

Seizing the Moment for Transformative Change:

A Framework for Personalized Student Success Planning

Executive Summary



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OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL
EDREDESIGN
THE EDUCATION REDESIGN LAB



About the Education Redesign Lab

Founded in 2014 by Paul Reville, former Massachusetts Secretary of Education and Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the Education Redesign Lab (EdRedesign) is a university-based actionable research hub. In the pursuit of equity and social justice, we support the field in building cross-sector, community-wide systems of support and opportunity for children from birth to adulthood.

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought new clarity and urgency to longstanding inequities in opportunities and outcomes for children of different economic backgrounds. At the same time, the crisis offers an unprecedented opportunity to drive transformative change in our educational systems. Some school leaders have already begun to address the effects of the pandemic on students by finding new ways to support and connect with them. Others are still looking for ways to mitigate the severe impact of lost school time, disconnection, and trauma on students experiencing poverty, those with disabilities, and English learners by developing strategies to understand and address each child's unique needs.

Even before the pandemic, it was clear that a one-size-fits-all approach to education and child development is not a successful strategy. Data underscores the ineffectiveness of the current approach to schooling: children feel increasingly disengaged from school as they move through the grades,¹ and those living in poverty or with any special needs have outcomes that lag those who are more affluent and who do not have identified needs.² Two-thirds of the variation in children's outcomes are associated with factors outside of schools.³ Stark differences across communities in access to resources and opportunities, from the quality of schools to healthcare and enrichment programs, compound and reinforce inequities. As of 2019, poverty affected 17 percent of children, equating to millions of students and families facing daily barriers and obstacles.⁴ This number is only growing. These disparities also impact children's access to enrichment opportunities: high-income families spend over 6.5 times more money on enrichment activities for their children outside the classroom.⁵

Children's experiences during the pandemic have varied widely, ranging from those who have had every possible support and opportunity to aid them in keeping pace with their studies to those who have been off the grid altogether, totally disconnected from their teachers and schooling. The prospect of bringing all these children back together and batch processing them seems likely to serve no one well. However, this impersonalized, "mass production" form of education is what schools have been doing since long before the pandemic, glossing over significant differences in learning needs as well as needs for other supports to ensure they can thrive in and outside of school. Such an approach is obviously no longer tenable. Too many children are left behind, underserved, and consequently unable to achieve success.

The antidote to this system failure is an approach common to other sectors ranging from medicine to business: personalization. Meet the patient—or in this case, the child—where they are and give them what they need. Every child needs to be seen, heard, understood, and responded to as an individual. Every child needs an advocate in the school system,

a navigator who knows the child and their family and sees to it that the child's needs are addressed by the system. No child should be anonymous any longer. Relationships matter.

A paradigm shift to personalization now seems possible in the education sector because of the heightened awareness and sense of urgency about children's acute needs brought about by the pandemic. Indeed, many school districts have made significant steps to reach out to families and children as part of their remote work in the past year and a half. Schools have begun to move in the direction of personalization, and there is an opportunity to accelerate this trend and thereby drive transformative change in the education sector.

In this moment of opportunity for transformative change, the Education Redesign Lab (EdRedesign) is expanding our role as a catalyst for a personalized, relationship-driven approach we call Success Planning. We launched our effort to create a Success Planning framework in 2019, with the publication of *Success Plans: Promising Tools for Customizing Student Supports and Opportunities* and an accompanying toolkit to help schools and communities get started on the process. The framework distills key elements of several models for personalizing supports for children, emphasizing both the importance of one-on-one relationships between adults and children and integrated, comprehensive supports. This approach is undergirded by substantial research showing the importance of supportive adult relationships for healthy child development and learning.⁶ In addition, research suggests that holistic strategies that address children's academic and nonacademic needs can improve multiple outcomes.^{7 8} Importantly, for every dollar invested, studies show that return on investments range from at least \$3 to up to \$15.⁹

Success Planning should ideally not be a standalone effort, but part of a broader community-wide strategy to support children that is coordinated by a cross-sector Children's Cabinet or other governing body. Children's Cabinets and Success Planning are two parts of a whole system, in which the information gathered by the Navigators can serve to identify the supports and opportunities for individual students and to compile aggregate information about students' needs. The Children's Cabinet has the authority and capacity to act on this information by conducting a community-wide asset map and needs assessment to identify—and address—gaps in services.

Since our initial report, we have continued to develop our vision for Success Planning and have also worked to support those enacting their own versions, including our *By All Means* consortium of communities who are implementing collaborative, cross-sector approaches to improve children's wellbeing. We are now preparing to bring together a new community of practice focused specifically on Success Planning. Our goal is to help drive a movement in which each child is known and supported as an individual with a robust, coordinated set of community-wide opportunities and resources.

Our new report has three goals: to share EdRedesign’s latest thinking, based on our research, about the key design elements of Success Planning; to highlight lessons learned so far by those implementing it; and to give examples of what personalized supports and opportunities look like, and the range of approaches different schools and communities have taken to putting personalized supports in place.

Success Planning Guiding Principles and Components

Recognizing that communities have different needs and capacities, EdRedesign has developed a set of guiding principles and core elements for Success Planning rather than a single model. Through our early research, we identified 10 guiding principles that embody our comprehensive vision for Success Planning. These principles are intended to inform the overall design of Success Planning efforts rather than be prescriptive. Operationalizing each principle varies based on individual communities’ needs and preferences.

The four core components of a comprehensive system of Success Planning are:

- A Navigator—an adult who forms an individual relationship with a child and, ideally, their family, and develops an understanding of the child’s needs and interests;
- A plan for action and a process for enacting it;
- A coordinated system of supports and opportunities;
- A data platform to capture information over time.

Design Questions for Success Planning

Success Planning is adaptable, and communities will need to make deliberate choices about how they want to design and implement their student support efforts. The first decision is whether to partner with an organization that has designed its own model or to create something on their own, building on their existing student support structures and data systems. In either case, communities don’t need to start from scratch. In the report, we feature a set of national organizations that represent different models of student support, including City Connects, Communities In Schools (CIS), and BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risks). Salem, MA, a former *By All Means* member and current Local Children’s Cabinet Network (LCCN) member, and Poughkeepsie, NY, a *By All Means* member, are partnering with City Connects. Communities may also adopt a model and later change direction. This occurred in Hamilton County Schools in TN, another *By All Means* member, which is implementing an approach adapted from its earlier City Connects partnership.

Notably, Success Planning is compatible with student support structures such as a Multi-

Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework, which aims to address the academic and behavioral needs of all students within the educational system. As such, Success Planning can be implemented as part of a MTSS framework. School districts in rural southern IL, a *By All Means* members, and Nashville, TN, profiled in the report, both took this approach, integrating Success Planning as part of their current student support structure and aligning with their MTSS framework.

Communities that develop their own approach to personalized supports must consider a number of design options and determine their point of entry. Given the importance of relationships and the need to understand each child's specific learning and other challenges, developing a system of adult Navigators can be a logical starting point. The school districts in Nashville, TN, Unity Point, IL, and Burien, WA took this approach by establishing networks of adults within each school who meet with students and assess their needs and interests. When considering the Navigator role, City Year, which is spotlighted in the report, illustrates a creative staffing model that can enable Success Planning implementation through the use of AmeriCorps members.

Others may choose to begin with another component of Success Planning, though, to build on elements already under development or with a lot of local enthusiasm and momentum. The Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, KY, a *By All Means* member, has begun with the creation of a sophisticated data platform that will vastly improve service referrals and coordination. Similarly, the Oakland Unified School District in Oakland, CA, another *By All Means* member, decided to build a robust data platform to significantly enhance its referral system and connect students more seamlessly to comprehensive supports. Thread, a Baltimore-based nonprofit, has taken another approach, deploying volunteers and pro bono service providers to provide students with an array of comprehensive supports.

For those communities and schools embarking on their own "homegrown" approach to Success Planning, key design questions include the following:

- What is the point of entry for schools and communities?
- What does the Navigator do?
- Who serves as Navigator?
- What training and support do Navigators need?
- What information will Navigators gather?
- What supports and opportunities are included in Success Planning?
- What data platform should schools or communities use?

In addition to these design questions, it's important to consider several salient elements that are central to Success Planning. These include equity, time, cost, and establishing defined roles. Each element requires careful thought and attention; they are discussed in greater detail in the report.

Key Takeaways

Success Planning is adaptable, and communities will need to make deliberate choices about how they want to design and implement their student support efforts. The first decision is whether to partner with

Based on our work with the *By All Means* consortium of communities and a scan of other models and approaches that reflect similar concepts to Success Planning, we gleaned several insights that can guide those interested in pursuing Success Planning. These key takeaways are outlined below (see the report for a more detailed description of each one):

- **Start Wherever You Can—But Don't End There:** Communities can get started on Success Planning by choosing a more limited starting point or a more basic structure, while simultaneously developing a plan for building the other components and embedding the approach within a comprehensive strategy to understand community-wide needs, with a Children's Cabinet overseeing and coordinating a broad set of solutions.
- **Ensure Navigators Have Support:** It is important for communities to be aware that Navigators can experience secondary trauma when they learn the full scope of needs and challenges facing children and families, and to develop strategies to support Navigators, particularly those who are serving in that role without formal training as counselors or social workers.
- **Develop a Strategy to Create Demand and Buy-in:** Those designing and implementing Success Plans—or adopting a national model—should have a plan to communicate the reasons why this new approach is worth the effort and how it can benefit everyone within the community.
- **Build Metrics and Evaluation into Your Plan:** Tracking both the implementation and the outcomes of Success Planning has a number of benefits, from creating a picture of the scope of the effort—by showing, for example, how many meetings Navigators have had with students or how many services and supports children have actually received—to identifying changes to relevant student outcomes.

Conclusion

More than ever, children need to be known and supported as individuals with unique needs and strengths. The pandemic has both exacerbated and made visible the vast disparities in access to opportunities and resources experienced by children and families. We have an opportunity, and an obligation, to seize this moment to create transformative

changes in the way we educate and support children. We know that a one-size-fits-all strategy does not work, and we have a roadmap to a new design that identifies each child's strengths and needs and creates a comprehensive plan to meet those needs.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

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³ Mary Walsh, "Coordinating Services for Students Pays Huge Dividend," *CommonWealth*, July 26, 2019, <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/education/coordinating-services-for-students-pays-huge-dividend/>.

⁴ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Center, "Children in poverty (100 percent poverty) in the United States," 2020, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/43-children-in-poverty-100-percent-poverty#detailed/1/any/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/any/321,322>.

⁵ Greg Duncan and Richard J. Murnane, eds. *Whither Opportunity?: Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2011).

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⁹ Ibid.