Race to the Top
Deep Dive Learning Summary
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History: Where We Started

In 2010, the Road Map Project began its community-wide effort aimed at improving education to drive dramatic improvement in student achievement in education from cradle to college and career in South King County and South Seattle. This project takes a collective impact approach to make large scale change, providing common goals and shared vision in order to bring about coordinated action. In 2012, seven South King County school districts applied for and won a federal Race to the Top $40 million grant to implement cradle to college strategies to raise student achievement. The Race to the Top District Consortium grant (RTT-D) supports the efforts originally articulated and designed by the Road Map Project.

The RTT-D grant included two intensive community-school partnership projects located in White Center and Kent-East Hill. These projects of regional significance focus on improving outcomes for students attending high poverty schools in specific neighborhoods. In order to build on the success of these intensive school-community partnership projects called “Deep Dives,” an investment fund was included in the grant to provide funding for additional partnership projects. Since 2013, our region has gathered a rich array of learning within the Deep Dive School-Community Partnership Projects in the Kent East Hill (Deep Dive 1) and White Center (Deep Dive 2) communities, as well as the Deep Dive 3 Investment Fund process and projects. These projects integrate education supports, health services, and family engagement strategies—extending learning time beyond the school day to attend to the academic and social and emotional well-being of the students. By utilizing a 24/7 approach focused on the needs of students in the opportunity gap, Deep Dive 3 projects provide invaluable examples how best to partner for strong student success.

Learning how to operationalize school-community partnerships while engaging in practices that promote equity and authentic relationship-building takes time, patience, the ability to persist and stay open through crucial conversations as well as a commitment to continuous improvement. It is critical to leverage our learning, continue to grow and replicate successful practices and partnerships to foster a long-term legacy of community-school partnerships in our region. This narrative and the accompanying resources summarize key lessons learned so far and opportunities for improvement and further growth.

The following timeline outlines significant junctures in this work and includes links to documents outlining our learning.
Timeline of Learning: What We’ve Done

- **2010:** The Road Map Project is launched.
- **2011:** The Community Network Steering Committee was established.
- **Fall 2012:** The seven Road Map districts and Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) applied for the Race to the Top District Grant.
- **Winter 2013:** The RTT-D grant was awarded to the Road Map Districts and PSESD.
- **Summer 2013:** Deep Dives 1 and 2 officially began.
- **Late Summer/Early Fall 2013:** A Technical Workgroup consisting of community-based organizations, district leadership, and school leadership met several times to determine how to shape the Deep Dive 3 Investment Fund for additional community-school partnerships. The group developed a criteria and rubric for the Deep Dive 3 Investment Fund that serves as the foundation and guide for proposed projects. The criteria and rubric represent the qualities and characteristics of ideal partnerships.
- **Winter 2013/14:** Members of both Deep Dive 1 and 2 project teams convened and identified lessons learned in their project work to inform potential DD3 projects.
- **Spring 2014:** A gathering of Round 1 DD3 project leads met to reflect on lessons learned from DD1 and 2 teams.
- **Fall 2014:** Superintendents from the school districts that submitted a Letter of Intent for Round 2 of DD3 attended the Community Network Steering Committee to share their perspectives and vision of authentic school-community partnerships.
- **Fall 2014:** All Deep Dive teams convened, discussed and shared best practices, and were introduced to the Racial Equity Toolkit and Worksheet.
- **Fall 2014:** A recommendation was granted to pause and extend the timeline in the Round 2 DD3 Investment Fund process which gave districts and partners more time to foster relationships and build project proposals.
- **Fall 2014:** A design team was brought together to further identify characteristics of authentic partnerships and to select providers for technical assistance to districts, schools, and partners applying for Round 2 funding. An RFQ was developed and technical assistance providers were contracted to support these objectives.
- **Winter 2014:** Race to the Top’s external evaluator, RTI International, conducted research and gave recommendations on the nature of partnerships within the RTT grant. The report called out specific findings and recommendations to improve partnerships within all of the work conducted in Race to the Top. RTI brought together district staff and community to reflect upon and discuss the findings and recommendations of the report.
- **Winter 2014/15:** The Technical Assistance Team provided support to districts and partners submitting proposals for Round 2 of DD3 and issued a report of their process, findings, and recommendations.
- Winter 2014/15: A brief was presented to the RTT Executive Committee outlining challenges from one of the DD3 projects, and a subsequent meeting with project team members and PSESD staff led to “lessons learned” and “next steps” to support future partnership work.
- Winter 2015: PSESD reflected with staff from each Deep Dive project on drivers and barriers to implementing the current projects. A summary of these findings was presented to the RTT Executive Committee and shared with project leads.
- Winter/Spring 2015: Community Network Steering Committee staff discussed with the RTT Executive Committee their observations and challenges faced within the DD3 Investment Fund and put forth recommendations. The majority of these recommendations were accepted, and a third round of the Investment Fund will be forthcoming with an extended timeline for project implementation.

Opportunities and Challenges: What We’ve Learned

Throughout the process of gathering feedback and recommendations from the various avenues listed above themes and patterns emerged that highlight what is most needed to do this work authentically and responsively. The following observations, recommendations, and issues demonstrate the complexity of this work and the importance of keeping the momentum moving.

Systems and Structures

- The ways that school districts select, work with, and support relationships is not uniform across the seven districts. We need to look more closely at what is needed to support authentic CBO–school district partnerships across the region. Specifically, we need to devote time and other resources to identify and scale best practices, and to create systemic structures to support these partnerships.
- Grant and proposal processes need to take into account the complex nature of creating new partnerships and equitable collaborations. Flexibility and creativity are inherent in a successful partnership, even more so when the system includes different cultures and stakeholders. Funding mechanisms need more flexibility to support the building of partnerships.
- Clear and transparent communication plans and structures between community partners, schools and districts need to be developed. Suggested elements include shared expectations and roles relating to upcoming timelines, contracting processes, data sharing, MOUs, restrictions on funding and reimbursement, procurement, budget allocations, deliverables, and other processes to navigate and maintain strong working relationships and partnerships.
• **Policies** and **procedures** need to be revised in order to move from a vendor/buyer relationship towards an equitable partnership relationship.

• We need to deepen the work of the partnership as a **learning community**. Many of the strategies in the RTT-D proposal are based on effective practices from some of the districts to leverage regionally. Collaboration and sharing of best practices across organizations is at the core of this project. However, a key challenge is the lack of time and resources for staff to attend meetings. By reflecting on this challenge, stakeholders have the opportunity to problem solve as a group in order to better collaborate.

• Systems barriers need to be identified and removed when possible to support equitable partnerships. This includes reviewing internal processes and protocols that surface as barriers to establishing equitable partnerships, making adjustments when possible, and implementing strategies to mitigate barriers when removal is not feasible. Some examples of potential systems improvements include:
  o Addressing communication between and priorities of different departments within districts that all interface with community needs; examining the requirements of using federal dollars (e.g. the need to include competitive bids for contracts and addressing the inability to use dollars for food for meetings and stipends for community/parent participation); and
  o Ensuring that the multiple layers of leadership and different departments, including school board members, are all aware of and engaged in partnership projects.

**Equity and Inclusion**

• The decisions and partnerships should stem from the needs, issues, and concerns of the **parents** and **communities**, while also identifying the needs and concerns of the schools. This approach builds community buy-in to create a partnership that addresses and resolves the jointly identified issues and concerns in the schools and communities.

• We need to balance **power dynamics** through equitable representation of stakeholders by ensuring that CBOs can take a lead role in proposal development and access funds directly for awarded projects. RTT-D is also working to increase the leadership and governance role that CBOs play.

• It is crucial to sustain a **common vision** and continue conversations about equity. As noted in RTI’s report, RTT-D stakeholders often had differing perspectives on the roles, expectations, and strategies of cross-organizational partnerships. Systems change requires an alignment of vision.

• More supports are needed to increase capacity for genuine partnerships to take shape and sustain. The creation of partnerships for authentic teaming and **building trust takes time**. Creating new relationships and ways of working together is an iterative, collaborative, and organic process, and the time must be **compensated** for all parties (CBOs and community members) in order to sustain full, continuous and equitable engagement. For example:
  o **Funding time** is needed for CBOs to attend partner meetings, and participate in planning and design discussions, as well as in grant preparation. We need to recognize and
compensate the time commitment needed for authentic partnerships to develop, conversations to happen, and relationships to form.

- District and school staff need to be engaged throughout the process on a consistent basis and have adequate time and support for these additional responsibilities. Districts/schools need more supports and resources in order to stay continuously engaged, for it is challenging for them to commit the time and add additional activities to their already packed schedules.

**Leveraging our Learning**

We have tremendous opportunity to leverage our learning in several ways in the remaining time in RTT-D. First, we have the chance to redesign the investment fund process for a Round 3 of DD3. This includes a re-vamping of the ways in which proposals and partnerships are built. Our partnership with the Community Network Steering Committee will be critical as we collaborate to ensure this process supports the building and sustaining of equitable partnerships. This work has the potential to inform an avenue for how such partnerships can be replicated in our region.

Second, the [Youth Development Executives of King County](https://www.youthdevelopmentexecutives.org/) are creating a partnership toolkit which could be used to inform current and future partnerships in the region. This toolkit is informed by many of our learnings within the Deep Dive projects.

Thirdly, another Race to the Top Project - the [CBO Data Portal](https://www.CBODataPortal.org) - will be testing new ways in which data is shared between districts, schools, and community organizations. This portal will help address some of the system barriers that currently impact partnership work.

Finally, the remaining Deep Dive projects will continue implementation, documenting best practices. This includes Deep Dives 1 and 2, the Round 2 DD3 project, as well as the next iterations of the Round 1 DD3 projects beyond RTT funding. We will continue to learn from these projects and leverage this learning to improve our regional systems. In conclusion, there are many opportunities to expand our knowledge and implementation of best and promising practices in authentic and equitable school-community partnerships to eliminate the opportunity gap for our students in the region. These partnerships are our legacy, and this work is our charge.