### Theory of Action: Creating Cradle to Career Proof Points

#### Implementing the Theory of Action

The Theory of Action is based on StriveTogether’s Framework for Building Cradle to Career Civic Infrastructure. The Theory of Action consists of five Gateways: Exploring, Emerging, Sustaining, Systems Change and Proof Point. Within each of the five Gateways, there are a series of quality benchmarks that are key steps in developing and sustaining a partnership. Meeting the quality benchmarks in the Exploring, Emerging and Sustaining Gateways leads to System Change and ultimately Proof Point. Partnerships implementing the Theory of Action effectively demonstrate four principles as they move from building a partnership to impacting outcomes:

1. **Engage the Community**
   - The work of the partnership must be grounded in the context of the community. Partnerships engage a broad array of community voices through building awareness and information sharing; involving and mobilizing the community towards improvement; and co-developing solutions and strategies with community members.

2. **Focus on Eliminating Locally Defined Disparities**
   - Inequalities in student achievement are defined by each partnership using local data and context. Partnerships make intentional efforts to eliminate disparities in achievement.

3. **Develop a Culture of Continuous Improvement**
   - The work of the partnership focuses on the use of local data, community expertise and national research to identify areas for improvement in a constant and disciplined manner that ensure Partners invest in practices that work.

4. **Leverage Existing Assets**
   - The partnership builds on existing resources in the community and aligns resources to maximize impact.

#### Gateways:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploring</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Sustaining</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pillar 1: Shared Community Vision</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pillar 2: Evidence Based Decision Making</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pillar 3: Collaborative Action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A cross-sector partnership with a defined geographic scope organizes around a cradle to career vision.</td>
<td>The partnership selects community level outcomes to be held accountable for improving.</td>
<td>The partnership commits to using continuous improvement to guide the work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The partnership formalizes a set of messages that are aligned and effectively communicated across partners and the community.</td>
<td>The partnership selects core indicators for the community level outcomes.</td>
<td>Collaborative Action Networks are engaged and/or formed to improve community level outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>An anchor entity is established and capacity to support the daily management of the partnership is in place.</td>
<td>The partnership prioritizes a subset of core indicators for initial focus.</td>
<td>The partnership has in place the necessary capacity to support the daily management of the partnership, data needs, facilitation, communication and engagement of the community.</td>
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<td>The partnership engages funders to support the operations and collaborative work of partners to improve outcomes.</td>
<td>The partnership collectively takes action to improve the community level outcomes using continuous improvement.</td>
<td>Partners support the operations work of the partnership.</td>
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<td><strong>Pillar 4: Investment &amp; Sustainability</strong></td>
<td><strong>Systems Change</strong></td>
<td><strong>Proof Point</strong></td>
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<td>The partnership mobilizes the community to improve community level outcomes.</td>
<td>The partnership builds on existing resources that are key steps in developing and sustaining a partnership.</td>
<td>Partners continue to actively engage in the partnership despite changes in leadership.</td>
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<td>The partnership has sustainable funding for multiple years.</td>
<td>The partnership demonstrates shared accountability for improving community level outcomes.</td>
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<td>The partnership develops a collective advocacy agenda to change local, state, or national policy to improve community level outcomes.</td>
<td>The partnership effectively communicates attribution of success and recognition of challenges.</td>
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<td>Financial and community resources are aligned to what works to improve community level outcomes.</td>
<td>The partnership enables student-level academic and non-academic data to be shared appropriately across partners in a timely manner to enable continuous improvement to improve outcomes.</td>
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<td>Necessary policies change to enable and sustain improvement.</td>
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<td><strong>Building IMPACT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Systems Change</strong></td>
<td><strong>Proof Point</strong></td>
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Shared Community Vision:

Communities often come together to support promising educational programs, instead communities should come together to identify the most important outcomes for children and commit to finding the best actions to improve those outcomes. Organizing around outcomes, identifying indicators for the outcomes and collecting local data to determine areas of need and promising practices/actions make this work fundamentally different. Engage key stakeholders, who understand local data, to form a data team. One strategy commonly used to select indicators, collect local data, communicate the data to the community and provide analysis expertise on behalf of the partnership. As partnerships progress in the work, the collection of data moves from aggregated community-wide data to program and student level data. Partnerships seek ways to make data available on a consistent basis in order for those serving students to have the data they need to continuously improve their services; this includes the use of systems, processes and people. This process often involves building trust with key stakeholders and complying with federal laws (FERPA & HIPAA) which regulate how data can be shared.

DEFINITIONS

Community Level Outcomes: Academic points along the cradle to career education continuum that are proven to be key levers that need to be moved in order to achieve the cradle to career vision and goals. Non-academic community level outcomes may be selected in addition to academic community level outcomes. (e.g.: Kindergarten Readiness).

Core Indicators: The specific measures that are being used to track progress on moving the community level outcomes and have been agreed upon to be the main metric, or one that directly measures an outcome. (e.g.: % of students assessed ready for kindergarten upon school entry).

Baseline Data: Data that is gathered as an initial data set that will be used later to provide a comparison for assessing improvement on community level outcomes.

Key Sub-populations: Populations in which the partnership determines a need for a more intensive focus in order to eliminate disparities in academic achievement. These sub-populations are determined using local context and data and could differ across partnership.

Local Data: Different types of measures that help to understand local context and impact for the geographically defined scope of the partnership.

Collaborative Action:

Several different types of action take place through the implementation of the Theory of Action. Collaborative Action is about community members coming together to use data in a disciplined manner to collectively move an outcome. Collaborative Action uses a process of continuous improvement that includes the following components:

- For each improving outcomes and indicators:
  - Uses local data
  - Leverages existing resources;
  - Includes the voice of the community (where appropriate);
  - Ensures action is within the sphere of control of those involved.

Collaborative Action requires participation from both practitioners and leadership. In the early stages of the work, Networks are engaged or formed; they then develop charters and action plans using disaggregated student level data and ultimately identify practices/actions that improve community level outcomes. Through their work, Networks identify opportunities for partners to improve outcomes.

DEFINITIONS

Continuous Improvement Process: The on-going effort to use local data in a disciplined manner to improve efficiencies and effectiveness of processes and action. Collaborative Action Networks: Groups of appropriate cross-sector practitioners and individuals who organize around a community level outcome and use a continuous improvement process to develop an action plan with strategies to improve that outcome.

Charters: A tool for Collaborative Action Network members to hold each other accountable to shared measurements and to the partnership. This is a ‘living’ document that should be updated regularly and contains the following components: Purpose Statement; Problem Statement; Project Scope; Membership; Operating Principles. Action Plan: A document that outlines the strategies that a Collaborative Action Network will work on collectively during a given time frame. This is a ‘living’ document that should be updated regularly and contains the following components: Long and Short-term Targets, Measures, Projects and Action Steps.

Investment & Sustainability:

Initiating or redirecting resources (time, talent and treasure) toward data-based practices on an on-going basis, usually requiring a shift in behavior, particularly in regards to funding and policy. In the initial stages of a partnership, securing multiple years of funding for the operations, including staff support (see key staff), is critical to long-term success. As the partnerships mature, the focus may shift to policies on allocating existing resources and identifying new resources (including: knowledge, time, volunteers, skills, financial contributions or other in-kind services) to practices and activities that are having an impact on community level outcomes. Policy changes are often a lynchpin for removing barriers that potentially inhibit improvements to community level outcomes. In the latter stages, a Partnership should seek to impact changes in policies to ensure impact over the long-term. Engaging the community in the work of the partnership also ensures long term sustainability.

DEFINITIONS

Anchor Entity: An organization or entity that commits to acting as the fiscal agent and ensuring the partnerships long term stability. Can provide additional functions such as housing partnership staff. Collective Advocacy Agenda: Shared plan for influencing public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic and social systems and institutions.

Key Staff can be provided in-kind or loaned to the partnership.

- Partnership Director: A full-time dedicated staff person that provides leadership and management to ensure that the mission and core values of the partnership are put into practice.
- Facilitator: Supports continuous improvement action planning
- Data Manager: Supports analysis, management, integration, and reporting of data
- Communication/Community Engagement Manager: Supports internal and external communications and engagement of the broader community.