

# “We Get to Make the Future What We Want It to Be”:

The Poughkeepsie, NY Children’s Cabinet

BY MICHELLE SEDACA

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In the spring of 2024, 21 teen leaders sat in a circle in an art studio in Poughkeepsie, New York and candidly shared the opportunities and barriers they experienced as young people navigating daily life in their city. A staff member of an initiative called the Poughkeepsie Board of Artistic Youth (PK B.A.Y.) facilitated the lively discussion, which was part of a brainstorming session for a public art project.



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Children’s Cabinet

Some named coaches and teachers who have acted as mentors, and others talked about their families, friends, and neighbors who have supported them. They also expressed their concerns, including the prevalence of drugs and gun violence affecting their neighborhoods.

Located in Dutchess County in New York’s Hudson Valley, Poughkeepsie is a small city of approximately 31,600 people that has an unusual array of resources for a municipality its size, from local colleges to a strong business foundation and proximity to New

York City. At the same time, the city is facing many of the same systemic challenges as larger urban areas, including intergenerational poverty and educational disparities.

There is little likelihood of reaching the middle class for children living in the Poughkeepsie neighborhoods farthest from opportunity. Low-income children who grow up in the city’s highest-poverty neighborhoods have a median household income of only \$21,000 as an adult, which is among the lowest rates of upward mobility in the country. Despite this, the young leaders at PK B.A.Y. are

proud to be from their hometown and are hopeful about its future. Looking ahead, they envision safer streets, greater access to extracurricular activities, and postsecondary pathways leading to lives filled with purpose and economic opportunity.

PK B.A.Y. is just one example of how leaders in Poughkeepsie are working together to expand the landscape of supports and opportunities for children, youth, and families. Launched in 2020, the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet (the PCC or Cabinet) is the nonprofit backbone organization comprised of the mayor, superintendent, county executive, and representatives from the city, county, school district, higher education institutions, and community- and faith-based organizations that is leading this innovative effort. In only a few years, the Cabinet has built a remarkable range of strategic programs and partnerships to drive transformative systems change in Poughkeepsie by layering investments and support from national organizations and networks, the federal government, the county and city, and local philanthropy.

### Context: Seeding a New Strategy

Poughkeepsie native Rob Watson, inaugural Executive Director of The EdRedesign Lab (EdRedesign) based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), had long sought to improve conditions in his hometown. Although he had left Poughkeepsie years earlier, Watson remained deeply invested in his community, where many of his family members and friends still reside. In a Harvard Ed. Magazine commentary, he said, "I was raised by a village of parents, educators, church members, aunts, and uncles who taught me from an early age that their investment in my development wasn't only about achieving upward mobility. They instilled in me a belief that my purpose was linked to my community's purpose—that our destinies and aspirations were intertwined." Yet, he recalled, the prevailing belief was that you had to leave your community to succeed.

A graduate course on cradle-to-career place-based partnerships and local coordinating bodies called Children's Cabinets, taught by Paul Reville, a HGSE Professor and EdRedesign's founder



A delegation of 25 Poughkeepsie civic leaders attend the Poughkeepsie Summit at the Harvard Kennedy School.

## THE POUGHKEEPSIE SUMMIT



A "first-of-its-kind partnership and social compact... between the city government, public school system, and key public and private anchor institutions."

and Faculty Director, led Watson to wonder whether a similar approach could work in his hometown. Watson connected with two peers who had also grown up in Poughkeepsie, James Watson (no relation) and Klynn Grier, along with other young professionals working on a range of community issues. The approach resonated with them as well. Reville and former EdRedesign Managing Director Bridget Rodriguez were leading the By All Means Community of Practice, which they had established to drive systems change for children and families through local Children's Cabinets. Reville and Rodriguez saw a clear synergy between Poughkeepsie's and EdRedesign's goals.

In August 2019, Watson and his peers brought a delegation of 25 civic leaders from Poughkeepsie to the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) to meet with EdRedesign's team for what they called the Poughkeepsie Summit. The Summit galvanized Poughkeepsie's leaders and practitioners, who decided to form a "first-of-its-kind partnership and social compact... between the city government, public school system, and key public and private anchor institutions."

### Launching the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet

Following the Summit, Poughkeepsie's leaders worked to build the infrastructure to support a Children's Cabinet. They formed a Leadership Council (initially called the Executive Committee), co-chaired by the mayor and superintendent. "He [former

Poughkeepsie Mayor Rob Rolison, now a NY State Senator] and I came together and said, 'Is this something that you're willing to invest in as a city? Is this something that you're willing to invest in as a school district superintendent?' And I most certainly said 'yes, let's move forward,'" recounted Dr. Eric Jay Rosser, Superintendent of Poughkeepsie City School District (PCSD). In February 2020, Rolison, Rosser, and community stakeholders officially launched the PCC.

Just as the Cabinet was getting underway, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Armed with a start-up grant from the Dyson Foundation, one of the Mid-Hudson Valley's largest regional philanthropies, the PCC established COVID-19 Response Task Forces to address children's and families' immediate needs. The seed funding also helped pay for part-time staffing for the PCC. James Watson and Klynn Grier, who had been working with Rob Watson to launch the Cabinet, stayed on as paid consultants, while the city and district contributed in-kind support and Rob Watson and others continued in their volunteer capacity.

Later that year, Poughkeepsie joined EdRedesign's By All Means Community of Practice. In his volunteer role, Rob Watson was part of the Poughkeepsie team in the By All Means Community of Practice, before joining EdRedesign in June 2021, initially leading the By All Means Community of Practice and initiatives before becoming Deputy Director and then EdRedesign's inaugural Executive Director.

## Gathering Data to Guide Cabinet Priorities

As the pandemic response shifted, the Cabinet pivoted its attention from meeting critical needs to crafting a long-term strategy for supporting pathways to economic mobility for Poughkeepsie's children and youth, from birth through postsecondary completion. They took a data-driven approach, assembling working groups to gather information on two pressing issues, early childhood and out-of-school time. The working groups identified several challenges, such as limited data on program access, cost, and quality as well as an absence of sustainable funding, among others.

In 2022, the working groups issued a set of policy recommendations for mitigating these challenges, including building city-wide early childhood and out-of-school time systems, investing in the capacity of the city's first Youth Services Division, and securing long-term funding streams. Cabinet leaders had worked closely with the Rolison administration and leaders from Poughkeepsie's Common Council (the city's law-making body), particularly to support the creation of the new Youth Services Division within the city government, which was approved by the Poughkeepsie Common Council in 2021 and opened in 2022. Prior to this, the city government had no institutional mandate to focus on youth development.

The PCC's recommendations were ambitious and would require sustained collaboration and substantial investment. Yet, PCC leaders were confident that their participation in the By All Means Community of Practice would be an invaluable opportunity to cross-pollinate ideas and best

practices as well as connect with top national organizations, institutions, and networks.

## Evolving From Start-Up to Backbone

An introduction by EdRedesign to the Children's Funding Project (CFP), a national nonprofit organization, jumpstarted the PCC's work on a key priority: establishing sustainable financing for child and youth programming and services. CFP assists communities in implementing a process called strategic public financing to identify current spending, calculate the costs associated with their goals for children and youth, and devise strategies to finance these costs. The Cabinet began a long-term partnership with CFP to develop a multi-pronged, data-informed approach to strategic public financing.

As a first step, the Cabinet worked with CFP to produce a fiscal map of existing federal, state, county, city, philanthropic, and community partner funding streams supporting children and youth in Poughkeepsie. This analysis uncovered a major gap in resources, especially related to services such as out-of-school time programming and youth violence prevention. PCC leaders used these findings to influence the city's policy and funding decisions impacting Poughkeepsie's young people.

Cabinet members called for greater investments in youth programming as well as the civic infrastructure necessary for coordinating a city-wide cradle-to-career pipeline. Their advocacy efforts were successful. The city more than doubled the annual budget allocation for its Youth Activity Grant from \$180,000 in 2018 to \$440,000 in

## EARLY CHALLENGES

- + limited data on program access, cost, and quality
- + an absence of sustainable funding

2024, and the Cabinet raised significant resources, including securing a \$175,000 grant from The Wallace Foundation in 2023 and generating more than \$578,000 in local government funding through fiscal year 2024.

With increased revenue, the Cabinet evolved from a nascent effort into a not-for-profit backbone organization. As a backbone, the PCC solidified its governance structure, increased staffing capacity, and further developed its strategy. The Cabinet appointed a Board of Directors, comprised of the Mayor, Superintendent, County Executive, President/CEO of the Dyson Foundation, former CEO of Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley, and Rob Watson. To ensure prominent participation from the public sector on the Board into perpetuity, the Cabinet wrote into its by-laws that the sitting Mayor, Superintendent, and County Executive have the right to serve on the Board. The PCC also institutionalized the Leadership Council as a permanent committee of the Board of Directors.

In 2023, PCC's Board of Directors hired Jill Roche Gomez as the Cabinet's inaugural Executive Director. Gomez has since expanded her team, recruiting a Community Partnership Director, a Children's Funding Coordinator, a Community Engagement Manager, and a Talent Development Fellow. In 2025, the Cabinet additionally began recruiting and training Community Champions as ambassadors for specific programmatic initiatives as well as laying the groundwork for authentic community engagement and a feedback loop within the growing civic infrastructure the Cabinet is building.

### Aligning Partners Around a North Star

EdRedesign's By All Means Community of Practice prepared PCC leaders to lay the groundwork to engage and attract the attention of other leading national organizations, such as Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), an internationally recognized cradle-to-career innovator, and its William Julius Wilson Institute (WJWI), the technical assistance arm

The Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet Board of Directors welcomes inaugural Executive Director Jill Roche Gomez.



of HCZ. In 2021, EdRedesign and HCZ leaders visited Poughkeepsie to learn firsthand about the Cabinet's emerging efforts. This connection set the stage for the PCC's future engagement with HCZ and WJWI.

To coalesce their broad coalition of partners around a unifying goal, PCC leaders needed a long-term plan to align and guide their efforts. In 2023, the PCC partnered with WJWI to draft a comprehensive 10-year strategic plan. The strategic plan rallies community and local leaders around a bold North Star goal that, "By 2033, over 5,000 City of Poughkeepsie young people and their families will be connected annually to transformative cradle-to-career opportunities that place them on pathways to postsecondary completion and socioeconomic mobility."

The plan also outlines a clear theory of change defining the Cabinet's multifaceted role: building a backbone intermediary organization to coordinate the work; establishing the cradle-to-career continuum by connecting existing programs and recruiting evidence-based interventions across the continuum; and explicitly pursuing systems change to shift policies, practices, and resources to better serve youth and families. When executed with fidelity, the theory of change will lead to more positive child and youth outcomes, resulting in pathways to economic mobility and breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

This theory of change aligns with a proven framework for advancing systemic change, developed by StriveTogether, a national network of over 70 communities working toward racial equity and economic mobility. Through EdRedesign, the Cabinet met StriveTogether leaders who recognized the strength of the PCC's collaborative, data-driven approach and invited the Cabinet to apply to join its renowned Cradle to Career Network. The Cabinet's application was successful, and it became a Network Member in 2024. This opportunity exposed local leaders to "best-in-class innovations and elevated the city's profile within the national cradle-to-career place-based field," according to EdRedesign's Watson.

As a Cradle to Career Network Member, the Cabinet adopted the seven cradle-to-career outcomes in

## POUGHKEEPSIE CHILDREN'S CABINET THEORY OF CHANGE

### WHEN WE

Build a durable and effective backbone organization to coordinate cradle-to-career work in the City of Poughkeepsie

Establish a C2C pipeline to connect, support, and scale-up evidence-based early childhood, K-12, out-of-school time, and postsecondary programs

Pursue systems change at the local, state, and national levels to shift policies, practices, resources

### THEN

*All Poughkeepsie children will:*

Start Kindergarten prepared to learn

Achieve at or above grade level

Remain healthy and safe

Graduate high school on time

Obtain a postsecondary credential

### IN 10 YEARS

*Individual and family level*

By 2033, over 5,000 City of Poughkeepsie young people and their families will be connected annually to opportunities that place them on pathways to socioeconomic mobility

*City and community level*

A critical mass of Poughkeepsie youth, civic leaders, and institutions will be committed to ending intergenerational poverty in our city

StriveTogether's framework. Now that the PCC had a clear roadmap to assess progress toward its long-term goal of economic mobility, it needed a way to share data publicly and spur action toward their North Star. The Cabinet enlisted Finding Common Purpose, a national organization that supports local efforts to meet basic needs and reduce disparities, to create a community-level cradle-to-career dashboard. In addition to the population-level outcomes, the tool contains household indicators such as housing cost burden rates and life expectancy. Results are disaggregated by race to illuminate and address existing inequities. The dashboard also displays selected contributing factors related to each outcome, which the Cabinet selected from the Results for America Economic Mobility Catalog of evidence-based interventions.

According to the PCC's Gomez, the dashboard's transparent, digestible data helps partners understand how their role contributes to their collective goals, which promotes buy-in and trust. "The

contributing factors were selected to demonstrate how all stakeholders, from parents to the school district, have an active role to play in improving student outcomes. We want to make sure that everyone from our school district to our city to our community-based partners sees themselves in the [collaborative] work and finds a way to make it relevant to the things that they do day to day," she explained.

The Cabinet has also cultivated buy-in among partners through a spirit of co-creation. As an example, the Cabinet, in collaboration with the David P. Weikart Center for Program Quality, organized a workshop series on evidence-based quality indicators for the city's afterschool providers. The Cabinet's facilitators engaged practitioners in interactive exercises to reflect on their own staffs' capabilities. Through this iterative process, they chose three areas to focus on—active engagement, skill building, and reframing conflict. This culminated in the partners adopting the Forum for Youth Investment's Youth

"...all stakeholders, from parents to the school district, have an active role to play in improving student outcomes."

Jill Roche Gomez,  
Executive Director,  
PCC



PCC's 18-member delegation visits the Harlem Children's Zone.

Program Quality Intervention (YPQI) framework, which will help standardize high-quality programming across organizations. To support providers in applying this framework and to enhance program quality across the city, PCC staff are continuing to offer tailored professional development to practitioners, building on the previous Weikart workshops.

### Facilitating Major Wins and Unlocking New Opportunities

By developing strong relationships over time, the PCC has successfully collaborated with partners to pursue and secure highly competitive funding opportunities. In 2023, the Cabinet helped the national nonprofit Ampact garner a \$240,000 federal American Rescue Plan Act grant to expand its AmeriCorps programs to the City of Poughkeepsie and Dutchess County. This funding enabled Ampact to open a New York office, its first in the state, and offer high-dosage tutoring programs to children and youth in the school district and early learning centers. Ampact operates the largest portfolio of high-dosage tutoring AmeriCorps programs in the nation and has a rigorous national evidence base.

That same year, the Poughkeepsie City School District (PCSD) won a \$2.5 million, five-year U.S. Department of Education Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant, one of the district's largest federal grants, to support the implementation of comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, families, and community members. PCSD was the lead applicant on the grant. The Cabinet provided crucial support, partnering with district leadership to

convene a joint working group to write the proposal and solicit the support of local and national partners. The PCC also provided resources from its Wallace Foundation grant to hire Catalytic Strategies, a national consultancy firm that specializes in strategic growth and development efforts, which worked in tandem with PCSD's grant writer to draft the proposal in collaboration with the working group. The Cabinet was also instrumental in identifying and bringing to Poughkeepsie several national partnerships and evidence-based programs that were a major component of the grant.

Previously, Poughkeepsie had not been able to tap into nationally acclaimed evidence-based programs and practices. Now, PCSD is utilizing this funding to support the scaling of City Connects, an evidence-based integrated student support model, in all five of the district's elementary schools.

A cross-sector team from Poughkeepsie had previously completed a pilot implementation of City Connects in PCSD's middle school. This pilot was launched during the team's participation in the inaugural cohort of EdRedesign's Institute for Success Planning (ISP) Community of Practice, led by Tauheedah Jackson, EdRedesign's Deputy Director and Director of the Institute for Success Planning. The ISP Community of Practice helps communities design, implement, and scale personalized, relationship-based systems of supports and opportunities for children and youth,

The Poughkeepsie City School District won a federal Full-Service Community Schools grant to support the implementation of comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, families, and community members.

City of Poughkeepsie Mayor Yvonne Flowers, Children's Cabinet Leadership Council Co-Chair, speaks with students during a visit to Sojourner Truth (formerly Morse) Elementary School for their annual Black History Month Event.



supported by a local coordinating body like a Children's Cabinet. Participating communities in EdRedesign's Success Planning Community of Practice receive a structured curriculum and coaching to equip teams of cross-sector leaders with practical skills, knowledge, and resources to build and implement an effective Success Planning initiative over a period of two years. EdRedesign's support is tailored to each local community as they work to tackle stubborn systemic disparities such as increases in chronic absenteeism, demand for mental health and basic needs services, and children and families experiencing homelessness. Many communities have moved the needle and seen positive outcomes by embedding and aligning the Success Planning strategy into their broader place-based strategies, like Community Schools. The communities also provide peer-to-peer support to each other, amplifying the impact of their Community of Practice experience. Key learnings from Poughkeepsie's middle school pilot led the district to rethink their City Connects implementation and shift to an elementary school strategy. With financial support through the Full-Service Community Schools grant, City Connects will scale throughout the district between 2024 and 2029, adding an additional school each academic year.

In addition to City Connects, the district is partnering with EveryDay Labs, a connection that the PCC facilitated, to implement one of the nation's most rigorously evaluated chronic absenteeism reduction programs. EveryDay Labs was launched by HKS Professor Todd Rogers, a behavioral scientist, and HGSE Professor Karen Mapp, an expert in family engagement, serves as an advisor. PCSD is also

leveraging the FSCS grant to increase high-dosage tutoring in partnership with Ampact and expand early childhood learning and development resources for families through The Basics, a science-based framework, network, and program that promotes a community-wide approach to early childhood development. The Basics grew out of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University (former HKS Professor Ron Ferguson is its Founder and President) and the Black Philanthropy Fund in Boston. The FSCS grant also supports afterschool and weekend enrichment opportunities and school violence prevention afterschool programming.

In 2024, the Cabinet facilitated another major win when Poughkeepsie was awarded a \$500,000, two-and-a-half-year U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Choice Neighborhoods planning grant, the first New York state recipient in over a decade. Through this federal initiative, local leaders, residents, nonprofits, schools, and other public and private stakeholders develop a comprehensive approach involving three main strategies, People, Housing, and Neighborhood, to revitalize public or HUD-assisted housing and generate reinvestment in the neighborhood.

Earlier in 2024, the Cabinet had introduced current Mayor Yvonne Flowers and her team to the national nonprofit Purpose Built Communities (Purpose Built), which partners with local communities to implement its holistic neighborhood revitalization model. That spring, the PCC led a group of 15 Poughkeepsie leaders, including the Mayor, to Purpose Built's national conference, which was co-hosted by its

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Ampact Early Learning Corps tutor engages a PCSD student in an individualized literacy learning experience.



Poughkeepsie group attends Purpose Built Conference in Birmingham, AL.

The Cabinet is unlocking new funding opportunities that have the potential to further expand high-quality programming for Poughkeepsie's children and youth.

Network Member Woodlawn United. Mayor Flowers saw the potential in Purpose Built's model and thought a similar approach could benefit Poughkeepsie's historically disinvested Northside neighborhood. She proposed that the City of Poughkeepsie, the Poughkeepsie Housing Authority, the Cabinet, and another local partner, the nonprofit MASS Design Group, collaborate on a Choice Neighborhoods grant proposal for funding to create a comprehensive neighborhood transformation plan. Choice Neighborhoods provides crucial federal funding to enable this work in localities across the country.

Each partner was enthusiastic about the opportunity and soon proposal development was underway. The City of Poughkeepsie was the lead applicant, and the Cabinet is the lead implementation partner for the community engagement strategy, co-chairs the People Taskforce, and serves on the Choice Neighborhoods Steering Committee. Purpose Built

advised the Poughkeepsie team on the development of their proposal, in addition to Catalytic Strategies, who had previously worked on the district's FSCS proposal, and WRT, a national planning firm and subject matter expert in Choice Neighborhoods. WRT is serving as the Planning Coordinator for Poughkeepsie's Choice Neighborhoods effort. Of note, in Poughkeepsie's Choice Neighborhood planning process, one of the target public housing sites for revitalization is Martin Luther King Jr. Apartments, a public housing complex of which both Mayor Flowers and Rob Watson are former residents.

In addition to facilitating these major wins, the Cabinet is unlocking new funding opportunities that have the potential to further expand high-quality programming for Poughkeepsie's children and youth. As an example, the Cabinet has continued its strategic public financing work with the Children's Funding Project, which recently completed a cost model estimating how much money it would take to fully

fund community- and school-based afterschool programs that meet a set of quality standards. This analysis identified potential sources of additional revenue, such as the School-Age Child Care (SACC) subsidy offered through the New York State Child Care and Development Block Grant. This subsidy provides up to \$6,300 per student per year to licensed providers.

The cost modelling process prompted PCSD to propose increased funding for its Extended Learning Time (ELT) programming serving Pre-K-5th grade students, allocating an additional \$1.8 million in its 2025-2026 budget to expand from part time to full time, and using additional state funding streams to expand the full-time ELT model to middle school. Additional priorities for the Cabinet's strategic public financing work involve building a cost model for summer programming, which PCC's Children's Funding Coordinator is currently developing, as well as producing an early childhood cost model and updating the existing fiscal map, both scheduled for fall 2025.

Recently, the Cabinet co-founded the New York State Place-Based Coalition, in collaboration with StriveTogether Network Members, including ROC the Future Alliance (Rochester, NY), South Bronx Rising Together (Bronx, NY), and the Thruway Coalition (Wayne County, NY), among other NYS-based organizations, and with continued technical assistance from StriveTogether, WJWI, Purpose Built, EdRedesign, and other organizations. By working together, they will collectively identify and pursue both state and federal dollars to support place-based efforts across New York.



PK B.A.Y. youth unveil the "Portal," a public artwork installation.

## Centering Poughkeepsie's Youth and Families

Poughkeepsie's leaders and practitioners are committed to empowering youth to shape city-wide policies and programming that directly impact their lives. In 2024, the Cabinet, with funding from The Wallace Foundation, partnered with five youth-serving organizations to form the Poughkeepsie Board of Artistic Youth (PK B.A.Y.), which aims to foster youth leadership and civic engagement. Twenty-one young leaders were nominated to join the Board and received a stipend for their participation.

During the initiative's first year, teen leaders spearheaded a city-wide youth assessment to understand priorities and barriers related to out-of-school-time programming. Through this experience, they gained skills in data collection and analysis, quantitative and qualitative research, and public speaking. They discovered that factors such as economic insecurity requiring adolescents to work after school and unreliable transportation hinder participation in out-of-school-time opportunities. The youth presented these findings to the Poughkeepsie

Common Council, the PCSD Board of Education, and the City of Poughkeepsie Public Arts Commission. Based on these results, the Cabinet and youth development programs that receive youth employment dollars through the local Dutchess County Workforce Investment Board are exploring how youth employment funding could be restructured to pay stipends to youth in afterschool programs.

As part of PK B.A.Y., as featured in the opening of this Spotlight, youth also collaborated on a public artwork project. Through a process facilitated by local arts nonprofit The Art Effect, they brainstormed ideas for a compelling concept, choosing the theme of a portal to reflect the connection between Poughkeepsie's past and present to the future. The teens engaged in thoughtful discussions about their hometown, expressing both their hopes and fears. "It was a very deep process for the students," Nicole Fenichel-Hewitt, The Art Effect's Executive Director, described. "They wanted to show there are two sides to things, and we get to make the future what we want it to be," she said.

Next, the youth prepared a request for proposals, reviewed submissions, and chose a local artist to design the public art installation. According to Bea

Alarcon-Aquino, an 11th grade student at Poughkeepsie High School and PK B.A.Y. member, the "Portal" signifies that "[Poughkeepsie] doesn't have to be this miserable or talked-down place. It can be a hope, a beacon of many different types of people from different races and cultures coming together for this one common goal." PK B.A.Y. has since attracted local funding to support a second year of programming.

In addition to empowering young people, the Cabinet is committed to authentically engaging Poughkeepsie families and residents. According to the PCC's Gomez, the Cabinet seeks to shift from "people not being aware or simply knowing that the Cabinet is engaging local government and the school district to understanding that true change is possible for youth outcomes and we can be a part of it too."

As a strategy, the Cabinet created a new part-time, stipend-paid position called a Community Champion, noted earlier. This role involves speaking with families to understand their needs and perspectives, sharing available resources, and connecting parents to relevant services. Initially, Community Champions will focus on engaging families with children 0-3 in collaboration with a district initiative called Bright Roads to the Future and building community voice within the Choice Neighborhood planning process with the city and local partners.

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Bea Alarcon-Aquino,  
Student, Poughkeepsie  
High School



Poughkeepsie High School students participate in Spark Studios summer youth employment program at The Art Effect, a PCC community partner.

# Poughkeepsie Wins Supported by the PCC

## Civic Infrastructure

- + Coalesced 12 direct service providers across early childhood to postsecondary to create a cradle-to-career pipeline of supports and opportunities for Poughkeepsie's children and youth.

## Funding

Collectively generated major federal, state, city, and philanthropic investments, including:

- + \$175,000 grant from The Wallace Foundation in 2023, over \$80,000 of which was subgranted to youth-serving organizations
- + More than \$578,000 in local government funding through fiscal year 2024 for backbone infrastructure and coordination
- + \$240,000 federal AmeriCorps planning grant to the national nonprofit Ampact in 2023
- + \$2.5 million federal Full-Service Community Schools grant to the Poughkeepsie City School District in 2023
- + \$440,000 in municipal funding to local youth programming for the city's Youth Activity Grant in 2024, double the amount in 2018
- + \$500,000 federal Choice Neighborhoods planning grant to the City of Poughkeepsie in 2024

## Youth Voice

- + Coalesced partners in new youth development initiative (PK B.A.Y.) in which 21 teen leaders collected over 80 responses on youth survey examining barriers to afterschool participation and executed a public artwork project in 2024.
- + In 2025, PK B.A.Y. students are engaging in a Civic Influencer curriculum to lead the planning of Poughkeepsie's PKX Festival, facilitated by The Art Effect and supported by the youth development programs.

## Metrics and Outcomes

- + Expanded city-wide early childhood care seats by 110% from 2020 to 2023, led by PCSD pre-K contracts.
- + Facilitated process for nine youth-serving organizations to adopt shared evidence-based quality standards in 2024.
- + Boosted kindergarten readiness in listening comprehension and numeracy among 3-5 year-old children who participated in Ampact's early learning program at PCSD, with the percentage of students scoring far below the performance level target in listening comprehension decreasing from 77% of students in the fall of 2023 to only 28% in the spring of 2024, while the percentage of students meeting the performance level target in numeracy increased from 27% in the fall of 2023 to 78% by the spring of 2024. Additionally, 80% of K-3 grade students who participated in Ampact's math tutoring program at PCSD improved their Mathway score, surpassing the national goal of 75% overall growth.
- + Improved chronic absenteeism rates among PCSD students who participated in EveryDay Labs programming, including a 12% decline during the 2023-24 academic year and a 10% decline during the fall of 2024. Fifty-eight percent of students at risk of being chronically absent prior to the program were no longer at risk after participating in the intervention.
- + Calculated annual cost of providing high-quality, full-time afterschool programming to develop city-wide structure to scale availability.

In a few short years, PCC leaders have mobilized a wide array of partners to coordinate a city-wide system of supports and opportunities for Poughkeepsie's young people. They have powerfully integrated multiple networks and organizations to advance their efforts. "[The national networks and organizations] can offer a wide range of resources and experiences that [the Cabinet] can tap into to ensure that we build a successful pipeline of services," noted Mayor Flowers. In addition to Cabinet members' participation in the networks and partnerships mentioned earlier, the PCC's Gomez was selected to join the inaugural cohort of EdRedesign's Fellowship for Cradle-to-Career Partnership Leaders in 2024, a first-of-its-kind, competitive, tuition-free 18-month program created in collaboration with Partners for Rural Impact, Purpose Built, StriveTogether, and WJWI. Also last year, Superintendent Rosser, who previously was a member of EdRedesign's By All Means Community of Practice and Institute for Success Planning Community of Practice, was invited to participate in the Place-Based Education Leaders Design Fellowship, a national coalition of superintendents led by WJWI, in partnership with EdRedesign and Chiefs for Change. Recently, Mayor Flowers was invited to join the WJWI Mayors Neighborhood Academy cohort.



PCC's delegation attends the Transforming Place through Neighborhood Leadership Summer Institute co-hosted by EdRedesign and the William Julius Wilson Institute at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The PCC's 2024 end-of-year report provides additional detailed information on their achievements and impact. According to Flowers, "This is the first time I've seen this type of organized collaboration in the City of Poughkeepsie. We all have a lot on our plate and can lose focus because other priorities may draw away our attention. The Cabinet helps keep us focused on our shared vision and desired goals."

The PCC structure has facilitated greater cooperation and communication among the city, school district, and community-based organizations, resulting in more effective responses to children's and families' needs. "Whenever a situation comes up, I can call or text the School Superintendent to see how we can assist each other in resolving an issue or help implement some type of change," the Mayor described.

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Mayor Flowers

#### THE CABINET'S STRATEGIC ACTIONS HAVE MADE TANGIBLE IMPROVEMENTS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES, INCLUDING:

- + increased access to early childhood education slots,
- + Introduced new evidence-based interventions to improve child and youth outcomes that are helping to reduce chronic absenteeism, increase kindergarten readiness, and improve K-3 grade math skills, and
- + developed shared quality standards for afterschool programming and a successful youth leadership and civic engagement initiative.

## Key Takeaways

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*There are several important lessons other communities interested in implementing a Children's Cabinet initiative to drive transformational change for their children, youth, and families can learn from the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet's journey:*

### **Galvanize a coalition of grassroots and grassroots leaders to name and work together toward a bold North Star.**

Through the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet, leaders were able to effectively align public entities, anchor institutions, the region's leading philanthropy, and direct service providers to name and work toward a unifying goal. More recently, the Cabinet has also intentionally engaged families and other community members in their work. In this way, the Cabinet is organizing the systems, programs, and people that are essential for achieving real impact in the city.

### **Systematically use and share data to understand pressing needs, inform decision making, improve quality, and assess progress over time.**

From the beginning, Poughkeepsie's leaders prioritized the use of data as an integral practice. They utilized early learnings from the working groups and fiscal mapping process to inform their priorities and advocate for policy and funding changes. The Cabinet also worked with practitioners to adopt a quality improvement framework as well as created a publicly accessible dashboard to track progress toward their collective goals and refine strategies based on the data.

### **Empower youth and families to identify challenges, shape programming, and advocate for better conditions.**

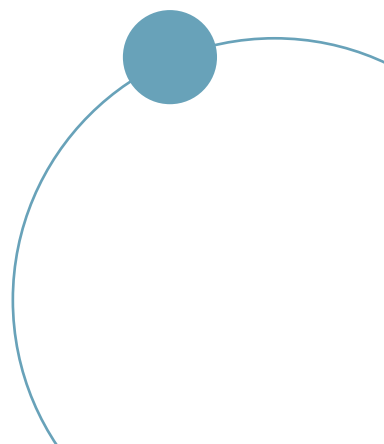
Poughkeepsie leaders have created authentic and creative ways to center young people and families in their collective work. This means that the needs, interests, and goals of youth and families help guide all programming and decision making. In doing so, Poughkeepsie's youth and caregivers are using their voices to advocate for positive changes in their city.

### **Leverage national networks, organizations, and models to layer multiple place-based strategies that bolster capacity, introduce evidence-based practices, and scale efforts.**

Several national networks and organizations have accelerated the Cabinet's efforts. By leveraging these strategic connections, PCC leaders have unlocked new revenue sources, discovered evidence-based interventions and promising practices, and forged mutually beneficial relationships with other communities across the country. As a result, the Cabinet has continued to grow and rapidly expand its collaborative work.

### **Pursue untapped funding sources at the local, state, and federal level to support high-quality child and youth services.**

The Cabinet partnered with the Children's Funding Project to understand existing revenue streams, estimate the costs of delivering evidence-based programming to all young people in Poughkeepsie, and discover potential new resources. PCC's recent co-founding of the New York State Place-Based Coalition will enable them to pursue and advocate for additional funding at the state level.

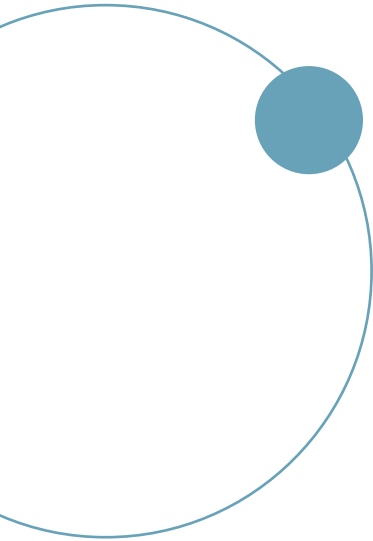


## Conclusion

By weaving together prominent networks, key initiatives, and major investments, Poughkeepsie's leaders are making progress toward their North Star. Looking ahead, the PCC's efforts are culminating in a new public-private partnership called Poughkeepsie Promise City, which was inspired by national best practices such as the Mission Economic Development Agency's (MEDA) and Mission Promise Neighborhood's (MPN) Promise City initiative. Through Poughkeepsie Promise City, the Cabinet is bringing together the city, county, school district, and the Dyson Foundation to align core anchor institutions and funders to formally create a comprehensive, high-quality, evidence-based system of supports and opportunities for the city's young people, modeled on the federal Promise Neighborhoods initiative. The PCC and its partners signed a Letter of Intent to participate in a planning process to launch this innovative effort, which will leverage strategies such as public-private financing that blend and braid city, county, school district, and philanthropic funding and policy incentives for collaboration between direct service providers. Poughkeepsie Promise City will pave the way for the Cabinet and its partners to further accelerate their collective work. "When I think about 5,000 kids involved in cradle-to-career opportunities, I think about all of the individual children and youth and the inspiring things that they'll get to experience," PCC's Gomez reflected.

"When I think about 5,000 kids involved in cradle-to-career opportunities, I think about all of the individual children and youth and the inspiring things that they'll get to experience."

Jill Roche Gomez,  
Executive Director,  
PCC



"We believe that Poughkeepsie's evolving approach to cradle-to-career, place-based transformation has the potential to serve as a model for small cities facing big-city challenges. By layering multiple cross-sector strategies at the neighborhood, city, county, and state levels, incorporating personalized support for young people and families, leveraging the technical assistance of national partners, and bringing together the right mix of homegrown leadership and new talent, Poughkeepsie is seizing its moment. We believe the work in Poughkeepsie matters not just for our beloved community, but because a lot of America looks like Poughkeepsie."

Rob Watson, EdRedesign Executive Director

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### About the Author

Michelle Sedaca is Senior Research Manager, EdRedesign. You can read her bio [here](#).

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All photos are courtesy of the Poughkeepsie Children's Cabinet, The Art Effect, and Ampact.

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### About The EdRedesign Lab

Founded in 2014 by Paul Reville, Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, EdRedesign provides catalytic support to the cradle-to-career place-based partnership field to drive systems-level change and open personalized pathways to well-being, educational attainment, civic engagement, and upward mobility. To support this growing field to effect transformational change that serves the needs and talents of individual children and youth, our work focuses on talent development, actionable research, our Institute for Success Planning, and our By All Means initiatives. Our mission is to ensure the social, emotional, physical, and academic development and well-being of all children and youth, especially those affected by racism, poverty, and disinvestment.