Study of the Engage New England Initiative Cross-Site Learning Brief 2

Learnings from the Cohort 1 Launch Year

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Barr Foundation

Cover photo: Chelsea Opportunity Academy.

Introduction

In 2017, the Barr Foundation launched Engage New England (ENE), an Education Team initiative that provides local education agencies and nonprofit organizations a unique opportunity to plan for and develop innovative schools to serve students who are off track to graduate from high school. School design partner Springpoint is leading three cohorts of ENE grantees through a year-long guided design process, with the potential for continued support from Barr and Springpoint for the launch and development of the new or redesigned school.

The first cohort of nine grantees received planning grants for the 2017–18 school year to start new schools or redesign existing schools. From this cohort, Barr selected five grantees to receive follow-on funding to support the first 3 years of implementation, and one grantee to receive 1 more year of planning funding to pilot-test its program. During the 2018–19 launch year, the first cohort of grantees focused on executing
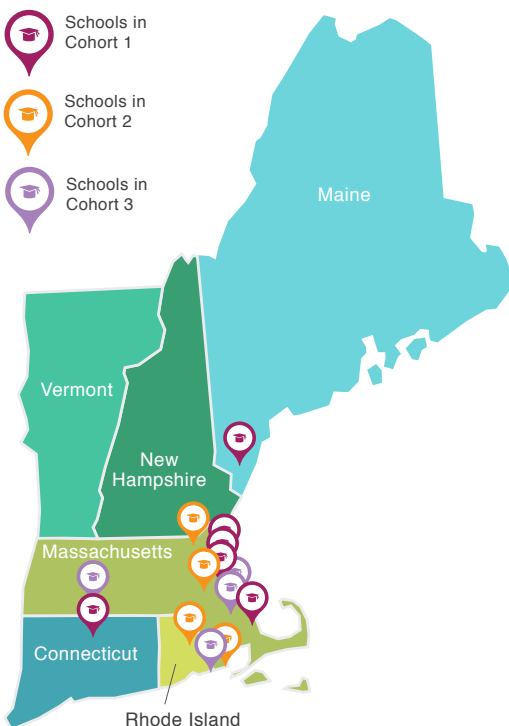
design priorities identified during the planning year, including building strong staff-student relationships and implementing new instructional models.

SRI Education, the research partner for the ENE initiative, captured the cohort 1 grantees' learnings during their launch year through interviews of school leaders, school staff members, and external partners; student focus groups; classroom observations; staff surveys; and student surveys.

Data Collection by the Numbers

- 91% staff survey response rate
- 68% student survey response rate*
- 56 interviews
- 65 student focus group participants

*At the two largest schools, less than 80% of students responded to the survey. As a result, survey results are biased toward more engaged students who attend school regularly.

This brief presents the lessons learned and common themes across the grantees, as well as implications for planning and implementation that may be useful for subsequent cohorts of ENE grantees as they prepare to launch their programs or schools. It is organized into two main sections:

- **Launch Year Lessons** (p. 2) describes how grantees emphasized strong relationships and student voice to build engagement with the initiative, and how they are building their instructional capacity.

- **Moving Forward** (p. 12) presents some of the long-term priorities grantees are addressing to complement the initiative's focus on instructional rigor and quality.

Schools in Cohort 1
Schools in Cohort 2
Schools in Cohort 3

Maine
Vermont
New Hampshire
Massachusetts
Connecticut
Rhode Island

Launch Year Lessons

Premised on a Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach, the ENE initiative seeks to create high schools designed to meet the developmental needs of adolescents as they grow to adulthood. The initiative emphasizes instructional approaches that foster student agency and engagement, such as personalized and competency-based learning, as well as linkages to community organizations, postsecondary institutions, and career opportunities to facilitate students' access to supports, competency development, and postsecondary transitions.

During the launch year, grantees focused on implementing a number of initiative elements simultaneously; some were easier to put in place quickly, others took (and continue to take) more time or had to be put on hold until staff had the time and capacity to attend to them.

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Launch Year Lessons

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Positive Youth Development

The initiative relies on Springpoint's How Student's Thrive: Postive Youth Development in Practice framework, which identifies five PYD tenets:

• Caring, trusting, and supportive relationships
• High expectations
• Voice, choice, and contributions
• Engaging learning experiences
• Consistency

Starting Points

In the first implementation year, cohort 1 grantees focused on a number of foundational program elements aligned with the initiative goals. Grantees built on existing strengths by fostering strong student-staff relationships and bolstering their student support systems. They also experimented with visible ways to incorporate student voice in school-level decisions as they transitioned from the formal design year to launching the school.

These early wins demonstrate schools' progress in the launch year and illustrate for cohorts 2 and 3 grantees how the cohort 1 schools began to build support and engagement for the initiative goals among students and staff. Starting with these foundational and visible components of the student experience helped grantees build their staff's understanding of the initiative goals and sustain the positive student engagement kindled during the design year, while simultaneously working on the deeper shifts to the instructional core. By their nature, these instructional shifts unfold on a slower timeline and may be less visible in the early phases of implementation.

Strong Relationships

Cohort 1 grantees excelled at informally fostering strong student-staff relationships during the launch year, which can serve as a foundation on which to build a structured primary person model as the schools grow.

The PYD framework features caring and trusting relationships as key factors for supporting students' overall development and in increasing student attendance and engagement. Given that the students they served had a history of failure in traditional school settings and many experienced ongoing trauma and related social-emotional challenges, the cohort 1 grantees viewed building relationships as the necessary first step to reengage the students in school and help them develop a mindset for learning. Grantees also hired dedicated staff members, typically social workers, to bolster the safety net for students with substantial nonacademic barriers to learning (e.g., trauma, homelessness, poverty, substance abuse).

In general, staff members successfully formed strong interpersonal relationships with students, On the survey, more than half (52%) of students identified having supportive teachers as what they liked most about their school, and 81% responded that at least one adult at their school would help them with a personal problem. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that they "really feel like part of [their] school's community."[1] As a student explained, "You build a relationship with [the teachers]… it's more like a friendship. It makes class really comfortable, too."

A core component of the ENE initiative is the primary person model for student support, which begins with the tenet that every student should have a relationship with at least one adult in the school who knows them well—but it does not stop there. An equally critical component is that

Designing Advisory Systems

"An intentionally designed advisory structure builds community, provides students with a safe environment, and forms the basis of a primary person model wherein all students have a trusted adult invested in their success."

– Springpoint, 2018

Springpoint recommends that grantees consider these questions as they develop their advisory systems:

- Does every student in the building have one adult who is officially designated as that student's "primary person?"
- Are the expectations for the primary person clear (e.g., regularly case conferencing with students to set goals, reflect on progress toward goals, and monitor grade point average, credit accumulation, and graduation pathways)?
- Do you have a clear vision for strong case-conferencing? Do you have the data infrastructure in place to enable case-conferencing?

For case study examples of successful advisory systems, see Springpoint's resource *Designing Advisory Systems: Innovative Approaches From High Schools*

staff leverage their connections with students to advance key learning goals (e.g., academic goals, social-emotional learning, postsecondary planning). Formal advisory structures provide a venue and structure to accomplish these goals.

These more formal advisory structures were still a work in progress across grantees. On the survey, 45% of the students reported participating in an advisory class. Yet the grantees struggled to make meaningful use of this time for students. At one school implementing crew for the first time, relationships between students and crew leaders were slow to develop because of staffing changes, and students said the crew functioned more like a homeroom. At another school, each day began with a community-building activity that some students felt was unnecessary. Consequently, in focus groups students reported that peers started coming to school late to avoid this activity.

Going forward, with proper support, cohort 1 grantees are well-positioned to build on the foundation of their strong relationships with students to create more effective advisory systems designed to advance their learning goals for students. The formal advisory structure can also help grantees maintain their strong staff-student relationships even as they grow.[2]

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING:

Take stock of your current student-staff relationships (existing schools) and current/planned support systems. Do students feel seen and cared for? Do you have support staff who can handle the nonacademic needs of your student population?

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

Consider how you can build on the foundation of strong student-staff relationships by intentionally designing advisory systems to leverage these relationships to advance learning goals. What additional training or supports do your staff need to make your advisory system effective?

Photo: Chelsea Opportunity Academy

Students' Role in Decisionmaking

Moving from design to launch, cohort 1 grantees maintained student engagement in the initiative by involving them in decisionmaking on schoolwide design and policies.

The ENE initiative posits that when schools and classrooms offer supports and structures for students to exercise choice, voice, and contribution, the students are more likely to engage. Ultimately, the initiative's vision is that students will have agency over their own learning—students understand what they need to do to be successful and they have the opportunity to follow their own passions, interests, and goals.

However, this level of choice and voice requires relatively advanced development of the school's instructional approach and student support system (e.g., the primary person model). Developing curriculum and instruction that provides opportunities for students to shape their learning and building robust advisory systems take time. As cohort 1 grantees were working to shift instruction and create formalized advisory systems, they recognized a need to continue to visibly engage students in shaping the school community to support their ongoing involvement and commitment to the school after their intensive participation in the design process.

Consequently, the cohort 1 grantees gave students responsibility for some of the norms, rules/policies, and upkeep of the school space using the following strategies:

- Solicited student feedback on school schedules (e.g., later start times).

- Allowed students to select the school mascot, slogan, and colors with staff input.

- Included students in teacher candidate interviews and hiring decisions.

- Solicited student input on the lunch menu.

- Provided students with an active voice in shaping program policies (e.g., cell phone policy, voting on whether students with disciplinary issues should stay in the program).

These responsibilities promoted students' buy-in to the school rules and norms and fostered students' pride in their school. The majority of student survey respondents (69%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had "seen adults at [their] school listen to the voices and ideas of youth when making decisions." One student reported that "all the decisions we make together… [the staff] let us have a voice."

At the same time, some grantees faced challenges in making these school-level opportunities for choice and voice authentic. Some students reported that although they felt heard and that their voices were valued, they were less certain about whether the staff incorporated their input into decisionmaking and action. For example, despite expressing a desire for more variety in the classes offered, like computer skills electives, students at one school reported not seeing the school staff make any changes to the offerings.

At times, schools may be inhibited from incorporating student voice because of factors outside their control. For example, during the planning year students at one school had requested that the design include dedicated spaces for yoga and meditation. Despite the design team's desire and intention to provide these spaces, it ultimately was unable to follow through because of structural restrictions at the school.

Maintaining ongoing transparency and clarity in the school's efforts to incorporate student voice, including communicating unexpected challenges and the rationale behind requirements and processes, may increase students' understanding and prevent them from disengaging.

Another strategy for increasing the authenticity of opportunities for student choice and voice is to ensure students are making informed decisions. For example, this might mean assigning articles on adolescent screen time use before voting on a schoolwide cell phone policy.

Finally, there may be some aspects of a school's structure that staff are unwilling to change because they are integral to the school's mission and vision. Staff should choose opportunities for student input into schoolwide decisionmaking strategically, and not offer options they are not prepared to follow through on.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING:

Consider how you will provide students with visible and ongoing opportunities for input while you are getting your instructional and student support systems up and running.

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

Consider how you can deepen students' agency over their own learning experience through clear expectations, relevant curricula, support for postsecondary planning, and ultimately by providing greater opportunities for student voice and choice in the classroom.

Photo: Map Academy

Instructional Core

At the same time that they were working to establish foundational program elements, all cohort 1 grantees worked daily to define, implement, and improve instructional practices. The instructional approaches they were trying to put in place, such as competency-based learning and project-based learning, are major shifts from the typical high school teaching and learning experience. Across the cohort 1 grantees, school leaders struggled to clarify and put into action their new visions for instruction.

Instructional Vision

Entering the launch year, school leaders must define a clear vision for the school's instructional core, with an explicit emphasis on rigor, and communicate this instructional vision to school staff.

A compelling vision can motivate the school community to achieve lofty goals (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) and provide a road map to achieving the school's mission. Among the six cohort 1 grantees, school leaders and teachers articulated a fairly consistent, albeit broad, vision for instruction: Instruction should be flexible, engaging, student driven/student centered, and relevant/connected to the real world. Generally lacking from those visions, though, was a clear definition of instructional rigor and a plan for enacting it with the population of students who are off-track to graduate high school.

While some leaders described wanting students to take more ownership over their learning or raise original questions and engage in debate,

grantees acknowledged struggling to define rigor for their student populations. One leader said it was a challenge to define rigorous instruction for some students who may be "apathetic and work-avoidant." A teacher at another school noted it was difficult to balance making instruction rigorous and attending to students' needs: "Kids come in with baggage. When do I push and when do I not for rigor? Kids deserve and need rigor; a lot want it." Other leaders viewed rigor as relative, determined by the skill levels of the students.

These perspectives were borne out in how respondents described rigor across their schools. One leader said, "Rigor is in the context of the skill that the students are at. The teachers are meeting them where they are rigor wise. I think the reality is, is that the skills of some of our kids are really low and so we need to meet them where they are, and so I think that could be perceived as—by outsiders—as potentially low rigor." Leadership at another grantee readily admitted that although there may have been pockets of rigorous instruction, instruction across the board was not that rigorous.

Several grantees found they needed to revisit their visions and focus more heavily on rigor as the year progressed. For example, for one school the initial emphasis was on building strong relationships with students, but during the launch year it shifted to increasing rigor across all classes. According to a school leader, students at the school rated rigor as low on a survey, and students in focus groups noted that the learning at this school was fun but acknowledged that they were not really asked to do very much.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING:

Articulate a vision for instruction that explicitly incorporates and defines instructional rigor.

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

Establish a focus on rigor in addition to strong relationships from the beginning of the year and provide models for what rigorous instruction looks like.

Instructional Shifts

The deep shifts in instruction aligned with initiative priorities require schools to find ways to catalyze and model change and for staff to learn from and support each other.

During the launch year, school leaders quickly learned that teachers needed concerted, ongoing support to increase instructional rigor and implement new, nontraditional instructional approaches such as competency-based learning. They noted that teachers struggled with supporting students in understanding competencies and taking ownership of their learning, providing feedback, and integrating social-emotional skill development into instruction.

Four of the six cohort 1 grantees were implementing competency-based systems, some for the first time, and one additional grantee planned to implement this approach in the future. Unlike a traditional seat time-based system, a competency-based education system puts students at the center of their learning by allowing them to progress at their own pace and measure their performance against a rubric. To

be successful, students need to develop both an understanding of the competencies and the necessary intrapersonal skills, like self-regulation and persistence, in order to direct their own learning and master the competencies.

In the launch year, schools that adopted competency-based learning sought to develop student understanding of the competencies through such mechanisms as direct instruction on the competencies early in the year or meeting with students at the start of each task to discuss the target competency. Despite these efforts, school leaders were concerned that their students did not achieve a deep understanding of how the competencies connect to larger learning goals. As a principal noted, "The understanding as to why we do competencies is elusive. When I want to dive deeper, I'm noticing students are struggling to articulate competencies."

Further, teachers needed to build their own capacity in competency-based learning. Staff members acknowledged that they grappled with the concept of competencies, and they questioned whether they could make instruction both engaging and effective. One teacher described her struggle:

> [I would like support with and feedback on] how to make English hands on, competency based. Things can be very fun, but what if it's like, "You're teaching your kids nothing, you're doing nothing?"

Grantees also struggled with helping students develop the intrapersonal skills they needed to succeed with more rigorous instruction in the context of new instructional approaches. One school leader described how teachers did not know how to support students' through the

discomfort and frustration that can accompany more demanding work, noting that teachers are "quick to go in and rescue" struggling students:

> "[W]e're still lacking depth in how much we push students and original thinking and problem-solving. It's there but there's still a lot of—we're weak on productive struggle and student stamina to stay in a challenge for an appropriate amount of time."

Cohort 1 grantees tried several new strategies to support their teachers, although it was too soon to tell how effective each of these approaches were in adequately building staff capacity around instruction. These strategies included:

- Creating and modeling a template for lesson planning on which teachers backward-mapped their lessons, starting with identifying outcomes and from there creating their curriculum units, performance assessments, and classroom instruction.

- Developing and modeling cogenerative dialogues (co-gens) through which groups of students could provide teachers with direct input on the rigor of specific lessons.

- Holding a weekly critical friends group that enabled teachers to give and receive feedback from colleagues on tasks they were developing for competency-based instruction.

- Leading a "competency institute" twice a month and, along with other school leaders, meeting weekly with teachers to break down and realign competencies to performance tasks.

- Providing a curriculum coach to help teachers design engaging curricula.

Social-Emotional Learning

See the SRI student behavior blog post on Incorporating social-emotional learning into everyday academic instruction: How do I do it? for resources on building students' social-emotional skills in the classroom.

- Offering professional development on instructional practice at weekly meetings of content area staff members in addition to separate weekly all-staff meetings.

- Hiring external consultants to build internal capacity through one-on-one coaching or group sessions, with formality and frequency varying across schools (e.g., one grantee provided teachers with weekly coaching sessions with an education consultant and another grantee provided teachers with monthly consulting from external coaches for 1.5 hours).

Looking at Student Work

Springpoint recommends that grantees institute regular Looking at Student Work (LASW) meetings to serve as a vehicle to norm and calibrate the instructional team on the competencies and to revise the language of the competencies.

For an explanation of LASW and a LASW protocol, see Springpoint's blog post Helping School Design Teams Develop a Protocol to Strengthen Instructional Practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING:

Design the school schedule to maximize the support and planning time teachers have to develop the skills and knowledge they need to provide rigorous and engaging instruction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

Focus on developing teachers' instructional capacity as a key lever for realizing initiative goals.

Instructional leadership

School leaders play a critical role as instructional leaders to help staff members implement new approaches and need to develop their own capacity to support these shifts.

Research suggests that effective instructional leadership strongly affects the quality of teaching and student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). Leadership was particularly critical as the grantees attempted to make major changes to their instructional approaches.

School leaders acknowledged that supporting teachers with instruction was challenging given their own time and knowledge limitations. They struggled to balance their administrative duties with supporting their staff instructionally (e.g., observing classes and providing feedback, modelling instruction for the staff). Leaders reported wanting more resources, such as examples of protocols for observing or talking to teachers about their practices.

Some leaders reported needing to develop their own understanding of how to support teachers with competency-based learning and project-

based learning. One leader admitted, "We are not experts in competency-based education by any means. We're doing everything that we can to learn about it." As such, several grantees wished they had used grant funds to access even more outside supports—earlier—to help teachers with the curricular and instructional changes. Moving forward, Springpoint's technical assistance is focused on building grantees' instructional leadership capacity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING:

Take advantage of Springpoint school tours and convenings as well as opportunities to collaborate with other schools to build instructional leaders who can help support schoolwide shifts in instruction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

Structure the principal's roles, responsibilities, and schedule to position the principal as the instructional leader. Continue to develop an instructional leadership team and provide visible ways to nurture and celebrate instruction aligned with initiative goals.

Hiring and onboarding practices

School leaders need to find strategies, including thoughtful hiring and onboarding, to sustain successes in fostering positive climates and relationships and to continue building capacity for the new instructional approaches.

Working with students who are off track to graduate and implementing competency-based instruction and other personalized learning models require

educators to play many roles, and a key priority for building program capacity is attracting and retaining staff who are well suited to the work. Moreover, the staff characteristics and skills needed depend on the local context (Casey, 2018), meaning that no set of educator characteristics or capabilities will work in all settings.

During the launch year, cohort 1 school leaders continued to assess and articulate their staffing needs. New schools sought to hire personnel aligned with their school models and to engage these staff in embracing the school's vision for teaching and interacting with students. Some existing schools eliminated positions or lost staff who no longer fit with the new cultural or instructional approaches. Finding staff who were the right fit was a struggle, as one school leader described:

> We did a ton of interviewing and seriously considered a couple of people, but none of them felt like exactly what we wanted....We weren't sure exactly what we wanted....The learning curve is steep. The reality of having someone else come in and having someone be at [the level we want them to be] is hard.

In response to this challenge, grantees worked to clarify the knowledge and skill sets they were looking for. Across the cohort 1 grantees, school leaders identified key attributes for staff who could help create the desired learning environment for students, including educators who:

- believe in a student-centered, PYD approach, including forging strong relationships with students;

- have the requisite skills and knowledge to implement the school's instructional vision;

- know how to help students develop social-emotional skills such as self-regulation and collaboration;

- have a desire to work in an alternative environment with high-need, nontraditional students; and

- possess a deep understanding of those students and their larger community.

School leaders also identified various site-specific staffing needs, such as individuals with expertise working with English learners or personal connections in the community. Further, grantees designed hiring processes that captured student perspectives, such as requiring a student reference or including students in the interview process.

Some cohort 1 schools used teacher collaboration time to acculturate new staff to the school. For example, one school leader helped teachers find more joint planning time to promote cohesiveness and hoped to establish more consistent systems
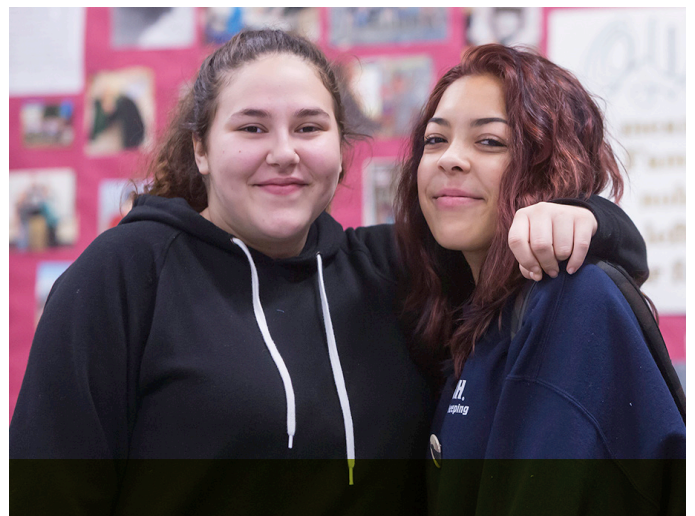

Photo: Multiple Pathways Program

and structures across classrooms so that new staff members could transition more seamlessly. Two school leaders reported making efforts to develop teacher leaders during the launch year, but these efforts were not fully implemented.

💡 **IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING:**

Clearly articulate the requisite staff qualities needed to realize the schools' mission and vision before beginning the hiring process.

💡 **IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:**

Create robust systems for staff collaboration and mentorship to acculturate new staff to the school.

Moving Forward

As grantees considered the range of initiative priorities, they began to establish structures for postsecondary exploration and planning and cultivated partnerships to support students' social-emotional development and postsecondary planning. They also experimented with learning management systems to facilitate student ownership of their learning. These components complement the primary work of improving instruction but may come as a second step for grantees that need to focus first on building their instructional capacity.

Postsecondary Planning

Postsecondary planning that starts early in high school enables students to explore and define their goals and understand how to reach them. During the launch year, cohort 1 grantees were in nascent stages of supporting postsecondary planning.

Survey data indicated that students need more guidance in future planning that accounts for all possible pathways. Even among the likely more engaged students who completed the survey, one-fifth reported not knowing what they wanted to do after high school. Further, although two-thirds of entry-level jobs and 80% of family-sustaining jobs currently require at least some education or training beyond high school (Carnevale, Strohl, Ridley, & Gulish, 2018), only 40% of student survey respondents intended to attend a 2- or 4-year college. These data suggest that the strong staff-student relationships did not automatically lead to conversations that helped students clarify their future plans.

One way to formalize conversations about postsecondary planning is through the creation of personalized learning plans that provide a roadmap to postsecondary success— ensuring high school experiences align with students' interests and goals and giving students more voice and choice in their own learning. Research has shown that high school students who have personalized learning plans demonstrate higher academic achievement, have more clearly developed career goals, and are better prepared to enter postsecondary

settings than students who do not have them (Lapan, Tucker, Kim, & Kosciulek, 2003; Stipanovic, Stringfield, & Witherell, 2017).

Advisory periods structured in part around creating and revisiting personalized learning plans may provide a venue for schools to intentionally support students' postsecondary planning.

Partnerships

The ENE initiative identifies formation of strong external partnerships as a mechanism for supporting students' learning and development and postsecondary planning. During the launch year, existing cohort 1 schools maintained or expanded partnerships with community-based organizations to offer mental health and substance abuse counseling or other social-emotional supports; one school partnered with a local community college to provide access to dual-credit courses. During the launch year, most grantees were not focused on developing partnerships to offer work-based learning experiences or inform project-based learning opportunities in the classroom.

Work-based learning encompasses a broad range of activities, from in-class speakers and career exploration opportunities to project-based learning that engages industry partners, to formal internships. One grantee worked with an outside partner to prepare and place students in internships at job sites. Students who participated in internships reported finding them impactful.

However, for schools, developing and maintaining partnerships to support work-based learning opportunities require a significant investment in

staff time and structures (Warner et al., 2016). Grantee staffs had limited capacity to build relationships with partners. Further, offering these experiences requires a time commitment from partners as well; the staff member responsible for internships at one partner organization noted that she did not have the time to fully support students because she managed work-based learning opportunities for another program as well.

Authentic work-based and project-based learning experiences can provide opportunities for students to develop their career goals as well as the workplace and social-emotional skills they need to succeed, but schools need to be realistic about the time staff can invest in facilitating these opportunities so that they are meaningful learning experiences for students.

Learning Management Systems

PYD prioritizes high expectations that are consistent, transparent, and accessible to students. As several of the cohort 1 schools implemented personalized or competency-based approaches, they sought to identify a learning management system to help staff and students track students' progress at the competency or assignment level.

A learning management system can be a powerful tool to facilitate student agency and ownership of their learning by enabling students to easily track their mastery of competencies and their progress toward fulfilling graduation requirements. As one student at a school that successfully implemented a learning management system noted, "I like the fact that we get to see our transcripts right in front

of us at all times. It has our transcripts, current courses, what we need to do next, and a graph of what we need to work on next."

Cohort 1 grantees discovered in their launch year, however, that finding or building the right system was a challenge. From the cohort 1 grantees' experiences, a quality learning management system should:

- Be student friendly so that students can easily use it to track their progress.

- Be easily customizable to the school's changing needs (e.g., if the school adopts new curriculum and/or competencies).

- Enable teachers to provide feedback on student assignments directly into it.

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Moving from a theoretical design to an actual new or redesigned school takes considerable work and flexibility. During the launch year, the cohort 1 grantees made enormous strides in creating a different type of high school to meet the needs of students off track to graduate. The grantees laid a foundation of strong relationships and worked toward implementing new, nontraditional instructional models, both of which required leaders to communicate a clear vision and staff to build new capacities.

It is not realistic to expect all components to be implemented seamlessly in the first year, and the schools will continue to develop and mature with support from Barr and Springpoint. During the 2019–20 school year, the initiative's focus, embodied by Springpoint's technical assistance related to transformative learning experiences (previously called signature experiences), is on building grantee capacity to provide rigorous and relevant instruction.

Endnotes

1 For two cohort 1 grantees, the survey response rate was below the acceptable threshold of 80%. For these schools, the results are likely generalizable only to the more engaged students who attend school on a regular basis.

2 Research indicates that fostering positive relationships among students and between students and teachers is more challenging in larger schools (Barker & Gump, 1964; Cotton, 2001; Raywid, 1996).

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