

Examining an Early Childhood-to-Early Career Educational Partnership in the Twin Cities

Conclusions and Recommendation of the Strive Working Group

October 2011

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The working group process was coordinated and facilitated by Kent Pekel and Julie Sweitzer of the University of Minnesota’s College Readiness Consortium and Cheryl Mayberry of Integrated Performance Management, LLC, who also served as the group’s consultant on the Six Sigma quality improvement methodology.

Four Voices

“Hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, economic instability, unemployment, chronic disease, drug addiction, and war persist in spite of the analytical ability and technical brilliance that have been directed toward eradicating them. No one deliberately creates those problems, no one wants them to persist, but they persist nonetheless. That is because they are intrinsically systems problems—undesirable behaviors characteristic of the system structures that produce them. They will yield only as we reclaim our intuition, stop casting blame, see the system as the source of its own problems, and find the courage and wisdom to *restructure* it.”

- Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (2008)

“Every Thursday, we’re all linked up on the Internet, and in 2½ hours, we go through about 320 charts. All the charts have the areas that need special attention. We review the entire operation. You can’t fool anybody. Do you have a compelling vision? Do you have a comprehensive strategy to deliver that vision? And are we going to work together to relentlessly implement that? We have a laser focus now. Every vehicle had to be best in class, quality, fuel efficiency, safety. That is benchmarked against the competition. Everybody knows everything.”

- Ford CEO Alan Mulally (2011)

“Why has Strive made progress when so many other efforts have failed? It is because a core group of community leaders decided to abandon their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement....These leaders realized that fixing one point on the educational continuum—such as better after-school programs—wouldn’t make much difference unless all parts of the continuum improved at the same time.”

-- John Kania and Mark Kramer, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2011)

“Nearly every problem (in education) has been solved by someone, somewhere. The frustration is that we can’t seem to replicate [those solutions] anywhere else.”

-- Bill Clinton (2004)

Executive Summary

The Reason for the Conversation

The ideas captured in the quotes above highlight some of the key themes that ran through the discussions that thirty-one leaders from across the Twin Cities had during the summer of 2011. That diverse set of individuals came together to learn about an approach to educational improvement known as Strive, and to consider the pros and cons of bringing that approach to our community. This report summarizes the process and the findings of the Strive working group and has two intended audiences. The first is a smaller group of critical decision makers that will review the report's contents during the fall of 2011 and decide if further investigation of Strive is merited. The second audience consists of the many individuals and organizations that did not participate in the working group process but have indicated an interest in learning more about the Strive approach. If an effort to create a Strive partnership in the Twin Cities is ultimately launched, actively engaging that broader set of stakeholders will be essential to its success.

Strive originated in the metropolitan area of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky in 2006. It brings together key individuals and organizations to identify common goals for improving education from early childhood through early employment, to publicly report on progress toward meeting those goals and to use a quality improvement process such as Six Sigma to remove roadblocks and improve outcomes. Strive is not intended to operate as a program that provides direct service to students, families or schools. Instead, it is a framework that brings educators, youth development organizations, non-profit organizations, philanthropic organizations, businesses, government agencies, political leaders and others together to pursue common goals using data-driven strategies for improvement. As such, it is intended to help meet the needs of communities that are program-rich but system-poor.

The Strive Partnership in Cincinnati reports that it is making progress on forty of its fifty-four indicators for improvement. Based at least in part on those positive early outcomes, other communities are creating Strive Partnerships of their own, including Portland, Boston, Houston, Seattle, Richmond, Memphis, and San Francisco. In Minnesota, the communities in and around Grand Rapids and Red Wing are actively exploring the idea as well.

The initial impetus for an investigation of Strive in Minnesota grew out of the work of the African American Leadership Forum (AALF – usually pronounced *alph*), a volunteer coalition of over five hundred seasoned and emerging leaders that is working to bring about positive social change in the African American community in the Twin Cities. In early 2010, the members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Work Group of AALF began a systematic review of the data on the educational performance of African-American students in the seven counties of the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

The results of that review led the members of AALF to conclude that systemic change in the education of most African American students is urgently needed.

At the same time as AALF was working to define its agenda for change, the University of Minnesota was expanding its role as an urban land-grant university in an array of areas, including improving the educational pipeline to higher education by closing achievement gaps at the K-12 level. One of the co-chairs of the Education and Lifelong Learning Work Group was Dr. Robert Jones, who also serves as Senior Vice President for System Academic Administration at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Jones shared information with the work group about the Strive framework, and based upon that that information AALF and the University of Minnesota decided to partner in an investigation of bringing Strive to the Twin Cities. Those two organizations were soon joined by the others identified in this report, and they collectively agreed that the focus of their inquiry should be on improving the educational performance not only of African American children, but of all students of color whose average educational performance places them on the wrong side of Minnesota's large and persistent gaps in student achievement.

Data on those gaps tells us that:

- The gap between students of color and white students in Minnesota and in the Twin Cities (where most of the students of color in the state reside) is one of the largest in the nation.
- Minnesota's achievement gaps are not large simply because the state's white students perform well. Students of color in Minnesota perform below students of color in many other states, including some with overall levels of educational achievement and attainment that are significantly lower than Minnesota's.
- Progress toward closing educational achievement gaps in Minnesota over the past decade has been limited. Even when the achievement of students of color has increased, gains by white students have often equaled or exceeded that progress, meaning that gaps have remained the same or widened.
- There are individual schools in the community and state – primarily though not exclusively at the elementary level – that have made significant progress toward closing achievement gaps, but replication of the approaches has been limited.

While educational achievement gaps already limit the prosperity of both citizens and the state today, they will be an even greater drag on progress in the decades ahead if they are not closed in significant and sustainable ways. According to the Minnesota State Demographer, the percentage of residents in the Twin Cities region who are Latino, Black, and Asian is expected to increase from 23% in 2010 to approximately 35% in 2035. The size of the White population in the Twin Cities, in contrast, is not expected to grow after 2015.

Understanding the Twin Cities

The Strive working group began its inquiry with an effort to develop a common understanding of the educational needs of students in the Twin Cities and the many initiatives that are currently underway to meet those needs. An early (and perhaps obvious) conclusion of the working group's discussion of the Twin Cities was that there are an extraordinary number of initiatives underway in the community to improve educational outcomes in general and to close educational achievement gaps in particular. The initial survey of the educational landscape identified more than five hundred such initiatives.

The Strive working group also found that those initiatives are focused on a very wide set of priorities, from preparing students for success in kindergarten to supporting students as they complete postsecondary credentials and degrees. Members of the group agreed that while each of those priorities may be valuable in itself, it is unclear how they add up to a coherent strategy that helps students build academic momentum over time. The working group also found that even when two or more efforts to improve education in the Twin Cities are focused on the same broad goals, they often measure success in very different ways. As a result, collaboration between and comparisons among programs are often difficult or impossible.

Finally, the Strive working group noted that there is no organization or entity that brings together the Twin Cities' extraordinary array of educational initiatives and organizations for strategic discussions about goals, measures, resources, interventions, and outcomes. Still further, the working group concluded that the Twin Cities lacks mechanisms for identifying and replicating effective practices across organizational, geographic, cultural and other boundaries.

Understanding Strive

There is no single formula for Strive, as it is a work in progress in its hometown of Cincinnati and elsewhere around the country. For the purposes of this report, however, the Strive model has been distilled into five key components: (1) a Strategic Leadership Group that sets priorities and evaluates performance (2) a set of Strategic Goals that the community unites to achieve, (3) a Data System that informs both strategic and operational decisions, (4) Improvement Networks that use a data-driven process to increase performance and (5) a Partnership Staff that facilitates the entire enterprise. The primary role that each of those components plays in the Strive process and the relationships between them are summarized by a graphic on page 20 of this report.

The structure of Strive as it is being implemented in a range of communities across the country is more complex than the example offered in this report, but it was these five components that the Twin Cities Strive working group had the time and resources to examine in significant detail. Working group members learned, for example, that in the Strive model the Strategic Leadership Group consists of the chief executive officers of key organizations in the community, as well as other influential community

leaders, and serves as the one table where the community can be viewed as a whole and issues can be examined across organizational, geographic and other boundaries. Among other critical tasks, the Strategic Leadership Group approves a limited number of Strategic Goals that are the focus of the entire Strive process. Each of those goals – from readiness for kindergarten to completion of a postsecondary credential or degree – represents an important educational gateway that students must pass through to be ready for success in the economy and society of the 21st century.

Data runs throughout the Strive process, starting with agreement upon the ways that the community will measure its progress toward reaching its Strategic Goals. Agreeing upon such Strategic Goal Indicators is essential if the partnership is to effectively identify, support and disseminate what works. In all cases, data on those Strategic Goal Indicators is disaggregated by race, income and other variables that capture the complexity of the community. At the outset of its inquiry, the Strive working group brainstormed a set of Strategic Goals and Strategic Goal Indicators that could form the basis of an early childhood-to-early career partnership in the Twin Cities. Those draft goals and indicators are included in this report.

The Data System in the Strive model also includes Improvement Benchmarks that identify the incremental gains the partnership expects and commits to make over time to reach its Strategic Goals by an identified deadline. Very importantly, those benchmarks are set based upon analysis of past performance overall and upon the past performance of high-performing and fast-improving schools and other educational providers. In contrast, the benchmarks are not set by identifying an ideal level of performance that has rarely or if ever been attained, and then expecting improvement toward that goal in equal increments over time, which is the approach at the heart of the federal No Child Left Behind education law.

The regular and reliable reporting of the partnership's progress toward reaching its Improvement Benchmarks is another important aspect of the Strive model. The Strategic Leadership Group receives and reviews the most recent data at each of its regular meetings, and at least annually makes the results available in a report that is widely disseminated within and beyond the partnership.

In the Strive approach, the use of data is not restricted to setting strategic goals and measuring outcomes against them. Another important type of data that fuels the partnership is Process Indicators that monitor the progress and effectiveness of the partnership's efforts to reach its strategic goals. These Process Indicators, for example, measure how many students, families and educators are being served and how the participants and providers view the quality of the services being provided.

For some members of the Twin Cities Strive Working Group, the most intriguing aspect of the Strive model was not setting common goals or even developing shared indicators of success, but undertaking serious improvement efforts across organizations. The Strive approach brings diverse actors together to serve on Improvement Networks that work to reach the partnership Strategic Goals as measured by

the Strategic Goal Indicators and the Improvement Benchmarks. Very importantly, the purpose of the Improvement Networks is not just to increase awareness and collaboration across boundaries, but to identify and support what works and to redesign or stop doing what doesn't.

An important aspect of the operation of Improvement Networks in the Strive model is the use of a quality improvement process such as the Six Sigma methodology, which has been used at 3M, GE and many other successful corporations. Such quality improvement processes establish the rules of the road by which people will plan, implement, study and continuously strengthen their work.

The Improvement Networks both inform and are informed by the Strategic Leadership Group through ongoing feedback loops that transmit data and information to senior decision makers. In turn, the Strategic Leadership Group sets priorities and provides support to those who are doing the direct work of raising student achievement in both formal and informal learning environments. In Cincinnati and other cities implementing the Strive framework, foundations and other funders have in some cases decided to focus resources on schools and programs that actively participate in one of the partnership's Improvement Networks.

While the success of the Strive model depends upon the commitment and capacity of the people who serve on the Strategic Leadership Team and the Improvement Networks, it is the Partnership Staff that connects the dots between the organizations and individuals that make up the collaborative. If the devil is in the details of a complex endeavor such as Strive, then it is the Partnership Staff that must manage that devil day in and day out. As one of the members of the Twin Cities Strive working group put it, "Unless some group of very talented people get up every day and focus on the success of this effort full-time, it will fall far short of what it could achieve and what our community needs." In Cincinnati, the Strive professional staff includes four individuals: an executive director, a director of continuous improvement, a director of community partnerships and a director of school support. Other facilitators are hired on contract to guide the Improvement Networks.

Because it is important that the Partnership Staff be neutral and objective, the organizational home of Strive in the Twin Cities is also a critical consideration. Largely for financial reasons, the working group members agreed that it would be better to house the partnership within an existing organization than to create a new non-profit. In Cincinnati, the anchor organization for the Strive Partnership has been the Knowledge Works foundation, which provided payroll, offices and other organizational services, and enabled several of its staff members to work on the Strive project for three years before formally transferring their employment to the Strive organization. The CEO of Knowledge Works participates on the Strive board but does not chair it.

This report includes two graphic examples of how the five components of Strive discussed above might work together to achieve two Strategic Goals in the Twin Cities: (1) ensuring that all students read at

grade level by the end of 3rd grade and (2) ensuring that all students complete a credential or degree after high school.

The Scope of Strive in the Twin Cities

The Strive working group also spent a significant amount of time discussing the scale at which an early childhood-to-early career partnership could function successfully in the Twin Cities. Some members argued that such a partnership would add the most value if it encompassed the two cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Others noted the creating coalitions between educators and other organizations within just one of those cities is extremely difficult and wondered if the task could be accomplished effectively across two. Still others urged that the partnership bring together urban and suburban communities that increasingly face similar challenges and in some cases serve the same subset of highly mobile students and families. Ultimately, most members of the working group agreed that if a Strive-like partnership is created in the Twin Cities, its initial membership should be comprised of one or both of the two center cities and a limited number of suburbs that share the cities' urgent need to improve educational achievement and attainment and that are willing to make a deep commitment to the principles and processes of the partnership. If and when the partnership begins to demonstrate results, it could and should expand its membership beyond this initial "coalition of the willing" to include schools, districts and organizations located in other areas of the Twin Cities.

Recommendation

Based upon their deliberations during the summer and fall of 2011, the vast majority of the members of the Strive working group concluded that an early childhood-to-early career partnership should be created in the Twin Cities if six conditions for success can be met. It is important to note that while this recommendation reflects the opinion of most working group members, it does not necessarily reflect the positions of the organizations they work for.

One member of the working group did not endorse the creation of an early childhood-to-early career partnership at this time even if these six conditions for success are in place. In a statement that can be found in Appendix I of this report, Jim Bartholomew of the Minnesota Business Partnership articulates an alternative approach.

The affirmative but still conditional nature of the overall working group recommendation reflects the fact that while most members of the group came to believe that the Strive approach makes great sense in theory, its actual value would depend on how well it functions in practice. The working group's six conditions for success of Strive in the Twin Cities are:

- 1) Strong Strategic Leadership: A sufficient number of the senior leaders of organizations that have the capacity to help produce major improvements in the lives of children and young adults in the Twin Cities must be willing to serve on the partnership's Strategic Leadership Group. Taken

together, those leaders must represent the major educational providers, businesses, non-profit organizations, public agencies, funders and cultural communities in the areas that participate in the partnership. An individual with sufficient skill and clout must be willing to chair or co-chair the partnership during its first years of existence.

- 2) Commitment to Data-Driven Improvement: The organizations and individuals that participate in the partnership must agree to adopt or develop a quality improvement process through which decisions are made based on shared goals and data. Through this process, effective programs should be replicated and ineffective programs should be strengthened or discontinued. Potential members of the partnership should be aware that this approach to improvement is fundamentally different from one in which the partnership works to share but not to significantly change the practices of its members.
- 3) Sufficient Scope: One or both of the center cities must decide to participate in the partnership along with a limited number of suburbs that share the cities' need to improve educational achievement and attainment. If and when the partnership begins to demonstrate results, it could and should expand its membership beyond this initial "coalition of the willing."
- 4) Appropriate Anchor Organization: An organization that is not regarded as biased or divisive must agree to serve as the host organization of the partnership. While the chief executive of that organization would serve on the partnership's Strategic Leadership Group, he or she would not have supervisory control of the partnership's work.
- 5) Skilled Staff: A highly-skilled director and staff must be in place to coordinate the partnership's work on an ongoing basis. Members of that staff must possess the skills in quality improvement, community collaboration and data-driven decision-making that would be essential for the partnership's success.
- 6) Adequate Funding: Sufficient financial and other resources must be available to support the effective implementation of the Strive process in its initial geographic areas of implementation. Funding should be secured for at least the first three and ideally the first five years of the partnership's existence.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the report outlines ways in which the successful implementation of the Strive framework would fundamentally change education in the Twin Cities for students of color and for all students.

Report of the Twin Cities Strive Working Group

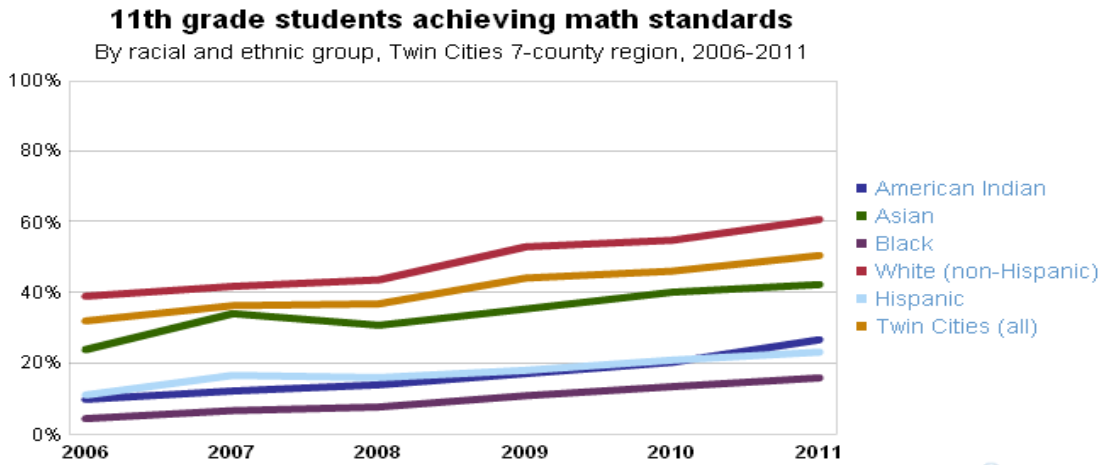
The Context for the Inquiry

The Twin Cities' examination of the Strive strategy for improving educational outcomes through community-wide collaboration began with the work of the African American Leadership Forum (AALF), a volunteer coalition of over five hundred seasoned and emerging leaders that is working to bring about positive social change in the African American community in the Twin Cities. In early 2010, the members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Work Group of AALF (pronounced *alph*) began a systematic examination of the educational environment and achievement of African American students in the seven counties that make up the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

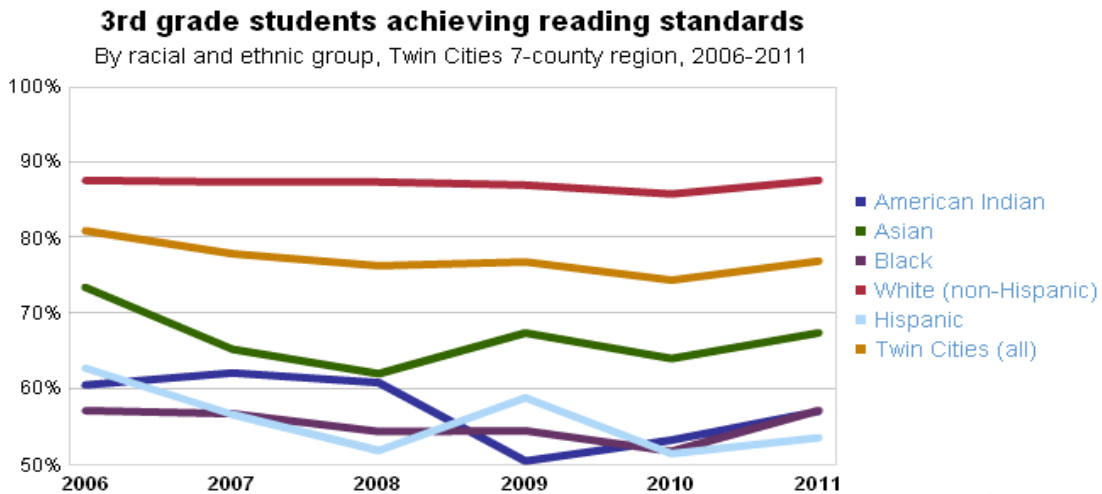
That examination began with a serious and systematic review of the data. That data showed that serious disparities in educational opportunity and outcomes exist across the entire spectrum of ages – from early childhood through adulthood. The committee found, for example, that only Washington, D.C., had a larger gap than Minnesota in the performance of White and Black students on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams in reading and math at 4th grade. At the 8th grade level, no state had a larger gap between Black and White students in both reading and math than Minnesota.

The committee also learned that not only are gaps between Black and White students in Minnesota larger than in other states – in many cases African American students in Minnesota score below African American students in other states across the nation. On the 2009 NAEP exam, for example, African-American fourth graders in Texas and Georgia scored higher in reading than their counterparts in Minnesota. The average achievement of Hispanic students in Minnesota is also lower than the average achievement of Hispanic students in other states. For example, on the NAEP fourth grade reading exam, Hispanic students in Minnesota performed significantly below Hispanic students in Texas, Louisiana, Georgia and Mississippi.

The AALF Education committee also reviewed data from Minnesota's state tests, and found that while 55% of white students statewide scored proficient on the 11th grade math test in 2011, just 21% of American Indian students, 42% of Asian students, 16% of African-American students, and 22% of Hispanic students scored at that level. A closer look at the seven country metro area shows that while proficiency rates have increased, the achievement gap has grown as well. The following graph, prepared by Wilder Research's Minnesota Compass initiative, shows the percentage of students who score proficient or above on Minnesota's challenging 11th grade math test, and illustrates this common occurrence:



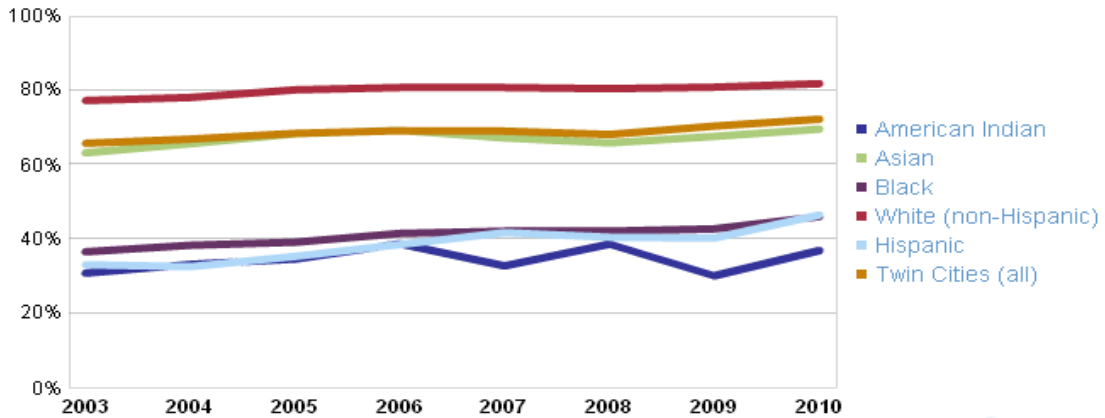
Even when the average proficiency of all student groups has held steady or declined in the Twin Cities in recent years, gaps between groups have often grown, as is illustrated by the following graph of 3rd grade reading results.



Looking beyond state assessments, while high school graduation rates in the seven county metro area have shown some improvement in recent years, significant gaps in the graduation rates of students of color and white students have persisted:

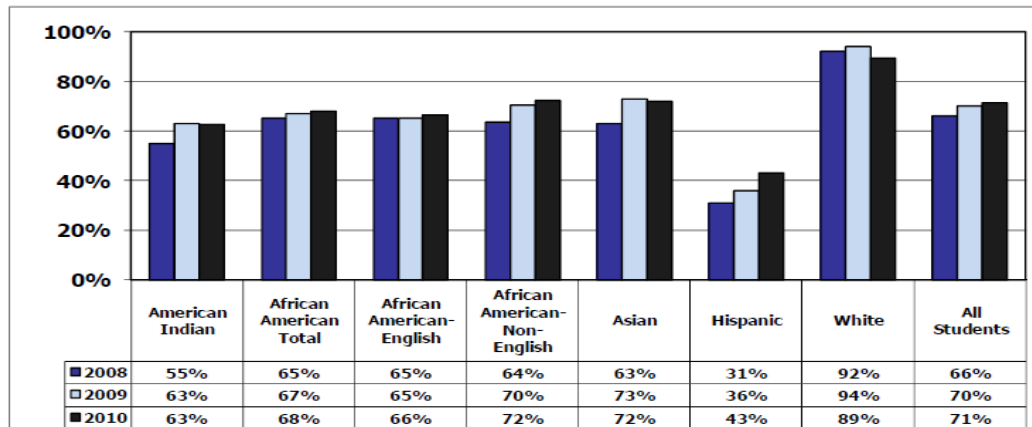
High school students graduating on time

By racial and ethnic group, Twin Cities 7-county region, 2003-2010

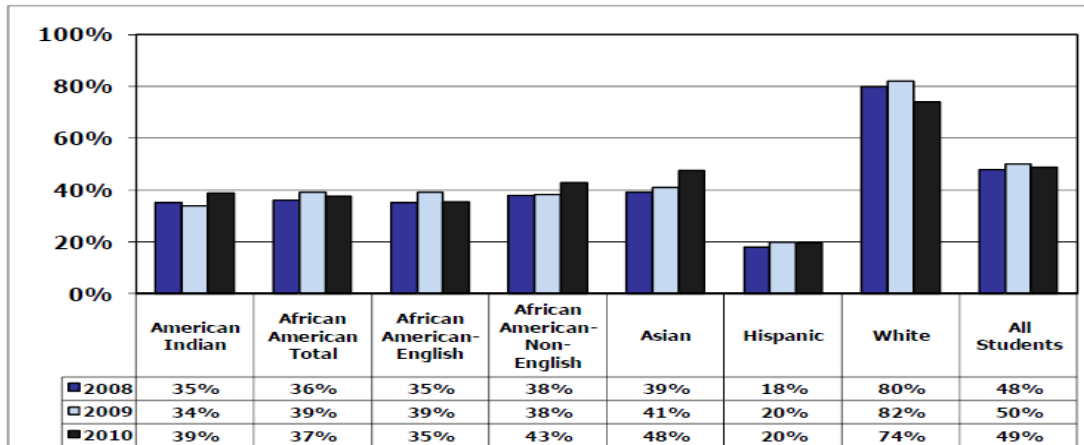


While data on the performance of students of color is most readily available at the K-12 level, indicators of achievement gaps exist at other levels as well. For example, the Minneapolis Public Schools' kindergarten readiness assessment shows gaps that persist in both literacy and numeracy despite recent gains:

Percentage of Kindergarten Students that Meet or Exceed the Benchmark for Total Literacy- Fall 2008-2010



Percentage of Kindergarten Students that Meet or Exceed the Benchmark for Total Numeracy-Fall 2008-2010



4

At the other end of the age spectrum, gaps also exist in college completion rates. As data from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education reveals in the 2008 “Measuring Up” report, 63% of Minnesota White college students completed an undergraduate degree within six years, while only 37% of African American students, 35% of American Indian, 54% of Asian and 51% of Latino students did so.

While data on educational outcomes in the Twin Cities and Minnesota paints an important picture of educational performance overall, it is also important to examine the performance of individual districts and schools because significant differences in achievement exist at the local level. The chart below, for example, summarizes recent data from the Minnesota Department of Education on the size of the Black-White achievement gap as measured by the percentage of students who are proficient in reading in each of the school districts in the Twin Cities.

MCA Reading District Percent Proficient (Meets or Exceeds)

	2010 White	2010 Black	2010 Gap	2011 White	2011 Black	2011 Gap	Change in Gap '10-'11
ANOKA-HENNEPIN	78.3	59.5	18.8	81.2	63.7	17.5	↓1.3
BLOOMINGTON	86.3	58.7	27.6	86.5	59	27.5	↓0.1
BROOKLYN CENTER	73.9	46.6	26.3	74.8	51	23.8	↓2.5
BURNSVILLE	82.8	53.2	29.6	82.9	56.2	26.7	↓2.9
COLUMBIA HEIGHTS	70.6	45.1	25.5	69.6	49.9	19.7	↓5.8

	2010 White	2010 Black	2010 Gap	2011 White	2011 Black	2011 Gap	Change in Gap '10-'11
EDINA	92.5	60.5	32	92.8	70.6	22.2	↓9.8
HOPKINS	86.6	52.3	34.3	86.3	59.3	27.3	↓7
MINNEAPOLIS	86.4	36.1	50.3	86.5	42.2	44.3	↓6
NORTH ST PAUL- MAPLEWOOD	77.6	51.2	26.4	78.0	54.6	23.4	↓3
OSSEO	84.2	51.2	33	84.3	56.3	28	↓5
RICHFIELD	74.7	40.1	34.6	78.2	50.5	27.7	↓6.9
ROBBINSDALE	80	46.2	33.8	81.1	49	32.1	↓1.7
ROSEVILLE	83.5	57.7	25.8	85.3	58.1	27.2	↑1.4
SAINT PAUL	80.9	42.5	38.4	81.5	45.6	35.9	↓2.5
SOUTH ST. PAUL	75.3	60.0	15.3	76.5	54.0	22.5	↑7.2
ST. ANTHONY-NEW BRIGHTON	84.3	63.0	21.3	84.9	60.6	24.3	↑3
ST. LOUIS PARK	86.3	51.1	35.2	86.9	60.0	26.9	↓8.3
SAINT PAUL	80.9	42.5	38.4	81.5	45.6	35.9	↓2.5
WEST ST. PAUL- MENDOTA HTS.- EAGAN	83.5	58.4	25.1	83.7	56.8	26.9	↑1.8

To a lesser but still significant extent, the achievement gaps between students of color and white students that exist in every Twin Cities community also exist between low-income students and their moderate and upper-income peers. Whether they are based upon race, income or other factors, all gaps matter because students who do poorly in elementary and secondary school are much less likely to earn postsecondary credentials and degrees and to secure well-paying jobs.

And while educational achievement gaps greatly limit the prosperity of Twin Cities' and Minnesota citizens today, they will do even greater damage in the decades ahead if they are not closed in significant and sustainable ways. That is because according to the Minnesota State Demographer, the percentage of residents in the Twin Cities region who are Latino, Black, and Asian is expected to increase from 23% in 2010 to approximately 35% in 2035. The size of the White population in the Twin Cities, in contrast, is not expected to grow after 2015.

As part of its review of the educational landscape in the Twin Cities, the AALF Education and Lifelong Learning Work Group also identified schools in the community that have defied these trends and have made measurable progress toward closing gaps. Concordia Creative Learning Academy in Saint Paul, for example, eliminated the gap on the 2011 reading MCAs, with Hispanic students scoring the highest of all student groups, and Black students scoring only one percentage point behind White students, a virtual elimination of

their very small four percent gap in 2010. And Harvest Preparatory school in Minneapolis increased the percent of Black students scoring proficient in reading from 62% in 2010 to 77% in 2011. In 2011, 82.5% of Black students at Harvest Prep scored proficient in math, beating the statewide proficiency rate of 29.1% by 53 points. At Sibley East-Gaylord Elementary in rural Minnesota, about one-third of the students are Latino with limited English skills, yet 77% of those students scored proficient or above on the 2011 MCA reading exam. These and other schools prove that demography is not destiny, and that with the right strategy and serious ongoing effort, schools in Minnesota can make major progress toward closing achievement gaps.

Background on the Twin Cities Investigation of Strive

Informed and animated by the data on the educational achievement of African American students, the members of the African American Leadership Forum's Education and Lifelong Learning Work Group turned their attention to the search for solutions. While the goal of AALF is to close the achievement gap for African American children, the members of AALF ultimately decided that they might be able to best meet those needs by creating a broader coalition of organizations focused on raising the achievement of students of color from all backgrounds.

Concurrently, the University of Minnesota was expanding its role as an urban land-grant university in an array of areas, including improving the educational pipeline to higher education by closing achievement gaps at the K-12 level. One of the AALF work group co-chairs, Dr. Robert Jones, Senior Vice President for System Academic Administration at the University of Minnesota, shared information with the group about an educational improvement initiative that created just such a broader coalition in the Cincinnati area in 2006. That initiative was called Strive and it is now being replicated in other communities across the country.

Strive brings together key individuals and organizations to identify common goals for closing educational achievement gaps, to publicly report on progress toward meeting those goals and to use a quality improvement process such as Six Sigma to remove roadblocks and improve outcomes. Strive is not intended to operate as a new program that provides direct service to students, families or schools. Instead, it is a framework that brings educators, youth development organizations, non-profit organizations, businesses, government agencies, political leaders and other organizations that affect the lives of children and young adults to pursue common goals using data-driven strategies for improvement. As such, it is intended to help meet the needs of communities that are program-rich but system-poor.

The Strive Partnership in Cincinnati reports that according to its most recent data, it is making progress on forty out of fifty-four indicators for improvement. Since its launch in Cincinnati, the Strive Partnership approach has expanded to Portland, Boston, Houston, Seattle, Richmond, Memphis, and San Francisco, with many other cities in an exploration phase similar to the Twin Cities, including Grand Rapids and Red Wing, Minnesota.

Interested in learning more about the Strive approach, the AALF committee decided to partner with the University of Minnesota to convene an opportunity for leaders from a range of fields to learn about Strive. In February 2011, approximately 250 people gathered in the University of Minnesota's Coffman Memorial Union to hear Nancy Zimpher, Chancellor of the State University of New York, and Jeff Edmondson, managing director of the developing Strive national network, speak about Strive. Chancellor Zimpher sparked the creation of Strive during her tenure as President of the University of Cincinnati, and Jeff Edmondson was the founding executive director of Strive Cincinnati. The audience that attended the initial presentation on Strive in Minnesota in February included representatives from K-12 schools and districts, state and local government, business, philanthropic organizations, non-profits, education associations, higher education and media.

Both during and after the February event, the U of M solicited and analyzed feedback from over 120 individuals on the pros and cons of implementing Strive or a Strive-like framework in the Twin Cities. That feedback clearly indicated that there was broad support for an exploration of Strive, and suggested that a number of key questions should be carefully considered through that inquiry. At the invitation of the U of M and AALF, a core group of organizations agreed to convene that investigation. Those organizations are:

- The African-American Leadership Forum
- The Bush Foundation
- The City of Minneapolis
- The City of Saint Paul
- General Mills
- The Greater Twin Cities United Way
- The Itasca Project
- The Minneapolis Foundation
- Minneapolis Public Schools
- The Minnesota Minority Education Partnership
- The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
- The Saint Paul Foundation
- Saint Paul Public Schools
- Target Corporation
- The University of Minnesota

The chief executive or another senior leader of these organizations agreed to serve on a group of critical decision makers that would charge a working group with a detailed review of Strive and the degree to which it might help to improve educational outcomes in the Twin Cities. Those critical decision makers are the initial intended audience for this report. In October 2011, they will meet to review its contents and to decide if additional planning to bring Strive to the Twin Cities is warranted. While the Strive working group was charged with testing the theory of Strive, it will fall to the critical decision makers group to decide if

an effective early childhood-to-early career partnership can and should be created in the Twin Cities.

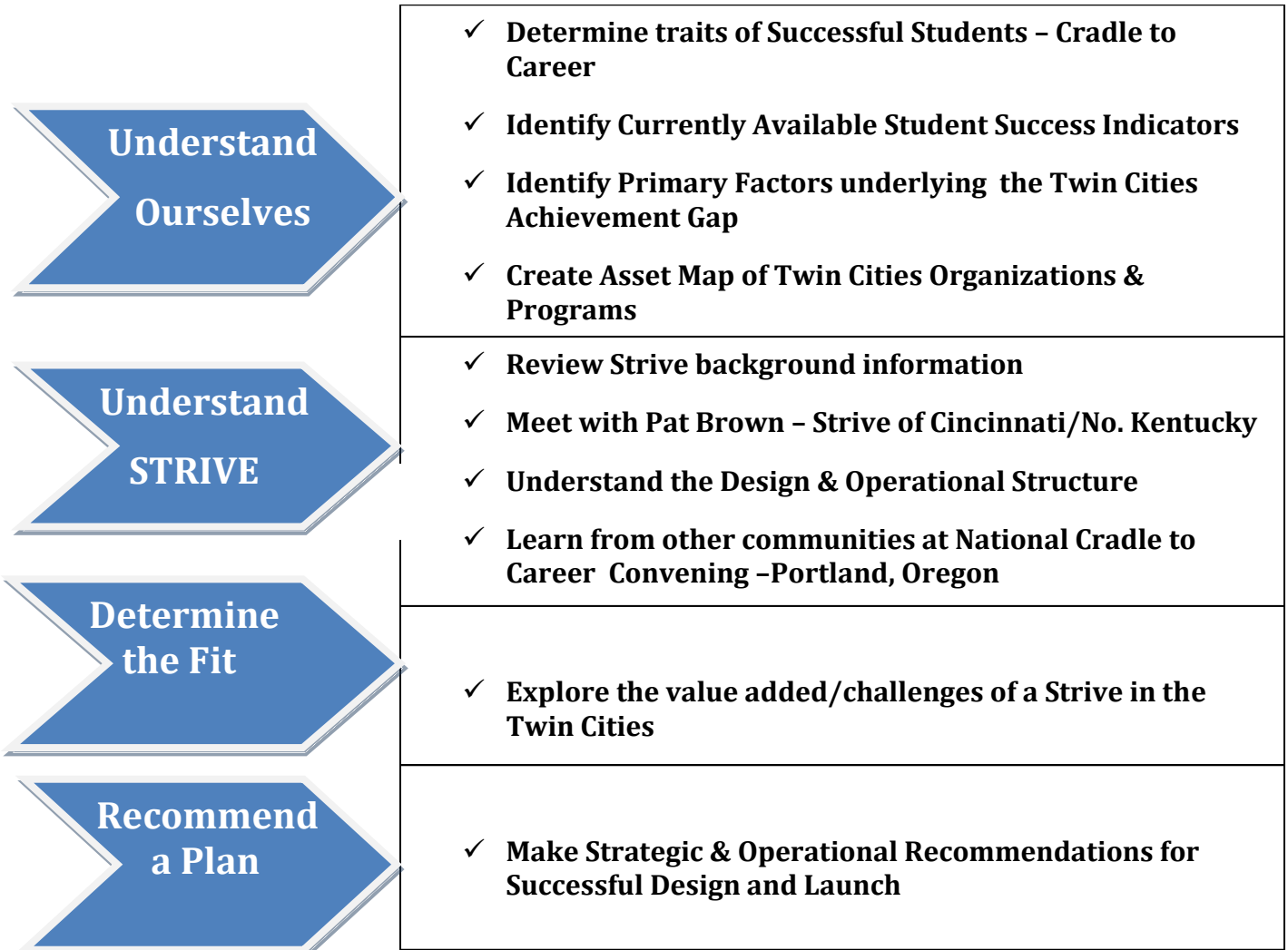
The charter that the critical decision makers created for the larger working group can be found in Appendix A. The thirty-one members of the working group are listed at the start of this report and represent a diverse array of organizations that have responsibility for or a major stake in educational outcomes in the Twin Cities. Those organizations included the cities and school districts of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, the suburban school district of St. Louis Park, the Itasca Project and the Minnesota Business Partnership, the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System, Target and General Mills, the Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota Private College Council, the Minneapolis, Saint Paul, McKnight and Bush Foundations, Wilder Research, United Way, the African American Leadership Forum, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Ready 4 K, the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers, Concordia Creative Learning Academy charter school in Saint Paul and the non-profit organizations MIGIZI Communications, AchieveMpls, and Growth and Justice. A representative from the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce was an active participant in the working group until she accepted a position with the United States Chamber of Commerce during the summer of 2011.

The members of the Twin Cities Strive working group met six times for three hours each between June and September 2011. Meetings were held in both Saint Paul and Minneapolis and careful notes were taken and disseminated to working group members who missed a meeting. Minutes and materials from the working group can be reviewed at www.collegeready.umn.edu. The facilitator of the working group's meetings and a key leader in shaping the inquiry was Cheryl Mayberry, owner and principal consultant with Integrated Performance Management. She is a certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, with many years of experience in quality improvement process as a senior manager with General Electric. She is also an active volunteer with the African American Leadership Forum.

The inquiry into Strive was led by Dr. Robert Jones of the University of Minnesota and the African American Leadership Forum, and the overall process was coordinated by Kent Pekel and Julie Sweitzer of the University's College Readiness Consortium. The chart on the following page summarizes that process:

The Strive Working Group Process

June – September 2011



Core Conclusions about the Twin Cities

Rather than beginning with discussion of Strive in Cincinnati, the working group began its inquiry with an effort to develop a common understanding of the Twin Cities. It took this approach to ensure that the focus of the inquiry was on the degree to which the Strive model could meet the particular needs of the Twin Cities, rather than on a general evaluation of the merits of Strive.

An early (and perhaps obvious) conclusion of the working group’s discussion of the Twin Cities was that there are an extraordinary number of initiatives underway in the community to improve educational outcomes in general and to close educational achievement gaps in

particular. The working group's initial and fairly informal survey of the educational landscape identified more than five hundred such initiatives (some of which reflect the implementation of the same program in different school and community settings.) A summary of the findings of that survey is included in Appendix F.

But while there is undoubtedly a great deal going on in the Twin Cities, the Strive working group also noted that there is currently no organization or entity in the region that brings together the key organizations and individuals that influence students' lives for strategic discussions of where the community stands today and where it should go tomorrow. Because there is no common table for such strategic discussions, it is not uncommon for important actors on the Twin Cities educational scene to learn of major decisions and new initiatives for the first time in the press, potentially undermining opportunities for collaborative efforts between organizations that might have advanced multiple agendas for improvement.

Another important conclusion of the Strive working group's discussion of the Twin Cities was that efforts to improve education and close achievement gaps are focused on a very wide set of priorities. Some emphasize improvement within schools while others focus on time after school. Some provide tutoring and others provide mentoring. Some focus on early childhood education while others promote college access. Some focus on reading while others focus on math, science and the arts. Some focus on strengthening the leadership skills of students and others focus on improving the cultural competence of educators and other educational providers. While each of these objectives is likely valuable in itself, it was unclear to the working group how they add up to a coherent strategy that helps students build academic momentum over time. Some working group members suggested that especially during a period of decreasing financial resources for education, it may be important to focus community initiatives on a more limited set of objectives and to promote and support the more efficient use of financial, human and other resources.

The Strive working group also noted that even when two or more efforts to improve education in the Twin Cities focus on the same broad goals, those programs often measure success in different ways, making data-based collaboration between and comparisons among programs difficult or impossible. The Strive working group also found that many organizations lack indicators of effectiveness altogether and instead cite the results of similar initiatives in other communities as evidence of the effectiveness of their work in the Twin Cities. In many cases, the lack of local measures of success was due not to an unwillingness to use data to measure outcomes, but from a lack of resources and expertise in doing so.

Finally, the Strive working group also found that there are relatively few mechanisms for identifying and replicating effective practices across organizational and geographic boundaries in the Twin Cities. In part, efforts to replicate what works are hampered by the lack of common goals and indicators of success. Replication of success is also limited by the absence of an organization that has the capacity to undertake the complex work of helping

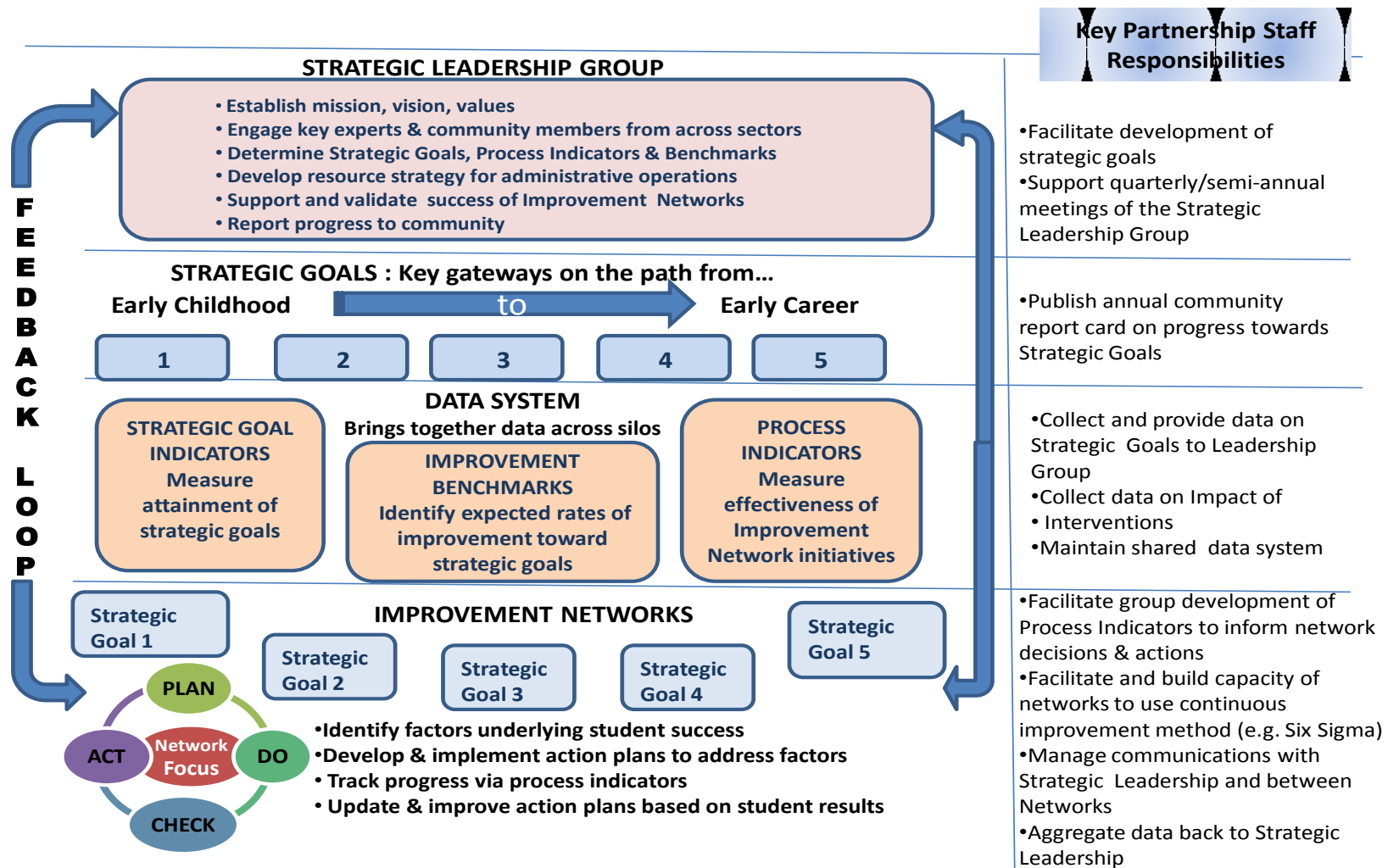
organizations adopt and adapt strategies that have proven successful in other organizations, communities and contexts.

Core Components of an Early Childhood-to-Early Career Partnership

There is no single formula for Strive, as it is a work in progress around the country and in its hometown of Cincinnati and elsewhere around the country. The design and creation of an early childhood-to-early career partnership is inherently an evolutionary process through which a national model is adapted to local realities. Because other communities have already begun to implement their own versions of the Strive approach, the Twin Cities would be able to learn from and perhaps improve upon their work if such a partnership is created here.

For the purposes of this report, however, the Strive model has been distilled into five key components: (1) a Strategic Leadership Group that sets priorities and evaluates performance (2) a set of Strategic Goals that community unites to achieve, (3) a Data System that informs both strategic and operational decisions, (4) Improvement Networks that use a data-driven process to increase performance and (5) a Partnership Staff that facilitates the entire enterprise. The primary role that each of those components plays in the Strive process and the relationships between them are summarized on the graphic below, after which some of the Twin Cities Strive working group's observations and questions about each component are discussed in greater detail. Other graphic representations of the strategic and operational structures of Strive that were reviewed during working group meetings are included in Appendices B, C, G and H.

Core Components of Early Childhood-Early Career Partnership



1. Strategic Leadership Group

The Strategic Leadership Group, consisting of chief executive officers of key organizations as well as other influential community leaders, serves as the one table where the community can be viewed as a whole and issues can be examined across organizational, geographic and other boundaries. There is both a vertical aspect of the Strategic Leadership Group's work – promoting coherence from one level of education to the next as students move upward through school – and a horizontal aspect connecting what happens during the school day to what happens in after-school and summer programs, and at home. System coherence matters because many students and families are increasingly mobile across the metropolitan area, moving from one district to another not just over the summer but during the school year. This is not just a Minneapolis-Saint Paul issue, but occurs at similar or higher rates in suburbs such as Brooklyn Center.

Members of the Strive working group agreed that an important role of the Strategic Leadership Group in the Twin Cities at the outset of creating a Strive-like network would be to define the organization's mission in clear and actionable terms. Some members suggested that the mission should focus exclusively on closing educational achievement gaps. Other members suggested that setting a more narrowly focused agenda could limit participation in and support for the partnership. Ultimately, most working group members agreed that while the partnership's mission should be defined as serving the needs of all students, it should set closing gaps as its first priority.

Several of the working group members stressed that is important that the mission define not just what the organization will do, but also what it will *not* do. Several members of the working group argued, for example, that a Strive-like organization in the Twin Cities should clearly state that its focus is on improving performance and outcomes at the local level rather than influencing state or federal policy. Were the organization to take such a policy-oriented role, it would risk duplicating and perhaps undermining the efforts of organizations such as the Minnesota P-20 Partnership or MinnCAN, both of which were created to influence state policy in education and other fields. The goal of a Strive initiative should be to complement but not compete with those policy-level organizations and efforts.

The Strive working group concluded that in the Twin Cities, the Strategic Leadership Group should include key positional leaders who can allocate human and financial resources, as well as leaders from the metropolitan area's major cultural communities. The group's members should collectively and individually possess significant financial, political, cultural and social capital. Several members of the working group stressed that while positional authority is very important, other types of influence should also be considered. They argued that the Leadership Group should include grassroots organizational leaders who have credibility within their communities and who are also willing and eager to step out of that zone and are chomping at the bit for change. They should have the capacity to help others see beyond their local or organizational priorities and realities.

Experience in other communities implementing the Strive model suggests that the members of the Strategic Leadership Group should possess a sense of urgency coupled with a significant degree of patience. While the group must be relentless in its commitment to improving student achievement, its members must also be willing to commit the time it takes to develop a serious shared strategy. The Strive working group also agreed that the members of the Strategic Leadership Group should share a commitment to the metropolitan area as a whole, and to making decisions based upon data, evidence and sound analysis.

The working group agreed that finding the right chair for the Strategic Leadership Group will be essential to the initiative's success. Several working group members suggested that the Twin Cities will need an individual to play the role that Nancy Zimpher played when she led the initial design of Strive during her tenure as president of the University of Cincinnati. She was someone who anyone in the community would meet with and who was widely seen as having the community's best interests at heart. She was willing to be tenacious in launching the program and did not delegate her role in the partnership to other lower-ranking or less-committed individuals.

2. Strategic Goals

The Strategic Goals that drive the Strive model are different from the goals that exist in many education improvement initiatives. First, they are developed and owned by this community, not externally imposed by the state or the federal government or another outside entity. And second, taken together the Strategic Goals in a Strive model form a coherent sequence stretching from early childhood through the early years of a career. This continuum of goals reflects the reality that success at one level of the education system can be undermined by dysfunction or mediocrity at the next. In contrast to Strive's vision of such a continuum, many strategic plans in education set a disparate collection of goals that bear little resemblance to one another.

The Twin Cities Strive working group agreed that the Strategic Goals of such a partnership in the Twin Cities should be understandable and seem important to both experts and citizens alike. They should be key educational gateways that can close or open doors to later learning, and they should be limited in number to focus the partnership's activities and provide the community with a focused set of objectives to understand and support. Some working group members suggested that the goals should not be overly focused on fairly traditional educational objectives, such as performance on standardized tests. All agreed that determining a set of Strategic Goals for an early childhood-to-early career partnership in the Twin Cities would require a very data-driven and highly inclusive process.

3. Data System

Data runs throughout the Strive process, starting with the measurement of progress toward the Strategic Goals. This report identifies those measures as the Strategic Goal Indicators, and they play a key role in the Strive approach. Only when all of the members of the partnership agree to measure attainment of the Strategic Goals in the same valid and

reliable ways is a serious quality improvement process possible. Data on the Strategic Goal Indicators must come from a trusted source, and should be available to as many members of the partnership as possible. The Strategic Goal Indicators should also be reported in formats that the general public can access and understand.

The Strive working group brainstormed the following set of Strategic Goals and Strategic Goal Indicators that could form the basis of an early childhood to early career partnership in the Twin Cities:

Potential Strategic Goal #1: Every child enters kindergarten with the developmental skills for learning success.

- Potential Strategic Goal Indicator: % of students who score proficient or above on the following domains of the Minnesota Developmental Assessment at Kindergarten Entrance: personal and social development, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, physical development, and the arts

Potential Strategic Goal #2: Every student learns to read at grade level by the end of third grade.

- Potential Strategic Goal Indicator: % of students who score proficient or above on the 3rd grade MCA reading assessment

Potential Strategic Goal #3: Every student has mastered the knowledge and skills to think abstractly in mathematics and succeed in higher-level math in high school.

- Potential Strategic Goal Indicator: % of students who score proficient or above on the 8th grade MCA mathematics assessment

Potential Strategic Goal #4: Every student graduates from high school ready for success in post-secondary education.

- Potential Strategic Goal Indicators: 4-year high school graduation rate, rates of enrollment in remedial courses during the first semester of study at a Minnesota institution of higher education, % of students who score at or above the college-ready benchmarks on the ACT exam, % of students who earn a score of 3 or higher on an Advanced Placement exam

Potential Strategic Goal #5: Every student earns a post-secondary credential or degree.

- Potential Strategic Goal Indicator: % of students who earn an AA degree within three years of high school graduation, % of students who earn BA or equivalent within five years of high school graduation

After the initial brainstorm that led to this list, the members of the Strive working group agreed that the potential Strategic Goals and Goal Indicators it arrived at were perhaps too focused on the traditional objectives of schools, such as strong performance on

standardized tests. Many members stressed that a Strive-like network in the Twin Cities should also include goals such as providing every student with a strong sense of self-efficacy, or a person's belief in his or her own competence. Those working group members argued that such non-academic factors are critical for success in college and careers and can be measured in valid and reliable ways using surveys and other instruments.

In the Strive model, data on the Strategic Goal Indicators is regularly collected, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, and reported to the Strategic Leadership Group for decision-making purposes and to the general public in an annual report card on progress.

Another important component of the Data System in the Strive approach are the Improvement Benchmarks that identify the incremental gains that the partnership expects and commits to make over time to reach its Strategic Goals by an identified deadline. Several members of the Strive working group argued that these benchmarks should be set based upon analysis of past performance overall and upon the outcomes attained by high-performing and fast-improving schools and other educational providers. In contrast, those members argued, the benchmarks should *not* be set by identifying an ideal level of performance that has rarely if ever been attained and then expecting improvement toward that goal in equal increments over time, which is the approach at the heart of the federal No Child Left Behind education law.

The Improvement Benchmarks in the Strive framework are intended to be ambitious – they should require all actors in the system to stretch beyond current levels of performance – but they should also be based upon a realistic assessment of what is possible given actual conditions on the ground. For example, if a group of schools or programs have demonstrated that it is possible to attain a significantly higher level of performance with a certain student group, then it may be reasonable to set the medium- or longer-term Improvement Benchmark for all schools at that level. If further analysis identifies a consistent rate at which these schools or programs attained their high level of performance, then it may also be appropriate to set the interim benchmarks at that rate of improvement.

In short, the Improvement Benchmarks in the Strive framework should be used to drive the entire system toward actual rather than idealized levels of high performance. It will be far more effective to expect all schools and providers to work toward what leading schools in the Twin Cities have actually achieved than to expect them to accomplish what no school has ever done before.

The regular and reliable reporting of the partnership's progress toward reaching these Improvement Benchmarks is another important aspect of the Strive model. The Strategic Leadership Group receives and reviews the most recent data at each of its regular meetings. At least once a year, the benchmark data is made available in a summary report that is widely disseminated within and beyond the partnership. Both the most recent and historical data on the benchmarks should be available on an ongoing basis through a user-friendly website. In the Twin Cities, the Minnesota Compass site created and coordinated by Wilder Research already plays that role in many respects, though that site is not

currently directly connected to the type of improvement network that is a key component of the Strive model.

The use of data in the Strive approach is not restricted to setting strategic goals and measuring outcomes against them. Another important type of data is Process Indicators that monitor the progress and effectiveness of the partnership's efforts to reach the strategic goals. Such process data, for example, measure how many students, families and educators are being served and how the participants and the providers view the quality of the services being provided.

Members of the Strive working group stressed that it would be important to build the capacity of all members of the partnership to use data effectively. One of those members suggested that could take place through ongoing professional development and coaching.

An important aspect of designing the Data System that drives Strive is creating a central repository where all of the raw data relevant to the partnership's efforts will be housed and from which a range of authorized users can access data. Members of the Twin Cities Strive working group agreed that, in a perfect world, a single data repository would be created to which authorized users from the partnership's member organizations would have ongoing access. The group also agreed, however, that the creation of such a single repository in the Twin Cities could face technical, financial and data-sharing challenges given the many diverse and independent organizations that would be involved. As such, the development of a Twin Cities data system might follow the same path as Cincinnati's, in which data was initially pulled from separate sources and reported in a common format on the Strive Partnership's web site and in its annual report card. In more recent years, however, the Cincinnati Public Schools has worked with the Strive staff and other partners to create the type of dynamic data system that is more conducive to ongoing educational improvement.

4. Improvement Networks

For some members of the Twin Cities Strive Working Group, the most intriguing aspect of the Strive model was not setting common goals or even developing shared indicators of success, but undertaking serious improvement efforts across the boundaries that often divide the many individuals and organizations in the Twin Cities that seek to improve youth outcomes. While those boundaries exist for a broad array of reasons – political and financial, cultural, linguistic, legal and otherwise – they do not reflect the complex and interdependent reality of many Twin Cities residents' lives. For example, because many students need more time to master challenging academic subjects, learning must extend beyond the school day and year into high-quality afterschool programs, summer programs and informal learning environments.

The Strive approach brings these diverse sectors together in Improvement Networks dedicated to reaching the partnership's Strategic Goals as measured by the Strategic Goal Indicators and the Improvement Benchmarks. Very importantly, the purpose of the Improvement Networks is not just to increase awareness and collaboration across

boundaries, but to identify and support what works and to redesign or stop doing what doesn't. As such, the first task of an Improvement Network is to deeply understand current levels of performance in the area of the Strategic Goal it is working to improve. Next, the Improvement Network reviews research and gathers opinions from an array of relevant stakeholders about the factors that may enhance or impede the system's capacity to meet the Improvement Benchmarks. When the network has identified the factors its members want to and believe they can meaningfully address, improvement initiatives are designed and implemented. The Improvement Network also establishes its Process Indicators to identify high and low performers and to continually improve outcomes across the network.

The Improvement Networks both inform and are informed by the Strategic Leadership Group through ongoing feedback loops that transmit data and information to senior decision makers. In turn, the Strategic Leadership Group sets priorities and provides support to those who are doing the direct work of serving students in both formal and informal learning environments.

An important aspect of the operation of Improvement Networks in the Strive model is their use of a quality improvement process such as the Six Sigma methodology that has been used at 3M, GE and many other successful corporations. In brief, those quality improvement processes establish the rules of the road by which people will plan, implement, study and continuously improve their work. This is an important aspect of the Strive model because often when educators and others who work directly with youth come together to collaborate, a great deal of time and effort is often spent deciding how the group will work together rather than doing the work at hand. Using a defined improvement process such as Six Sigma answers those questions in advance and enables the group to focus its efforts earlier and more effectively on improving student outcomes. In Cincinnati and other cities that are implementing Strive, the business community has often contributed its expertise in quality improvement processes to the partnership.

In Cincinnati and other cities implementing Strive, foundations and other funders have in some cases decided to focus resources on schools and programs that actively participate in one of the partnership's Improvement Networks. Those foundations report that connecting funding to participation in such a network helped to align their use of grant funds with other funders, strengthened the grant recipients' use of data to drive improvement and enhanced the chances that effective practices would be replicated by other schools and organizations.

5. The Partnership Staff

While the success of the Strive model depends greatly upon the commitment and capacity of the people who serve on the Strategic Leadership Team and the Improvement Networks, it is the Partnership Staff that connects the dots between the organizations and individuals that make up the collaborative. If the devil is in the details of a complex partnership such as Strive, then it is the Partnership Staff that must manage that devil day in and day out. As one of the members of the Twin Cities Strive Working Group put it, "Unless some group of

very talented people get up every day and focus on the success of this effort full-time, it will fall far short of what it could achieve and what our community needs.”

In Cincinnati, the Strive professional staff includes four individuals: an executive director, a director of continuous improvement, a director of community partnerships and a director of school support. Other facilitators are hired on contract to guide the Improvement Networks using a quality improvement process.

The Strive working group in the Twin Cities concluded that if an early childhood-to-early career partnership is created here, the number and roles of the staff should be determined by the geographic scope and function of the partnership. While most members of the working group agreed that that organization should be as lean as possible, several members argued that creating a staff that is too small or that lacks needed skills and expertise would be counterproductive. Either the staff needs to be structured to advance the mission, or the mission needs to be defined to reflect the capacity of the staff.

Working group members agreed that whatever the size and shape of the staff, it is vitally important that the individuals who comprise it – starting with its director – have the substantive expertise to immediately add value to the work that committed educators and others are doing on behalf of children. Taken together, they must possess an understanding of education, youth development, data, quality improvement and the diverse communities and cultures of the Twin Cities. They must also be relentlessly objective and unbiased in their work. They must approach each situation, organization and individual with fresh eyes, dedicated to follow the data where it leads.

Because it is so important that the Strive staff be neutral and objective, the organizational home of Strive in the Twin Cities would also be a critical consideration. Largely for financial reasons, the working group members agreed that it would be better to house the partnership within an existing organization than to create a new non-profit. In Cincinnati, the anchor organization for the Strive Partnership has been Knowledge Works foundation, which provides payroll, offices and other organizational services, and that enabled several of its staff members to work on the Strive project for three years before formally transferring their employment to the Strive organization. The CEO of Knowledge Works participates on the Strive board but does not chair it.

Experience in Cincinnati and other cities implementing Strive indicates that it is critical that the anchor organization have the clout and credibility to bring leaders to the Strive table despite other priorities, to help them work through conflicts and to keep the leaders focused on the shared long-term goal. While members of the Strive working group offered many ideas for an organization that could anchor a Strive partnership in the Twin Cities, no single organization emerged as the obvious choice.

Examples of How it All Might Work

The graphic below summarizes the way the Strive process might work to achieve a Strategic Goal along the continuum from early childhood through early career. The Strategic Goal in this hypothetical example is ensuring that all students have a solid foundation in reading by the end of third grade. The community embraced this Strategic Goal based upon research that found that if a student has not learned to read by third grade, he or she will have great difficulty reading to learn, a critical aspect of education in the upper elementary grades.

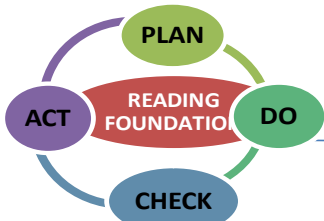
To measure this Strategic Goal, the community agreed to use the percentage of students who score proficient or above on the third grade MCA reading exam as its Strategic Goal Indicator. Using that indicator, Improvement Benchmarks were set for each student subgroup based upon analysis of the current and past performance of the system overall and especially upon the record of the highest performing and fastest improving schools in the system. Results in reaching those benchmarks are being regularly reported to the public through the partnership's annual report card.

The community in our hypothetical example then reviewed research and conducted extensive outreach to identify the factors that experts, practitioners and others thought would enhance or impede the community's capacity to meet the benchmarks. The community ultimately selected three factors to focus on and developed an Improvement Network to address each. Because the community's data analysis indicated that students are struggling to decode complex and unfamiliar words, the partnership created an Improvement Network that provides elementary teachers with professional development on effective decoding strategies. One of several important Process Indicators that the network uses is the percentage of teachers in the targeted schools and/or areas who participate in and complete the training. If the network notices that too few teachers in a school or area are choosing to participate in the professional development sessions, it would investigate the reasons for that shortfall and adjusts its operations accordingly.

The hypothetical community in this example also created two other Improvement Networks to help it meet its goal of providing all students with a solid foundation in reading by the end of third grade. The second network seeks to provide more learning time and personalized attention through tutoring to students who are identified as off track to meet the Strategic Goal by third grade. That network decided to use the percentage of students receiving tutoring who demonstrate high fall-to-spring growth on the MAP exam as one of its Process Indicators. Reflecting the research that consistently finds that parental reading habits influence their children's later literacy skills, the community created a third Improvement Network to ensure that all children are read to for at least twenty minutes each day at home. That network advances toward that goal by conducting a public information campaign on the benefits of reading to young children and providing parents with high-quality reading materials and training in reading techniques. Among the Process Indicators used to monitor that effort are regular surveys of parents at early childhood programs, schools and community centers that help to determine how frequently and how long they read to their children each day.

All of these hypothetical networks use a defined quality improvement process to conduct and continually improve their work. Data on the Process Indicators used by the Improvement Networks is periodically summarized and reported to the partnerships' Strategic Leadership Group to inform their direction of the community's overall strategy for improving educational outcomes.

The second graphic example included below of the Strive Partnership approach at work focuses on an effort to help every student complete a postsecondary credential or degree.



Strong Early Reading Foundation: Early Childhood-Early Career Partnership

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP GROUP

SAMPLE STRATEGIC GOALS

Every Student Enters Kindergarten Ready to Succeed

Every Student Reads at Grade Level by End of Third Grade

Every Student Enters High School Ready for Higher-level Math

Every Student Graduates From High School

Every Student Completes Post Secondary Education/ Training

F E E D B A C K L O O P

DATA SYSTEM

SAMPLE STRATEGIC GOAL INDICATOR

% of students who score proficient or above on 3rd grade MCA

IMPROVEMENT BENCHMARKS

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
White:	xx%	yy%	zz%	aa%	bb%
Black:	xx%	yy%	zz%	aa%	bb%
Latino:	xx%	yy%	zz%	aa%	bb%
Asian Pac:	xx%	yy%	zz%	aa%	bb%
Amer Ind:	xx%	yy%	zz%	aa%	bb%

IMPROVEMENT NETWORKS

Targeted PD on identified student weaknesses

Tutoring for students who are behind

Campaign to increase parents reading at home

SAMPLE PROCESS INDICATOR

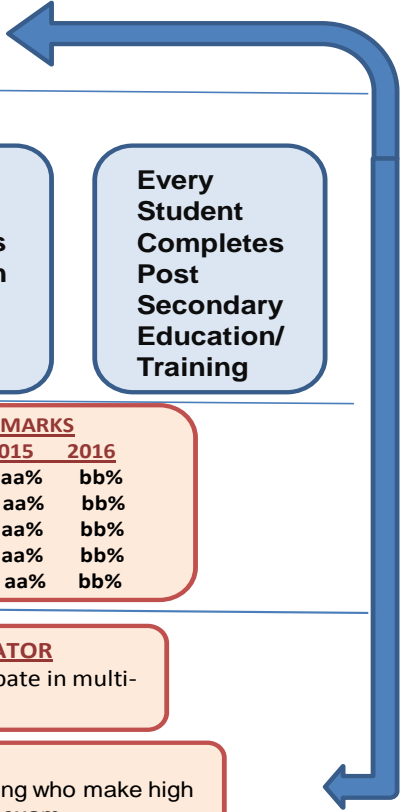
% of teachers who participate in multi-district training

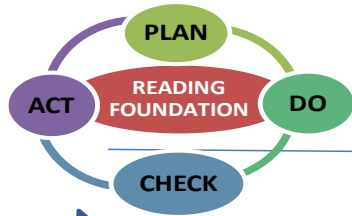
SAMPLE PROCESS INDICATOR

% of students receiving tutoring who make high fall-to-spring growth on MAP exam

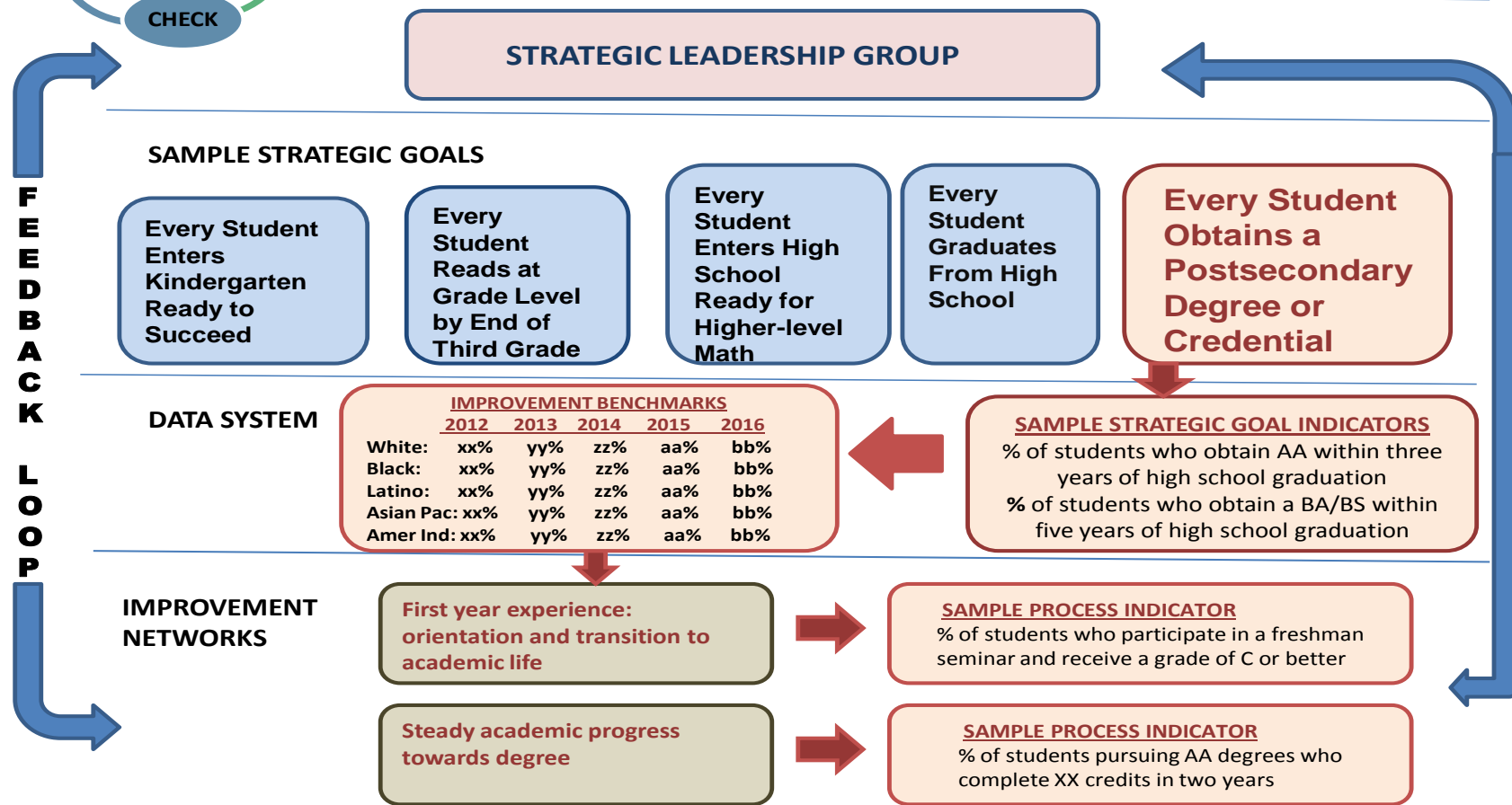
SAMPLE PROCESS INDICATOR

% of parents who report they read with children 20 minutes per day





Completion of Postsecondary Education: Early Childhood-Early Career Partnership



The Scope of Strive in the Twin Cities

The Strive working group also spent a significant amount of time discussing the scale at which an early childhood-to-early career partnership could function successfully in the Twin Cities. On one hand, many working group members saw great appeal in creating a partnership that could identify effective practices across the boundaries of school districts, including the divide between charter and district public schools. Many working group members were particularly interested in a partnership that connects the urban districts of Minneapolis and Saint Paul to the rapidly changing districts in the first and second ring suburbs. Other members of the working group strongly cautioned against expanding the partnership beyond likely capacity to provide effective coordination and resources. They also cautioned against designing a partnership linking communities that are so different from each other that the opportunity to share strategies is very limited.

Ultimately, most members of the working group agreed that the scope of the partnership should be determined by identifying a limited number of communities in the Twin Cities that face common educational challenges and that are deeply committed to the partnership's core components. Most committee members expressed hope that both the Saint Paul and Minneapolis school districts would elect to be involved, as would a number of charter schools in those communities and a number of suburban districts with significant numbers of low-income students and students of color.

If the Minneapolis and/or Saint Paul school districts elect to participate in the partnership, members of the working group agreed that it will be important to work closely with the two promising efforts that are already underway in those cities to improve educational outcomes through new levels and types of collaboration: The Northside Achievement Zone in Minneapolis and the Promise Neighborhood in Saint Paul. Those efforts are modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone in New York, and many working group members stressed that if a larger partnership using the Strive model is created in the Twin Cities, the partnership's goal should be to further enhance the effectiveness of those two neighborhood-based partnerships. A number of working group members suggested that one way that a Strive-like partnership might assist the two local efforts is by enhancing their capacity to use data-driven quality improvement processes to achieve their objectives.

Recommendation

Based upon their deliberations during the summer and fall of 2011, the vast majority of the members of the Strive working group concluded that an early childhood-to-early career partnership should be created in the Twin Cities if six conditions for success can be met. It is important to note that while this recommendation reflects the opinion of most working group members, it does not necessarily reflect the positions of the organizations they work for.

One member of the working group did not endorse the creation of an early childhood-to-early career partnership at this time even if these six conditions for success are in place. In a

statement that can be found in Appendix I of this report, Jim Bartholomew of the Minnesota Business Partnership articulates an alternative approach.

The affirmative but still conditional nature of the overall working group recommendation reflects the fact that while most members of the group came to believe that the Strive approach makes great sense in theory, its actual value would depend on how well it functions in practice. The working group's six conditions for success of Strive in the Twin Cities are:

- 1) Strong Strategic Leadership: A sufficient number of the senior leaders of organizations that have the capacity to help produce major improvements in the lives of children and young adults in the Twin Cities must be willing to serve on the partnership's Strategic Leadership Group. Taken together, those leaders must represent the major educational providers, businesses, non-profit organizations, public agencies, funders and cultural communities in the areas that participate in the partnership. An individual with sufficient skill and clout must be willing to chair or co-chair the partnership during its first years of existence.
- 2) Commitment to Data-Driven Improvement: The organizations and individuals that participate in the partnership must agree to adopt or develop a quality improvement process through which decisions are made based on shared goals and data. Through this process, effective programs should be replicated and ineffective programs should be strengthened or discontinued. Potential members of the partnership should be aware that this approach to improvement is fundamentally different from one in which the partnership works to share but not to significantly change the practices of its members.
- 3) Sufficient Scope: One or both of the center cities must decide to participate in the partnership along with a limited number of suburbs that share the cities' need to improve educational achievement and attainment. If and when the partnership begins to demonstrate results, it could and should expand its membership beyond this initial "coalition of the willing."
- 4) Appropriate Anchor Organization: An organization that is not regarded as biased or divisive must agree to serve as the host organization of the partnership. While the chief executive of that organization would serve on the partnership's Strategic Leadership Group, he or she would not have supervisory control of the partnership's work.
- 5) Skilled Staff: A highly-skilled director and staff must be in place to coordinate the partnership's work on an ongoing basis. Members of that staff must possess the skills in quality improvement, community collaboration and data-driven decision-making that would be essential for the partnership's success.
- 6) Adequate Funding: Sufficient financial and other resources must be available to support the effective implementation of the Strive process in its initial geographic

areas of implementation. Funding should be secured for at least the first three and ideally the first five years of the partnership's existence.

Conclusion

During the many discussions that members of the Strive working group had with each other and with others across the Twin Cities, a common question was this: *“So how would this really be different from the situation we have now?”* The chart below attempts an answer:

Current Situation in the Twin Cities	How an Effective Early Childhood-to-Early Career Partnership Might Change the Situation
Many initiatives to close achievement gaps exist but they are often disconnected from each other	The partnership brings together key organizations and individuals for strategic discussions and collaboration across the many organizational, geographic and cultural boundaries that exist in the Twin Cities
There are numerous goals for educational improvement across the community and they are focused on a broad range of priorities	A limited number of understandable and actionable Strategic Goals identify critical gateways that all students must pass through on the road from early childhood-to-early career
Even when programs are focused on the same goals, they often measure success in very different ways	Agreed-upon Strategic Goal Indicators provide create a common approach to measuring success
Schools, early learning settings and other organizations that serve youth have a lot of data on educational outcomes but relatively little data on the educational inputs that can be used to help students reach the outcomes	The Data System includes Process Indicators that inform efforts to strengthen the programs and strategies that are being used to help the community meet its Strategic Goals
Few mechanisms exist for identifying and replicating effective practices across organizational and geographic boundaries	Improvement Networks identify effective practices and work together to support and replicate them
Existing groups often disagree about <i>how</i> to collaborate across organizational and other boundaries	An agreed-upon quality improvement process is used by the entire partnership so efforts can focus on doing the work rather than on determining how people will work together
Collaborative efforts, if and when they occur, are focused on sharing what the participants are already doing	Improvement Networks exist and do not take the status quo as a given but instead start with data and focus on identifying and expanding what works and discontinuing what doesn't

