

# NextGen SUCCESS



Financial empowerment for young people through coordinated educational and workforce pathways

## OPPORTUNITY

Ensure youth from low-income communities have supportive and coordinated pathways toward economic well-being through continuing education or connection to employment after high school.

## CHALLENGE

While there is an abundance of youth-focused services with diverse expertise and deep understanding of the needs of youth across our region, there is no clear path for youth from lower-income families that enables longer-term economic well-being. Youth often fall through the cracks as they transition from child and youth programs into adult-focused supports. The pathways that do exist may be offered only in certain schools or communities and may not fully consider the other challenges youth face, such as being involved in the child welfare system. This is holding back young people from reaching their full potential.

## PORTFOLIO COMPOSITION

Investment of  
**\$1,350,000**  
in 12 partners



## SYSTEMS CHANGE PARTNERS

- Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Cincinnati
- Breakthrough Cincinnati Inc.
- Children's Law Center
- Cincinnati Youth Collaborative
- Covington Partners
- YMCA of Greater Cincinnati - Cradle to Career Cincinnati
- Found Village
- GRAD Cincinnati Inc.
- High Achievers Aim High
- Lighthouse Youth & Family Services
- National Network of Youth Ministries
- The DAD Initiative Inc.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT:

**Education is an important step towards economic mobility and well-being**

Many interconnected factors drive intergenerational economic mobility, including educational attainment of a child's parents, the safety of the community, access to good nutrition, health care and healthy relationships. The opportunity to learn is a key driver in the longer-term success of young people living in households with low incomes. Meeting educational milestones, such as reading by fourth grade, graduating on time and pursuing education after high school, can improve the likelihood of mobility from poverty.<sup>i</sup>



“ I was not prepared to be an adult. If my own parents are not going to be there for us... No one will be there for us. A lot of youth don't have anyone there to guide them, they are just winging it. (It's important for) adults to be role models to help youth become good adults.”

– Community member and youth leader

## UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE:

The academic disparities and achievement gaps among young people living with low incomes are often indicative of the longer-term financial challenges they will face as adults. Striking educational inequities exist across the United States for students of color, and those inequities can be exacerbated by special sets of challenges outside of the classroom, such as youth experiencing homelessness or engaged in foster care. While the pandemic has presented new obstacles for all young people pursuing higher education – more than 1 million fewer students enrolled in college in 2021 than before the pandemic – this is especially true for students from lower-income schools.

### NATIONALLY

- **Only 50% of children in foster care will finish high school and less than 10% will earn a post-secondary degree.** Homeless and unaccompanied youth face barriers to education and face higher rates of drug use, mental health problems and involvement with the criminal justice system. Homelessness and the foster-care-to-prison pipeline also disrupt or end dreams of completing college.
- **Nearly two-thirds of all jobs require some sort of post-secondary education, yet students of color are 2.5 times less likely to graduate from college than their counterparts.** This demonstrates that college degree attainment and economic well-being are directly related.<sup>ii</sup>
- Among 2020 high school graduates, **students from lower-income schools had lower college-going numbers, as did students at high minority schools.** The gap in college access between higher income and lower-income students grew wider. “Community colleges are the schools that traditionally enroll lower-income students, so we can assume that that's primarily who is affected and still staying away the most.”<sup>iii</sup>

### LOCALLY

- **More than 5,000 students across our region** experienced homelessness during the 2020-2021 school year.<sup>iv v vi</sup>
- **There has been a 45% increase in the number of children entering the custody of Hamilton County Job and Family Services** over the past six years.<sup>vii</sup>
- Across Greater Cincinnati, **Black people are nearly three times more likely to have incomes under the poverty line** than white people and are less likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>viii</sup>

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

## RESOURCE FLOW AND COORDINATION

Systemic challenges with resources to schools and communities directly impact the academic success of young people. With an increasingly digital world, many young people don't have adequate access to technology and internet access at home. Research by Chetty, Friedman and Rockoff shows that money invested in schools and small student-to-teacher ratios are strongly correlated with economic mobility.<sup>ix</sup> And schools in lower-income areas are often under-resourced due to lower real estate tax incomes, resulting in higher student-to-teacher ratios and limiting additional academic or extracurricular activities. While changing public school funding is a very long-term challenge, we can explore shorter-term solutions to help address gaps by coordinating services and mobilizing advocates and volunteers.

*How might we better align, coordinate and sequence community resources to fill gaps within schools and build pathways toward economic mobility for students with lower incomes?*

## RELATIONSHIPS AND VALUES

**Social capital** – a person's network of trusted and valued relationships – plays an important role in supporting economic mobility. Relationships, especially those with people very different from us, can help provide exposure to new ideas, experiences, people and communities. These can be critical in supporting youth in school and as they explore post-secondary options and begin careers. And relationships with people similar to us, referred to as "bonding ties," are also important as they help build a sense of security and self-worth.<sup>x</sup>

Community members and partners often share a need to build stronger relationships among youth, schools, parents and communities. While they may have similar goals of supporting young people, it can feel as though they are working against each other. Community members shared that young people could feel powerlessness as decisions are typically made *for* them, not *with* them. And parents can feel the same – systems making decisions for and about their children without their input. There is a clear opportunity to build stronger relationships and focus on shared values to help improve outcomes for young people.

*How might we engage the voices of young people to align around shared values and strengthen relationships that support the educational outcomes and economic mobility of young people with lower incomes?*

## DATA FROM INSIGHTS

- 67% of solutions prioritized by community members through United Way's community insights process addressed the need to improve relationships and connections:
  - Improved partnership between social services, communities and public officials to coordinate solutions (31%)
  - More use of family feedback to determine how to change or improve programs (23%)
- The majority surveyed do not agree that there are adequate/easy-to- find opportunities, training or education to obtain skills to get quality jobs, and most believe that post-high school education is important to get a good paying job.
- Only a third of those surveyed agree that social/emotional skills are sufficiently supported in the community via any of the identified means:
  - Parents/caregivers can support their child's development at home
  - Children/youth generally have healthy social soft skills to be successful adults
  - Children and youth have the support they need at home to develop healthy social and soft skills like building healthy relationships or managing stress.

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**“ Collaboration between schools/school districts. We all have the same problems, so why not come together to fix them? ”**

– Community volunteer and parent

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