantly grow the capacity of participating nonprofits so they can be more effective in their work, reach more students, and have even greater impacts on the lives of young people in need of high-quality mentoring. AT&T goes well beyond financial investments by providing participating nonprofits with technical assistance and business acumen to help strengthen their models. AT&T's philanthropic team and Community Engagement leadership teams are also invested in identifying new opportunities for mutually beneficial collaborations among their recipients that allow them to create a full pipeline of supports for students. Through the collaborative work of the Aspire Mentoring Academy, innovative efforts are being piloted in communities across the country.

## UNIQUE ASPECTS OF THE ASPIRE MENTORING ACADEMY

The Aspire Mentoring Academy is unique among corporate giving work for several reasons. First, AT&T seeks to go beyond funding and act as a true collaborator to its recipients. This includes access to the business and technical skills of AT&T staff, collaboration with recipients around growing and scaling programs, and technical assistance to improve the ability of nonprofits to assess their impact, collect data on a variety of metrics, and use that data for proactive learning and development.

Second, the Aspire Mentoring Academy has deliberately built a collaborative space for its nonprofits, and actively encourages and supports them to meet and communicate regularly, share strategies and challenges, and look for ways to collaborate with one another. AT&T has played an active role in building and maintaining this strong learning community, making valuable connections between nonprofits that might otherwise never have worked together, and backing the ideas for collaboration that come from the group. This is a unique level of engagement and focus on collaborative work on the part of a funder, and has resulted both in knowledge sharing as well as concrete partnerships and innovative pilot programs.

<sup>15</sup> MENTOR: The National Mentoring Academy. (n.d.). *The Mentoring Effect*. Retrieved from <http://www.mentoring.org/program-resources/mentor-resources-and-publications/the-mentoring-effect/>

This level of engagement with a funder, as well as the success of the collaborative work, is the result of careful and intentional planning on the part of AT&T's staff, and the nonprofits' focus on the success of the young people they serve above all else.

This white paper explores the work of the Aspire Mentoring Academy from perspectives of AT&T leadership to better understand the overarching themes that drive the work, and the vision for the future. It also showcases the experiences of the AT&T employees who serve as mentors to understand their perspectives on why they choose to serve in this way, and the value it adds to their communities. And finally, the paper explores the experiences of the Aspire Mentoring Academy nonprofit organizations, and the value they find from being a part of this work.

### AT&T ASPIRE MENTORING ACADEMY ENGAGEMENT FIGURES

 **1.3M+**  
MENTORING HOURS

 **3,800**  
EVENTS IN 370 CITIES

 **17,200**  
EMPLOYEE MENTORS

 **220,000**  
STUDENTS REACHED

## PERSPECTIVES OF AT&T EMPLOYEES ON THE ASPIRE MENTORING ACADEMY

The work of the Aspire Mentoring Academy would not be possible without the dedicated volunteerism of AT&T employees who share their time and expertise with young people through the wide variety of programs offered by AMA nonprofit partners. AT&T employees are diverse—people of color made up 42 percent of AT&T employees in 2015, and over 18,000 women worked in STEM jobs at AT&T

during that same year<sup>16</sup>—making them particularly well-suited to work with young people of all backgrounds and ethnicities, and mentor them toward their career of choice. Brad Yates, director of public affairs at AT&T, noted the benefits of a large and diverse workforce, saying that “getting all employees engaged around one mentoring opportunity is incredibly unique—as is the scale and geographic reach [of AMA].” Yates explained that AT&T has worked hard to get employees at all levels, in all roles—from call center employees in Florida and marketing managers in Seattle to the CEO and executive team at AT&T’s headquarters in Dallas—to engage with AMA in some way, and to make it easy for them to do so.

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***AMA utilizes a system of employee volunteers (Ambassadors) to oversee and plan AMA events across their 150+ geographic locations.***

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AT&T employees who volunteer with AMA expressed several main reasons for their interest in and engagement with the program. First, they connected their volunteerism to the overarching goals of AT&T to combat the dropout crisis, and felt motivated to contribute to that goal. Second, many of them said they themselves would have benefited from a mentor while in school, and wanted to offer that opportunity to the youth of today. And finally, AMA is flexible enough that employees are able to work it into their busy schedules—technology and the e-mentoring platforms have been particularly impactful in this area.

AMA utilizes a system of employee volunteers (Ambassadors) to oversee and plan AMA events across their 150+ geographic locations. Kristian Cosme, an Ambassador for Aspire Mentoring Academy, explained that his original interest in AMA was because of its connection to addressing the high school dropout issues. “Being an Hispanic-American, I knew that the dropout rate is high for our community. When I learned that AT&T had a group working on this, I wanted to be involved.” Another regional network lead from Community Engagement for the Southeast, Betty Byrd, noted that AMA offered employees the opportunity to work on an issue that AT&T as a company was invested in, and to do so in their own communities. “People may not have realized that high school dropout was a bigger crisis than what was just in their backyards,” she explained. AMA provides employees with an opportunity to improve their own communities, while also contributing toward a bigger national goal.

Employees also expressed personal connections to the AMA program as something they would have benefited from as young people, particularly given the field that they work in now. “Before I started with AT&T, no one ever came and talked to me about the kind of job I have now,” said Jackie Jackson, a regional Ambassador for Aspire Mentoring Academy. “These kids have already been exposed to technology—but they need someone to show them the steps they could take [to work in this field].” Others connected to the idea of mentoring young people because they have children of their own, and see the great value of youth having access to adult role models who can help point the way toward success in their future careers. Still others said they themselves grew up in underserved communities, and went to schools with limited resources and few positive adult role models. They hoped that through AMA they could reach students growing up in similar circumstances, and help keep them on the path toward a successful and stable future.

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***Heldman saw the value in building a true learning laboratory, a space for nonprofits to share best practices, test innovative partnerships, and model forward-thinking efforts for the mentoring field.***

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And finally, employees noted that their continued volunteerism with AMA would not be possible without the flexibility of the program, and the support of their managers. Employees gave examples of their use of technology to connect with far more students than they would be able to without those platforms. Jackson described how she leverages the flexibility of the program to engage more volunteers, and reach more students. “If there’s a need in the community, I build a program around it.... It’s a platform that is very flexible—employees can do it in their own buildings for an hour or two. And for those who can’t come during the workday, we do it on the weekends. It’s my passion, and I’ve made it my own.” That feeling of ownership of the program, combined with strong company support for employee volunteerism, allows employees to deeply engage with the AMA programs, and encourages many repeat volunteers at AMA events.

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<sup>16</sup> [http://about.att.com/content/dam/sitesdocs/DiversityInclusion\\_2016\\_AR.pdf](http://about.att.com/content/dam/sitesdocs/DiversityInclusion_2016_AR.pdf)



## CREATING A LIVING LABORATORY: THE EVOLUTION OF AMA

The first iteration of the Aspire Mentoring Academy (though it was not officially titled AMA at the time) was a job shadow program in partnership with Junior Achievement. The program brought students into AT&T facilities across the country to meet employees and learn about their day-to-day work, with the goal being to give young people a better understanding of the education and skills they would need to acquire to work in the field in the future. The program set out to reach 100,000 young people, and achieved that goal in 2012. It was at this point that AT&T leadership began to consider what the next phase of AMA should encompass. Brad Yates recalled the strong focus placed on the need for college readiness, and concerns of top AT&T leadership that students were not being adequately prepared to take on STEM positions, which AT&T would need to fill in the future. Kelem Butts, director of charitable operations at AT&T, noted feeling that the job shadow program alone would not move the needle on these important issues—a two-hour engagement with employees a couple of times a year just was not enough to have a strong and lasting impact on the students they served. Butts knew that “we would have to think bigger.”

AT&T’s team, including Peter Heldman, senior strategist at AT&T, and Yates, began scouring the literature and research on the high school dropout crisis, looking for the levers that AT&T could focus on in order to truly have an impact on this issue. With a continued focus on mentoring, they searched for nonprofit organizations demonstrating positive outcomes for students through academic supports, wraparound services, life skills, and college and career readiness. They also looked for organizations that were already serving students most at-risk of dropping out.

But the approaches and students served was just one piece of the puzzle. Heldman saw the value in building a true learning laboratory, a space for nonprofits to share best practices, test innovative partnerships, and model forward-thinking efforts for the mentoring field. Therefore, Heldman’s goals in selecting the nonprofit partners for the next phase of AMA were multifaceted.

First, AMA would need to provide a range of volunteer opportunities that would reflect the diverse interests and abilities of AT&T employees. The selected nonprofits would also need to have national reach in order to serve the 150+ communities where AT&T employees live and work. Heldman looked for nonprofits with a strong track record of working with mentors to help matches flourish, and providing the supports and education that mentors needed

### KEY COMPONENTS OF AMA PARTNER NONPROFITS

- Ability to provide a range of volunteer opportunities to leverage the diversity of interests and skills of AT&T employees;
- Interventions aligned with one or more dropout factors for students;
- Data-driven culture, and interest in using data for learning.

to be successful in their roles. In addition, understanding the value of long-term and more time-intensive engagements for improving student outcomes, selected nonprofits would need to have capacity to provide employees and mentees with opportunities that went beyond a one-time event.

Second, Heldman hoped to build a cohesive and aligned team of nonprofits that could work together to fill in the gaps for students and mentors, and strengthen communities by leveraging their unique strengths. Ultimately, AT&T wanted to support organizations that were already providing deep levels of service to young people, and providing interventions around the dropout factors identified in the research phase, with mentoring being one component of the programming. With these goals in mind, Heldman began to assemble a “dream team” of nonprofits. The big picture goal, Heldman explained, would be to “foster a living laboratory—a trusting environment where [nonprofits] can share and learn, and come together to support kids and ‘fail forward.’” A strong interest in collaboration with other organizations was therefore a requirement for the participating nonprofits, as this would be a key component of AMA.

And finally, Heldman wanted AMA to have a data-driven culture, with participating nonprofits willing and able to self-assess, innovate, and use data to improve their outcomes. This meant finding nonprofit partners who were either already using data for learning in this way, or who were moving in that direction and could benefit from AT&T’s technical expertise.

The AMA nonprofits reflect these goals in a variety of ways. The group includes large and well-known mentoring organizations, such as Boys & Girls Clubs; organizations focused on helping young people prepare for the world of work, such as DECA and Jobs for America’s Graduates; organizations that provide wrap-around supports to at-risk

students, such as Communities In Schools; as well as smaller and younger organizations, such as iCouldBe and We Teach Science, both of which utilize e-mentoring platforms that allow mentors to participate from across the country, and have been using data for learning and self-assessment from the very first days of their programs.

Together, these organizations provide a diverse set of supports to students, with a focus on keeping students in school and on track, and preparing them for college and career.

AMA nonprofits, which have participated in this collaborative group for three years as of 2016, reflected on the ways in which their participation has impacted their work and programs.

## PERSPECTIVES OF ASPIRE MENTORING ACADEMY NONPROFITS—VALUE BEYOND THE DOLLARS

While recipients certainly benefited from the fiscal support of AT&T, the assets they pointed to most in terms of their work with AMA were not just dollars, but rather the thought partnership, access to technical expertise and business acumen, ability to connect with other high-quality mentoring programs, and the willingness of AT&T to act as a collaborator in their work rather than only a funder.

### GROW TECHNICAL CAPACITY

AT&T's technical expertise, and willingness to put that expertise to use to help their recipients become more data driven and improve their outcomes, is a major asset of this collaboration. Nonprofits gave examples of how AT&T has helped them access new technology platforms to reach more students, build better data systems, and improve their evaluation capacity.

**ICOULDBE** is an e-mentoring program with a focus on college readiness. The program matches eleventh and twelfth graders with a mentor through their online platform, provides a curriculum that mentors follow through the year, and intensively monitors the mentor/mentee relationship to ensure the success of the match. Because their mentoring is all done online, iCouldBe is able to engage AT&T employee volunteers from 48 states, which allows them to take full advantage of the diverse skills and backgrounds of AT&T employees to meet student needs.

iCouldBe was already data-focused before they became a part of AMA. The organization collected data for every

mentor/mentee match, examining when and for how long mentors and mentees were using the platform, and the content of their interactions. In January 2016, iCouldBe decided to go beyond those metrics to try and better understand the factors that contribute to a successful mentor/mentee relationship. AT&T is supporting iCouldBe in this work, utilizing the technical skills of its employees to refine the tools originally created by the iCouldBe team, and finding ways to look at the data year over year to identify impact. The refined tool will allow iCouldBe to see in real time if mentor/mentee engagements are on track for success or disengagement, and to course correct proactively.

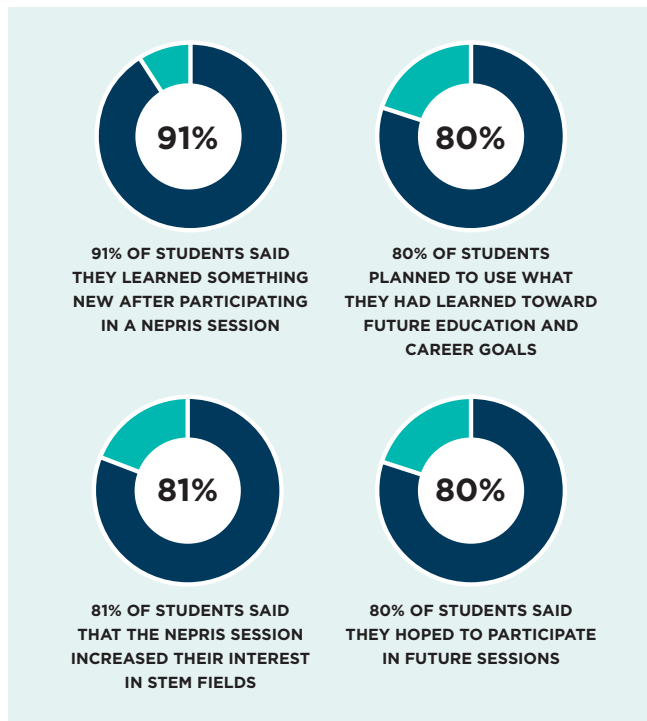
AT&T also helped iCouldBe redesign their online platform so it could be accessed through any web-enabled device—meaning that mentors and mentees can now use their smartphones to access the program, rather than having to use a desktop or laptop computer. While iCouldBe originally expected the vast majority of users accessing the program through their smartphones would be AT&T employees, they found that it was about a fifty-fifty split of both mentors and mentees using the new option. This update to their platform improves accessibility for students and mentors.

**WE TEACH SCIENCE**, an AMA nonprofit with programs working in California and Texas, has also benefited from the technological expertise of AT&T. Through its Remote Tutoring and Mentoring program, We Teach Science pairs STEM professionals with students for regular tutoring and mentoring. The nonprofit is currently working with AT&T to get a new online platform off the ground, drawing on the technical expertise of employees and connections available through the philanthropy team. AT&T helped We Teach Science form a technology committee to review state-of-the-art systems available, and brought in leadership from CISCO, Polycom, and Skype to provide their expertise as well. The willingness of AT&T to make those introductions to peer technology companies on behalf of We Teach Science meant that the nonprofit had access to a level of expertise that would not have been possible otherwise. This year, We Teach Science will migrate 100 percent of its mentor/student pairs onto the new platform, helping to resolve technical difficulties with the old system, improve the mentor experience, and boost volunteer retention rates.

In an example of utilizing technology to reach more students, AMA nonprofit Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), through support from AT&T, is able to utilize Nepris, an online platform that gives their rural subsidiaries access to mentors with skills and knowledge that may otherwise be out of reach. Through the platform, AT&T employees can build and upload presentations around topics that they are interested in and knowledgeable about, and teachers in schools can

then look through the profiles to find categories of interest to their students. The Nepris platform allows students in the classroom to engage with an AT&T employee, ask questions about their work, and learn about the topics in which that employee has expertise. For schools in rural locations with few adults working in STEM fields, this is particularly impactful, and can introduce students to fields of work that they might not otherwise know existed.

**COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS** also utilizes the Nepris model through its Career Exploration Project. Eleven affiliates had the opportunity to engage with the platform in 2016, reaching 539 students in middle and high schools across the country. In student surveys of this program, 91 percent of students said they learned something new after participating in a Nepris session, and nearly 80 percent planned to use what they had learned toward future education and career goals. In addition, 81 percent said that the Nepris session increased their interest in STEM fields, and 80 percent said they hoped to participate in future sessions.



## PILOT INNOVATIVE COLLABORATIONS

A major focus of AMA has been to find new ways for the nonprofit participants to work together and leverage their unique strengths to create a network that supports students at all stages of life. Building partnerships and cooperative efforts among organizations takes careful planning, a clear understanding of each organization's priorities and work,

and time to build trust and buy-in among organizational leadership. AMA provides a safe space for organizations to share goals, identify potential areas of collaboration, and begin the process of trust building and planning needed to make any partnership successful.

AMA nonprofits shared efforts are already underway, or in the early stages of planning and development. While these efforts have not been in existence long enough to have strong metrics around outcomes, they demonstrate exciting new ways that nonprofits are working to leverage each other's strengths, as well as organizational practices, programmatic resources, and tools.

Kate Schrauth, executive director at iCouldBe, described how AMA has allowed her organization to network with larger, more established mentoring organizations, and identify areas for collaboration. Schrauth explained, "As a small e-mentoring program, it's been a wonderful way to think about how we can leverage our different strengths alongside the older, more established groups." Through AMA gatherings, iCouldBe met other AMA nonprofits with more traditional mentoring models, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters. The connections made between these two organizations at AMA gatherings allowed iCouldBe and Big Brothers Big Sisters to identify an opportunity to collaborate and leverage both of their strengths.

**BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS** was searching for ways to engage with their corporate partners in Chicago, but had found it difficult to make traditional mentoring relationships feasible given the hectic schedules that many corporate employees keep. In 2015, iCouldBe and Big Brothers Big Sisters launched a pilot program at two schools in Chicago in which they utilized the e-mentoring platform and curriculum built by iCouldBe and the support staff that Big Brothers Big Sisters already had on the ground. In this way, they were able to connect corporate employees who previously had been unable to mentor given their schedules with young people in need of mentors. To support the matches, Big Brothers Big Sisters had their support staff visit participating schools on a weekly basis while students were working on the iCouldBe curriculum to ensure that everything was going smoothly. Big Brothers Big Sisters also facilitated four in-person events during the year for mentors and mentees to meet one another face to face. Given the initial success of the pilot, the organizations plan to launch the program in an additional four schools in the Chicago area.

Like iCouldBe, We Teach Science was able to leverage the AMA community to identify new opportunities for collaboration with other AMA participants. We Teach Science is partnering with a well-established and much larger

organization, DECA, to provide their students with We Teach Science mentors through their e-mentoring platform. This pilot program is now in preliminary stages at MacArthur High School in Dallas, Texas.

In addition, We Teach Science is also partnering with iCouldBe to build a pipeline of mentoring opportunities for students from ninth grade through graduation. Currently, We Teach Science works with students through sophomore year of high school, while iCouldBe starts its program at the eleventh grade. By working together, these two organizations are hoping to seamlessly move students from one mentoring platform to the other, ideally keeping them with the same mentor for all four years, and ensuring that the student has consistent support for their entire high school experience. The two organizations are currently working on plans for a potential partnership.

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Aragon Burlingham, the CEO of We Teach Science, explained that these pilot collaborations have been greatly supported by AT&T, and might not have been possible otherwise. AT&T advocated to DECA's national level leadership for We Teach Science, and helped both organizations to find the right local DECA affiliate to give the pilot program a try. Similarly, iCouldBe and We Teach Science were introduced at an AMA event, a meeting that might never have happened if not for AT&T's focus on collaboration.

As a final example, **COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS (CIS)**, an AMA nonprofit with 161 affiliates across the United States, is leveraging relationships built through AMA to provide its at-risk students with much needed mentoring support. The organization provides schools with wraparound supports for at-risk students, and connections to service providers and caring adults who can help students navigate the barriers they face to their success in school and beyond. Through its participation in AMA, Communities In Schools was introduced to iCouldBe, and saw an opportunity to match its students in need of mentoring and college readiness assistance with a mentor. Communities In Schools can provide strong case management, as they already

do through their program model, and iCouldBe has the technology platform and expertise to give those students access to a mentor, regardless of their location. Communities In Schools will be piloting this partnership in 2017 with its CIS of Charlotte affiliate.

## **INCREASE COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO GROW IMPACT**

**COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS** also works with AT&T through its Career Exploration program, which provides onsite activities at AT&T offices. During Career Exploration program days, employees and students engage with each other around activities that focus on collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication. Employees engage in informational interviews with students, talk about the paths they took to get into their careers, and share what working in their job is like on a day-to-day basis. Megan Robinson, director of program investments and partnerships at Communities In Schools, noted benefits for both employees and students through these events. "Employees at AT&T are experiencing parts of their communities they may have previously been unfamiliar with and learning about schools they never have been in contact with before." At the same time, students get the opportunity to travel to AT&T offices, engage with adults they might otherwise never have met, and be exposed to new fields of work in their own neighborhoods that may spark their interest.

Through the Career Exploration program, local CIS affiliates have been able to build stronger connections with community members. Local AT&T employees now serve on the boards of many of those affiliates as a result of their engagement with AMA, while others have become donors to the program. In addition, Robinson noted that many AT&T employees who volunteered to participate for the day of a Career Exploration program have returned and engaged with Communities In Schools as long-term mentors through their local CIS affiliates. This movement from a one-day volunteer toward long-term engagement is powerful for local affiliates, and Communities In Schools plans to leverage the value of AT&T employees by strategically working to expand affiliates with AT&T employee locations nearby in the future. To date, AT&T employees have supported over 20,000 CIS students in partnership with 46 CIS affiliates.

## **TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST**

AMA nonprofits are continually refining program models to grow their impact, and many of them are also expanding their footprint to serve more students. With growth come many challenges, potential setbacks, and hurdles

to overcome. A trusting and transparent relationship with a funder is a great asset during this process. If the nonprofit and funder are able to communicate openly about challenges as they arise, and areas where support is most needed, they can avoid misunderstandings, lost funding, or wasted time and effort on both sides.

Building that trust between recipient and funder requires hard work on both parts. AMA nonprofits and AT&T staff gave examples of how they worked to create transparent and trusting relationships, and the ways in which it has benefitted their work.

Transparency was a goal of the collaboration that AT&T built with the nonprofits from the very beginning. Heldman explained that, from the start, AT&T wanted to act more as a for-profit collaborator, rather than a donor. To make that possible, Heldman set several expectations from the start of the AMA collaboration with nonprofits.

First, AT&T would be involved operationally with the nonprofit, not just philanthropically. This meant bringing corporate business rigor to the process of self-assessment, constantly asking, “What comes next,” and moving toward that next goalpost.

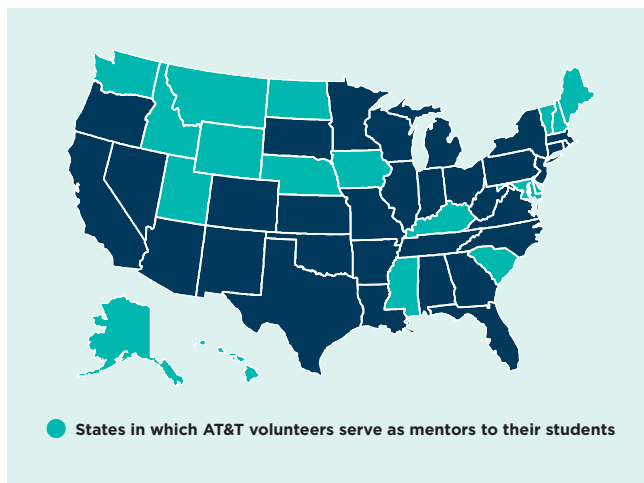
Second, there would be joint responsibility for both successes and setbacks. Heldman explained that from the very beginning, “If things didn’t go well, we didn’t tolerate finger-pointing. If there was a problem, we (the nonprofit and AT&T) were responsible—we fostered that kind of ownership on both sides.” This meant celebrating the good things together, and jointly working to make processes better and more effective. Trust was built over time as nonprofits saw AT&T consistently back their strategies, be responsive and maintain support when things didn’t go exactly as planned, and rally to address the problems that they brought forward. Conversely, Heldman noted that the nonprofits helped engender trust in their organizations when they proactively brought forward concerns and discussed any changes that they knew would be coming to their organization with AT&T in advance.

And third, both AT&T and AMA recipients must remain focused on the clear and overarching goal of addressing the larger high school dropout crisis. “If we really want to help kids,” Heldman explained, “we have to be willing to innovate, adapt, and change to make our programs better. When [the nonprofits] bought into that idea, their programs did better—and that success was contagious.”

AMA nonprofits described an open and transparent relationship with AT&T foundation staff, citing many of

the same reasons for that trust as expressed by Heldman. Schrauth at iCouldBe said that while “a lot of funders provide dollars and move on, AT&T is there, weekly calls, weekly data results—we’re growing together, learning together.” That open relationship was particularly beneficial for iCouldBe as they started the process of updating their data system. Because AT&T understood what they were trying to do, and the different stages of the process they were going through, AT&T could identify the optimal window for them to offer support and guidance, rather than coming in too late or too early.

We Teach Science gave a similar explanation for their transparent relationship with their funder. From the very first day of the contribution, Burlingham recalls sharing their program plans, budget, strengths, and weaknesses with AT&T staff. Burlingham described the relationship as more in line with a for-profit business arrangement, rather than the more typical donor-recipient relationship. Putting all the cards on the table at the very beginning allowed AT&T to be more strategic in terms of both its funding and the technical and business support it provided to We Teach Science, particularly as they began to think about expansion of the program. For example, We Teach Science originally had about 20 percent of their mentoring sessions conducted in person, rather than online. As they thought together about how to expand their organizational reach, AT&T suggested We Teach Science consider moving their program entirely online, and do away with in-person sessions. They reviewed student data together and found that outcomes did not drop for those students who did not meet their mentors in person. That data point gave We Teach Science and AT&T the confidence to proceed with a trial that recruited AT&T volunteers nationally. The shift has been a great success, and today We Teach Science has AT&T volunteers from 33 states serving as mentors to their students.



## THE FUTURE WORK OF AMA

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Looking forward, AT&T and the nonprofit organizations are continuing to think about how they can leverage skilled AT&T employees, strong collaborations, and the power of data to continue to keep students in school, on track, and graduating prepared to succeed in the workforce of the future.

AT&T plans to continue in its role as funder and collaborator to its nonprofit. For Kelem Butts this means that the philanthropy wants “to move beyond the old model of giving money and coming back in a year—our grant managers, the whole team, want to work side by side with our recipients to improve their ability to track and improve outcomes. We are a company of engineers, and engineers want to see numbers. We want to know, are we making a difference?” AT&T will continue to work closely with nonprofits to evaluate the true impact they are having on outcomes for youth served, and to adjust course to maximize the return on investment.

AT&T also is focused on leveraging the unique STEM skill sets of its employees to benefit students. Leadership hopes to create more unique opportunities for their employees to engage deeply with youth of all ages and help them build the technical and STEM skills that they will need in the workforce of the future. Employees volunteering with AMA recipients also noted the importance of exposing students to the STEM careers available at AT&T, and the high value of mentors who understand and can teach those technical skills to mentees.

For the nonprofits, many of them see their roles in the future greatly expanding as students continue to need access to technical skills, internships, and career-building activities that might not be accessible through their schools. JAG anticipates an increasing need for the career supports it provides to students going forward, and Communities In Schools hopes to continue to leverage the value and diversity of AT&T employees by growing their local affiliates in areas with AT&T locations in order to capitalize on the skills of AT&T employees and the local support that they bring to their communities.

Nonprofits and AT&T staff also discussed ways in which they see the collaborative work of AMA continuing to benefit both young people and the mentoring field as a whole. The pilot programs that have begun through the AMA learning community are demonstrating ways in which nonprofits can overlay their programs to fill in gaps for at-risk students. These collaborations have also demonstrated how nonprofits can leverage each other’s strengths and compensate for weaknesses. Building on this work, Heldman sees the next step as fostering more interworking at a local level—

making nonprofits more aware of potential partners in their areas of service, and thinking through providing multiple interventions to the same cohort of students. Similarly, Kate Schrauth at iCouldBe envisions AMA as “a place where [nonprofits] can try things and advance the whole mentoring community—that would be my dream for AMA.”

## CONCLUSION

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In many ways, the work of AMA is just beginning. New collaborations are forming, AT&T and nonprofits are getting new technology and data-tracking platforms off the ground, and many recipients are at the early stages of expanding their footprints. As the collaborative work of AMA continues to grow, it will benefit from the strengths of AT&T employees, and the overarching vision of getting more students to high school graduation ready to take on the next steps of college and career.





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