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# Collective Impact Case Study: The Road Map Project



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## Summary

The Road Map Project seeks to double the number of students on track to graduate with a postsecondary degree or career credential in the South Seattle and South King County, Wash., region by 2020, as well as to close achievement gaps. It will do this by driving a dramatic improvement in student achievement from “cradle to career” in South Seattle and South King County. The project builds on the belief that collective effort is necessary to make large-scale change and has created a common goal and shared vision in order to facilitate coordinated action, both inside and outside schools.<sup>1</sup>

### Key Facts

**Initiative / backbone name:** The Road Map Project / Community Center for Education Results

**Year initiative formed:** 2010

**Mission:** Double the number of students on track to graduate with a postsecondary degree or career credential by 2020, and close the achievement gaps

**Geography:** Seattle and South King County, WA

**Impact area(s):** Education

## Problem

At first glance, educational attainment in the Seattle metro region appears high – in 2010, 47% of adults over 25 in King County had a bachelor’s degree,<sup>2</sup> compared to roughly 30% of the population nationally.<sup>3</sup> However, those statistics – caused by the relocation of college graduates from other parts of the country and world to the region – masked serious problems for local students in disadvantaged areas. In fact, according to the Road Map Project’s baseline report “only one out of every four King County residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher was born” in the region.<sup>4</sup> The entire Seattle region, but particularly South Seattle and South King County, faced unacceptable educational achievement gaps for low-income students and children of color, as well as low overall educational achievement rates. While data shows that 67% of jobs will require a college degree or credential by 2018, only 24% of children from the region and 10% of children of color, receive such a credential. Graduation rates needed to rise dramatically to ensure that students in the region will have the opportunity to obtain meaningful careers in the future.<sup>5</sup>

Despite promises of education-focused programs and organizations in the region working to improve educational attainment, many in the community believed that the measures of student success were still

<sup>1</sup> The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013, <http://www.roadmapproject.org>

<sup>2</sup> The Road Map Project Baseline Report. Accessed, July 2013. [http://www.roadmapproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/The\\_Road\\_Map\\_Project\\_Baseline\\_Report\\_2011.pdf](http://www.roadmapproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/The_Road_Map_Project_Baseline_Report_2011.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> United States Census, “Educational Attainment in the United States.” Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/education/data/cps/2012/tables.html>

<sup>4</sup> The Road Map Project Baseline Report

<sup>5</sup> Carnevale, Anthony, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl. “Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018,” Georgetown University. Published June, 2010. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/FullReport.pdf>

unacceptably low and too little progress had been made. Thus, the Road Map Project set out to transform the education system in the region by implementing a collective impact effort so that students can acquire the education and skill levels the economy demands.

## Collective Impact Beginnings

The Road Map Project formally began in early 2010. Many local leaders were interested in finding a new and more powerful way to improve the region's education outcomes, and there was interest in creating a data-driven, cradle-to-college approach, similar to the Harlem Children's Zone or the Strive Partnership in Cincinnati. The Community Center for Education Results (CCER) was incorporated to launch this work in 2010. From the start, CCER's express mission was to create a comprehensive collaborative to improve education results in the South Seattle and South King County area.

The organizations who sponsored the Road Map Project, and helped create CCER, were the first to begin collaborating in a new way. The group was composed of powerful local actors with a desire to see major change in the community, including the City of Seattle, major foundations (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Seattle Foundation), educational institutions (e.g., Puget Sound Educational Service District, Seattle Community College), community based organizations, and advocacy organizations (e.g., League of Education Voters). Through the leadership efforts of CCER, these actors formally created formed a "Project Sponsors" group, which set the goal of doubling the number of students on track to graduate with a postsecondary degree or credential in the region by 2020. CCER also recruited a broad set of partners needed to create a comprehensive "road map" to join the effort. In the first year, CCER also conducted a large-scale parent survey to understand attitudes towards education. The survey was translated into multiple languages to get a representative sample of the community. During the same period, CCER and the Project Sponsors group brought together community college presidents, district superintendents, philanthropic leaders, education experts, local nonprofits, and others focused on the problem. They also organized the Education Results Network, a large and diverse group of education stakeholders working throughout the region, to keep them informed of the project's progress and to solicit input and guidance along the way.

After engaging key stakeholders, the Road Map Project set out to define what the "road map" to student success would look like. Four initial workgroups were created to identify key performance indicators: Early Learning, Community Supports, K-12 Education, and Postsecondary Education. By November of 2011 the workgroups had successfully drafted the key performance indicators the group would use to measure student success in order to track progress toward the initiative's 2020 goal. Once these common indicators and goals were in place, the group transitioned from "building the road map" to "organizing for action" – focusing on how the group could work together to double the number of students on track to graduate in under a decade.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "History," The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.roadmapproject.org/the-project/history/>

## Structure

The overall strategic direction for the initiative is provided by the Project Sponsors. The Project Sponsors group comprises representatives from organizations that share the goal of dramatically improving educational attainment. Individual strategies for the initiative are developed by six cross-sector strategy workgroups (that evolved from the four workgroups that identified performance indicators), and then reviewed by the Project Sponsors. After strategies have been approved by the Project Sponsors they are refined and implemented by the workgroups. The workgroups include representatives from cross-sector organizations.

Specialized representatives who fulfill more targeted roles for the initiative are also involved. For example, the Aligned Funders group includes foundation representatives and focuses on aligning grantmaking in the region to be more impactful and to avoid duplication of existing funding; the Community Network Steering Committee comprises community partners and is focused on community and parent engagement; and the Advocates Caucus comprises policy experts and advocacy organizations and identifies policy changes the Road Map Project can advocate for as a collective.

Behind the scenes, CCER provides backbone support, handling administrative issues, convening meetings, coordinating logistics, collecting data to track progress, providing analytical support, and managing all of the various stakeholders. CCER serves as the "glue" for all of the different groups and partners within the initiative.

The following graphic visually represents the different groups currently participating in the Road Map Project:<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> "The Project," The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.roadmapproject.org/the-project/project-team/>

## Results

The Road Map Project's work is ongoing – with robust implementation of most strategies beginning in 2013. The on-track indicators show progress toward the common goal of doubling the number of students on track to graduate,<sup>8</sup> providing a view of students' progression from cradle to college and career.<sup>9</sup>

One success of the initiative to date has been to rapidly increase the number of low-income 8th grade students signing up for the College Bound Scholarship. For students who sign up by 8th grade, this Washington State Scholarship program promises to pay tuition at public institution rates, along with a small book allowance, to those low-income students who “work hard in school, stay out of legal trouble and successfully enroll in a participating higher-education institution when they graduate.”<sup>10</sup> High school graduates who fulfill the requirements and obtain the scholarship are much more likely to transition into and graduate from a post-secondary institution. Through a concerted effort by partners, the Road Map Project was able to significantly raise the proportion of students signing up for the College Bound Scholarship. In 2013, sign-ups reached 94% of eligible students, up from just 53% three years ago.<sup>11</sup>

Another notable accomplishment of Road Map Project partners was their successful pursuit of a Race to the Top District award. The initiative secured a \$40 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education in 2012, one of only two awardees nationally to receive the maximum grant for innovative system-wide education efforts, effectively leveraging significant new funds into the region.<sup>12</sup>

## Five Conditions of Collective Impact

### Common Agenda

The Road Map Project focuses on “doubling the number of students in South King County and South Seattle who are on track to graduate from college or earn a career credential by 2020.” Furthermore, the initiative seeks to once and for all close the achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color while increasing achievement for all students from cradle to career.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Measuring Success,” The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013 <http://www.roadmapproject.org/data-center/measuring-success/>

<sup>9</sup> The Road Map Project Baseline Report.

<sup>10</sup> “College Bound Scholarship Program,” Washington Student Achievement Council. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/PreparingForCollege/CollegeBound>

<sup>11</sup> “Region hits 90% in College Bound Scholarship sign-up effort,” The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.roadmapproject.org/2013/region-hits-90-in-college-bound-scholarship-sign-up-effort/>

<sup>12</sup> Road Map Region Race to the Top. Accessed July, 2013. <http://roadmapracetothetop.org/>

<sup>13</sup> “The Road Map Project Goal,” The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.roadmapproject.org/the-project/our-goal/>

## Shared Measurement

The Road Map Project has selected indicators that are linked directly to a student's educational success, can be tracked consistently over time, and can help inform and improve practice to support student success. During the "building the road map" phase of the initiative, members of the strategy workgroups created a set of indicators to be approved by the Education Results Network. Through the Education Results Network and the Data Advisors Group, the initiative is continually reviewing and revising those indicators.

In order to hold themselves accountable to each other and to the community, the indicators – and current progress toward those indicators – are released via the Road Map Project website. The majority of indicators measure if students are "on-track" to graduate with specific annually reported targets; there is also a set of "contributing indicators" that lack specific targets, but are still reported as consistently as possible. These targets will be measured against interim targets for 2014 and 2017, and ultimately assessed against the overall goal in 2020.<sup>14</sup>

## Mutually Reinforcing Activities

The Road Map Project brings together a network of educators, parents, community-based nonprofits, government, business, students, and the community and aligns their work toward a common goal. The workgroups drive the activities of the initiative by tracking performance, identifying strategies that will improve education outcomes, and reviewing results to inform changes in practice.

Since the start of the initiative, the number of workgroups has grown from four to six to reflect the effort's increased scope. Two workgroups focus on areas of the education pipeline (Birth to 3rd Grade, High School to College Completion) and topics requiring additional emphasis (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM); English Language Learners; Youth Development Organizations). The Data Advisors group ensures the initiative is collecting and using data most effectively. The workgroups are developing action plans which "aim to build stronger systems and identify a set of actions that – if implemented well – will help accelerate progress specific to certain indicators of student success."<sup>15</sup> Key implementing partners in each workgroup spearhead the work of the action plans.

## Continuous Communication

Continuous communication occurs between cross-sector stakeholders within workgroups around particular action plans, and between partners who have similar roles in the educational ecosystem of the region – for example, policy advocates meet together in the Advocates Caucus, funders in the Aligned Funders group, and educational systems leaders in the K-12 Superintendents and Community College Presidents group (also known as the Puget Sound Caucus). Each of the individual groups receives administrative support from the backbone.

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<sup>14</sup> "Measuring Success," The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> "Data Advisors Group," The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.roadmapproject.org/collective-action/project-hub/data-advisors-work-group/>

The Road Map Project also communicates extensively with external stakeholders and members of the community. The initiative has a website ([www.roadmapproject.org](http://www.roadmapproject.org)) that includes upcoming events, presentations from past meetings, data tracking and progress toward goals, contact information for initiative groups, a blog, and more. Data relevant to current activities – like the current sign up rate for the College Bound Scholarship – are reported on the website as well. Furthermore, quarterly Education Results Network meetings are open to the community and often attended by parents, residents, community based organizations, funders, educational leaders, and government officials. The meetings serve to inform stakeholders about the initiative’s progress, gather input on the project, and provide networking opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

### Backbone Support

CCER’s primary role is to serve as the backbone for the Road Map Project. CCER is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Microsoft, Boeing, and other private funders. In 2013, the backbone had a staff of nine, including an executive director, associate director, project associate, program associate, data analyst, and communications manager.<sup>17</sup>

As the backbone, CCER serves in a number of different roles for the initiative. It coordinates and orchestrates community outreach and engagement; collects, analyzes, and reports on the shared measures of the initiative; convenes key partners; facilitates the workgroups’ strategy selection process and creation of the action plans; facilitates the alignment of organizations and funders to the Road Map Project goal, metrics, and strategies; and keeps all of the different partners and stakeholders moving forward towards their common goal.

## Lessons Learned

**Emergent strategies:** One of the Road Map Project’s greatest accomplishments has been its ability to take advantage of opportunities as they emerged. Over the last three years the workgroups have increased in number from four to six as the scope of the project changed. This adaptability has also allowed the initiative to pursue opportunities that were not part of the original Road Map Project’s scope, such as the decision to shift resources to pursue and secure the \$40 million dollar Race to the Top grant from the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Road Map Region Parent Forum,” The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.roadmapproject.org/collective-action/parent-forum/>

<sup>17</sup> “Our Supporters,” The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.roadmapproject.org/about-ccer/our-supporters/>

<sup>18</sup> “Race to the Top,” The Road Map Project. Accessed July, 2013. <http://www.roadmapproject.org/collective-action/race-to-the-top/>

**The transformational power of data:** The Road Map Project has also placed a heavy emphasis on collecting data and using it to inform action. As in the case of the College Bound Scholarship, data can motivate the collaborative to mobilize quickly around an issue. Using data that tracked progress towards a specific goal (i.e., the number of students signing up for the College Bound Scholarship), in nearly real time allowed the initiative to see the relative performance across school districts, spurring a friendly competition. As Peter Bylsma, director of assessment and student information services for the Renton School District, said, "We were seeing how other districts around us were doing. There's a sense of competition – we don't want to look worse than them."<sup>19</sup>

**Value of quick wins:** Keeping a complex initiative like the Road Map Project moving forward is not always easy, as organizations and individuals are working together in new ways. By focusing on and achieving quick wins, the initiative was able to quickly demonstrate the power of this new type of collaboration and keep everyone motivated and moving in the same direction. This can be seen in the quick response to the College Bound Scholarship – as partners tracked the data and saw the number of sign-ups rising, they invested even more in the process. Furthermore, the partners did not stop at improving the scholarship sign up rate – they are increasingly working together to provide ongoing support for College Bound Scholarship students to enable them to get into and stay in college (e.g., hosting FAFSA events for seniors at local high schools).

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<sup>19</sup> "The Transformational Power of Data," Huffington Post. Accessed July, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/willa-seldon/the-transformational-powe\\_b\\_2971552.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/willa-seldon/the-transformational-powe_b_2971552.html)



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