



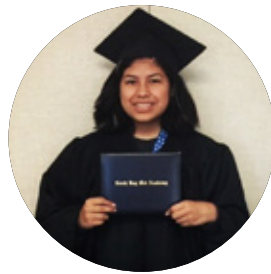
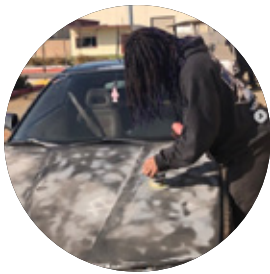
SHOWING THE WAY

SCOTT BOLDT



UPSTREAM COLLABORATIVE

I believe that our own experience instructs us that the secret of Education lies in respecting the pupil. - Ralph Waldo Emerson



Emerson's simple observation corresponds not only to the value and significance that Upstream Collaborative places on a 'one-student-at-a-time' approach to schooling and education, but also he captures the essence of its coaching practices with schools. If we swap the word 'learner' for 'pupil' it opens up the meaning and sheds light on the importance of building trusting relationships with teachers and principals, understanding and valuing their context, issues, needs, and experiences, and maintaining the proper focus on serving and respecting the learner.

This report will delve into the work of Upstream Collaborative, an initiative of Big Picture Learning, and present the findings on how it is helping to shape and influence alternative schools in California and Washington and beyond. Upstream Collaborative is a community of practice network of alternative education schools working with school leaders and staffs to implement new programs and practices to create a school culture based on the centrality of rigor, relevance, and relationships, and the '10 Distinguishers' of Big Picture Learning (see Appendix). Its aim is to redesign schools for equity and to transform the learning experiences of students.

Led by Big Picture Learning (BPL), Upstream Collaborative is supported by a grant from the Stuart Foundation to provide coaching, professional development and practical support to the schools. The Stuart Foundation was formed in 1985 and is dedicated to improving the life outcomes of young people in California and Washington through education. The focus of the Stuart Foundation is on improving student learning and success by helping organizations and policy-makers as well as educators

and education systems that are working with and for young people who are furthest from opportunity.

Upstream Collaborative started its work just over three years ago with 11 schools in California. As of July 2020, the network has grown in California and expanded into the state of Washington and now includes 40 schools (Table 1 and 2). Five schools joined Upstream Collaborative in the Spring of 2020, so this report only covers the experiences of 35 schools (21 in CA and 14 in WA). The new schools are all in California and are located in Fort Bragg, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, Vacaville and Windsor.

The alternative schools that form the network vary considerably in type, size, and progression. Among the schools in the network are Continuation Schools (generally serving youth who have fallen behind in high school credits), Community Schools (whose purpose is to retain students who are at-risk of dropping out of school), Court Schools (serving school-aged children and youth residing in court supervised detention programs) and other forms and types of alternative education including Independent Learning Centers, Career Academies and Career and Technical Education.

BPL staff interact, model the approaches, and assist school staffs to implement new practices, to address problems, and to support continuing developments. They provide follow-up contact with regular calls and through the organisation of school district leader meetings. A new feature of the past year has been a concentration on organizing micro-convenings to create local regional communities of practice where educators can connect, collaborate and support one another. Prior to the pandemic, Upstream

TABLE 1

Upstream Collaborative 2019 – 2020, California Schools

School	Type of School	District	Moves Made Practices being Implemented
1. Be.tech Academy	Alternative, CTE, district charter	Manteca Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
2. Bitney Prep	Charter	Nevada County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
3. Buena Vista High School	Continuation	Paramount Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning • Advisory • Interest exploration
4. Community Day School	Community	Paramount Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
5. Confluence High School	Continuation	Placer Union High School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
6. El Centro Juvenile Hall Jr./Sr. High	Juvenile hall	Sacramento County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
7. Elinor Lincoln Hickey Jr./Sr. High	Community day	Sacramento County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
8. Gerber Jr./Sr. High	Community day	Sacramento County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
9. Highland Park High School	Continuation	Los Angeles Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
10. Liberty High School	Continuation	Benicia Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
11. North Area Community School	Community day	Sacramento County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
12. South Valley High School	Continuation	Ukiah Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
13. North Bay Met Academy	Continuation	Windsor Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory

Upstream Collaborative 2019 – 2020, California Schools

School	Type of School	District	Moves Made Practices being Implemented
14. Come Back Butte Charter	Charter	Butte County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI Procedures & Curriculum
15. BCCS-LEAD	Community	Butte County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI Procedures & Curriculum
16. Hearthstone	Independent study	Butte County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure for Presentations of Learning
17. Table Mountain School	Juvenile Hall	Butte County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning • Who Am I Projects
18. Step-Up	Community	Butte County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI Procedures & Curriculum
19. Vista Visions Academy	Independent study, credit recovery program	Vista Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
20. Alta Vista High School	Community	Vista Unified School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovery Phase
21. Marin County	Community day	Marin County Office of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
22. Noyo High School	Continuation	Fort Bragg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Advisory
23. Windsor Oaks Academy	Continuation	Windsor Unified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competency-Based Learning • Advisory
24. Country High School	Continuation	Vacaville Unified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Advisory
25. Marce Becerra	Continuation	Healdsburg Unified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Advisory • BPL
26. Boyle Heights Continuation HS	Continuation	LAUSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovery Phase

Collaborative had already been connecting online on a weekly basis with Breakthrough Leaders' Meetings. These were for ten coach-practitioners who had been selected to serve as mentors to support schools in the network. During lockdown additional meetings began to be held on Mondays. These sessions quickly expanded to include not only teachers and advisors across the network but also BPL educators from six countries (Ireland, Italy, Kenya, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK). These meetings averaged 30 participants and resulted in another online international gathering but this time for students. Since April BPL students have been connecting weekly and it has expanded to schools in Australia, Canada, India, and Kenya.

The vision of Upstream Collaborative is to create schools where students, who historically have not done well academically and are furthest from opportunity, will flourish, are honored and valued, and have opportunities to pursue and grow in their interests and talents. The objectives of the research presented in this report are:

- To identify and analyze the lessons that have been learned by Upstream Collaborative about what it really takes to help alternative schools redesign their models in terms of concentration of support and technical assistance, duration and District support, and creating communities of practice.
- To understand the learning experiences that participating schools/Districts/ County Offices of Education (COEs) have implemented that are contributing to outcomes such as improved student engagement and students' sense of belonging, and to capture if any 'unconventional indicators' can be or have been used to assess these.
- To specify some key ways in which participating schools/Districts/COEs increased their capacity in each of the networks.
- To describe and assess the effectiveness of creating micro-regions of professional support provided by Upstream Collaborative and highlighting how these facilitate school improvement and transformation of practices.
- To analyze in greater depth any distinctions between California (CA) and Washington (WA) to highlight any significant differences in structure, compliance and curriculum generally as well as in implementing redesigns specifically.

The data that has been collected from the research is synthesized and analyzed against the Stuart Foundation five outcomes of the Grant Results Worksheet (i.e. School Capacity, Improved Student Experience, Learning Agenda, Increased Membership and Ownership, and Influence). Collectively, the findings allow for a comprehensive appraisal of the work of Upstream Collaborative and its potential for transforming alternative education schooling and having a wider impact on coaching and mainstream schooling generally.



TABLE 2

Upstream Collaborative 2019 – 2020, Washington Schools

School	District	Practices
27. Seattle Interagency	Seattle School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning & Advisory
28. Career Academy	Federal Way School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
29. Chelan School of Innovation	Lake Chelan School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
30. Henderson Bay Alternative School	Peninsula School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internships • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
31. Methow Valley Independent Learning Center	Methow Valley School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
32. Moses Lake High School	Moses Lake School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
33. New Start High School	Highline School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning & Advisory
34. Quincy Innovation Academy	Quincy School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
35. Selah Academy	Selah School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
36. Soap Lake High School	Soap Lake School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
37. South Sound High School	North Thurston School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning & Advisory
38. Tonasket Choice High School	Tonasket School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
39. Open Doors	Federal Way School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations of Learning • Advisory
40. Two Rivers High School	Snoqualmie Valley School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTI • Presentations of Learning • Advisory

METHODOLOGY

The research involved a variety of techniques and activities including use of ‘narrative methodology’ that relied primarily on open-ended, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Upstream Collaborative coaches, school principals and staffs, students and other stakeholders. Two short survey questionnaires were distributed to the Upstream Collaborative schools. The first had a broad focus and was designed with reference to the overall objectives; the second was focused on how schools responded to closure due to the coronavirus, how prepared they were to do so, and what type of supports they had during this time that enabled them to connect with their students.

In response to the Covid-19 crisis and the lockdown of schools, a decision was also made to conduct online case studies with four schools (2 in CA, 2 in WA) to provide a fuller view of schools’ experiences of Upstream Collaborative coaching and professional development. The case studies shed light on how school practices have been transformed, and give further clarity on the most effective ways that Upstream Collaborative has been working with schools, highlighting its implications for work in other schools and contexts.

The findings from the research will be presented under a series of headings with the various research methods and data relevant to each heading analyzed and discussed therein. The headings are as follows:

- COACHING PRACTICES AND LESSONS**
- STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND BELONGING**
- CAPACITY-BUILDING**
- IMPACT AND INFLUENCE**
- CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As mentioned above, four case studies were done with Upstream schools and these will be featured separately in the report. It should be noted that these case studies have been anonymized for the purposes of confidentiality. Each case is a composite of the four and they are intended to give a fuller flavor of how schools have experienced being a part of and receiving coaching input from Upstream Collaborative. Although each of the case studies covered the same areas, the presentations have been written to emphasize particular aspects and experiences that align with the objectives of the research.



CASE STUDY 1 - PARKER SCHOOL

Parker School is an alternative education school that has for over 20 years been serving students, most of whom had difficulties in the local comprehensive high school and were described as 'credit deficient.' Three years ago the Superintendent of the District attended a Big Picture Learning conference and determined that Parker would join Upstream Collaborative and take a different approach to learning. The Principal at the time and half of the eight teaching staff were not pleased about this but did accept that some changes were needed and the school's low attendance rate had to be improved.

The first year of the change was unusual because the school went the first three months with posters displaying 'The 10 Distinguishers of a Big Picture School' and all kinds of related messages, but no one on the staff had received any professional development or training related to Big Picture nor had any clear idea what this meant for the school or what they were supposed to do differently. It was in October when the staff was finally introduced to Upstream Collaborative through a full day of PD with an Upstream coach. With one exception, everyone was inspired by the day and excited about moving things forward; however, they were still unsure how to proceed as a school.



Some teachers wanted to introduce everything (advisories, learning plans, internships, student exhibitions) right away, while others felt that the school needed to introduce things slowly and 'not rock the boat too much.'

Not surprisingly, the rest of the first year was a mixed experience for staff and students. A number of students embraced the changes and three of them were the first to do internships, all of which went very well. The majority of students continued to complete packets for credits, and attendance only slightly improved compared to the previous year with the graduation rate unchanged.

With more PD and support from the coach, the second year started off with a lot of enthusiasm, for most, with the school altering its schedule to allow for advisories and employing an internship coordinator to connect with local businesses and mentors to support students in finding relevant placements to do interesting projects outside of school. It appeared that parents and students were delighted with the changes and that the school was making good strides, but then the Principal announced that she was retiring and a member of staff became seriously ill. These factors seemed to stall the momentum of the first half of the year and two teachers, in particular, began questioning whether students were falling behind and given 'too much freedom' during advisories. This tension culminated in a heated end of year staff meeting that may have been affected by the knowledge of who the new Principal was to be – a young Principal from a comprehensive high school who had no experience of alternative education.





Some teachers felt that the new Principal would be a setback to all the progress they had been making with Upstream Collaborative with new practices and approaches that were connecting with students. Attendance rates were up compared to the previous year and, for the first time, students who were not due to graduate all presented an exhibition of their learning. Others took the view that he would not understand 'Alt Ed and our type of kids,' and most had the opinion that he lacked experience and 'probably would not have the confidence to speak up for the school at District level.'

The Principal had never heard of BPL or Upstream Collaborative but he did attend the BPL summer conference shortly after taking up his position. He made a decision to understand everything he could about the approaches that the school was adopting and be fully committed to them. He said that his work in the school is 'all about keeping people faithful to the program, taking responsibility for what they need to do whether that's staff or students, and seeing things through.'

He mentioned that at his first staff meeting before school started, 'we had a few teachers who were not big fans of all the changes' and wanted 'to revert back to old practices' that had not been working. He stated that, 'I told them that this is the way the school is now and it has started to work and we're not giving up on it. I think they thought that because I was new to it that I wouldn't want to do it.'

He said that the past year has been a 'baptism of fire' and 'it's been like building the plane while you're flying it,' but he thinks that the support from the coach and Superintendent has been 'fantastic.' His approach is thorough and rigorous, and he spoke of devoting considerable time 'getting essential documents drafted so that everybody uses the same ones and everyone is clear on what we mean by advisories or learning plans.' One of the struggles he identified among a few staff is that despite 'having received loads of BPL training, they are still deficit minded in regard to students and this isn't Big Picture; you have to see all the potential in kids, not what you think they are lacking.' He said that he's been supporting a more collaborative approach within the staff but 'there's still a long way to go.'

The new Principal had an interesting perspective on alternative education which was new to him since he had only ever previously worked in comprehensive high schools. He said that although most alternative schools 'tend to be housed in some of the worst buildings' and are often perceived negatively by the District and 'by middle-class parents', they offer 'great flexibility and opportunity to innovate and make a big difference in kids' lives'; he even referred to alternative schools as 'the best kept secret in education.'





The school was proud of how their third year was progressing. Up until closure due to the coronavirus, Parker had amazingly gone from three to 34 internships; all students were doing exhibitions as part of the assessment of their learning, and all students had a learning plan built around their interests. One teacher said that they 'are still working on advisories; some are working great, others not really but they are now a part of the school and what we do.' One student's comment summed up well how the school has been doing - 'I wouldn't have graduated if I had stayed at my old school, and I got to do a lot of really cool stuff because of coming here.'

The case study showed the important difference that school visits can make. 'I have sent teachers out to schools, we had a newer teacher go just to observe an advisor and then I sent two others to see student exhibitions. They all came back inspired and you could see the difference it made.' Nearly all of the staff attended an Upstream Collaborative micro-convening early in the year. One teacher remarked: 'It was great. We all wanted more of that.' Parker has also benefitted from visitors coming to the school. 'We have had three different schools come to visit and then there was a big group that came from the Big Picture conference.'

The large group of conference participants who visited was significant and not just for the staff. 'It was a fantastic benefit and made a big change in the kids especially because there was a lot of diversity and our staff is not that diverse, but our students are. It changed one student completely; he really opened up and is a different kid after that visit. The students want more people back. They loved hosting them and showing them all that they have been doing.'

There was consensus that the work they have been doing since becoming part of Upstream Collaborative meant that 'coping with Covid was no biggie, we were ready.' The Principal said that the District was very helpful also but 'did put big pressure on time and staff because they demanded a lot of measurement.' One teacher said that the crisis 'showed how we have become a family, a community.' Parker maintained contact with all of its students after the school building closed, and in addition to regular online contact, students organized special weekly lunch sessions with teachers. One highlight for staff and students was 'Staying to Learn' where each Friday the school hosted a special, well-known online guest who they sourced from Twitter who shared their story and answered questions.

COACHING PRACTICES AND LESSONS

All the coaches shared documents and information on their work with schools, and they each participated in at least one in-depth interview as well as a wide range of interactions and narrative conversations both in person and online. The researcher had regular opportunities to engage with coaches during lockdown through Zoom and to understand and witness their methods of connecting with and supporting schools.

The interviews with the five Upstream Collaborative coaches centered around analyzing what they have learned about helping alternative schools redesign their models, practices, and approaches in line with Big Picture Learning principles. We explored how concentrated the level of support from coaching may need to be and over what period of time it is required, what type of technical assistance has been found to be important, the impact of District support, and the benefits of creating communities of practice.

There was consensus among the coaches that support and coaching for a redesign takes at least three years. This does not mean that all the work is done in three years but rather that this period of time should be sufficient to address the change in culture and structures of the school, to work on school mind-sets, and to embed the principles and practices so that they become the norm in the school. All the coaches equally emphasized that each school is distinct and there are many factors and variables that affect how a school will respond; therefore, there is not a set formula or a specific duration, but they have learned that building relationships of trust and being WITH schools in a supportive and challenging way while modelling the new principles and practices builds the foundation needed to move schools forward significantly.

The coaches' views varied on the importance of the amount of time as well as the actual timing of the coaching and professional development (PD, hereafter) that they need to carry out with schools. One felt that if one full day or ideally two full days in a school's first year with Upstream Collaborative could be used in the summer for PD, that this would make the process of transition much easier saying, 'two days in the summer would accomplish all and more than the one hour meetings over six months because people would get it from the start'.

Two other coaches found instead that ongoing contact and being able to respond to challenges and difficulties as they arise in schools is very important. Another coach believed that the timing has to do with the mind-sets of the people in the schools, stating that 'some schools were ready before we started' while others take a lot more time. The other coach observed that the important point is the 'awareness (in a school) that things are not working or could be much better' and claimed that the process can be 'accelerated by having them visit other schools and seeing what it (BPL practices and approaches) looks like'.

It is clear that all the coaches have developed excellent working relationships with their schools and are seen as the key element in enabling these alternative schools to restructure and redesign their practices to improve the educational experiences of the students. Principals and teachers used words such as 'invaluable', 'incredible', and 'inspiring' to describe the work of their coaches. In the interviews, all the coaches emphasized the importance of establishing good relationships and trust with their schools. The quality of these relationships allows the coaches to challenge the schools, to speak honestly about what they observe, and to highlight issues.

It might be helpful to point out that Upstream Collaborative coaching is not primarily about one-to-one coaching with a Principal or advisor; the coach is the coach to the school. The coaches spoke of how they have 'a pretty clear idea' of the direction and redesign of the school that is needed, and their understanding is informed by the context of the school – its students and local community, and the capacity and experience of the staff. In the one-to-one work that is done, the coach is not performing the role of a counselor but is working with an individual while keeping an eye on that person's role in regard to implementing and advancing the development and redesign of the school.

The coaches genuinely do take account of the big picture in their work with individuals and schools. Their approach is about guiding, shaping, steering and navigating the school to transform its practices for equity and the successful engagement of students. Interestingly, a description put forward by a BPL coach in Australia captured the Upstream Collaborative coaching process very well.

So the coach as the outsider is holding the BPL design and represents it and can talk to its intentions. As a coach to any school, I'm just holding the space and the questions ... I'm not sitting there wanting them to do something in particular; I'm just wanting them to understand what they are doing better and to take responsible action from their reflections. If a BPL school goes off tangent contrary to the design, I do care and I have a responsibility to say so and name it. So there is a stronger evaluative edge to being the BPL Coach than to being just a coach or consultant. - John Hogan

The fact that four of the five coaches in Upstream Collaborative are experienced Big Picture Learning educators and leaders gives them the credibility and therefore the authority to speak into the school situations. In relation to 'technical assistance,' all the coaches noted that such work with schools gives credibility to their coaching. As one coach remarked, 'They know you fully understand and just don't have the theory or good ideas. You can show them how kids learn in the real world, how to have them follow their interests, and how they can publicly display their learning'.

Providing technical assistance to schools not only helps them to address problems or issues directly, but also it deepens the respect for the coach and, in many cases, seems to solidify the relationship and confirm the trust. As one Principal remarked, 'The best thing has been the modelling of practices and examples of working with students – watching skilled and experienced BPL people with students, it's like, "Oh, that's what you mean by a learning plan meeting"; you know they know what they are doing.'

Of crucial importance in 'showing the way' is when the coaches themselves model Big Picture practices and principles in their work with schools, thereby equipping Principals and teachers by demonstrating WITH them and WITH students how things work. Modelling is such a simple and effective way to teach, to learn, to understand, to improve and to develop; perhaps, it is sometimes overlooked because traditional classroom teaching, which is pervasive, limits the scope for modelling. It may be that modelling someone else's work is mistakenly perceived as copying or cheating, but it tends to be the highly effective approach used by all parents, mentors, craftspeople, artisans and artists. The data from the interviews, focus groups and case studies affirm that the schools found this approach by Upstream Collaborative coaches to be a great source of learning.

Of significant value, according to the findings of this research, was the opportunity that school staffs have had to meet with colleagues from other schools, to 'see' the work they are doing, experience what other schools are like and be able to share experiences, questions, struggles, successes, resources and ideas. In most cases across the education sector, staffs in public schools rarely meet and there is little interchange between them. The reason for this probably has to do with a combination of no tradition in the teaching profession to meet and collaborate with colleagues working in other schools and the hectic and full schedules that typify most schools. Upstream Collaborative has discovered that in the face of this reality coaching facilitation is definitely one if not the best way to get schools to connect with other schools. When this happens, relationships and communities of practice form, and Principals and teachers gain deep resource wells from which to draw and learn.



A good example of how Upstream Collaborative coaches innovate and communicate can be seen in the email example below. This is a copy of correspondence sent to Upstream schools inviting them to get involved in a new virtual gathering. Bear in mind that this was distributed in January 2020, well before lockdown and prior to Zoom being a household name.

The language and tone of the message really captures the relational element, the modelling that the coaches do, the sense of everyone learning together, the open-ness and respect for all the recipients, and the clarity of communication which states the purpose and values, expectations, roles and opportunities.



Dear Upstream Folks,

As part of our efforts to build collaboration across our regional network, we are hosting a big virtual kick-off meeting on Thursday, January 16th, from 10:00 to 10:30AM. You'll all be on the calendar invitation going out shortly. We are working to improve our transparency and accountability with you our colleagues and the larger org, so we wanted to share this with you for at least the following reasons:

1. This virtual kick-off is open to all in the region, and we'd love to have you there too, though there is no obligation for you to attend.
2. We'd like you to be aware of why we are doing this and what we hope comes of it.
3. We'd love any feedback you'd like to share about any of this (purpose, vision, specific plans, etc.), particularly any red flags we may have overlooked in our planning.
4. We want there to be some institutional memory and learning from this, and your involvement may support that.

The purpose of this particular meeting is to kick-off what we hope will become regular Thursday virtual gatherings called The Weekly Resource, occurring three times a month to supplement in-person micro-convenings occurring roughly monthly. At this first meeting we'll (1) share an online resource bank of frequently requested resources like a regional contact list, learning plans, project supports, exhibition resources, competency-based transcripts, etc., (2) roll out the schedule of monthly micro-convenings for the remainder of the year, and (3) raffle fun prizes and have a surprise guest appearance.

The Weekly Resource uses weekly facilitated zoom calls to support Big Picture Learning educators and students to create more human, student-interest-driven schools. We've scheduled the first three calls, all on Thursday mornings in January and early February. Our hope is that these calls will lead to improved outcomes for the most school-disengaged youth, decreased school-recommended transfers, and increased staff morale. Part of this is about increasing support to schools between coaching visits and for schools with no coaching contracts.

Thanks for any feedback, send any questions, and watch for the calendar invitation if you'd like to attend.

Thanks!



The case studies display how powerful the experience is as schools come together guided in a spirit of collaboration with a shared purpose and focus on improving their practice to benefit their students. The interview data likewise bear this out. One Principal observed: 'If schools are going to transform, people have to meet and be together; they have to see and learn how others are doing this and just get that support that comes from being a part of something bigger than your own job or school.' A teacher captured the view of several of her colleagues in saying, 'compared to a couple years ago, now when I have an issue or want to get some fresh ideas, my first reaction is to talk to other people in my school or in the other schools, where before I was flying solo, doing everything myself, searching the internet – it's so easy now and much, much better.'

The collaboration between schools can be greatly helped if there is recognition and financial support for these inter-school meetings. Furthermore, Districts and COEs can play an important role in supporting and fostering school connections and communities of practice. Fortunately, BPL and Upstream Collaborative are providing the means, motivation, and opportunity for these to happen and to expand.

In trying to establish how important the support from a school District is overall when a school is changing its design and practices, it is not clear from the coaches or the schools the extent to which it really matters. Support from a school District or School Board does not seem to be critical to the success of a school transformation. Of course, a supportive school District can help immensely in providing encouragement and funding, whereas a District where schools face opposition to the practices they are introducing makes things much more difficult, but this factor was not seen as making a critical difference.

In some of the Upstream schools, the active involvement of a Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent was a catalyst for the school joining Upstream Collaborative; in other schools, the District acknowledged and took an interest in the work and provided modest support. In other cases, the District seemed to be only vaguely aware that a school was implementing changes, did not interfere but offered no additional support. In a few cases the Superintendent or District was obstructive or impeded developments; in two instances, there was active opposition from the School Board or District.



The experience of the Upstream schools within their Districts whether in California or Washington is quite varied and mixed. As mentioned above, support from a District/COE/School Board is definitely welcome and assistive to the successful process of school redesign; however, it does not determine whether or not a school can transform its practices. This finding should be encouraging in that schools do not have to rely on their District/COE/School Board to engage in changes. Moreover, it indicates that any support schools do receive makes things easier, can allow for a quicker and more sustainable transition, and identifies how District/COE/School Board's can be most supportive – by funding coaching and PD, by allowing flexibility in scheduling and practices, by encouraging wider school connections and visits, and by celebrating success, allowing space for mistakes, and giving schools the 'breathing room' to learn as they go, seeking to enhance the learning experience of students.

Coaches creating communities of practice was considered to be a significant element to the work of Upstream Collaborative and to its success. Connecting Principals and schools with one another was cited as one of the pillars of the work of the coaches as it enables the sharing of ideas and resources, and provides mutual support. This was much in evidence as soon as the pandemic hit. Information was quickly shared, and crisis meetings were arranged offering suggestions and support. Weekly online meetings were convened that have grown in number and have continued to the present day. It was obvious that a supportive and connected network was in place with schools ready to help each other, with coaches available and responsive to school needs.

Furthermore and in general, when schools develop communities of practice, it allows them to appreciate the good work that they are doing and reinforces what is working; it highlights areas where they can improve and shows them how to make those improvements, and it reminds them that they do not have to be perfect or developing at the same pace as other schools – they need to focus on their particular students and school and let the principles guide them in engaging in the practices.

In the visits carried out as part of the research as well as in the interviews and focus groups with Upstream school staffs and coaches, the spirit of sharing and mutual support was remarkable. Instead of holding on to good ideas and effective techniques, people were not just willing but active in communicating to others what they have found to work with students in their schools.

There was no sense of competitiveness but shared goals and a hope and desire to see other schools progress and develop. It was as if everyone had signed a 'disclosure agreement' to let everyone know what they are learning, what is working, how to deal with X when Y happens; and yet, it was more than that because Principals and teachers were sharing materials they had produced (e.g. examples of learning plans or a letter they had sent to parents), links to helpful resources and other relevant contacts.

As an example, one online group conversation went something like this.

'What are you guys doing for graduation with Covid?'

'We are driving separately as a team to each graduate's house and giving a brief speech; then, we have a red carpet that we are rolling out and the graduate gets to walk up and receive the diploma.'

'That's really cool.'

'I love the idea of a red carpet – where did you get it?'

(discussion about the carpet and the practicalities of knowing that the carpet can be used in the area outside each student's house)

'We (different Principal talking) have a lot more students so they are arriving 15 minutes apart by car. They enter the school and we have a one-way graduate route they have to take. Student work is exhibited along the way and we have a graduate portfolio. They can have two family members accompany them and then when they get to me (the Principal) I do a personal speech for them, then they collect their diploma from a different area.'

'What kind of portfolio do you have?'

(Explanation)

'That sounds great. I'd love to see an example of that.'

'I'll email you the template we developed. What's your email?'

And so on.

These type of exchanges are becoming the norm across the Upstream Collaborative schools whether it is with Principals, LTI Coordinators, advisors or other administrative staff. It is the predictable consequence of people with a common cause and shared values having had a chance to develop collaborative relationships through the connections and gatherings that the coaches have arranged. It is also proving to be a highly effective way to advance the redesign of schools, enhance the student experience, and ensure sustainable developments.



CASE STUDY 2 - ORTIZ VALLEY

Ortiz Valley Continuation School was one of the first Upstream Collaborative schools. It is an interesting case because it had been doing very well in its District prior to joining the network in relation to attendance and graduation rates. The Principal and many of the staff however were not satisfied because they were aware that although they were graduating students, they knew that the graduates were struggling and were not well prepared for post high school life, because most were simply fulfilling requirements to graduate. As a school, they decided to embrace a new design and an approach that they felt would better equip students and provide a far richer learning experience than what they had been offering.

In the first year with Upstream, because of how arrangements were made with the District, the coach 'was mainly just working with the Admin., and it was leadership oriented.' The Principal said that she wanted to bring in changes right away but, in hindsight, she said that the time in the first year gave the leaders the confidence that they would need 'to persist when times got tough.' The school started slow in its implementation with one teacher describing it as 'BPL-light' and saying that the first year was 'very haphazard' and at times 'confusing for staff, parents and especially students.' The Principal stated: 'It takes a year before the students even get what you're offering. Kids don't know how to deal with it at first.'



The second year of the redesign was quite successful in introducing and implementing new approaches across the whole school with advisories, learning plans and some internships. 'In year two, we got the teachers connected with the coaching and this made all the difference.' One teacher said that in the first year, he liked the idea and 'kinda saw how it should work in theory but I really didn't know what to expect or even what to do at times. Then I saw that I need to change and I need to listen to the kids, really listen and that's not always too easy because Continuation kids kick up. I've been really inspired. I focus now on what students are doing rather than on what I need to do.'

All the staff agreed that the modelling of the coaches was the key to 'making big strides.' 'Modelling helps people SEE how it has to happen. The coaches when they are with staff or how they deal with anything, they model Big Picture so you experience it, you receive it and then you can do it with the kids.'

The Principal spoke very highly of any coaching from Upstream Collaborative that the school has received. 'They have global moderation. The coaches keep it all together but allow immense freedom. They give ideas and suggestions but let you get on with the job. Can we help you? They set the tone. They are unobtrusive and they work their magic'.

Even when their graduation rate decreased, they had some criticism from the District, and two members of staff decided to leave, the school believed it was going in the right direction. The Principal explained that the changes meant that the 'Students are involved in doing all the stuff. We are leaving things up to them and supporting them. They decide what and how to learn and connect learning to what they are excited about and connect it to life after school.' She said that this was important because 'there had been a complete disconnect between what we were teaching kids, what they were learning and what life was like for them – it was two different worlds; now, they link with each other and you see it in the kids who have graduated and how well they're doing.'

In regard to the third year, the LTI Coordinator shared her view that despite being a Continuation school, in her words, 'We started attracting non-Continuation kids. They didn't have issues in the Comprehensive, they just were bored. There are out-of-the-box kids.' She sees this as a strong proof of the success of the redesign and thinks that 'a more diverse school helps everyone. We still have kids with real issues but school is about giving kids the chance to advance to success like their peers who have a lot going for them. It's helping everyone.' Referring to the success of the school, the Principal was forthright, 'The data that shows me our success - no suspensions, kids coming to school who were not going to school. Parents are grateful to us that their kids are being so supported. We are serving the kids and not the school system.'

This case study illuminates how the Upstream coaches connect with a school and indicates to a large extent why the network has been so successful in helping schools to transform and embrace change. The experience of Ortiz Valley also shows the impact that collaboration, especially through micro-convenings, is having on the expansion and sustainability of Upstream Collaborative.

'With Upstream, they walk the talk. You see it in the relationships – they do BPL – how they relate to admin, teachers, kids, everybody. But the learning has been challenging. At the beginning I was frustrated with the coaching because I could not get any answers to my questions.



It drove me crazy. Now, I understand. There are no schools that are the same, you have to fit it to your kids and your place. You have to work it out yourself. It took two years before I could explain BPL to someone. It's a philosophy AND a structure. The philosophy is the same, the structure has to be different – what it looks like will be different. In hindsight, I understand but I didn't put the philosophy and structure together. You have to find the answers yourself. But that is the secret to good coaching; they can't do it for you but they show you, lead you to learn how and to figure it out.'

A teacher shared the Principal's view. 'We don't know what a 'good' project looks like – you can't get a straight answer from Big Picture (laughing) – I understand why but it is really frustrating. But we needed to go through that frustration to learn it.' A different teacher shared: 'I crave opportunities to be immersed. I really value the 'thought partnerships'. I have got great ideas from the coaches and other leaders. All the BPL staff are very responsive.' The Principal said that for her, 'the best support often has been to have them in constant virtual contact.'

I can't get away much from the school, so much is asked of us, so leaving for a day can be difficult but Upstream communication is so easy – phone, email, online – they are always responding and responsive. That responsiveness keeps me fresh and up to date and helps me resolve things quickly. I don't have to wait to go to a conference, though I love them.'

The Principal added: 'Once we met (other schools) once or twice, I lost the hesitancy to contact people, and it's the same for the rest of the staff. My teachers are so connected with BPL now. They have their buddy here or there, in San Diego, in Hawaii, around the world. All are talking the same thing.' A teacher who has been working for 39 years in the profession observed: 'In all my years, I had never worked with a group of educators who were willing to share everything. I can ask for anything and people hand it over. And the admin folks treat teachers the same, you don't feel that there is this hierarchy, people are on the same level.'

The 'micro-convenings' organized by Upstream Collaborative were highly regarded. Here is a selection of quotes from the staff of Ortiz Valley.

The convenings are awesome – great support from great people; I love that they happen in other schools – It's like I'm going on a field trip to a school – most of the time the schools are in session, so it gives the school a boost and they want to show off and we just learn so much. The gatherings model Big Picture.

I have been to three different schools. The visits are great, you bring back ideas and I have stayed in touch with them.

I've been to two schools and the recent virtual connections with other schools have been terrific, really supportive.

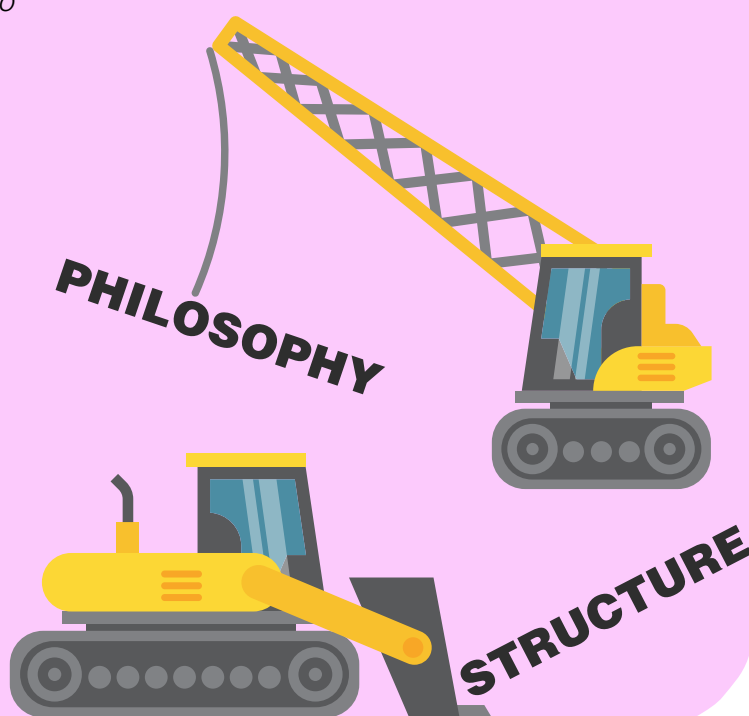
At micro-convenings, you share information with the wider community. It's great to have people just an email or phone call away.

PD has been invaluable. Relationships are the backbone. Collaboration – not living on an island but we are part of a community. I've become a lot more reflective. I see that our struggles and questions are not unique and I see that we don't have to be like the other schools – it's one-student-at-a-time so we should look different.

The micro-gatherings have been the most valuable collaborations in my teaching career (15 years).

The PD is all about modelling. The PD is not prescriptive. It has been perfect for me – perfect lessons that allow you to try it yourself before you do the work with students. I used to dread PD, now I love it. I'm not exhausted after it but completely energized and on a high.

Reflecting on her and her school's experience in Upstream Collaborative, the Principal said, 'They have helped us formulate a vision for the school and they were instrumental. They got our focus on creating relationships, they reshaped our thinking, and they challenge us. The benefits to students are clear. I would say to the Stuart Foundation – the money, the timing and the support were perfect for the huge need in my area, in education. Traditional schools are not even close to what students need today. The schools are not in sync with the world. How it started for me was I was told to go visit a BPL school.'



STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND BELONGING

Ensuring that every child feels a sense of security and belonging within the school enables each child to accept and participate actively in transforming situations that are part of learning experiences.

- Loris Malaguzzi

For the Stuart Foundation, BPL, and Upstream Collaborative the purpose of their work is to improve the experiences, opportunities and life chances of students. If the dedicated and inspiring work of the coaches does not result in the improvement of student learning or if the redesigns, change in culture and structures, and the formation of communities of practice do not lead to greater educational equity, then this work could not be judged successful. Fortunately, the trends are clear in the data on attendance, student learning and graduation rates as well as in the findings from the research - all are showing that this network is working well for students. For many of the schools, it is still quite early in their connection with Upstream Collaborative to assess the extent of change and the extent of their success; however, reports of significant transformations in the learning and engagement of students, the highly positive response of parents, and the perspectives of Principals and teachers on the impact on students all point towards considerable progress and achievement to date.

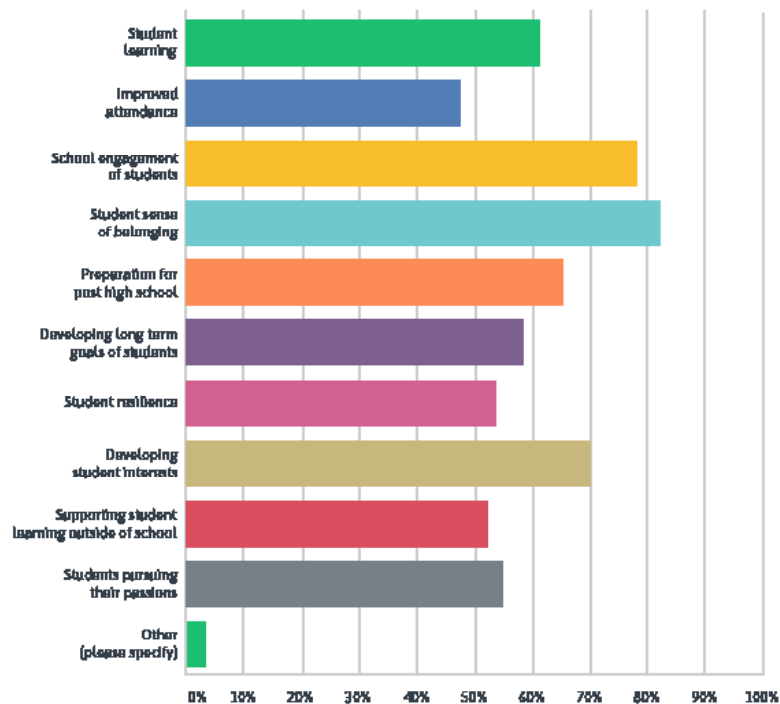
Owing to the coronavirus outbreak, it was not possible to carry out a questionnaire with students, but the first survey that was conducted with the schools asked specific questions about what in the school's capacity had increased the most in the last two years to meet the needs of students. The questionnaire was distributed by email to 35 Upstream schools, and 23 of the schools responded (there were 61 respondents in total consisting of Principals, Advisors/Teachers, LTI Coordinators and Other School Staff).

Impressively, the highest responses on what had increased most in schools (approximately 80% each) were 'Student sense of belonging' and 'School engagement of students' (Graph 1). When asked about what has helped their school to increase its capacity, over 90% responded 'Collaboration with staff' and over 70% answered

'Professional Development from Upstream Collaborative' (Graph 2). The survey results indicate that teachers' relationships with students, the practice of having Advisories, and adopting a one-student-at-a-time approach contribute most to students' sense of belonging and increasing their positive self-concept (Graphs 3 and 4). In many ways, it is an obvious point that the stronger the relationships are between students and teachers, the more students will feel they belong and the more they will want to engage with the learning and activities happening in school.

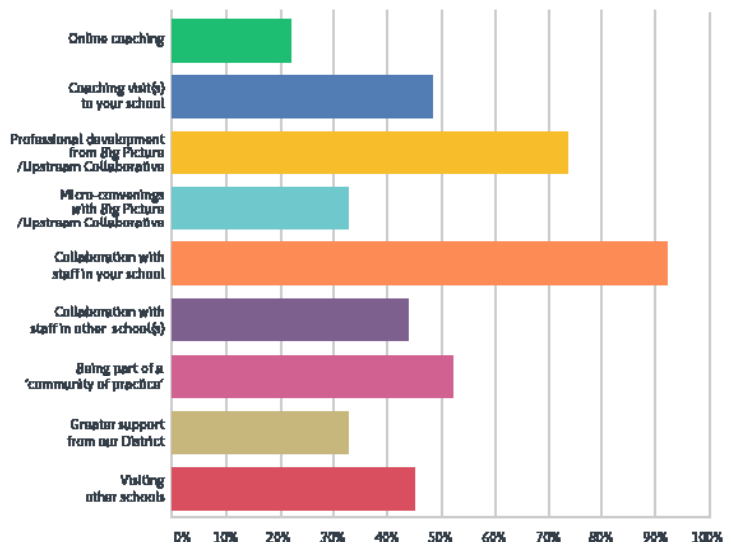
Graph 1

Please tick any of the following in which your school has increased in its capacity to meet the needs of students over the past 2 years.



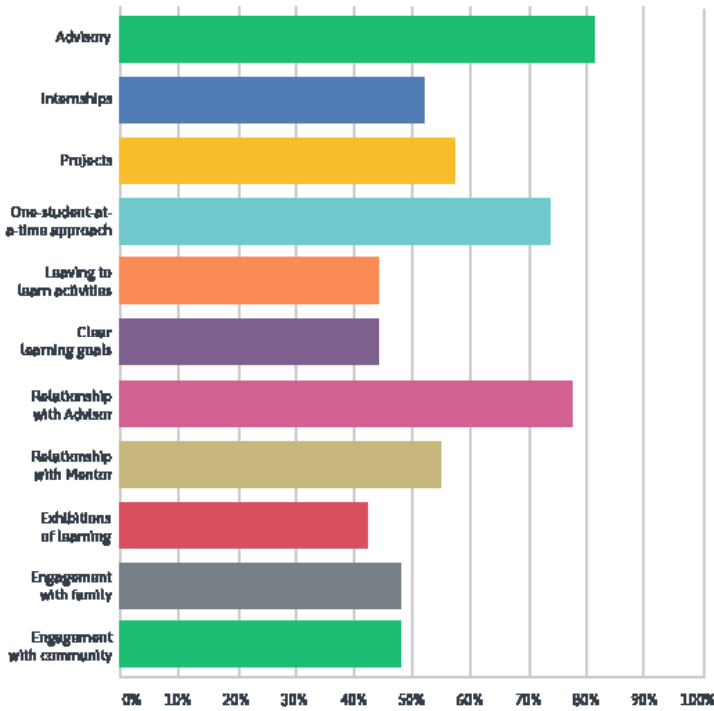
Graph 2

Please tick any of the following that has increased your school's capacity to meet the needs of students over the past 2 years.



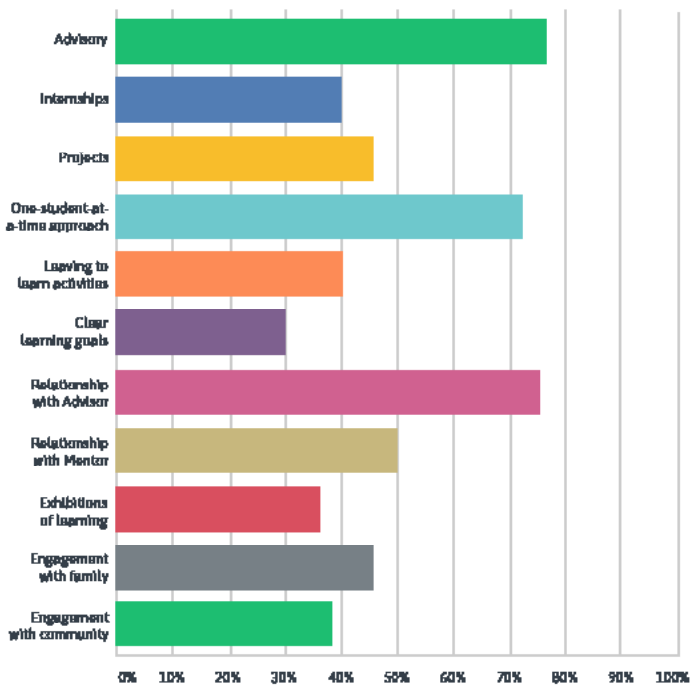
Graph 3

Please tick any of the following learning experiences or practices that have contributed to student positive self-concept at your school in the past year.



Graph 4

Please tick any of the following learning experiences or practices that have contributed to student sense of belonging at your school in the past year.



In most high schools, however, the structures, curriculum, and schedule limit the space and time for solid relationships to form between students and teachers; therefore, many students often feel detached and disconnected or ‘anonymous’, ‘ignored’ or ‘just a number,’ as some Upstream students had described their previous experiences in high school.

When schools join Upstream Collaborative there is a heavy emphasis placed on relationships, and many of the schools now use personal learning plans for each student. The curriculum is driven by the student and built around his/her needs, interests, and passions. This practice communicates to the students that they are valued as individuals and that their interests and circumstances are valid and worthwhile and need to be taken into account as the context for their learning. When schools adopt the practice of Advisories, this creates the structure and context for strong relationships to form both between students and teachers but also amongst students. In Upstream schools that have internships and do ‘leaving-to-learn’ activities, these expand further the meaningful relationships students can have with adults who are serving as mentors or sharing their experience and knowledge about things that students are interested in.

The other notable responses to the question on what has improved in the schools (Graph 1) were ‘Developing student interests’ (70%) and ‘Preparation for post high school’ (67%). Both of these are best supported when relationships are deepened, and teachers are able to cultivate and provide opportunities to explore interests as well as post high school options. Preparation is also best and most efficiently undertaken when it is known what one is preparing for; this does seem an obvious point, nevertheless much career advice in high school is often made with limited knowledge of or relationship to a student.

For my part, I should be inclined to suggest that the chief object of education should be to restore simplicity. If you like to put it so, the chief object of education is not to learn things; nay, the chief object of education is to unlearn things. - G.K. Chesterton

The quote from Chesterton resonates in two significant ways. Firstly, the institution or ‘grammar’ of schooling has in many ways become so ingrained that some, if not many, of its structures, practices, traditions, and ways of being can complicate the



experience of schooling for students and get in the way of simple, effective ways of learning (e.g. knowing students' interests and needs and then providing a relevant program and experience to facilitate their learning). Schools can lose sight of the simple need to listen and get to know their students.

The case studies and data from the interviews with Principals and teachers resound with examples of the need 'to keep it simple.' 'I learned I need to listen.' 'A lot of the time we just need to get out of the kids' way and let them learn.' 'Once students have the confidence and support, and if we simply allow them to – they do amazing things.' 'What can I say – if you're doing stuff you're interested in, you are going to learn a lot. If kids get to keep doing that, following their interests and finding more interests, they learn more and they keep on learning – you don't have to be a genius to figure that one out.'

Secondly, Chesterton points out that there is a need in school (perhaps it should be a priority) for 'unlearning.' By unlearning, we mean addressing and overturning many bad lessons that students have been taught and acquired through their schooling. Sadly, many students, especially those in alternative education, have been told directly and indirectly and then learned (incorrectly) that they are 'no good,' 'won't amount to anything,' 'aren't College material,' that their interests are not of value and that some of their life and career aspirations are either unattainable and 'beyond them' or are inferior and of a low status. If students can unlearn if they were taught that they are 'failures' or that real learning only happens in school or that their interests and hobbies are of little value, then their experience of school and learning can be transformed.

Such unlearning can only happen when students are known well in their schools, and when students

are provided the opportunities to demonstrate that they can learn and succeed. Graphs 3 and 4 both show that the practices that have contributed most to students' 'Positive self-concept' and 'Sense of belonging' are those that deepen relationships. The results for each question are quite similar. In both cases 'Relationship with Advisor' was rated the highest (78% and 85%) followed closely by 'Advisory' (81% and 77%) and the 'One-student-at-a-time approach' (75% and 72%). These practices that have been introduced and implemented into the schools since they joined the Upstream Collaborative network are having a strong and positive impact on students' confidence and sense of belonging; therefore, there is an effect on student engagement resulting in an improvement in learning.





After schools closed due to the coronavirus, Upstream Collaborative provided a different type of internship program entitled, 'Learning in the Time of COVID'. It was designed to capture some of the learning that students were engaged in on their own, separate from any projects or activities that were given to them by their schools. Twelve students applied for the internship that required them to record, assess, and reflect on their learning and to make a presentation of it. All the students completed the internship within the timeframe and were awarded with \$200.

The student internships were varied and quite impressive. Students learned to play instruments, created programs for elementary school students, wrote and illustrated children's books, constructed gardens in their yards, designed and built a skating ramp, created habitats, wrote a cook book, gave make-up demonstrations, and conducted tutorials to other students.

Commenting on the internship program, one of the coaches said: 'We connect this to the importance of how individual learning plans can be a tool for shifting curriculum and content in order to include what matters to students as key components of the learning process. This project also touched on many of our equity imperatives: assessment, personalization, mentorship and community, and professional development. We're still in the process of unpacking the powerful learning samples we collected from students.'

CAPACITY

Over the years ‘capacity-building’ has become a common buzz word in regard to educational training, professional development and school change and reform. Predominantly, capacity building refers to increasing and improving the skills, knowledge and resources that teachers have so that they can implement new ideas and support school change and improvement. The word capacity itself refers either to the maximum amount that something can hold or contain, or to the amount that something or someone can produce. The human capacity to learn is quite limitless as is the amount that people can produce. In a real sense, Upstream Collaborative is not ‘building’ the capacity of the schools but rather they are enabling them to recognize how much capacity they have and to see that the capacity of their students to learn, to explore, to develop, to create and to do and produce amazing things is vast.

Even though human capacity is immense, there are obvious limits on people’s time and there are only so many schools a coach can serve. With this in mind and in view of the consistent growth of the network (11 to 40 schools in 3 years), Upstream Collaborative set out at the start of the school year to engage school leaders who had been identified to serve as coach-practitioners. A total of ten educators were selected (6 from WA, 4 from CA), and two full day coach-practitioner retreats were designed to immerse participants in the principles and practices of Upstream Collaborative coaching. The retreats were complemented by weekly level setting and training sessions called ‘Breakthrough Leaders Meetings.’

Coach-practitioners started with the values of Upstream Collaborative as a way to engender a deeper sense of ownership and to be clear on what the work will entail. These values were articulated by one of the Regional Coordinators. ‘We’re for reimagining an equitable school system that works for our students, their families, and their communities. We are focused on praxis (i.e. we’ll concentrate on the practical application of our beliefs and philosophies), and we’re proceeding with the intention of being a breakthrough community that creates bold visions and anticipates challenges and breakdowns, and that understands the relational aspect of school and systems change.’

The following outline is an example of how some of the work with coach-practitioners was carried out by Upstream Collaborative coaches in co-preparing a PD day with a school.

- 1) establish a problem of practice with a Principal,
- 2) roughly calibrate how we (coaches) are going to approach the day with the school
- 3) observe/inquire/collect data for first half of school day in relation to a problem of practice,
- 4) analyze data and plan afternoon PD,
- 5) facilitate afternoon PD,
- 6) follow up with staff based on next steps generated at PD.

Since one of the main purposes of recruiting and training the coach-practitioners is to assist in the development and sustainability of the network, attention was focused on equipping them for the work ahead. A decision was made to concentrate on six areas.

- 1. Learning plans and personalization.**
- 2. Multiple assessment strategies for students.**
- 3. PD and leading a community through change and uncertainty.**
- 4. Connecting students to their communities for mentorship.**
- 5. Trauma and anti-racism.**
- 6. Awareness of the intersectionality of equity, race, opportunity, and healing.**

When schools were forced to close, weekly online convenings of coach-practitioners were started in California. Shortly thereafter similar online meetings were arranged in Washington. The purpose of these meetings was primarily to serve as supports to the schools, to share information and ideas, and to identify needs or gaps in what was being provided by the Districts in response to the pandemic.

Consistent with their mode of working, the Upstream Collaborative coaches had the coach-practitioners design and help facilitate the weekly meetings that began during lockdown. These opened up and allowed coach-practitioners to be involved in one-to-one formal and informal coaching. In Washington, coach-practitioners also hosted 'featured practice' online sessions weekly. During these sessions, coach-practitioners shared promising practices with colleagues in Upstream schools by sharing examples, presenting their experiences, describing difficulties they encountered, and responding to questions.

As decisions were made about lockdown and schools developed ways to connect with their students, the online coach-practitioner sessions took on a wider, international focus. The pandemic had affected European schools earlier than those in the USA. The BPL schools in Italy, the Netherlands and the UK shared with Upstream coach-practitioners,

Principals and teachers how they were managing the situation. These online meetings involved a sharing of ideas, resources, approaches, and suggestions.

The online connections also led to the establishment of a new network between Upstream Collaborative students and students in BPL schools in Europe. Named ZOT (Zooming Opportunities Together) this grew further to involve BPL staff and students in Australia, Canada, India and Kenya. It was set up and is coordinated by a teacher in an Upstream Collaborative school in California. Students from ZOT made their presence felt at the BPL three week online conference in July 2020 called Summer Fest by hosting all kinds of sessions and activities for students and adults. ZOT is continuing on a weekly basis and is growing.

Reflecting on ZOT, the coordinator stated that 'it is proof that there should be no borders when it comes to education - that the old way of thinking we are confined by a physical space is no longer valid. It also proved to be an amazing "social-emotional" tool as students grew comfortable with each other, learned to work together and trust each other, and gained in self-esteem and confidence. Many students who were "afraid" to speak found their voice and did things that were way outside of their comfort zone. It was amazing to witness'.



His goal is to get (at least) 100 students on a ZOT call so they can learn about each other, discover common ground and interests, and begin to collaborate and work together on shared projects or in support of one another. His hope is, 'to build a huge, global student network (and advisors and other staff as well) that can lean on each other for ideas, support, and, when this pandemic is over, visit each other's schools and thus see the world'. In words similar to those expressed by teachers about what they have been learning from being part of Upstream Collaborative, the ZOT coordinator said, 'If I have learned one thing from ZOT this summer, it is that if we provide a safe, positive, nurturing environment for our students and get out of their way, they will do amazing things'. The capacity is there, it may just be a matter of recognizing it and allowing students to produce and flourish.

The work with coach-practitioners was seen as increasing the leadership in schools, furthering a sense of ownership, expanding and developing the relationships across the whole network, and providing for participants a broader perspective on the network and how the work can be scaled up. As stated by one Regional Coordinator, 'The coach-practitioners provided guidance, expertise, sharing of dilemmas, and supported other schools with their implementation. It was powerful for staff members from other schools to hear about the journeys of the coach practitioners.' In addition to coach-practitioners, Upstream Collaborative has also been making use of its schools' capacities to host visitors.

As articulated in the interviews and focus groups, school visits were reported to provide great mutual benefit and learning. For schools considering joining the network or interested in what practices such as Advisories, personal learning plans or student exhibitions look like, there is nothing as compelling as seeing it first-hand in action, especially when the visit is primarily hosted and facilitated by students themselves.

The case studies reveal that the visits work both ways. In other words, visitors benefit from being present in a school and seeing how it operates and 'getting a feel for the culture and how we work with students.' For host schools, it likewise is a beneficial experience, allowing them 'to show off our good work,' 'giving students a great opportunity to exhibit their learning and mix with adults from other

schools. 'In hearing how other people perceive us, sometimes we forgot how far our students have come. It is so satisfying to watch our kids in action and to see teachers from other schools chaperoned by them or being given the tour.'

Upstream Collaborative has learned through the power of its own practices of modelling that school visits can be 'game changers' for some of their visitors. There are however two caveats to school visits. One is that if visitors are not cognizant of the fact that schools using Upstream Collaborative principles and practices are all different and work in their own distinctive fashion, then they may come away from a school visit thinking that it is 'the way' to do certain things, like advisories or internships. The second caution is that if some of the visitors are skeptical and the school they are visiting is significantly different from their own (e.g. better resourced, a different type of school that does not have the same compliance requirements, or is located in a very different community in terms of wealth or demographics), they may wrongly assume that such approaches would never work in their own school, community, or with their type of students.



Over the last year in particular, Upstream Collaborative has been building on the power of school visits and tapping into the potential for collaboration by organizing ‘micro-convenings’ throughout the network. The term micro-convenings has been purposely adopted by Upstream to distinguish these gatherings from an educational conference, seminar or workshop. The micro-convenings happen in an Upstream Collaborative school with a particular focus or topic (e.g. student exhibitions, learning plans, internships) and involve other Upstream schools that are located within driving distance in that region. Participants devote one or one and a half days to ‘tackling a specific problem of practice and learning from one another.’



The feedback that coaches have received from the Principals, teachers and LTI Coordinators who have attended the micro-convenings was highly positive, and those findings have been confirmed in my interviews with schools. In fact, several Principals cited the micro-convenings as being pivotal to their schools moving forward. The opportunity to connect with other schools with a shared focus that dealt with related and relevant issues had a cascading effect. In other words, after Upstream educators had gathered at a micro-convening, many continued to connect with each other over their work and to share with and support one another. Communities of practice developed organically. They were not prescribed or a suggested action to take forward from a micro-convening; instead, they formed naturally around needs and issues that people had in common and that made sense to keep in contact in order to help, support, and learn from each other.



In the interviews and focus groups, Principals in particular highlighted the micro-convenings as important turning points in staff ‘getting it’ and seeing how the practices work. A Principal said, ‘Micro-convenings are ideal when you see the work modelled and then you work together on it and share ideas’. A different Principal observed, ‘the micro-convenings work because we had dedicated our time to meet and connect with educators engaged in similar problems. The coaches helped us and showed us and then let us practice.’ The collaborative work in the micro-convenings is both a case of a ‘community of practice’ and frequently a springboard for the formation of new and other communities of practice.





These emerging networks continued and in many cases deepened with the outbreak of Covid-19 and then the incidents that followed the killing of George Floyd and others. The need for educational leaders to understand and engage with the diversity, pluralism, and/or multiculturalism that characterize a globalized society has been recognized for some time. Fifteen years ago, Mulford identified and highlighted, 'respect for the worth and dignity of individuals and their cultural traditions as one of the most powerful emerging concepts for educational leaders.' This could not be any more prevalent than during recent events that have reverberated across the United States in consciousness raising, protests, demonstrations, rioting and the reaction and responses to all these happenings.

The response of Upstream Collaborative was to address these issues head-on, to set them in their proper context as matters relating to justice and equity, and to reflect on how as a network of schools they can facilitate consideration of these issues, challenge injustices, and support students in their learning as well as in their pain or confusion over all these events. Upstream online gatherings featured much discussion of these matters and a wide sharing of resources related to anti-racism, cultural diversity, and social justice.

Upstream Collaborative has been active prior to 2020, indeed from its start, in creating greater cultural understanding and respect. This is reflected, for example, in its association with the BPL Native

American Alliance which began three years ago. Many Upstream Collaborative schools serve American Indian, Alaska Native and First Nation (AIANFN) students, and five schools have coaching contracts with BPL Native American Alliance. The aim of the Alliance is to 'ensure that each BPL network school is prepared to meet the unique cultural and linguistic needs of their AIANFN students, as guaranteed by the treaties' and to 'decolonize and indigenize Big Picture Learning network schools so that all students may benefit from the wide breadth of cultural knowledge and worldviews of Indigenous peoples.'

BPL Native American Alliance has provided PD to Upstream Collaborative schools in collaboration with AIANFN students, families, and community partners, on how best to serve American Indian, Alaska Native, and First Nations students and educate ALL students about the history, political realities, and contemporary lives of Indigenous peoples. Several 'leaving to learn' opportunities for BPL students, both Native and non-Native, have been organized with student trips to the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, the Grace Hudson Museum and Sun House, and the American Indian Child and Family Resource Center. A database of AIANFN focused internship opportunities for participating schools has been compiled, and during the Covid-19 pandemic there have been weekly Native Student Alliance meetings on Zoom.

A Native American Studies course is being designed specifically for BPL schools in partnership with the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center. The curriculum will be available to all Upstream schools. Lastly, because of the connection between an Upstream Collaborative school and the BPL Native American Alliance, a meeting was facilitated in California with the Windsor United School District (WUSD) Superintendent, the School Board members, community partners, school staff, and the Highline School District Indian Education Program Manager on establishing a Title VI Indian Education Program in WUSD. This work reveals yet again the power of connections and collaboration, and indicates the deep impact and the wider influence that Upstream Collaborative is having as it grows, develops, and strengthens its partnerships.



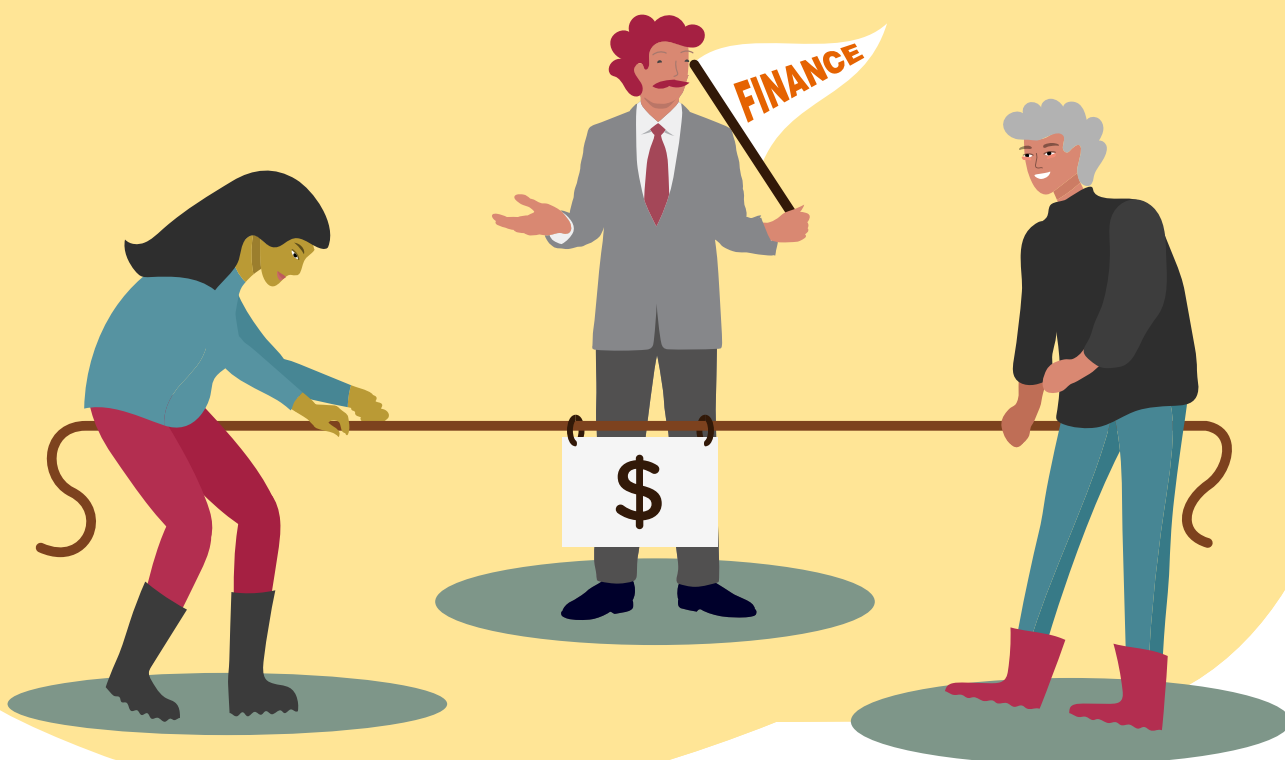
CASE STUDY 3 - THE CAT

Now based in a house that used to be used as a Scout Hall, nicknamed the Cat, this Independent Learning Center had been a school-within-a-school (at the local Comprehensive High School) and then was in a pre-fab before being moved to its current location. Up until about two years ago, the Cat was seen as a 'dumping ground for kids who didn't fit into regular school' and it had a reputation as being 'rough and tough.' All that has changed with an increased enrollment, attendance averaging well over 90% and one of the highest graduation rates in the District. Much of this is down to the Principal and his small team who decided to go 'all in' when they joined Upstream Collaborative three years ago.

The decision to join the network of Upstream Collaborative schools was not an easy one as there was and has been opposition from the Board and District against the new direction the school has taken and the increase in the number of students. In practice this has meant 'a fight for finance and recognition' because the opposition has created some obstacles for staffing, for adequate compensation for the work and hours that have been put in, and for recognition of the role of Principal. Interestingly, the District has not created any problems in relation to the practices and changes in scheduling of the school. The Principal said that he has 'great flexibility to build our program around our students whatever that looks like.'

The experience of lockdown caused by Covid-19 has had an interesting impact on how the school might be structured differently when students do return. The Principal explained that he was, 'surprised how staff struggled with the whole thing initially, but students were well equipped to undertake their learning, to document it and to reflect on it. They know what they want to learn and how to approach it, we just have to guide and support them. Not all but most of our students did great things being at home. It has made me question if any structures in our school inhibit learning. If they do then we need to change or scrap them. It's like with internships - some of the internships were sometimes not for the whole day so we had kids coming back in when I can see from lockdown that they don't have to be in here so much. I really want to make sure that our need for scheduling doesn't get in the way of students learning.'

Both the Principal and some members of staff have been in regular contact with other schools in the network during lockdown, and they have found this not only supportive but a great source of learning and sharing. One teacher mentioned that, 'before lockdown, we tried to convene advisors online. People were interested but we could not get it scheduled. Then Covid hits and we have been able to meet regularly. This is something that will definitely continue even after or if we ever get back to normal again.'



The Cat is located in a more rural location but the staff reported that during lockdown most of the students have been engaged in really interesting learning activities. Over half of students were able to continue to attend their internships, and some of them went to their sites more than two days a week because they had the availability, and it was safe to do so. Of the students who had but could not go to their internship sites, several maintained contact with their mentors and did projects online. In most cases, the teachers did not have to advise the students on their internships and projects – students did this themselves.

In addition to internship projects, students made videos of their own self-directed projects which ranged from designing and making a garden of raised beds and helping an uncle rebuild an engine to helping to coordinate the delivery of food packs and participating in a global online art project. Teachers expressed pride and delight in the quality of the work of their students and overall how well they had coped during the crisis and supported one another. Moreover, they said that they had received similar reports from colleagues in other Upstream schools and believed that the BPL practices they have adopted really help students 'to take responsibility for their learning and do amazing things'.

As with Parker and Ortiz Valley, the Cat had high praise for the coaching from Upstream Collaborative and the micro-convenings they had attended with other schools. They also extolled the benefits of school visits and being part of a community of practice.



The micro-convenings and organized gatherings of people focused on shared needs or interests are terrific.

The micro-convenings are ideal when you see the work modelled and then you work together on it and share ideas.

The most valuable (Upstream Collaborative coaching resource) is not written descriptions but watching skilled and experienced BPL people with students. "Oh, that's what you mean by feedback at a student exhibition". This can also happen with school visits.

There is nothing better than seeing examples of working with students – modelling of practices.

Hosting visits is powerful as well. I can see the big light bulb go on – especially when they see and hear from students.

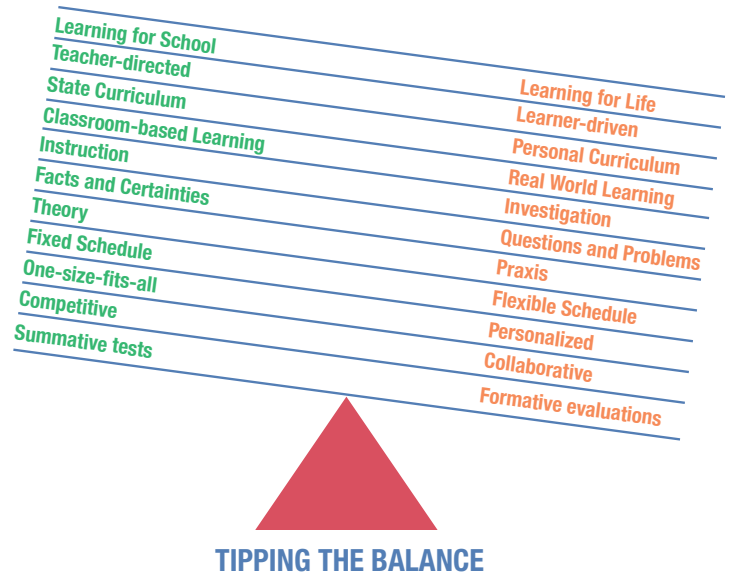


IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

For the purposes of this report, 'impact' will be understood as the positive effect that the work of Upstream Collaborative is having on the schools within its network; 'influence' will be understood as the positive effect that the work of Upstream Collaborative is having on their school Districts, on education in general (local and international), and on Big Picture Learning as an organization.

The impact of Upstream Collaborative on its own schools has been covered to a large extent thus far in this report, but it is worth pointing out the distance that schools have had to travel in redesigning their practices and in adopting new principles to guide them in their work with students. Prior to joining Upstream, the schools were not offering internships, did not have Advisory or learning plans, and their students were not making presentations of their learning. Students, their voice, interests, needs and aspirations have shifted to be the center of attention. The main focus of the schools is on learning not teaching. Diagram 1 depicts this in showing how the balance has shifted in the Upstream Collaborative schools.

DIAGRAM 1



On the left-hand side are the structures and approaches descriptive of how most of the schools were operating before becoming part of Upstream Collaborative. On the right-hand side of the diagram are principles and practices which have been adopted that engage the students and transform the learning experience. In the educational literature, the right-hand side of the diagram represents what is considered to be the most appropriate form of schooling for the 21st Century. The majority of the schools in the network have moved significantly in this direction and the impact on students, staff and administrators is apparent.

DIAGRAM 2

It is interesting to contrast the student-driven Upstream Collaborative approach to learning with what was purported to be an innovative 21st Century model for learning depicted in Diagram 2. The advocates of this project based approach to schooling argue that it is 'a learning model that can meet the needs of 21st century learners and the demands of our times - a model learning vehicle designed to transport students toward the goal of becoming more successful 21st century learners, workers, and citizens'.





The use of an old bicycle betrays the traditional assumptions and understandings behind this perceived innovative form of schooling, especially in regard to the position and relationship of students. In the diagram, it is the teacher who is driving and steering, deciding the speed, direction, and level of difficulty. Furthermore, the bike has four seats for the students implying that they all should be on the same journey, at the same pace, and travelling at the behest of their teacher who has the primary and overall say on where they are going. It is also interesting to note that the students only have one set of pedals, so three of them will mostly be passive passengers who will likely be told to 'pay attention' even if they do not know where they are going and have little interest in the destination.

When a school is redesigned to allow students to drive their learning, the impact on the school culture, teacher-student relationships, curriculum and assessment are significant and can be profound. Consequently, the impact on students, their families, and their community deepens. Upstream Collaborative has been having such impact on the schools and their learners. It is helping to transform their education and enabling educators to guide, support, oversee, and participate in the facilitation of their learning.

As detailed in this report, Upstream Collaborative is making a strong impact on educators' professional development by creating (as the name implies) opportunities for collaboration. This has happened through the micro-convenings and school visits, the planned as well as the dynamic development of communities of practice, and through the numerous online connections, some of which began pre-Covid but many of which developed widely with the closures of schools. The impact of this should not be underestimated particularly in the light of the research which shows that, 'in general, schools have weak networking and knowledge-sharing among teachers.'

The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the OECD conducts international comparative research and develops innovative approaches to education and learning. They have consistently found that, 'Most of the professional knowledge that teachers use in their daily work is tacit: it is rarely made explicit or shared with colleagues.' In seeking to explain the factors that inhibit fundamental change in traditional school practices, CERI has identified that, 'schools and classrooms are normally isolated one from another rather than interlinked ... (and) that too many schools still tend to have only rudimentary knowledge management practices, despite knowledge being education's explicit business.'

Other research has confirmed the positive impact of teacher and school collaborations. Grant et. al. (2003) demonstrated that effective and supportive educational leadership allows teachers to learn from one another as they try new approaches and adapt their pedagogy. Harris and Chapman (2002) found that successful school leaders in disadvantaged schools are ones who ‘invest in teacher learning and build coherent communities in their schools.’ Cresswell (2004) researched cooperation among school staffs and concluded that, ‘effective schools have strong teacher collegiality and cooperative interactions’ with the sharing of resources and collective actions taken to address clearly identified issues.

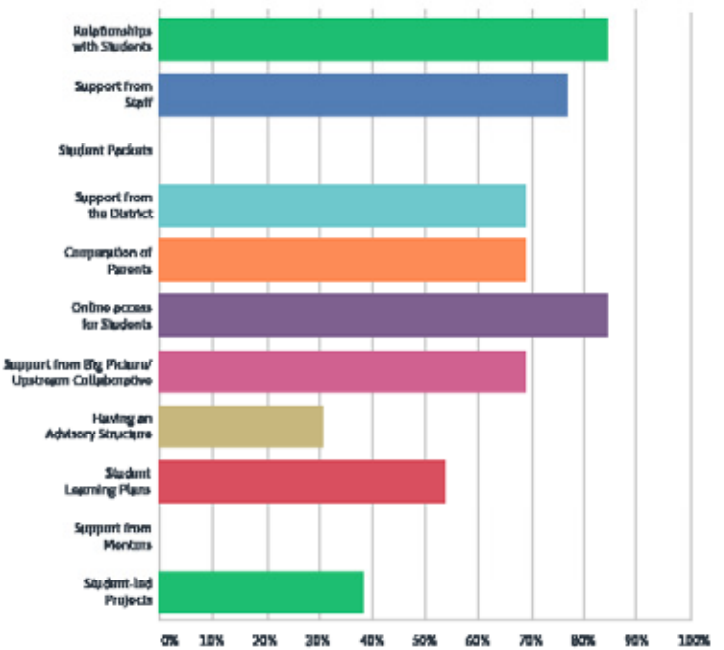
The outbreak of the coronavirus and the response of the schools has also indicated the impact that Upstream Collaborative has been having. UNESCO reported on the effects of the lockdown stating that, ‘by increasing social isolation, the pandemic also increased the risk of marginalized students disengaging further from education and leaving school early’ (UNESCO 2020, pp. 79-80). Although comprehensive figures are not available, the Upstream schools who participated in the lockdown survey in May 2020 (14 of the 35 schools) indicated that were maintaining regular and ongoing contact with the vast majority of their students throughout the lockdown. EdWeek reported that only 39% of surveyed teachers were interacting with the majority of their students daily as of April 8, only a 1% increase from March 25.

The literature on ‘education in emergencies’ (e.g. Burde et. al. 2017 and Mundy and Dryden-Peterson 2011) highlights that a key principle is providing students with a degree of normalcy and opportunities to share any fears, concerns or uncertainties with trusted adults. Since relationships are at the heart of Upstream school practices, they have been able to support students not just with their education but also with their social, emotional and mental health.

Graph 5 shows that ‘Relationships with students’ and ‘Online access for students’ were the biggest factors that have made things easier during lockdown. Graph 6 affirms this indicating that the two biggest things that have made lockdown difficult were ‘Difficulties connecting with students online’ and ‘Inability to provide social and emotional support to students.’ Interviews with Principals and teachers online conveyed the concern that staff have for their students, especially those few who remained out of contact or rarely communicated with the school. As Graph 7 shows, however, schools were able to maintain regular contact with the majority of their students.

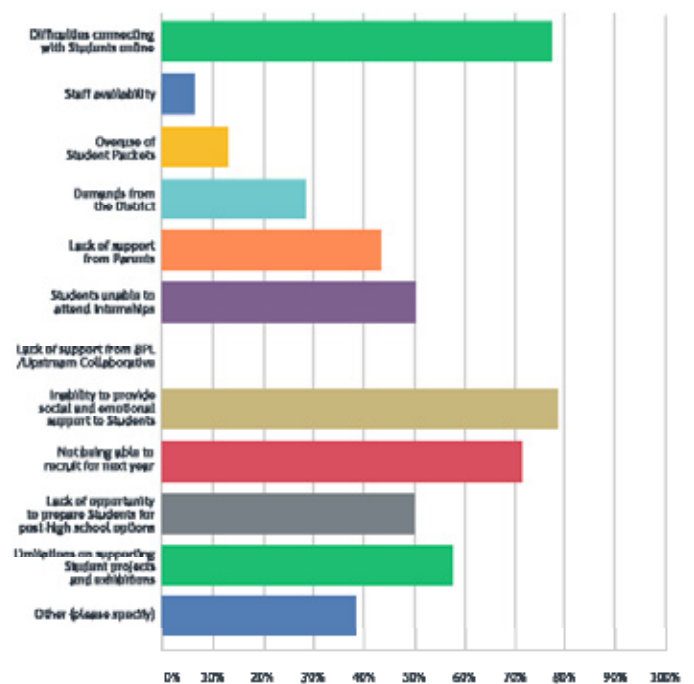
Graph 5

Please tick any of the following that have made things easier during the time of lockdown.



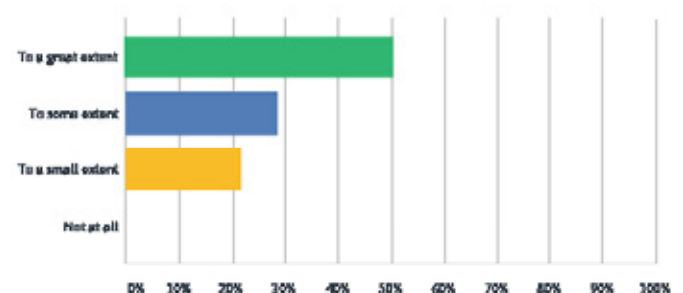
Graph 6

Please tick any of the following that have made things more difficult during the time of lockdown.



Graph 7

Since lockdown began in your school, how well have you been able to sustain regular contact with the majority of your students?



The variety and creativity of responses that Upstream schools made during the Covid crisis had a wider influence beyond their network. As mentioned earlier in the report, online collaborations and support were developed with other BPL schools in the United States and internationally. Concerns and problems were shared along with ideas, suggestions and practical resources. The strong student-teacher relationships in Upstream influenced a group of alternative schools in Ireland, called Youthreach, to adopt an advisory structure in response to lockdown. Youthreach serves students aged 15-23 who have left school with no qualifications. There are eleven Youthreach Centers in Dublin and nine of them decided to introduce advisories when the centers had to close. Those nine centers maintained nearly 100% contact with their students whereas the two centers that relied on subject teachers connecting with students to deliver classes only had contact with less than 15% of their students.

Closer to home, one of the Superintendents from a school District in California commented to an Upstream school Principal in the context of the pandemic that, 'the alternative has become the mainstream' and that 'We need to learn from you.' Data from other Principals reflect a growing influence. One Principal recalled the response of her District during a previous crisis. 'After the fire, we were at an all-District staff meeting and they said that we don't need to worry about the school but are to focus on the kids and relationships with them – yeah, we were already doing that but it validated how important the relationships are. I think the District saw that in focusing on the relationships, behaviour improved and school work improved. So they are seeing the benefits of what we are doing'.

A Principal in Washington said, 'I was amazed when the Superintendent said that "we have to follow the kids" ... they are finally getting it because they see the effect it is having here. And our school is being followed by other schools in the District on social media; they want to see what we're doing because the Sup (Superintendent) is talking about us'. A Principal of a Continuation school in California reported that, 'A few components have spread. The Comprehensive high school is doing some learning plans with certain students and they have introduced internships like ours.'

A different Principal remarked: 'We have had some struggles with the District – truth saying was

necessary. We said we want to be in front of the wave rather than under it. We have gone all in and are influencing the District.'

Upstream Collaborative now covers 40 schools in 28 school Districts in 2 states. All of the alternative education programs in Butte and Windsor Counties in California have a connection to the network and are served by it. In LAUSD there are connections with Directors, Superintendents, Board members and other District personnel who are advocating for the BPL design. One of the Regional Coordinators led a community of practice for six Continuation school Principals in LAUSD during lockdown.

The coaches have presented at a variety of conferences and seminars over the course of the year leading up to the lockdown. Their work has included a presentation at iNACOL the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (now the Aurora Institute) on equity and alternative education, and at the Big Picture Leadership Conference as part of a seminar on Educational Policy. Last year's report on the work of Upstream Collaborative, *Listening and Learning*, has been disseminated widely throughout the national and international Big Picture Learning network and was presented, in part, at the EnlightED international educational summit in Madrid. Upstream Collaborative has been mentioned in Forbes "11 Alternative Schools That Are Real Alternatives" by Tom Vander Ark (forbes.com). Upstream also featured as part of a Learning Policy Institute multi-year study on Big Picture Learning, *Spreading Relationships, Relevance and Rigor One Student at a Time*, by Bradley and Hernandez.

The work of Upstream Collaborative has continued to influence the thinking of Big Picture Learning both in terms of its approach to and lessons learned from coaching, and in regard to how BPL can continue to affect change in the educational system to bring about greater equity for students who are furthest from opportunity. Modelling and school visits have always been features of BPL coaching; however, the development of micro-convenings by Upstream Collaborative has been watched closely by BPL Regional Directors. Similar gatherings are planned for other BPL schools outside of the network. The Regional Directors see the micro-convening as a great way to create communities of practice and 'to catalyze the ability of experienced BPL staff to mentor and potentially coach newer staff and schools.'

BPL schools across the USA and internationally have primarily been established in areas of social and educational disadvantage with a strong value placed on addressing issues of equity and social injustice. It is a fact that the work of Upstream Collaborative has resulted in the largest growth in BPL schools in California and Washington. Upstream Collaborative has quickly made a significant impact on students, families, and communities in helping to create the conditions for students to (re)engage in their learning, pursue their interests, and to explore and experience a much wider range of educational and career options. BPL has been attracting the attention of more and more alternative schools and is now well placed with the experience and expertise of Upstream Collaborative to provide an established model to assist in redesigning schools for equity and excellence.

Interestingly, the Upstream coaches have developed a considerable online influence since the lockdown not only in their regions and across the BPL USA network, but also internationally. They have helped to influence the direction and developments of new BPL schools in Europe and one in Nairobi, Kenya. They have directly informed the coaching approach to the BPL school in Doncaster, UK and continue to engage in weekly online discussions with this wider network.

Upstream Collaborative has two Juvenile Halls within its network. These are Court Schools that serve school-aged youth who are residing in

court-supervised detention programs. Over the past year, these schools have become more creative in designing and facilitating internship opportunities as well as implementing learning plans and student exhibitions. The experience of these schools fed into a curriculum review of Oberstown Children Detention Campus in Ireland. Oberstown is in the process of redesigning its educational program and is drawing on the insights of Upstream Collaborative to inform some of its practices, including learning plans and internships.

The impact and influence of Upstream Collaborative has been deep, far and wide. As a network of alternative schools now made up of 40 schools across California and Washington, as a team of experienced coaches, and as a community of educators, Upstream is impacting on the lives of students and influencing the conversation on educational redesign and innovation.

One of the reasons why educational change and redesigning schools can be so difficult is because there are so many interconnected aspects to schooling. If one teacher in one school simply wants to introduce one new way of doing things in her classroom, there are issues about what happens to those things that would normally be done during that time, how to know if that change will be significantly and demonstrably better than what had been done, how that will affect students' learning in other classes and with other teachers, how that change will be measured or can it be measured at all within the existing forms of assessment.



Let's assume that the change makes a big difference to students and other teachers or the Principal decides that all the teachers should start doing that. How will training in the new practice be arranged and facilitated, what are the cost and schedule implications, what if certain teachers object to having to introduce the change or if parents are concerned that their student is missing out on what students in other schools are receiving?

Now if the change is not just a new technique or program but a fundamental shift in how the school operates that alters student-teacher relationships and the timetable, involves learning outside of school, requires students to drive their learning and connect their interests with mentors to do real-world projects, entails students having to prepare and present their learning in a public exhibition, and actively seeks to address issues relevant to the local community in regard to equity and justice, it is clear that such a change is a huge undertaking fraught with difficulties and potential opposition. Most changes, especially of the nature and scale to which we are referring, take a period of time to demonstrate their impact, effectiveness and success. Furthermore, schools are likely to move forward at different and varying paces encountering distinctive barriers and problems some of which have never been experienced before.

Since the start of this millennium, most industrialized countries have been attempting to implement wide-ranging and sweeping educational reforms; in the past ten years, this trend has emerged in developing countries as well. Commenting on the initiatives taken in industrialized countries, the OECD concluded that, 'although there was some real initial progress, these reforms have ultimately come up against a wall, or rather a ceiling, beyond which further progress seems impossible, leading increasing numbers of school administrators and educators to wonder whether schools do not need to be reformed but to be reinvented.' Upstream Collaborative would likely advise that what is needed is not reform or a reinvention but rather a redesign that incorporates the principles and practices that are helping to transform their schools.

Perhaps in response to the 'ceiling' that educational reform has encountered, there has been a strong push for schools to change in order to provide students with what has been termed '21st Century Skills' or '21st Century Learning.'



In the last decade, numerous reports, whitepapers, and well organized and well-funded education initiatives launched by non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations have appeared with the express purpose to reconceptualize education for the 21st century. These initiatives have come to be known generically as 21st century teaching and learning. Some of these initiatives represent partnerships between school districts, government departments, and education ministries with large multinational corporations, to shift education priorities to new learning goals and disrupt deeply embedded education structures initiated over a hundred years ago that are still foundational to current education practice. While diverse authors, reports, and agencies emphasize different skills, knowledge, and dispositions over others, most agree on the four C's of 21st century learning: Critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creative problem solving.

The literature suggests that there is an international consensus coalescing around the skills, competencies, and attributes it is believed young people will need to attain in order to meet the challenges of the world. Scott (2015), Voogt and Roblin (2010, 2012) and Chalkiadaki (2018) have demonstrated that there is a broad range of different attributes, competencies and skills that define '21st Century Skills' but there is little substantial evidence available on the most effective approaches to deliver those skills. A related issue is the extent to which such skills are of relevance to specific regional or national contexts, let alone particular communities or schools. The conclusion of most commentators is that there is a potential disconnect between particular understandings of '21st Century Skills' and their application.

This confusion or disconnect should not be surprising because educational systems once again are attempting to apply a fairly unclear and ill-defined set of skills to an entire cohort or generation of unique students from all different backgrounds with tremendously diverse interests, skills, aspirations, resources, needs and passions, and to prescribe a curriculum intended to teach these skills and competencies and then demonstrate they have been acquired through traditional forms of assessment and testing. It is of little wonder why so many countries, despite commitments and even high levels of funding, fall short of transferring policy into practices and practices into positive transformations in the lives of students (Care 2019, GPE 2020, Jukes and Sitabkhan 2020 and Schweisfurth 2020).



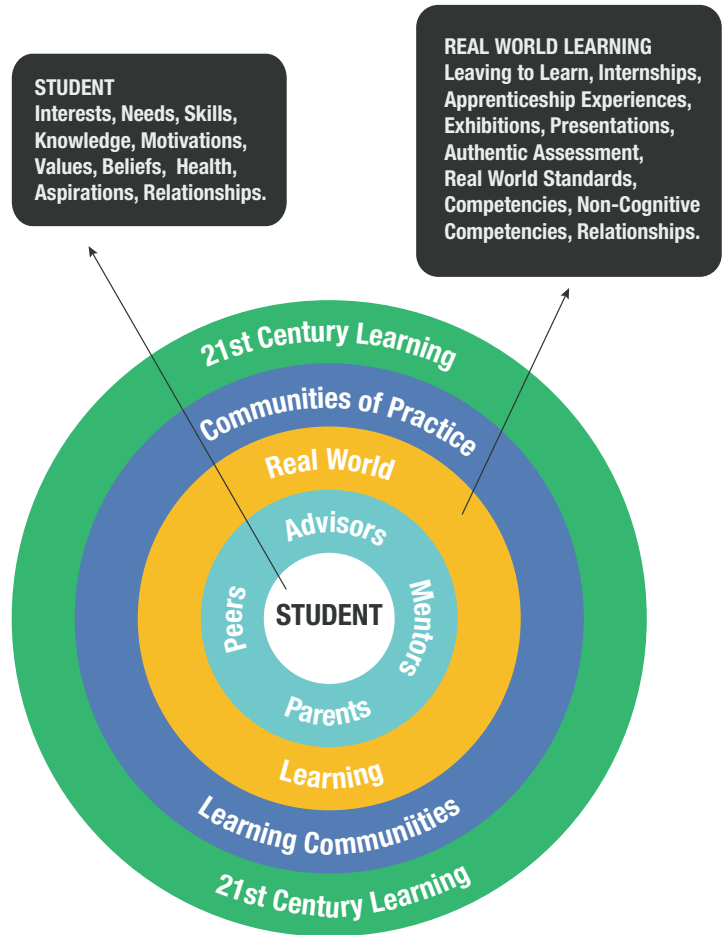
DIAGRAM 3

Diagram 3 shows the way that Upstream Collaborative is providing for these 21st Century skills in whatever way they are defined by allowing the students to drive their learning. The diagram shows that there is nested support for building on these learning opportunities for students that grow out from and develop their interests, needs, and competencies. This approach is always flexible and responsive to the student and to changing contexts, unforeseen difficulties, and emergent issues, such as a global pandemic, a personal crisis or a unique opportunity for learning.

One of the persistent challenges that so often stops educational reform in its tracks is the dominant model of educational assessment and examinations. Examinations are seen as the method of proving that an educational change is working, and few if any new pedagogies or approaches will be allowed to become widespread if it is perceived that the learning they are intended to bring about cannot be measured. On the surface, this seems a fair, reasonable, and a responsible position to adopt as an administrator or policy-maker; however, if on the same token one is seeking to develop new skills, competencies and attributes (e.g. 21st Century skills), it is quite possible that the modes of assessment may need to differ to measure whether or not these skills have been acquired or mastered.

One of the distinctive forms of assessment that BPL and Upstream Collaborative have used and rely on is student exhibitions or presentations of learning. Students are assessed by these public displays of learning that track growth and progress in the student's area of interest. Assessment criteria are individualized to the student and the real world standards of a project or pursuit. Students present multiple exhibitions each year and discuss their learning growth with staff, parents, peers, and mentors, so that it can be adequately and accurately assessed.

As part of the research, I attended student exhibitions in person and online (following school closures due to Covid-19). Student presentations of learning are often public and do not only take place in school but can be done at a student's internship site, at a different educational or District facility, or, during the Spring of 2020, from students' homes. Some of the exhibitions I attended had other outside guests present – members of the school Board/COE/District, an interested educator from a different school, a former Principal of the school, or one of the Upstream Collaborative coaches.



Student exhibitions cover the four C's of 21st Century skills and learning because the students have to draw on a number of important competencies in order to deliver their presentation – preparation and planning, organizational skills, communication, dealing with difficulties and problem solving, critical thinking and responding to questions, listening to feedback, and often collaborating with others. Student exhibitions do provide an innovative indicator of student learning that is not just measurable but also is useful for continued learning; advisors incorporate the feedback and outcomes from exhibitions into new learning goals. Following an exhibition, learning plans are updated and often enhanced, modified, and expanded based on the progress that a student has demonstrated.

Another benefit of student exhibitions is that they often display the culture and practices of the school. Students describe how and what they have been doing, how they found and arranged an internship, what they have learned, who they have worked with, and how it all fits into their learning plan and their longer term goals or their progress towards graduation. Upstream Collaborative schools have been seeking to influence educational policy on assessments and compliance, and student exhibitions provide a solid base to demonstrate student learning, competencies, and career and post high school readiness.

Connected to student exhibitions, Upstream Collaborative has been working with a few of its schools to develop and pilot Innovative Indicators of student learning that they believe better reflect the skills, abilities, competencies and non-cognitive competencies that students have attained while driving their learning, pursuing their interests, and engaging in real-world work and experiences. BPL and Upstream Collaborative have been developing a number of Innovative Indicators of student learning because they are aware that many of the standard measures of student learning are either inadequate, too limited or would benefit from complementary forms of assessment.

For the Innovative Indicators that Upstream Collaborative has been developing, the acronym MAPS (Multiple Assessment Profile of Students) has been adopted to develop innovative ways to assess student learning and to see how well schools are helping students to learn. MAPS conveys the idea that every student has her or his own learning journey to embark upon as they move through school and life. It is therefore important to know where each student is (YOU ARE HERE) which means that relationships are central to understanding and being able to provide a relevant assessment. Knowing a student (where they are on the

map) provides the foundation needed to help them to learn, to identify their needs and abilities and interests and strengths and challenges. This relationship is not simply to establish where a student is educationally. Relationships are often the key to unlocking potential.

Traditionally, schools are focused on examinations, and testing can be adequate to indicate 'what' a student learns; however, there are limitations to what standardized testing demonstrates in regard to learning. In general, tests show 'what a student knows at the time of a test' but they do not and often cannot indicate 'what a student has learned' or 'what competencies and skills they have acquired'. Take, for example, a student whose mother is Spanish and he was brought up speaking Spanish. If this student takes a test in Spanish it may well show that he knows the language at a certain level, but it in no way shows 'what' he has learned from his Spanish classes in school. He may have learned nothing in his class, but he might have scored the highest grade.

This discrepancy is more obvious in the example of a foreign language, but it actually applies to any subject. If I have a passion for reading or calculating or figuring out how things work, I may do extremely well in a particular school test but, if you do not know me (where I am starting from) this is likely to tell you very little about what I have learned and nothing about how, where, when and to what extent I learn.

If I come from a volatile household or have had little or no support in my school learning, I may have learned a great deal in school but my test results may only indicate that I have merely passed a test. The Innovative Indicators are intended to provide a much broader understanding of who a student is, what and how they learn, what competencies, skills, and attributes they possess or need to develop, and how ready they are to further their learning and develop in the direction where they wish to go.

The Innovative Indicators (see Appendix) involve insights from the wider school community, students' families, local employers and post high school institutions as well as from students themselves. They are only at a developmental stage but offer a fresh and distinctive means to assess and support student learning. In the face of the current pandemic, many schools, school Districts and educational systems are struggling to respond adequately to the situation, especially in regard to testing, examinations, and certifications. It is not only a question of how will students learn, but are the normal tests and forms of assessment useful and relevant in this situation?

CASE STUDY 4 - THE PROMISE CENTER

The Promise Center is a Community school that also offers Career and Technical Education. It began with Upstream Collaborative just over two years ago spearheaded by an Assistant Superintendent who was 'completely supportive, loved Big Picture and stuck by us every step of the way until she moved to another District' (where she encouraged another alternative school to join Upstream Collaborative). The Promise Center still struggles to 'get all the staff on board' but it has seen some of the more reluctant teachers 'recognize the benefits of what we've created after the school went into lockdown.'

We are stronger during this time. We have more one-to-one with students and weekly contact online. Our LTIs (interest exploration and internships) are still working. Covid has elevated the one-to-one connection with students. It has been an opportunity to have students do LTI interests and the staff are connecting those with core standards and giving credits for their learning. Students are learning so much now through their interests, about managing a household, designing and doing projects, looking for jobs.

Advisors are connecting core learning to student projects. I have been thinking about skills we want our graduates to have and connecting those with the projects students have been doing. Some of the content areas are in silos but Covid has pushed the staff to see connections and to see better how BPL works. One thing I would do different if we were starting again is I would implement Leaving to Learn much more than other elements of BPL. The most impactful learning, the stuff that kids highlight in their exhibitions is their Leaving to Learn stuff.



The school is still transitioning to advisories and a fair bit of the school schedule involves classroom teaching. 'We see the CTE (Career and Technical Education) staff as mentors to the students and the core teachers are the advisors. The combination of CTE with Core Content is challenging. For students who have a real interest in a trade, they view CTE staff as mentors, others see them as teachers. The content areas are still in silos to an extent and there is still a distinction between traditional school and BPL.'

Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Promise Center had been making progress in certain areas and this seemed to be the result of more contact with the Upstream coach. 'On-site coaching has been critical to pressing forward. As a leader, it's great for staff to hear the same language and to have the principles and practices reinforced and for staff to be challenged.' Another administrator agreed saying, 'You need an intermediary to experience significant change in a school. With coaching, you have the validation of the whole Big Picture network. Our previous efforts to do some things similar to BPL weren't really working. Having an accountability partner also helps. Overall, it's the mind-set of adults that has to be addressed.'

Since the Assistant Superintendent left, the Principal said, 'The District just lets us do our own thing. It's a big District and Alt Ed is a lower priority for them. We are not really know by our district. Our Board is very supportive. They respond to all our invitations; they love the kids and the program options.'

The school has experienced two different Upstream Collaborative coaches since they became a member of the network and have found both to be 'excellent.' It was said that the coaches' styles were different but both were 'very personable with staff' and 'very patient.'

Building relationships and connections with the staff were seen as necessary to address mind-sets, and they appreciated how each coach was able to work at the school's pace. 'Flexible' and 'empathetic' were used to describe the coaches. The school liked that when the coach is planning for PD, 'they take our views into account and craft the experience around them.' A number of teachers remarked that, 'each time PD finishes we are left with an action' and they liked having something clear cut to work on and, importantly that the coach holds them to account. 'It's not that they fly in and do something like a motivational speaker and you never see them again. You can ask them stuff if you're struggling and when you see them again they are asking how this and that are going and what's working and what have we learned.'

One of the administrators offered an interesting insight that depicted the coaching of Upstream Collaborative. 'They are navigators. He navigates the needs of our team. What we say sometimes isn't what we believe, so he discerns, asks and challenges us. When a school is trying to change, you need intermediaries to give momentum, to keep you on course. They are navigators. We are steering the ship or driving the work but they are there to guide us.' Because the coaches have been leaders in their own schools and bring a wealth of experience, they are able to 'show the way' and work with credibility in the schools. The Principal acknowledged that the coaching 'has helped me by changing my attitude. There is a sense of urgency for change. I see that I can't do it myself and we need to work together. We don't yet have a shared vision – the coaching helps with this. I have been learning how to work with adults.'



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The educator has the duty of not being neutral – Paolo Freire

The vision of BPL and Upstream Collaborative is to help and coach schools to transform so students, who historically have not performed well academically, will flourish, be honored and valued, and have widening opportunities to pursue their interests and talents. For schools that share the vision and want to be a part of the network, a serious commitment is required which entails the implementation of asset-based pedagogical practices that enable student-driven learning, outside of school learning, and student exhibitions/presentations of learning. School leaders commit to learning and participating in the micro-convenings, ongoing PD, and connecting with the coaches and other colleagues.

All the schools in the collaborative with the exception of the five new schools that joined in the spring of 2020, have made good and healthy strides in redesigning better schools with distinctive practices for their young people. The success of the network can be clearly seen in the fact that despite all the disruption surrounding Covid-19, the work of Upstream Collaborative and its schools has not stalled and, to a large extent, the lockdown has revealed many of the strengths of the network in equipping and engaging learners, in building the capacity of educators and in fostering creative and responsive leadership for equity.

Overall, the work of Upstream Collaborative is on track with burgeoning and exciting prospects for deepening its impact and expanding into more schools and Districts. The coaches have developed and maintained strong partnership relationships with school leaders and with the school communities. A diverse range of communities of practice that formed throughout the year have come together and grown even more during the pandemic. The advisory structure and healthy teacher-student relationships have helped greatly to address and weather the separation, isolation, and trauma of students arising from the coronavirus and the civil unrest that escalated in the spring.

Notwithstanding the exceptional circumstances brought about by Covid-19, the goal of Upstream Collaborative has remained the same – to make

schools more equitable for students furthest from access and opportunity. In the face of inequities and injustices, educators do not serve the situation well by being neutral or passive. Upstream Collaborative articulated clearly its commitment to justice. The 'communities of practice' that have grown in the network have been reframed as 'communities of justice' that have been challenging the strictly online learning offerings advocated by Districts and COEs while emphasizing relationships, advisory structure, and presentations of learning that students have been doing outside of school. Upstream has supported its schools to make content relevant to the situation and circumstances of each learner.

Upstream Collaborative is working along similar lines to Big Picture Learning as an organization; each is engaging in a process of reflection on their work to see how the '10 Distinguishers' can serve as leverage to bring about greater social justice, equity and anti-racist attitudes and behaviors. Personal learning plans, for example, are being viewed as a tool that all schools can employ that not only provide a good and solid pedagogy but also act, by centering on each individual, as a mode for justice and anti-racism. Upstream and BPL will continue to assess and identify their principles and practices for the ways they can catalyze and nurture action to redress injustices and embed equity within education and across their school communities.

Both Upstream Collaborative and BPL are considering how best to deepen and expand collaboration and support among school practitioners, and they are thinking beyond their own networks, making connections with school Districts, and leveraging those relationships to link in with other schools. The experience and learning achieved by Upstream Collaborative over the past three years in CA and WA provides an excellent resource for BPL to make use of within its realms of influence across the USA and beyond. There is a need for the Upstream coaches to share their practices with the Executive and Regional Directors of BPL, especially in relation to the success they have had with micro-convenings and generating communities of practice. Upstream has learned that school change requires relationships - intentionally building alliances, coalitions, and strong partnerships.

For the forthcoming school year, plans are in the making to create a network of practitioners from Upstream schools, other BPL schools and any other schools that are interested in the principles and-practices that have been used to engage learners,

address equity, and expand learning experiences. Given the likelihood that students in CA and WA will not be returning to school in a normal or regular capacity, there is a pressing need for clear and educationally sound responses. Upstream Collaborative is well placed to lead in this area, and there is great potential for having a broader impact and a wider influence.

During the pandemic, observers have noted minimal and uneven participation rates among certain students, particularly those who lack access to learning platforms and resources. Because learning platforms, in general, do not encourage social interaction among children who are studying at home, there are further challenges to motivate students. If the continuing pandemic results in learners being separated from their fellow students and school for longer periods of time, it will be imperative for educational systems to figure out how to foster learning that is relevant and can be supported and enhanced at a distance. Will teachers be able to mediate students' learning and can households support learning at home for prolonged periods? Will schools be able to facilitate activities that not only enrich learning but also promote positive social and emotional skills and well-being? Upstream Collaborative has answers to these questions, and it is in a position to offer tried and tested approaches with the coaching experience necessary to help implement them.

In regard to the time it would take schools to implement the principles and practices that Upstream Collaborative has been cultivating in its network, this is not an over-night process. Upstream has learned that it is a multi-year effort; however, this does not mean that it takes three years to have an impact and to benefit learners. In fact, the effect on students can be immediate, but for those practices to become embedded in a school there is a need for time and patience.

There is no typical pattern to the type of school change and redesign that Upstream offers. If schools ambitiously implement new practices in year one, years two and three tend to force them to slow down and refine these new practices, to 'unpack' their learning, and to learn with staff from other schools. If a school starts slowly, there are often cultural or staff challenges that require attention or act as roadblocks to establishing new practices.



One firm conclusion from this research is that every school has a unique character that has to be taken into account when introducing and implementing a new design with different approaches and a transformation of roles and relationships. To state the obvious, schools are made up of people who, by nature, possess different abilities, experiences, perspectives, needs and understandings. Therefore, it seems that the best way to enact change that will be understood, accepted, implemented and sustained, is to approach and engage with schools on a one-school-at-a-time basis, and then one-district-at-a-time and one-county-office-of-education-at-a-time.

In year three, Upstream Collaborative has grown to 40 schools – only 40 schools – BUT in the same breath that is 40 schools with 40 different Principals, many with Assistant Principals, hundreds of school staff, hundreds of students and of parents plus mentors and other adults interacting with the school. Each school has its own location, building, neighborhood, relationship to its District, particular history and dynamics. Of the 40 schools, they are of many different types from Continuation Schools, Independent Learning Centers, Juvenile Halls and so on. They are all schools charged with supporting the education of young people with some, if not many things, in common, similar and shared; however, when they are described individually, it is clear that there are abundant differences amongst them and that when it comes to introducing changes in their school culture, design and approaches to learning, it would seem misguided to attempt to do the same thing with each of them and expect the same or even similar results.

The ethnic make-up students or the socio-economic location of the school or the experience and talents of teachers or the leadership style of the Principal – ANY of these characteristics and several more would justify a personal and tailored approach to working with any school on curriculum development; yet so often school change is introduced as a WAY that can be learned simply by teachers attending some Professional Development training. This is not to demean or diminish the importance and usefulness of PD, but for so many years there has been insufficient time and funding provided for the lessons from PD to be sustained and developed in school in order to have a significant impact on school culture.

Over the past 15 years, there has been general consensus on what makes for successful PD. Harris' (2007), for example, reviewed PD programs and

showed that there is a combination of factors that make for successful PD, and these align completely with how Upstream Collaborative does its work.

- **Conducted in school settings**
- **Linked to school-wide change efforts**
- **Teacher planned and teacher assisted**
- **Provides differentiated learning opportunities for participants**
- **Focused on teacher-chosen goals and activities**
- **Exhibits a pattern of demonstration-trial-feedback**
- **Includes concrete goals and instruction**
- **Ongoing over time**
- **Provides for ongoing assistance and support on call**

Policy-makers and educators often fail to or do not adequately take this information into account when they attempt to bring about change, because they take a general rather than a specific approach. The intention behind their work is seen to make sense because it appears to be efficient and fair. On paper, it seems cost-effective and time-efficient to introduce school change by establishing training for teachers, delivering this across a number of schools and then rolling out the changes in a way that can be evaluated with established indicators and criteria assessed against stated aims and objectives. It is a simple and understandable input-output model that does work for some initiatives, but for the type and depth of school cultural changes that Upstream Collaborative is working with schools to implement, such an approach would be inadequate. How the coaches have interacted with schools has made all the difference.

It is the case that this pandemic does present an unusual opportunity for educators to influence policy and possibly bring about important systemic change not just around assessment but in the principles and practices that guide learning and schooling. In considering how Upstream Collaborative can influence educational policy and assist in the transformation of schooling for equity, it may be useful to draw on the approach to policy put forward by the sociologist Carol Bacchi.

What is distinctive in Bacchi's approach is that she does not focus on how policies address issues or seek to solve problems; instead, she is attentive to how problems are conceived and how something becomes named as a problem. Bacchi examines the 'problematizing process' of policies, in other words, she has moved from looking at 'What is the problem' to 'What is the Problem Represented to be (WPR).' By concentrating on how certain behaviors or outcomes are problematized, she highlights how policies and their proposed solutions consist of assumptions that are made in the problematizing process; for example, if the problem is seen as 'low graduation rates' then attention and funding may be directed towards simply making sure students get enough credits to graduate irrespective of the impact on student learning and the development of useful competencies or if it actually limits or inhibits their learning and development.

Bacchi (1999) asserts that by probing into 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' in policies, the analyst can identify how they are conceived, what things are not problematized and what are the effects of the problem representations. The WPR approach helps to identify the built-in assumptions and biases of policies because it starts from the view that a policy (what one proposes to do about something) displays what is thought to be problematic, what needs to be reformed, altered or changed. The policy reveals not only what is seen to be the problem but also what is not problematic.

For Upstream Collaborative, the following questions may be worthwhile considering when seeking to influence or change educational policies.

- 1. What is left unproblematic in the problem representation? What are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?**
- 2. What effects are produced by the representation of the 'problem'?**
- 3. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended?**
- 4. How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?**

Grades, tests, and exams ultimately can be the strongest determinants of how schools are structured, what students learn, and how they experience education. Upstream Collaborative is showing different ways to design schools and demonstrating their effectiveness. If the WPR remains focused on test results, graduation rates, and percentages of students going to four-year colleges, then, for example, lack of relevant competencies and '21st century skills' may remain 'unproblematic', and there will be 'silences' about the quality and depth of student learning experiences, and less attention given to equity and justice.





As Upstream Collaborative continues to develop, refine, and expand its use of 'innovative indicators' of student learning, it will be able to question, disrupt, and ultimately contribute to the replacement of the standardized forms of assessment. The leverage and reputation that has been created by Upstream with Districts and COEs can be used to form policy-level alliances and coalitions which in turn may be able to 'problematize' the ways that authentic learning and student potential are overlooked, or at least they may help to have the current 'problems' thought about differently.

'Status quo'. Latin for the mess we're in.
- Jeve Moorman

In the present climate amidst the coronavirus pandemic, commentators speak of the unprecedented and (incorrectly) of the 'new normal'. There is yet to be a new normal because the situation we have been in thus far has simply been abnormal, and therefore there is uncertainty and ambiguity. It is hard to tell if the status quo can be returned to and maintained. Schooling, in the medium term, will not be normal. For some, this reality is daunting and a cause of worry and anxiety. For others, this is a time of excitement, opportunity, and possibility. For many, it is a matter of 'wait and see, hope for the best and make do with what we have'.

For BPL and Upstream Collaborative, the focus is not on the status quo but on status mutatio (educational change). Covid-19 has not slowed Upstream Collaborative down. Indeed, its online collaboration has expanded massively with regular contact occurring between Principals, Advisors and LTI Coordinators, and Coach-Practitioners. As covered in this report, the coach-practitioners' engagement has spawned an international connection which in turn has an off-shoot with students connecting with each other from all over the world. These online

communities have a solid foundation and will continue regardless of whether people return to a customary school schedule. This is the direct consequence of the relationships, foresight, principles, and practices generated by the Upstream coaches.

It will be interesting to observe how the online Upstream collaborations develop in the new school year. It would seem wise to maintain the regional connections in order to further those relationships and the benefits they bring to participants. Equally, since a school's location is not a barrier to online communication, Upstream Collaborative should seek to expand the potential of what it has created through its micro-convenings and develop wider networks of connection both within its own schools as well as across other schools.

Upstream Collaborative has continued on its journey of redesigning and supporting schools, and it is planning to grow and deepen its work both within the network and with new and different schools and Districts. Upstream has, to some degree, been preparing for significant growth by identifying and equipping coach practitioners, and through creating communities of practice and communities of justice. There are multiple paths to be explored in this process, but the work of Upstream to date suggests that it is building a solid foundation that can accommodate rapid growth and expansion.

Every great organization tends to be characterized by two complementary and sometimes simultaneous actions – preserving its core (the distinguishers) and stimulating development with flexibility. A clear set of core values and a defined purpose drive sustainable growth when these are fixed and also when the operating practices, norms, processes, methods, structures, and guidelines are flexible and

can be adapted to respond to changing realities. As Jim Collins observed 20 years ago, “Indeed, the great paradox of change is that the organizations that best adapt to a changing world first and foremost know what should not change; they have a fixed anchor of guiding principles around which they can more easily change everything else”. He went on to say:

*No matter how much the world and its organizing structures change, people still have a fundamental need to belong to something they can feel proud of. They have a fundamental need for guiding values and a sense of purpose that give their lives and work meaning. They have a fundamental need for connection to other people, sharing with them beliefs and aspirations to form a common bond. More than at any time in the past, people will demand operating autonomy—freedom plus responsibility—and will simultaneously demand that the organizations they are part of **stand** for something.*

Upstream Collaborative stands for equity and justice in education. It has developed a refined and flexible approach to redesigning schools that builds from the strength of BPL principles and practices. The coaches have helped transform the schools in their network and in so doing are contributing to the transformation of the lives of students who are farthest from opportunity. Their impact after only three years has been significant in California and Washington in their break-through work in alternative education. The influence of Upstream Collaborative is already beginning to show in school Districts, on the BPL organization, and increasingly across the wider educational system.

Upstream Collaborative does not work from a set ‘theory of change’ or a codified strategy for growth

and expansion; however, the focus of the network is on spreading its impact and influence. The coaches do not work to a linear, sequential step-by-step process but are concerned with organic growth and development. Getting schools to implement and adopt BPL principles and practices is not a terminal item or point. Redesigning schools requires an ongoing adoption process, varying according to practice and the individual schools, staff, and students.

Help, information, and support are sought at different times from different sources, and for different reasons; these are sought before and after adoption. In general, information ‘about’ is looked for at the beginning along with ‘why’. Information on ‘how’ is pursued during the adoption - how to implement a new practice or idea. After adoption, schools seek information that gives support for the new practice that has been adopted to reduce dissonance which arises from the fact that this is a new way for the school with implications for culture and relationships.

As articulated in a 2019 report featuring BPL entitled *Deeper Learning: Taking Student Centered Learning and Equity to Scale*, “They are driven by their commitments to deeper learning and to spreading practices, norms, and beliefs grounded in equity. ... and rethinking the structures surrounding teachers’ work, the use of time in schools, and the ways in which students demonstrate their progress. Each of the networks continuously collaborate with a wide range of local stakeholders to instantiate its model, working to ensure that its schools are responsive to local needs and communities”. Upstream not only has been taking the same approach but it now is showing the way in how to redesign alternative schools, create communities of practice and justice, enliven educational leadership, and move schools and communities towards greater equity.



APPENDIX

10 DISTINGUISHERS

Big Picture Learning schools exist throughout the country and the world. They are in rural environments and urban environments. They serve both large and small populations of students. Some Big Picture schools exist in gleaming new buildings, while some can be found in retrofitted structures which haven't been in use for some time. In short, Big Picture schools (like the students they serve) often look dramatically different than one another. Each is its own unique environment where students can flourish as individuals within a community of learners. However, there are many elements within our learning design that are uncommon and distinct, which pull our network together and distinguish them from most other schools.

ONE STUDENT AT A TIME - The entire learning experience is personalized to each student's interests, talents and needs. Personalization expands beyond mere academic work and involves looking at each student holistically.

ADVISORY STRUCTURE - Advisory is the core organizational and relational structure of a Big Picture Learning school, its heart and soul, often described as a "second family" by students. Students stay with an advisor and a group of fellow classmates for four years, building close personal relationships that last a lifetime.

LEARNING THROUGH INTERESTS AND INTERNSHIPS (LTIs) - Real world learning is best accomplished in the real world. Big Picture students intern--often twice a week for an entire school day--with experts in their field of interest, completing authentic projects and gaining experience and exposure to how their interests intersect with the real world.

PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT - Parents are welcome and valued members of the school community and play a proactive role in their children's learning, collaborating in the planning and assessment of student work. They use their assets to support the work of the school, and often play an integral role in building relationships with potential LTI mentors.

SCHOOL CULTURE - In Big Picture schools, there is palpable trust, respect and equality between and among students and adults. Students take leadership roles in the school, and teamwork defines the adult culture. Student voice is valued in the school decision making process and visitors are struck by the ease with which students interact with adults.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT - Students are assessed not by tests, but by public displays of learning that track growth and progress in the student's area of interest. Assessment criteria are individualized to the student and the real world standards of a project. Students present multiple exhibitions each year and discuss their learning growth with staff, parents, peers, and mentors.

10 DISTINGUISHERS (CONTINUED)

SCHOOL ORGANIZATION - Schools are organized around a culture of collaboration and communication. They are not bound by the structures of buildings, schedules, bells, or calendars. There is an interdependence between school and community.

LEADERSHIP - Leadership is shared and spread between a strong, visionary principal; a dedicated, responsible team of advisors and other staff; and students. The community functions as a democracy. A pervasive sense of shared ownership drives a positive culture dedicated to ongoing improvement.

POST-SECONDARY PLANNING - Students develop plans that contribute to their future success--be it through college, trades, schools, travel, the military, or the workforce.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - Regular advisor PD is conducted at each school by principals, other school staff, and BPL staff and coaches. A Big Picture School is a community of lifelong learners who embrace continuous improvement.

INNOVATIVE INDICATORS

In Upstream Collaborative/Big Picture Learning, we have been developing a number of 'innovative indicators' of student learning because we are aware that many of the standard measures of student learning are either inadequate, too limited or would benefit from complementary forms of assessment.

We want you to pilot some or all of these in your school where you think they will be relevant and helpful. You should treat the 'innovative indicators' listed in this pack as 'drafts' or 'in process'. We want you to use them in your schools but in ways that work for you and your learners, so feel free to adapt them, add to them or use them in other ways than we are suggesting.

Our primary purpose here is to learn how you might make use of them and to see if it might be practicable and feasible to use them more widely to assess student learning and, perhaps, to have them recognized by Districts or States as sufficient measures in their own right.

You are free to use all of these, some of them or just one. If you think that none of them would be useful to you, that is also helpful information for us and we would be grateful if you could let us know why.

Please be aware that Scott Boldt is available to assist you with these in a variety of ways. If you are unclear or want to talk through how you might use them, please contact him at greenowl@bigpicturelearning.org.

Equally, if you need Scott to develop them for you or to draft a survey that you can use, do not hesitate to ask.

Each page can be downloaded individually, if you want to print it out to distribute or if you want to send as an email attachment. They can also be copied and pasted into programs such as Survey Monkey, if you want to use them online. If you have any difficulties or want Scott to set up a survey for you, please contact him directly.

After piloting any these, Scott will be in contact (online or by email) to find out about your experience and to learn how helpful or otherwise they were, how they can be improved and how you might use them in the future.

All the data collected will be anonymous, and Scott will be available to compile your findings and present them to you.

We are excited about the prospects of learning from your experience and developing these further so that we can better assess the learning of students.

STUDENT SCHOOL REVIEW

Please rank your school (1 excellent, 2 good, 3 average, 4 poor, 5 terrible) for each category.

	1	2	3	4	5
School reception and welcome	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your sense of belonging to the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for you to pursue your interests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being recognized for your talents and abilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Help with understanding / dealing with prejudice or discrimination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting a realistic view of your abilities and potential	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for you to be creative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Supporting you with internships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connecting with the local community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Help in getting more knowledge in a field or job you are interested in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to be a leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Availability of a strong support person	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Focusing on your long range goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for out-of-school learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connecting with your family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

COMPARATIVE DATA

- 1** Report number and percentage of students by class year who publicly exhibited their interest-based work to students, school staff and outside persons (e.g. family, mentors, visitors).
- 2** Over a six month period, report number and percentage of students who have done Shadow Days AND Leaving to Learn AND an internship (must be more than 6 days). Report by class year, gender and ethnicity.
- 3** Report number and percentage of students doing Leaving to Learn or Internships AND receiving credit for them as part of their program of study. Report by class year, gender and ethnicity.
- 4** State credits earned by students and their GPAs in previous school (or in previous 6 months) to credits earned and GPA in present school.
- 5** Report number and percentage of students with a Learning Plan that contains long-term goals (i.e. goals that extend beyond one full academic year).
- 6** Look at the long-term goals/exit plans for Seniors and see if you can identify any patterns or trends specifically relating to gender and ethnicity .



78.2%

STUDENT SURVEY

Please rank how likely you are to recommend your school to each of the following (1 = very likely, 2 = likely, 3 = neither, 4 = unlikely and 5 = very unlikely).

	1	2	3	4	5
A friend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone in your previous school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A younger sister or brother	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The son or daughter of the wealthiest person in town	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A person who has just dropped out of school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone who doesn't feel like they fit into their own school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

CHARACTER REFERENCE

Ask a mentor or a member of staff who is not a student's Advisor to write a character reference for a student they know well.

Here is a template that can be used/modified.

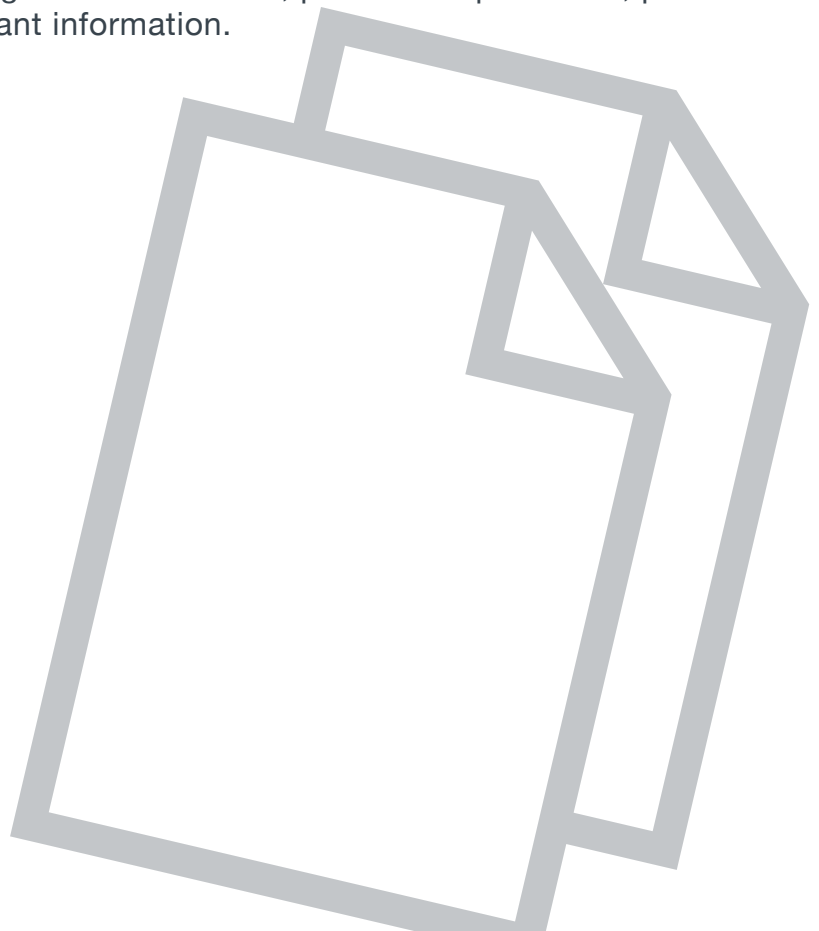
To Whom It May Concern,

It is my pleasure and honor to recommend [Name of Student] to you. I have known [Student] for [X months/years] and was delighted to serve as [advisor/Principal, LTI, mentor, school support staff, etc.] at [Your School]. Since I have known him/her, [Student] has demonstrated [skills/abilities, attitudesbehavior, creativity/initiative, etc.] on multiple occasions, for example ... In particular, [example showcasing aforementioned achievement].

On a personal level, [Student] is a young [woman/man] of strong character who Specifically, I was impressed by her/his [2-3 positive personality traits]. When scenario/challenge/situation/etc.] he/she [performed X action displaying aforementioned personality trait.]

I have no doubt she/he will .. and has the potential to Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding his/her character, practical experiences, past academic work, or any other relevant information.

Sincerely,



HOME SURVEY

1. Write down 3 words to describe how your student is doing in school.

2. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the most excited), please circle how excited your student is about learning?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Please describe any differences you notice in your student's

a. attitude to school

b. attitude to work

c. attitude towards her or his future

d. attitude to learning

HOME SURVEY

4. How much time (a lot, a little or none) OR how many hours per week does your student spend doing school related work?

5. How often does your student talk about something that he or she has learned (a lot, a little or none)?

6. Has any of your student's interests changed or deepened recently? Explain.

7. What does your student spend the most time doing (apart from sleep) when not in school?

8. Does your student have many involvements in other activities? Please describe.

9. Does your student have a strong support person outside of the family and school? Describe.

10. What evidence do you have that your student is learning?

EMPLOYERS' QUESTIONS

Convene a gathering or conduct a survey of local employers on 'what skills, qualities and abilities that they have found lacking in recent recruits'.

Compile their responses into a set of skills/competencies AND compare them to the Learning Goals of the school AND with a sample of student Learning Goals from their Learning Plans.



**NOW
HIRING**

POST HIGH SCHOOL QUESTIONS

Convene a gathering or conduct a survey of post high school educators/administrators on 'the skills, abilities and qualities that they have found lacking in new students'.

Compile their responses into a set of skills/competencies AND compare them to the school's practices and goals AND to student Learning Plans.



LEARNING LOOK STUDENT FOCUSED

Invite school district officials, politicians, principals/teachers from students' former schools, local educators and employers, artists and community activists, and/or other selected individuals to a Student Focused Learning Look day. A Student Focused Learning Look day is an opportunity for outside individuals not connected with the school to visit and assess the learning of specific students.

Visitors will agree to spend two hours in the school and to meet with a maximum of three students. Visitors will spend approximately one hour getting a tour of the school from the student(s) they will be assessing. Then each student will spend 15 minutes with a minimum of 2 visitors having a focused conversation about learning. The student will make available examples of work, projects, internships, and interests.

During a Learning Look day, visitors will be free to roam around the school and to talk with school staff and other students. They may wish to sit in on learning activities or to examine their students' learning examples in more detail.

After attending a Student Focused Learning Look, visitors are requested to write up a narrative of their experience and insights.

Individual schools may wish to provide a template or specific areas/questions that they would like visitors to focus on for each student or for their students in general.



LEARNING LOOK WHOLE SCHOOL

Invite school district officials, politicians, principals/teachers from students' former schools, local educators and employers, artists and community activists, and/or other selected individuals to two specified Learning Look days.

A Learning Look day is an opportunity for someone not connected with the school to visit and assess learning (i.e. to have a look at learning). People may spend the whole day in the school or drop in for an hour or more. While present, they are free to sit in at any learning activity and to speak to any student or member of staff.

During a Learning Look day, there may be 3 assembly gatherings (morning, lunch, afternoon). At the morning and afternoon gatherings, students will present some significant learning they have achieved during their time in school. This may focus on a specific accomplishment or project OR relate to their overall learning. The students who present in the morning will be different to those students who present in the afternoon.

At lunch time, all students will know that they are available to any visitor to discuss and share their learning.

At the other times during the Learning Look day, visitors are encouraged to roam around the school and highlight any aspect of learning they observe. This may be in conversations with students/school staff, through displayed evidence around the school, in advisories or from an examination of student work/portfolios.

After attending a Learning Look, visitors are requested to write up a narrative of their experience and insights.

Individual schools may wish to provide a template or specific areas/questions that they would like visitors to focus on.



SHOWING THE WAY

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