FOCUS   A Field Assessment Guide

The Strong
Field Framework

*A Guide and Toolkit for Funders
and Nonprofits Committed to
Large-Scale Impact*

The **Bridgespan** Group

Contents

Introduction

Helping young people in poor neighborhoods transition successfully to adulthood. Demonstrating that low-income students can graduate from high school ready for college and career. Ensuring that all children show up for kindergarten ready to learn.

Our nation's leading foundations and nonprofits are committed to achieving compelling and far-reaching goals like those above. Many of them, however, have come to believe that their bold aspirations cannot be realized without a critical mass of organizations and individuals aligned and working effectively as a field. For the goals mentioned above, the strength of the after-school, charter school and early education fields, respectively, may mean the difference between success and failure.

> **What is a field?**
>
> A **community** of organizations and individuals:
>
> - working together towards a **common goal**, and
> - using a set of **common approaches** to achieving that goal

That's why field building is a critical strategy for social change; it's also why funders and nonprofits committed to large-scale impact know that they need to be intentional about strengthening the fields in which they operate. Yet these agents of social change often struggle to understand how to focus their field-building investments and activities because they lack a comprehensive and coherent map of the strengths and weaknesses of their field.

To help address this challenge, The James Irvine Foundation asked The Bridgespan Group to develop an approach to assessing the strengths and needs of a field. The result is a framework for building more robust fields, The Strong Field Framework, presented in this report. (We have used the framework to assess the field of multiple pathways in California in order to inform our Youth program strategy. The framework's application to the multiple pathways field is included as a case study on page 12.)

The Strong Field Framework can help other foundations and nonprofits to assess the strengths and needs of the fields they seek to build, and to prioritize their efforts and investments. It has helped us become more strategic in our field-building work; we have also found that the very act of assessing a field, if done in collaboration with the field's leaders, can help to coalesce the organizations and agencies working towards a common goal in powerful ways.

We hope it can do the same for you, and we would welcome your input and feedback as well as accounts of your own experiences, as you work to strengthen your field.

Why Field Building Is an Important Lever for Change

Systemic change is critical for solving some of the greatest social challenges in our nation today. And one of the most important levers for bringing about such change is field building — coordinating the efforts of multiple organizations and individuals around a common goal and creating the conditions necessary for them to succeed.

Why? When successful, such efforts can improve the overall infrastructure of a field, enabling the organizations within it to achieve greater social impact. The rising tide — in the form of support for weaker organizations, filled gaps in service, enhanced understanding of peers working towards the same or similar goals, and improved communication and coordination throughout — lifts all boats. Importantly, however, the goal of field building is not to make each organization follow the same strategy or approach; rather, it is to enable a variety of organizations to operate and collaborate more effectively, whether their efforts center on specific aspects of the field or are more broadly focused.

What do field-building efforts look like? It depends on the field itself, and its particular strengths and weaknesses. Take the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) efforts to eliminate tobacco use in the United States. RWJF committed to this goal in the early 1990s. Translating the goal into practice, the foundation's strategy for building the tobacco cessation field focused on the policy and environmental factors affecting tobacco use; RWJF made investments in "encompassing research, policy interventions, prevention and cessation programs, education and advocacy, coalition building, leadership training, convening, and communications activities."[1]

The Aspen Institute's microenterprise fund for innovation, effectiveness, learning, and dissemination (FIELD) provides another example. The purpose of the FIELD program is to expand the microenterprise development field by developing and disseminating best practices for microenterprise practitioners and educating funders and policymakers about microenterprise as an anti-poverty strategy. The FIELD program's work includes publications on the state of the microenterprise field, training for practitioners on scaling programs with quality, and performance measurement tools to measure the impact of microenterprises.[2]

Finally, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation provides an example of field building in the area of conflict resolution. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing for more than two decades, the Hewlett Foundation's grants to the field "have supported virtually every aspect of today's conflict resolution field: from the development of a theoretical foundation that seeks to understand the sources and dynamics of conflict, to the emergence of sustainable practitioner organizations that apply conflict resolution tools across society, to the infrastructure that supports the continuing vitality and advancement of the field."[3]

[1] Bornemeier, James, "Taking on Tobacco: the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Assault on Smoking." *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Anthology,* 2005.
[2] From the Aspen Institute's FIELD website, www.fieldus.org.
[3] Kovick, David, "The Hewlett Foundation's Conflict Resolution Program: Twenty Years of Field-Building 1984–2004." Hewlett Foundation, May 2005.

The Strong Field Framework

The Strong Field Framework is a tool designed to help you assess the major elements of a field, revealing in the process areas of particular strength and also areas of weakness. Using the framework requires gathering objective information about five key components of a given field (discussed below), via primary research methods such as surveys, interviews, focus groups and organizational profiling, as well as secondary research — gathering and analyzing existing information.

The goal is to paint a robust, data-rich picture of each of the five components. With these pictures in hand, you can develop a comprehensive definition of the field, its key stakeholders and their roles. You will also be able to assess the field's state of evolution and its strengths and needs. Finally, the exercise itself can help strengthen the cohesiveness of the field and build stronger partnerships among its members.

Five Components

The Strong Field Framework has five components: shared identity, standards of practice, knowledge base, leadership and grassroots support, and funding and supporting policy. Each is further described as follows, then summarized in a chart on page 5.

Shared Identity

A shared identity is the foundation for any field of practice, without which individuals and organizations with similar motivations and goals may end up working in isolation or at cross-purposes. Do those working in the field identify as members of a field? Are they clear about what the field is collectively trying to accomplish? How well do diverse and distinct individuals and organizations in the field collaborate? Are there common approaches and practices to achieving an overall goal? As the accompanying graphic shows, "shared identity" is an overarching component binding the other components in common purpose.

Standards of Practice

Classically, fields (like medicine or law) are comprised of trained practitioners who are engaged in an area of specialized practice.[4] The same should be true for strong fields engaging in social change. Does the field have codified practices? Are there demonstration models that members of the field are aware of? How well developed are the training and professional development programs that support practitioners? Are there established processes and organizations to ensure the quality and fidelity of implementation?

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[4]   Melinda Fine, "What Does Field-Building Mean for Service-Learning Advocates?" National Service Learning Partnership, 2001.

Knowledge Base

It takes credible research that confirms the efficacy of core practices to strengthen a field. How well developed is this evidence and knowledge base? Are there experts who research the field? How engaged are these experts and practitioners with the ongoing improvement of the field? How well is knowledge documented and disseminated within the field?

Leadership and Grassroots Support

To build and sustain a field, leadership and grassroots support are critical.[5] Are there influential leaders and exemplary organizations working to advance the field? Is there a broad base of support from key constituencies?

Funding and Supporting Policy

Dedicated funding, along with supporting policy, can foster the development of a field. Is there sufficient funding for the field to achieve its goals? Is the policy environment supportive? Is the field actively involved in helping to develop the policy environment?

The Strong Field Framework

Shared Identity Community aligned around a common purpose and a set of core values			
Standards of Practice	**Knowledge Base**	**Leadership and Grassroots Support**	**Funding and Supporting Policy**
Codification of standards of practice Exemplary models and resources (e.g., how-to guides) Available resources to support implementation (e.g., technical assistance) Respected credentialing/ ongoing professional development training for practitioners and leaders	Credible evidence that practice achieves desired outcomes Community of researchers to study and advance practice Vehicles to collect, analyze, debate and disseminate knowledge	Influential leaders and exemplary organizations across key segments of the field (e.g., practitioners, researchers, business leaders, policymakers) Broad base of support from major constituencies	Enabling policy environment that supports and encourages model practices Organized funding streams from public, philanthropic and corporate sources of support

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[5] Not all fields require grassroots support. The conflict resolution field described earlier in the report, for example, did not need a broad base of public support to be successful.

Toolkit – A Practical Guide to Field Assessment

This toolkit describes the steps you can take to assess the social change field you may be working in. To explain how to use the toolkit, each step is illustrated with a hypothetical application to the field of Early Learning in the state of Washington.

1 Getting Started: Defining the Field

The first step is to define the field's boundaries as clearly as possible. It is critical at the outset to define the field's common goal — including values and beliefs — its common approaches, and the community of actors working to advance it. Shared identity is the basis of a field of practice, without which individuals and organizations may work in isolation or at cross-purposes. Keep in mind these questions as you define your field:

Common goal
- What is the issue that this field is trying to influence?
- Who is the target population?
- What is the field's desired outcome(s) for the target population?

Common approach
- What are the approaches used to achieve these outcome(s)?
- Are these approaches codified?
- Are actors in the field aligned on using them?

Community of organizations and individuals
- Who are the primary actors supporting and affiliated with the field?
- Are there any skeptics of this field? What are their critiques?

A Challenging but Critical Step

Success or failure of your assessment will hinge on properly defining the field. It is important to define the field as narrowly as possible — to maximize the potential to see alignment (of goals and practices) among the members of the field.

Yet it is also important to capture the natural boundaries of the field and include those who see themselves as contributors to the field. In trying to define fields as examples for this report, for example, being overly broad would be problematic. For instance, taking "foster care" as a field may cut too broad a swath because it encompasses too much disagreement in goals and approaches of the field. Yet, "early childhood education" as a field works well given the relative agreement in goals and practices among its members.

ILLUSTRATION

Early Learning in Washington State

The **common goal** of Washington's Early Learning field is to prepare all children in Washington from birth to five years old to be successful in school and life.

A variety of approaches are being used to realize the vision and goals of the field. These include center care, parental care, and friends, family and neighbor (FFN) care. There is disagreement about how "educational" early childhood education needs to be to prepare children for school. Despite these differences, there are elements of **common approaches** to reach the goal of the field.

The **community** of key stakeholders supporting and affiliated with the Early Learning field includes individuals and organizations in these categories:

- Childcare providers
- Parents
- Funders
- Regulators/quality rating entities
- Business leaders
- Community leaders
- Researchers
- Advocacy organizations
- Policymakers
- K–12 educators

2 Planning the Work: Crafting a Research Agenda

If your goal is to assess the field as a whole, it is important to talk to representatives from each area of the field. The second step, then, is to identify the individuals and organizations you will engage with across each of the field's segments (e.g., funders, service providers, policy makers, researchers, beneficiaries). Your particular goal will determine the number of interviews, focus groups, surveys and so forth that will be needed to capture a robust assessment.

For those "field builders"[6] whose goal is to leverage a field assessment to quickly identify and prioritize their investments within the field, it is possible to develop an objective perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the field by simply interviewing representative individuals and organizations in the various stakeholder categories within the field (see Option A on page 8).

However, organizations wanting to partner with the field to develop a shared strategy to advance the field should consider convening an advisory committee (consisting of influential and respected leaders from each segment of the field) and investing in a more robust research agenda. Convening such a committee not only yields guidance in setting the research agenda, interpreting emerging findings and formulating recommendations, but it can also help to coalesce the leadership of the field. In addition, expanding the research agenda to include interviews with a greater number of stakeholders provides field builders with a deeper data set and understanding of the field, and also offers an opportunity to establish or deepen relationships with those other stakeholders (see Option B on page 8).

For all types of field assessment, no matter how robust, performing secondary research in each field category is also important. Having short initial conversations with prominent researchers studying the field is a good starting point for understanding the scope and strengths of the secondary research base. It is also important to include people who will candidly discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of the field. Including critical friends and other detractors on the interview list will help create a fuller picture of the state of the field you're assessing.

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[6]   Foundations and nonprofit leaders who are seeking to build a field as a strategy for achieving their social change goal.

Option A: High-Level Research Agenda — Early Learning in Washington State

To perform an objective and relatively high-level assessment of the Early Learning field in Washington — to quickly identify and prioritize investments within the field — you would speak to representative individuals or organizations within each field segment.

Research approach consists of…

• Number of interviews: 10–15

The research agenda would include interviewing between 1 and 3 representative individuals or organizations in the broad field segments. For example, in Early Learning:

• Childcare providers
• Parents
• Funders
• Regulators/quality rating entities
• Business leaders
• Community leaders
• Researchers
• Advocacy organizations
• Policymakers
• K–12 educators
• Technical assistance providers

Option B: Comprehensive Research Agenda — Early Learning in Washington State

For a robust assessment of Washington's Early Learning field — with the goal of holistically understanding strengths and weaknesses to formulate an investment approach — you would speak to leading representatives in each field segment, create an Advisory Committee of leaders from each field segment, and pull together group interviews of beneficiaries and practitioners.

Research approach consists of…
• Number of interviews: 25–50
• Number of focus groups/group interviews: 1–3 (e.g., parents, childcare providers)
• Number of Advisory Committee meetings: 2–3 (e.g., align on research agenda, discuss emerging findings, formulate recommendations)

Using your relationship network, scanning the secondary research and testing your list with a few initial field leaders, would likely lead you to interview and include on your Advisory Committee leaders of these kinds of organizations:

• Funders
– Federal government: Department of Health and Human Services
– State government: Department of Early Learning
– Private philanthropy: Gates Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation
• Regulators/quality rating entities
– Seeds to Success initiative in Department of Early Learning
• Business leaders
– Business Partnership for Early Learning
– Microsoft Corporation
• Community leaders
– United Ways of Washington
• Researchers
– Institute of Learning and Brain Science
– Washington State University Spokane, Child and Family Research Unit
• Advocacy organizations
– Talaris Institute
– Foundation for Early Learning
• Policymakers
– Washington State Legislature
• K–12 educators
– Statewide: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
– Local: Puget Sound Education Service District
• Technical assistance providers
– Success by Six of Snohomish County
– Thrive by Five Washington

You might also hold group interviews with parents and childcare providers.

3 Gathering Results: Assessing the Field

The goals of your primary and secondary research should be to collect sufficient data to determine the current strength of the field in each category of the Strong Field Framework (See The Strong Field Framework on page 5 for characteristics that define a strong field). In each interview, you would test the characteristics of a strong field to determine the primary strengths and weaknesses in each field category. (See the following page for an illustrative assessment of the strength of Washington's Early Learning field).

A systematic approach to interviewing will aid you in collecting information from your primary sources. An interview guide can help standardize the approach to interviewing, allowing you to ask your questions consistently, which is critical to being able to identify trends in interviewee responses. If you are using a team to conduct your interviews, you may want to share interview notes among the team on a regular basis and reflect as a team about the findings of the interviews.

The interview team should meet regularly to develop hypotheses about the field, and to use these hypotheses to shape future interviews and research. Regular check-ins with your external Advisory Committee about your emerging findings can help to refine the hypotheses and build buy-in throughout the field.

ILLUSTRATION

Assessing the Field — Early Learning in Washington State

If you tested the strength of Washington's Early Learning field against the Strong Field Framework, you might find the following strengths and weaknesses emerge from interviews and secondary research:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Shared Identity	• Field members have a strong affiliation with the early learning field. • There is wide agreement about the goal of the field: to increase the early learning opportunities in Washington so that more children are ready to be successful in school.	• Field members do not agree about terminology in the field. • Field members do not agree on a common approach to achieving the goal; there is great disagreement about how "educational" the approach to early learning needs to be to achieve the goal.
Standards of Practice	• There are several promising practices in the field, which have been well documented. • Proven approaches (e.g., Abecedarian, Perry Preschool, Nurse Family Partnership) with measurable outcomes exist.	• Proven models exist at the site level but have not been demonstrated at a regional scale. • Many key areas of early learning (e.g., friends, family and/or neighbor care, low-intensity parent education) lack proven models. • There is no agreed upon codified standard or measure for early learning and quality varies greatly around the state. • There are multiple delivery methods (e.g., out-of-home learning environments, in-home care, parent education) hindering standard development. • Quality training and professional development opportunities for new and experienced practitioners are limited.
Knowledge Base	• There is a strong community of researchers working on researching early learning. • There is a strong evidence base; the long-term impact of early learning on public investments is well documented. • Promising new measurement systems to measure kindergarten readiness are being developed.	• There is little infrastructure to disseminate knowledge within the field. • Further research is needed to prove effectiveness of model programs on specific populations.
Leadership and Grassroots Support	• There are influential leaders in key segments of the field (e.g., researchers, intermediaries, funders, practitioners). • Early learning is a major priority in Washington.	• Parents do not all recognize the importance of early learning and its far-reaching effects on student success. • Center-based care is a politically sensitive topic in the state, limiting parental support for early learning (especially for parents who believe early learning is about limiting parent choice about how and where young children should be educated).
Funding and Supporting Policy	• There is emerging support for quality improvement and measurement.	• Funding for early childhood programs is fragmented. Practitioners must cobble funds together; sources include local, state, federal government, public and private foundations, and nonprofits. • State funding for quality improvement and measurement was recently cut. • Model programs are cost prohibitive, which has affected the field's ability to replicate at a regional scale. • Professional development and training is expensive, which has affected the field's ability to deliver quality early learning at scale.

4 Analyzing Results: Formulate Recommendations

Once the interviews and secondary research are complete, field builders will then be able to compare findings on strengths and weaknesses of each field category, and formulate recommendations to strengthen the field. In framing the recommendations, you need to keep in mind the audience — a particular actor (funder or nonprofit) or the entire field.

To increase engagement with the field, you can share emerging themes with the Advisory Committee. In addition to engaging the field in your work, the use of an Advisory Committee allows field leaders to weigh in on the critical next steps of the research. Using the feedback from your Advisory Committee and the themes from the interviews and secondary research, develop recommendations of investments and activities for the field.

Initially, you may find that your list of recommendations is quite long. To create a list of recommendations that is actionable and achievable, you may want to winnow down the list of recommendations and prioritize the most critical recommendations on the list. You should determine whatever criteria are most appropriate to prioritize your recommendations. For example, you can anchor your criteria with your organization's strategy. You may also want to sequence your recommendations by dividing your recommendations into near-term (e.g., 12–18 months), moderate-term (e.g., 3–5 years), and long-term (e.g., 7–10+ years) subsections.

ILLUSTRATION

Formulate Recommendations — Early Learning in Washington State

When considered together, the strengths and weaknesses you have identified in each field category indicate that Washington's Early Learning field is at a promising stage of development but the field faces challenging barriers. These barriers must be overcome to improve the quality of early learning opportunities for Washington's children. Given this information, you might formulate the following types of recommendations:

Recommendation #1. Design and conduct awareness and outreach activities for parents and the general public about the importance of early learning and about what quality early learning looks like.

To be successful, the Early Learning field in Washington must engage parents to demand quality early learning opportunities for their children. Currently, most parents do not know that early learning can improve long-term outcomes for their children, nor do they know what quality early learning looks like. By increasing awareness of the importance of quality early learning, the field can increase the public pressure for funding and supportive policies for quality early learning.

Recommendation #2. Identify the most promising practices in early learning and demonstrate effectiveness with broad populations.

While promising practices exist in the field, the field would benefit from a more definitive evidence base, demonstrating the effectiveness of these practices at a regional scale and with different ethnicities, nationalities and income groups. Without knowing what promising practices have broad application, legislators cannot direct large pools of funding towards the most effective programs and practitioners cannot be sure they are providing effective programs to all beneficiaries.

Recommendation #3. Create a statewide quality improvement and rating system to sustain continuous improvement in quality of care in licensed childcare facilities.

To increase the availability of high-quality, early learning opportunities in Washington, the field must be clear about what high quality looks like. The field would benefit from a system that provides clear benchmarks of quality, regular assessments and aligned incentives to encourage continuous improvement in the field. The Early Learning field is not aligned on what quality looks like, and to achieve the outcomes the field desires for children in Washington, it is critical that the field gain clarity to advance the field.

Case Study: The James Irvine Foundation's Multiple Pathways Field Assessment

The Irvine Youth program seeks to increase the number of low-income youth in California who complete high school on time and attain a postsecondary credential by age 25. The Youth program's leaders believe that a "multiple pathways" approach, which combines rigorous college preparatory and career education in high school, can dramatically improve rates of college and career preparation because it makes high school relevant to young people's futures. (See box at right for a more detailed description of multiple pathways.)

Multiple pathways programs build on work begun in the 1970s with "career academies"; the Foundation's leaders believe that this approach has the potential to improve the quality of the 600+ such academies already in the state, and also to harness their momentum. The Foundation thus seeks to make multiple pathways programs available to low-income youth across California. The centerpiece of its strategy for doing so is to help build a vibrant and capable field of direct providers, intermediaries (e.g., curriculum developers, technical assistance providers), policymakers, researchers and parent/student leaders.

Irvine's leaders began their work on multiple pathways with an intentional period (about three years) of grantmaking to test their hypotheses. During that time, they came to appreciate even more fully the importance of field building to embedding multiple pathways in school districts across California. Without a strong field, multiple pathways could never get to scale and be sustained. Irvine needed a well-informed plan for its field-building investments and activities. The Foundation's leaders also realized that the field itself needed to come together around a shared set of priorities to grow stronger. With those goals in mind, they asked The Bridgespan Group to analyze the multiple pathways field and make recommendations on how to build the field.

What is Multiple Pathways?

Multiple pathways programs provide young people with rigorous and relevant secondary educations. The goal of these programs is to graduate high school students on time and ready for success in college and career.

To reach that goal, multiple pathways programs offer students an integrated academic and technical curriculum, as well as work-based learning opportunities, academic and social supports, and a clear connection to a full range of postsecondary options and careers (e.g., two- and four-year colleges, one-year certificate programs and high skill careers).

Integration of curriculum occurs when teachers look for lesson plans and projects to incorporate academic concepts into technical courses or apply real-world concepts in academic courses. In pathways programs, integration of curriculum typically centers around a single industry theme — such as building and environmental design — which threads through all of the student's academic coursework and work-based learning opportunities.

To assess the state of the field, the Bridgespan team interviewed more than 60 members of the field representing educators, administrators, the business community, districts, policymakers, researchers and funders, along with a few prominent skeptics. The team also conducted a focus group of school district superintendents and performed a thorough assessment of related secondary research. Before beginning the interviews, the Bridgespan team developed the Strong Field Framework after identifying elements that were core to success of a field based on research on existing field frameworks. The team used the framework to guide the interviews and conversations in the field and continued to refine framework through the course of the effort to assess the field.

To ground the work in practice and ensure that it would build upon the wealth of existing knowledge and experience in the field, the team also established a 24-member advisory committee made up of key members of the field. Committee members provided important feedback on the data collected; they also played a role in forming conclusions based on that data. Beyond adding an important voice, the committee played an active role in the work, which helped build cohesion within the field. The committee helped develop the research agenda and provided extensive insight and feedback on findings and recommendations.

Assessment yielded the following findings:

Shared Identity

- Members of the field can easily and consistently articulate the goals and core elements of the multiple pathways approach. The field is reasonably well-aligned at this level.
- By contrast, members of the field do not agree on the details of execution, such as terminology or definitions of key concepts of multiple pathways. What's more, while the various practitioners feel strong affiliation with fields related to multiple pathways, few see it as their primary field of affiliation.

Standards of Practice

- The field is well aware of model school-level programs; site visits to model programs are seen as the most effective way to demonstrate the promise of the multiple pathways approach.
- However, it is critical that multiple pathways be demonstrated at a larger system-wide scale. District or county-level demonstrations will be needed to further refine the field's standards of practice and prove the feasibility and impact of multiple pathways beyond existing school-level models.
- There is a dearth of teachers prepared to deliver multiple pathways and a lack of technical assistance capacity to help deliver multiple pathways. The supply of trained teachers, curricula and technical assistance is insufficient to support growing demand

Knowledge Base

- School-level demonstration programs have generated promising evidence of success. The field benefits greatly by a series of rigorous, randomized studies[7] about the effectiveness of the multiple pathways approach that demonstrated positive effects of multiple pathways.
- There are two major gaps in the evidence base that the field must overcome in order to achieve scale: (1) Lack of evidence about best practices in delivering specific components of the multiple pathways approach; and (2) lack of understanding about how best to measure student achievement.
- The field lacks systematic ways to share knowledge and best practices.

Leadership and Grassroots Support

- District, policy and business leaders increasingly support the multiple pathways approach. Proof of this growing support is demonstrated by the growth of a state-supported, career-themed academy program and also by the growth of business coalitions around California that are active in establishing multiple pathways in their communities.
- However, without parent and student support, multiple pathways cannot succeed; their engagement is an important component of bringing multiple pathways to scale.

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[7] MDRC has published a series of random assignment studies about career academies over the last decade that indicates the approach improves outcomes for students, particularly for those most at risk of dropping out or underachieving. The MDRC studies examined a cohort of students who applied to nine average-performing career academies over 15 years. Compared with the control group, career academy students were more likely to have completed academic and CTE coursework and participated in work-based learning opportunities that included paid internships.

Funding and Supporting Policy
- Certain policies and structures, inherent to the traditional school model, make it difficult to execute multiple pathways effectively. Innovative practitioners have been able to overcome these barriers; however, on a large, system-wide scale, doing so will be more difficult, due to lack of systematic incentives. Field leaders will need to cobble together funding in order to make multiple pathways work.

Recommendations

After assessing the field, the Bridgespan team concluded that it was at an early stage of development, and needed to overcome a set of key barriers to make multiple pathways available to many more youth in California. Working closely with Irvine and the advisory committee, team members developed three recommendations:

Recommendation #1
Develop a clear, precise definition of multiple pathways, messaging aligned with that definition and a quality-control system to distinguish high-fidelity implementations.

The field is not aligned on a definition of multiple pathways. Even though that may alienate some members of the field, it's worth the tradeoff for the field to develop a more precise definition and message. The field also needs to develop a quality-control system to ensure that everyone can distinguish high-fidelity multiple pathways implementations.

Recommendation #2
Establish large-scale, system-wide demonstrations.

Large-scale demonstrations are being hindered by a combined lack of evidence, infrastructure and regional intermediaries. The field needs to overcome these barriers to prove the feasibility and impact of multiple pathways at a district or county level.

Recommendation #3
Work to increase state funding and create more supportive policies that would facilitate broad adoption.

Broad adoption of multiple pathways requires greater funding and more supportive state-level policies. Implementation of multiple pathways at the district or county level provides a unique opportunity to learn what's required for scale and to build a constituency for statewide adoption. Policymakers should be involved in these demonstrations, perhaps through a formalized partnership, so that they can see the benefits and the requirements of multiple pathways when implemented at a district or county level. Parents, students and district leaders in these demonstration sites should also advocate for state-level funding and supportive policies for multiple pathways.

For more information

To read the entire Focus report on Assessing California's Multiple Pathways Field, please visit www.irvine.org/publications.

ABOUT FOCUS

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