

The background features a complex geometric pattern of overlapping triangles in shades of teal, orange, and yellow. A repeating pattern of circular motifs, each composed of small triangles, is scattered across the entire background. Two white rectangular boxes are centered on the page, containing text.

From Idea to Action:

TWO DAYS, 32 CITIES,
ENDLESS INSPIRATION



City six-word story quilt squares. Photo credit: Casey Atkins

FROM IDEA TO ACTION: Two Days, 32 Cities, Endless Inspiration

In March 2018, Every Hour Counts brought together city teams from around the country to learn from and tap the expertise of leading expanded-learning intermediary organizations as part of our expanded-learning systems-building institute. *From Idea to Action: National Institute for Building Expanded-Learning Systems* was designed to dive into the heart of our systems-building work: using cross-sector collaboration to ensure that all young people have access to transformational learning opportunities.

Every Hour Counts' systems-building institute is the only peer-to-peer institute for expanded-learning practitioners in the country. Unlike at a typical conference, at *From Idea*

to Action local teams of expanded-learning intermediaries, program providers, practitioners, funders, and K-12 and city representatives came together to freely share their ideas, promising practices, resources, and lessons learned. Through interactive workshops led by Every Hour Counts leaders, attendees and presenters worked together to explore a wide variety of pertinent topics, from how to infuse continuous quality improvement into expanded-learning systems to increasing racial equity within organizations, systems, and programs. In the spirit of high-quality expanded learning, *From Idea to Action* was filled with hands-on learning experiences for attendees, from a Boston After School & Beyond-led role playing session on developing a program quality improvement model to participatory, small group discussions and analyses of how and why we can engage youth in our work, led by Youthprise.

During lunch on the first day, we were all treated to an inspiring presentation by Gigi Antoni, The Wallace Foundation's Director of Learning and Enrichment. Gigi Antoni's presentation served as a rallying cry for the room, encouraging us all to stay in the fight for equitable learning systems for the long haul:

People in the Middle Ages spent multiple generations building cathedrals; every generation built on the previous generation's work. Don't give up, don't lose hope. You are all leaders...the fact that you're thinking about and building systems to provide equitable distribution of resources for children is a great gift for this country.

During the second day's lunch, Paul Reville, Francis Keppel Professor of Educational Policy and Administration, Harvard Graduate School of Education and former Secretary of Education for Massachusetts, reminded all of us of why we do this work:

Genius is evenly distributed across zip codes, but access and opportunity are not. Our community can't be successful unless ALL of our youth are successful. Youth can't be successful depending on schools alone. It would be better to go together than to go alone.

With so much talent and passion in the room, our 2018 institute sought to address some of the most pressing systems-building issues and challenges facing the field:

1. *Scaling high-quality practices*
2. *Establishing the right governance structure for your city's expanded-learning goals*
3. *Financial sustainability*
4. *Defining and measuring success*

This report features highlights and lessons learned from the 2018 institute, and discusses how they're informing our 2019 institute.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Shining More Brightly Together

Every Hour Counts has been hosting our systems-building institute for five years, and we're proud to say that in 2018, nearly 200 people from 32 communities in 29 states and the District of Columbia traveled to Boston ready to roll up their sleeves for their young people back home. Attendees included representatives from city governments and school districts, funders, after-school program providers, and citywide expanded-learning non-profits, who came together to truly listen to and learn from one another.

The day before *From Idea to Action* formally kicked off, Every Hour Counts hosted a special funders' session for grantmakers that are focused on college and career readiness and expanded learning. The session explored how funders can help the expanded-learning field improve program quality and impact measurement, address gaps in access, and partner with schools to better address issues of equity in education.

Day one of the institute started with introductions and a round of six-word stories to break the ice. Created as a way to combine drama and poetry, six-word stories are meant to convey a whole story in six little words. Each city group spent some time coming up with the story of their expanded-learning efforts, and in true six-word story form, they were filled with poetic drama and action. Youth Development Executives of King County, in Washington, wrote, "Innovative city, disparities growing, time's now;" the team representing Providence, RI wrote, "Providence Propigates Program-Quality Painstakingly;" Collective for Youth, in Omaha NE wrote, "Culturally relevant connectors,

cheerleaders, community-wide advocates,” and the team from Tacoma, WA wrote, “City of destiny holding the space.” Combined, the more than 30 stories painted a picture of an expanded-learning field focused on equity, dignity, and youth-centered approaches. They highlighted the passion for high-quality learning in the room, as well as the long-standing dedication to a vision of education that prizes the potential of every single young person in our country.

With those values guiding us, *From Idea to Action* was structured around the key building blocks of systems organizing, with the goal of demonstrating how we can realize our vision for learning only when we all bring our strengths to table and work collaboratively.

SESSION HIGHLIGHT 1:

Racial Equity, From Practice to Policy

Led by Jackie Jainga-Hyllseth, Chief Program Quality Officer for School’s Out Washington, and Jessica Werner, Executive Director for Youth Development Executives of King County, *Racial Equity, From Practice to Policy* sought to demonstrate that it isn’t possible for systems-builders to focus on high-quality social and emotional learning (SEL)

without also addressing racial inequities. Building equitable systems, they emphasized, inherently requires dismantling systems of racialized oppression. As such, the session focused on demonstrating how both Youth Development Executives of King County and School’s Out Washington believe that to embed cultural responsiveness into their program quality work, they had to start by focusing on themselves. Deeply understanding one’s one identity and intentionally rooting out the conscious and unconscious biases we each have is critical.

As Werner pointed out:

If we, [expanded-learning systems builders] are committed to building a society where race is not a predictor of one’s success, we must address racism and racial inequities in our own organizations and institutions while also working for the policies, programs and systems in other sectors that will lead to optimum outcomes for all.

Jainga-Hyllseth went on to elaborate that:

Data on a variety of youth outcomes show us that racial disparities [in education] continue to exist. We believe that access to high-quality expanded-learning opportunities is essential for closing the opportunity gap and challenging inequity.



Five of the 30+ “six-word stories.”

This work is by nature complex and can be emotionally difficult, but for anyone committed to positively influencing what happens to our young people, taking the opportunity to self-reflect is critical. With that in mind, Werner and Jainga-Hyllseth provided participants with a clear model for identifying bias and authentically advancing cultural responsiveness work, while also demonstrating a pathway for white systems builders to strengthen their comfort levels with and skill at being what Werner and Jainga-Hyllseth called “co-conspirators in anti-racism work.” To accomplish the session’s goals, participants had guided conversations about how we can all do the work of undoing racism in ourselves and in our organizations through:

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE:

Understanding the historical and present context of racism in our country, communities, and institutions.

SELF-AWARENESS & REFLECTION:

Exploration of my own and our collective privilege and oppression, and our impact on others.

COMMITMENT:

Expressing dedication to dismantling racism at the individual, institutional, and structural levels.

ACTIONS & BEHAVIOR:

The actual behavior and impact of individuals and organizations.

Participants learned about the efforts of intermediary organizations already working to change practice through an intentional focus on racial equity, and were provided a worksheet entitled “Moving Towards Racial Equity: A Multi-Level Matrix.” Through this process, participants began to map out and discuss where they individually had the most energy when it comes to racial equity work and where they felt challenged the most. The session leaders then provided the group with tools and strategies that they could use to capitalize on their energy and address core challenges around advancing racial equity work at their organizations. One such tool *and* strategy that the group got some hands-on practice with was caucusing.

Caucusing is a key racial equity tool that acknowledges that white people and people of color have work to do both separately and together—caucuses provide spaces for people to work within their own racial/ethnic groups. This is crucial because people of color caucuses support healing from internalized oppression and build solidarity, while white caucuses work to disrupt internalized white superiority, and to build muscle strength to be co-conspirators in anti-racism work. Jainga-Hyllseth and Werner noted that as a tool for working towards true racial equity, caucusing operates under some key assumptions:



“Genius is evenly distributed across zip codes, but access and opportunity are not. Our community can’t be successful unless ALL of our youth are successful. Youth can’t be successful depending on schools alone. It would be better to go together than to go alone.”

Paul Reville | HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND FORMER SECRETARY OF EDUCATION FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

1. *We live in a society where race matters; we're all part of the picture.*
2. *Our history is built on slavery, genocide, and exclusion. The systems and institutions we have inherited are built on racist and discriminatory policies and practices.*
3. *None of us asked for this. The structures of race and racism were set up in the past, but all of us are responsible for the present and the future.*
4. *As we sit here talking about race and racism, racism is playing out. We need to have these conversations, but we also need to be taking action to end racism.*
5. *Racism hurts everyone.*

The room was then divided into a People of Color Caucus and a White Caucus. In keeping with the tenets of caucusing, each participant committed to staying engaged; speaking their truth while holding others' truths as sacred; experiencing discomfort and embracing their growing edge; noticing power dynamics in the room; recognizing intent vs. impact and owning their impact; speaking from the heart *and* the mind; and focusing on relationships.

The caucus exercise was a transformative one, and highlighted how it's essential to make space for continued conversation among your staff, leadership, and board of directors. Persistent advocates from within the organization are necessary for continued progress, and leaders and staff need additional support, including resources and time. By making racial equity a "household" topic and incorporating it into daily discussions and standing agendas—which includes developing comfort with naming issues like privilege, bias, and microaggressions—

you'll begin to see how racial equity becomes a central focus within the policies and practices of your organization. The journey is ongoing, so be sure to celebrate your successes and be realistic about the challenges.

SESSION HIGHLIGHT 2:

All in for SEL: Aligning Efforts Through Professional Learning Communities

Partnership for Children and Youth's Executive Director Jennifer Peck and Katie Brackenridge knew that they had their work cut out for them when their organization launched Expanded Learning 360/365, which leveraged a major educational shift in California. As in many places, after-school and summer programs in the state had historically been seen as a way to raise test scores and help with homework. But with the implementation of Common Core and the end of No Child Left Behind, conversations within the educational community throughout California began to shift from standardized test preparation to student engagement. Partnership for Children and Youth saw this as an opportunity to explore the possibilities surrounding SEL and project-based learning. They knew that SEL is the foundational component for all youth development programs, but six of the *Quality Standards for Expanded Learning in California* directly promote three core areas of SEL.



“People in the Middle Ages spent multiple generations building cathedrals; every generation built on the previous generation’s work. Don’t give up, don’t lose hope. You are all leaders... the fact that you’re thinking about and building systems to provide equitable distribution of resources for children is a great gift for this country.”

Gigi Antoni | THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

During their session, they outlined how Partnership for Children and Youth used these standards as the foundation for Expanded Learning 360/365, which had the goal of improving SEL practice and alignment between the school day and expanded-learning programs across nine districts in Northern, Central, and Southern California. To accomplish this goal, they identified three core strategy components:

1. *Build on existing assets.*
2. *Learn from on-the-ground experience.*
3. *Attend to adult SEL skills and practices.*

Peck and Brackenridge noted that in order to align SEL efforts, an important first step for any organization is to gather key after-school stakeholders to assess what youth outcomes their programs are already supporting and how they connect to outcomes prized by the state and school districts. They then convened school districts to present the data showing that expanded-learning program providers were already implementing high-

quality SEL practices and seeing outcomes. After making the case that California’s expanded-learning program providers could help districts improve SEL practice, they initiated a professional learning community with nine diverse districts.

Each professional learning community team had between five and eight members that included expanded-learning and school day representatives and, when appropriate, up to three community-based partners. The teams met monthly to create rubrics to describe what SEL alignment between the school day and expanded learning should look like. The rubrics enabled them to rate themselves and then create an iterative action plan for achieving their vision. Partnership for Children and Youth facilitated the professional learning communities, and provided consulting support to help them implement the strategies in their action plan.

Brackenridge and Peck emphasized for participants how success with any professional learning community hinges on six key characteristics:

1. *Inclusive membership, which means ensuring mixed roles are in the room and on each team*
2. *Clarity about the purpose of the professional learning community*
3. *A sense of collective responsibility, meaning that everyone takes ownership of the work and understands that it's not the professional learning community's work, it's **their** work*
4. *A dedication to building mutual trust, meaning that there needs to be a significant amount of time building positive relationships and open and respectful communication*
5. *Consistently provide opportunities for reflection*
6. *Create opportunities for teams to collaborate across districts*

The results of California's SEL professional learning communities demonstrated for participants how strong teams of cross-sector educators can come up with a multitude of ways to improve SEL alignment between the school day and expanded learning programs. Sacramento's team focused on creating shared SEL language across all departments, from food services to transportation, to ensure that all the adults that interact with students in any capacity are on the same page. The professional learning community was the first time they'd been given the opportunity to have those conversations. Oakland's team developed three signature SEL practices—warm welcome, engaging practices, and an optimistic close—and piloted SEL strategies and curricula. San Leandro decided to focus on shared professional development, and even included expanded learning representatives in the trainings they provided for

school day staff. These examples demonstrate how professional learning communities can be used to scale SEL while remaining responsive to specific district and community needs.

Interestingly, Peck and Brackenridge noted that the beauty of a successful professional learning community is its ability to bring together diverse stakeholders from across the political spectrum. By focusing on relationship building to create mutual trust, team members can engage in a process of productive disagreement, which produces stronger work and innovative ideas.

That quality of productive disagreement really resonated with participants, who hailed from a wide variety of communities with varying political belief systems. During the question and answer session, one participant reinforced how this detail hit home, noting:

If you don't bring enough different perspectives to the room, the work won't move forward. Too often it can be a room of people who agree, which doesn't push the work.

This notion of working across not only educational contexts, but also political and ideological beliefs also really highlighted the ways in which adults can strengthen their own SEL skills, which is another goal of any strong professional learning community focused on SEL for young people.

SESSION HIGHLIGHT 3:

Relationship Status: It's Complicated

Ensuring long-term sustainability of an expanded-learning system requires navigating some complicated relationships between school districts and schools and community-based organizations.

Acknowledging this, former ExpandedED Schools President Lucy Friedman, Prime Time Palm Beach County's President and CEO Suzette Harvey, and ExpandedED Schools' Vice President of Program Excellence Rashida Ladner-Seward came together on the second day to tell their "it's complicated stories"— three approaches/ strategies they used to promote healthy partnerships with schools and overcome challenges. ExpandedED Schools and Prime Time Palm Beach County were each started within a couple of years of one another, but grew in very different ways, illustrating how expanded-learning systems builders must be responsive to the changing needs and dynamics of the schools and organizations within their respective communities in order to establish long-term sustainability.

As Friedman noted, New York City's ExpandedED Schools was created 20 years ago with the idea that if school principals could just see how transformative after-school learning was for students, they would realize that their schools needed to adopt the same strategies and practices during the school day—a sort of "back door school reform" approach, as she called it. Although that never happened, over time it became clear that the strongest expanded-learning programs were the ones embraced by principals. Even so, ExpandedED Schools quickly learned that putting all of their eggs into the principal basket doesn't guarantee a long-term, healthy relationship with a school. Principal turnover is high, so Friedman emphasized the need for creating positive relationships at as many levels as you can within a school, from teachers to guidance counselors.

Ladner-Seward went on to address how expanded-learning systems builders also need to think strategically when they're developing and nurturing school/community relationships. Oftentimes that means working with community-based organizations to identify areas of

outcomes synergy with schools. This entails looking at what might be wildly different program models in order to find where the common threads of intent and the common outcomes are. With a set of common outcomes articulated across programs, she can then go into schools and have intentional conversations so that schools and community-based organizations develop shared goals.

It's worth noting that New York City is the largest school district in the United States, and so ExpandedED Schools has prioritized having unified and consistent messaging and goals across all departments at the Department of Education. Working with such a huge district might seem like an insurmountable challenge when it comes to creating long-term relationships, however Ladner-Seward surprised the audience by saying that that working with multiple offices—both centralized and decentralized—can actually help you spread your message across the system in some unexpected ways, creating a sort of viral effect using multiple in-roads. "Sometimes you have to chip away from the middle or even the bottom" because you can't always get to the executive director or top level of a school system, she explained—"Find your champions who can help you bridge and broker conversations." Doing this requires three levels of work and consistent messaging:

1. *On the ground work through in-person relationships at schools;*
2. *Systems-level work at the District- and programs-level;*
3. *Creating consistency where there seems to be disparity, especially with regard to shared goals and outcomes.*



“Find your champions who can help you bridge and broker conversations.”

Rashida Ladner-Seward | EXPANDED SCHOOLS

While ExpandedED Schools was established as an attempt at “back door school reform,” what is now Prime Time Palm Beach County came into being 19 years ago with a single funder as a quasi-governmental agency convened to share resources to improve the quality of local afterschool and summer programs. As Harvey explained, in Palm Beach County, all after-school programs were school-based, not offered through community-based organizations, and principals would hire after-school directors. However in 2000, a big shift happened. A high-ranking school administrator decided that after-school programming would focus on social and emotional learning and the school day would focus on academics, but never the twain shall meet. In response, the original convening group formed a separate nonprofit called Prime Time Palm Beach County. However, with the district focusing on academics and seeing social and emotional learning as wholly separate, Prime Time was seen as an ancillary, rather than essential, partner.

Harvey noted that although Prime Time Palm Beach County worked with 70 of the 93 school-based programs, they would only ever see Prime Time Palm Beach County staff after 3PM, and although Prime Time’s mission is all about hands-on learning and professional development, their educators would get curricula and a script. This presented a number of challenges with regard to relationship building, so with the help of The Wallace Foundation, Prime Time developed a sort of Trojan Horse: non-district professional development and training for teachers and out-of-school time professionals.

By focusing on positive youth development practices, Prime Time was able to develop a professional development approach designed to improve social and emotional competencies and classroom practices—teachers reported that it was the best training they’d ever had. What’s more, social and emotional learning competencies were already embedded into part of the district’s teacher evaluations, so Prime Time created online training modules to help teachers do better on their teacher evaluations. By developing a joint professional development series that intentionally took teachers’ needs to heart, Prime Time was able to build a network of champions within schools. Now the district has begun seeing Prime Time as more of a true partner.

In both the Prime Time and ExpandedED Schools examples, nurturing meaningful, strategic relationships was at the heart of creating a shared sense of commitment between schools, districts, and expanded-learning systems builders. Importantly, those relationships can be developed at any and all levels, from the grasstops to the grassroots.

Conclusion

From Idea to Action was our largest national institute to date, and although only two days, it was packed with sessions that encouraged participants to think outside of the box, and created spaces for engaging with one another, brainstorm, and learn from successful field examples.

We heard from Boston City leaders about how they came together to discuss Boston's approach to building and scaling an out-of-school time system, and the important attributes of partnership, measurement, and innovation. From there, participants spent half a day diving into a variety of workshop sessions focused on continuous quality improvement, from the nuts and bolts of establishing a quality improvement system to creating a program quality and compliance profile. From a morning swimming in quality, participants spent the afternoon of the first day exploring youth outcomes, as well as policy and advocacy. Participants got "pro-tips" from Penn Hill Group and the Providence After School Alliance on the most efficient and effective advocacy strategies to make the biggest impact, and heard from Youthprise, Sprockets, St. Paul, and the University of Minnesota about leveraging community engagement to achieve SEL outcomes.

The second day focused on equity, youth engagement, data, and building relationships with K-12. Nashville After Zone Alliance and Sprockets, St. Paul engaged participants in the process of identifying what types of data to collect, why to collect various types of data, and how to use it to drive improvements. Expanded Schools, the Providence After School Alliance and Prime Time Palm Beach County sat down with their group to discuss how partnerships structures (e.g., after-school, expanded learning, and community school models) can provide a foundation for deeper partnership.

By the time *From Idea to Action* ended, participants had gotten a clear picture of how they could return to their communities and establish youth-centered, impact-driven expanded-learning systems in their own cities. Every Hour Counts was founded by a pioneering group of citywide expanded-learning systems builders 12 years ago. During that time, we've learned a lot about

what goes into making a successful expanded-learning system, and we've created a "playbook" of sorts. As we look to our 2019 national institute in Denver, we're excited to leverage what we've learned with the goal of elevating the next generation of emerging systems builders.



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We are grateful for all the communities who attended the Institute, who lead this movement and who strive every day to break down barriers and provide transformative learning experiences to support the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people across the country.

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