

# The Power of Partnership

## Road Map to Success

The urgent need to move the dial on key student outcomes and close large achievement gaps demands new and innovative approaches. In this spirit of creative problem solving, communities around the country are embarking on collective impact initiatives aimed at accelerating systems improvement through a multipronged, multistakeholder, and data-driven approach to community and institutional change. The Road Map Project (RMP) in South Seattle and South King County, Washington—one such collective impact initiative—has the long-term goal to double the number of students who are on track to earn a postsecondary credential by 2020 and to close gaps for low-income students and students of color.

Launched in 2010, the RMP reflects a commitment to achieving large-scale change by creating a common agenda and bringing together leaders at all levels of the education, nonprofit, community,

civic, and philanthropic sectors. The RMP is organized around four core areas of activity:

1. **Alignment** across sectors
2. **Parent and community engagement**
3. **Power of data** for improving policy and practice
4. **Stronger systems** from cradle to college

Education Northwest, a Portland-based nonprofit, has worked closely with the project's backbone organization, the Community Center for Education Results (CCER); the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; and individuals and organizations throughout the South King County region to document RMP's progress and challenges. Through this evaluation brief, we hope to offer important insights to other communities engaged in or planning collective impact efforts.

## Year 1 findings

Education Northwest's evaluation of the RMP is based on surveys of 93 organizational partners and 324 broader stakeholders, interviews of 45 key leaders in CCER and across the project, and ongoing observations of project meetings and events.

### Alignment

**Key finding: Partners from across the region are aligning their efforts with the goal, strategies, and metrics of the RMP**

Through the work of the RMP, individual partners commit to the goal of the initiative and align their own policies and actions to produce the desired RMP outcomes. Since 2010, partner organizations across key sectors have increasingly demonstrated their support and commitment by investing in organizational strategies and metrics aligned to the RMP goal and indicators. Strongest alignment is occurring in the K-12 and funding sectors, with community-based, postsecondary, early learning, and governmental partners also starting to adopt RMP indicators and strategies.

**RMP efforts are yielding high levels of commitment and shared vision.** There is growing appreciation across organizations and districts for the collective impact approach to supporting young people within the region because “people are ready to come together.” Organizations are seeing the value of this coordinated regional approach.

*[P]eople ... see it [the Road Map Project] as a very positive thing. They think it's a very powerful thing and I think people also see it as a well thought out strategy for facilitating change collectively.*

—K-12 stakeholder

**Systemwide metrics support alignment across the initiative.** Partners are adopting the RMP measures and indicators for tracking progress. For example, districts, postsecondary institutions, funders, and community-based organizations (CBOs) are increasingly starting to align their metrics with the RMP indicators and are using these indicators to track the progress of their own work.

*We refined all of our data collection around what the Road Map Project collects ... so as that project continues to develop, we are tracking the same data points they're tracking.*

—Government stakeholder

**Partners are making changes within their organizations to align their efforts with the project goal.** Beyond participating in RMP meetings and events, partners are also aligning their own institutional policies, practices, and strategies to the RMP goal and focus



Photo courtesy of Road Map Project

areas. For example, districts are demonstrating “more intentionality” around parent engagement by hiring family engagement staff, reaching out to diverse communities, and hosting parent events.

**Momentum may be difficult to sustain over time.** Many participants expressed concern about institutional commitment to implementation and whether partners will make the deep investments necessary to change systems “at scale.” To date, many of the alignment changes are focused on policies and have not been tested yet in implementation. Challenges to sustaining momentum include resource investment in long-term systems change, turnover of key leadership, and capacity to implement the changes that individual partners have committed to make.

*The will and strategic piece is absolutely necessary, but there isn't a huge amount of attention and resolve put on where the work actually needs to be done: in schools, with kids, with families.*

—K-12 stakeholder

## Parent and Community Engagement

**Key finding: Authentic engagement is important but very difficult**

Fostering powerful community voice strengthens public demand for excellence and equity. It may start with simply raising awareness among community stakeholders but later may evolve into developing specific public and collective commitments, helping to cultivate the emergence of leaders, and engaging broad community support for improving student outcomes. The RMP's focus on community voice includes two important components: (1) engaging parents in the education system and (2) creating opportunities for diverse communities and sectors to participate and lead the work.

**The project is doing important foundational work to engage families.** The RMP is prompting K-12 systems to

develop new indicators and make new investments in parent engagement. There is also some perception of increased access for parents due to RMP activities and public events. Several participants cited the Parent Forum as an example of how the project is providing a new venue for engaging parents in policy conversations. Families were incentivized to attend the forum with transportation, childcare, translators, and multicultural food. Through workshops and discussion sessions, the event created an entry point for families to engage with each other, with community organizations, and with school district leadership as key partners in fostering student success.

*Parents need to be primary partners ... we need to learn from them as much as we want them to learn from us.*

—CBO stakeholder

However, there are still challenges in authentically engaging and providing leadership opportunities for parents and youth. Engaging families from historically marginalized communities may require the project to take a different approach that emphasizes partnership and relationship building. It will be important for the RMP to continue to build on the work of the Parent Forum and provide entry paths into the work to “do with” rather than “do for” the parents and youth that the project aims to serve.

**There is “more work to be done” to ensure that all stakeholders are engaged in the RMP in a meaningful and influential way.** Currently the strongest involvement in the initiative is the K-12 sector and leadership—leading to some perceptions that the initiative is too K-12 focused. Additional efforts are being mounted to increase engagement of professionals who work most directly with young people and their families, early learning stakeholders, postsecondary institutions, CBOs, and historically marginalized communities. A key part of this strategy is to increase the capacity of grassroots stakeholders and direct service professionals to serve as leaders

We just reorganized our whole structure to align with Road Map ... It was basically a decision of highest and best use. We are going to align with the work that is already happening, we are going to partner with the people who are doing work around the same priority, and we are going to help them move the dial in the context of partnerships.

—CBO stakeholder

I think that it's helped change who's at the table from an institutional perspective so that people are getting used to being at tables with other types of organizations ... I think I'm seeing that in more places and outside the Road Map Project work specifically. I think that's a result of helping people understand what community impact means.

—K-12 stakeholder

in the RMP. For example, the High School to College Completion (HSCC) work group is launching a postsecondary success subcommittee to better engage postsecondary administrators, instructors, and student services staff in strategy development. These partners will help identify strategies for supporting students' persistence in and completion of higher education. The HSCC work group also plans to include postsecondary representatives on its Advisory Committee to provide ongoing support and monitoring as the work group implements its action plan.

### Power of Data

**Key finding: Increased data capacity is driving change across the region**

One of the key strategies the RMP uses to produce systems change is building strong data capacity and using data on the RMP indicators to target and catalyze necessary changes. By publicizing progress on the indicators, the RMP fosters accountability across organizations for meeting the project's targets. Detailed data briefs broken down by district, community, and student subgroups are driving action by helping districts and communities to home in on targeted areas where they are not making progress and to identify successes that can be shared across partners. This cross-organizational learning and accountability is increasing the focus on using data to drive the work, and partners are increasingly making decisions with the goal of meeting specific RMP targets.

**Efforts to increase access to data have been highly successful.** An important RMP success is the wide and public sharing of regional data on the project's indicators. Key examples include the 2011 Baseline Report and 2012 and 2013 Results Reports. The project encourages data use by putting data in people's hands in an understandable format.

*[A success of the Road Map Project has been] actually getting data into the hands of people in a systematic way and from a systems perspective. This is a new way for us to think about data.*

—K-12 Stakeholder

**Data use for decisionmaking is becoming more widespread.** RMP partners are beginning to engage in more data-informed decisionmaking to target their efforts, sharing data with organizational staff, communities, and even the legislature. For example, while K-12 district leadership previously focused on academic data for decisionmaking, they are now increasingly using data on nonacademic indicators such as attendance, discipline, and student engagement to inform district policy. More generally, stakeholders explained that the RMP indicators and goal serve as "proof points" to document progress and to justify "why we're allocating resources like this."

**More work is needed to support effective data use by all partners.** Some challenges remain in building data capacity and encouraging the use of data across all sectors and organizations in the region. For example, data use is not as widespread in some sectors: between early learning providers and the K-12 system; between K-12 and postsecondary institutions; and among some CBOs. This is due to limited data access, but as data systems grow and improve, additional coaching on effectively using the data will be important for catalyzing change.



Photo courtesy of CCER

## Stronger Systems

**Key finding: Collaborative systems are emerging in the RMP region**

For sustained change to occur, alignment must take place within organizations as well as across organizations and sectors. This includes alignment between the K–12 and postsecondary systems, across CBOs, and with governmental agencies and business partners. Systems-level changes include revising or establishing new policies, increasing collaboration and coordination among stakeholders, and developing networks. Systems change will look different for different issues. For example, systems change in early childhood is about creating a system that brings together birth to age 3, pre-K, and K–12 organizations and institutions. Systems change for K–12, on the other hand, may involve strengthening established networks, innovating within the system, or creating linkages to other systems or sectors.

**New partnerships with schools and districts are developing.** Sectors such as higher education, youth development, and early learning report that the RMP offers a unique opportunity to interact with representatives from the K–12 system and to come together around a common goal. Creating work groups and indicators around each of these issues communicates that these sectors are an important part of the continuum of opportunity and support for South King County youth.

**The RMP provides a framework and structure for increased collaboration.**

Within-sector and cross-sector collaboration has substantially increased since the inception of the RMP. The RMP provides many opportunities that encourage professionals to develop new relationships and shared understandings with colleagues from other sectors. Stakeholders explained that the project “has opened doors for us” and “helped support our community engagement.” Many of these new collaborations have emerged between early learning and

## RMP System-Level Collaborations

- The Road Map Project’s coordination of the **Let’s Read! summer reading campaign** has provided access to new partnerships for the King County Library System and other organizations. The effort has raised awareness in the region about the importance of reading in the summer, and the need for organizations to work together to prevent summer learning loss.
- The English Language Learner (ELL) work group has successfully advocated for **expanded funding and programs to support ELL students**. The state legislature allocated increased funding for the Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP) which, starting with the 2013–2014 school year, will enable districts to support recently exited TBIP students to succeed in academic courses.
- The Birth to Third Grade work group has focused on establishing **Community Birth to 3rd Grade Networks** by connecting and aligning pre-K and K–3 teachers, systems, and community partners. Districts are adopting successful practices from one another, such as agreeing to a regional kindergarten registration day and a streamlined process.
- The **College Bound Scholarship campaign** used data and leveraged relationships between K–12 and community partners to dramatically increase sign-ups and demonstrate tangible impact for stakeholders across the region.
- **College and career readiness activities** include increasing Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate course taking among underrepresented students and developing agreements between community colleges and districts about multiple measures for placement into college-level coursework.

K–12, K–12 and CBOs, and between government and all other types of organizations.

**The RMP can claim several cross-sector “quick wins” that lay the foundation for system change.** There are many ways in which RMP partners are collaborating within and across sectors. Many examples are short-term wins that involve lots of cross-sector and cross-organizational

collaboration (e.g., the Lets Read! campaign) and may serve as a launching point for more sustainable systems change.

## Conclusions

As the work moves forward, the ability of the RMP to create tangible, sustained changes across the region will depend on how vigilant and nimble its partners can be. There are going to be hits and misses along the way; the key is how the region will react to these ups and downs. Some strategies will show promise from the start. Partners need to recognize quick wins, harness these good ideas, and support each other to scale up this great

work. Other strategies may not be so successful, however. What happens when the indicators are not showing progress? How can the RMP make the most of these opportunities for growth?

Course-correction requires a strong commitment. It takes time to make meaning of the data. It is hard work to engage new partners, build relationships, and identify ways to work together. Most of all, it takes courage to change course and maintain morale when the data may not show the improvements that partners hoped to see. But, if RMP partners can commit to adapt and improve along the way, South King County students will have the best chance at success.

## To Learn More

Education Northwest ([educationnorthwest.org](http://educationnorthwest.org)) works to transform teaching and learning in the Pacific Northwest and across the nation. For more information on this evaluation and other research and evaluation projects, contact:



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Education Northwest's services to states, districts, schools, community-based organizations, and foundations include rigorous research and evaluation of new and existing programs; research-based technical assistance in areas such as equity, school improvement, and distance learning; widely acclaimed professional development in the fields of literacy and mathematics education; and strategic communications that maximize impact.

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